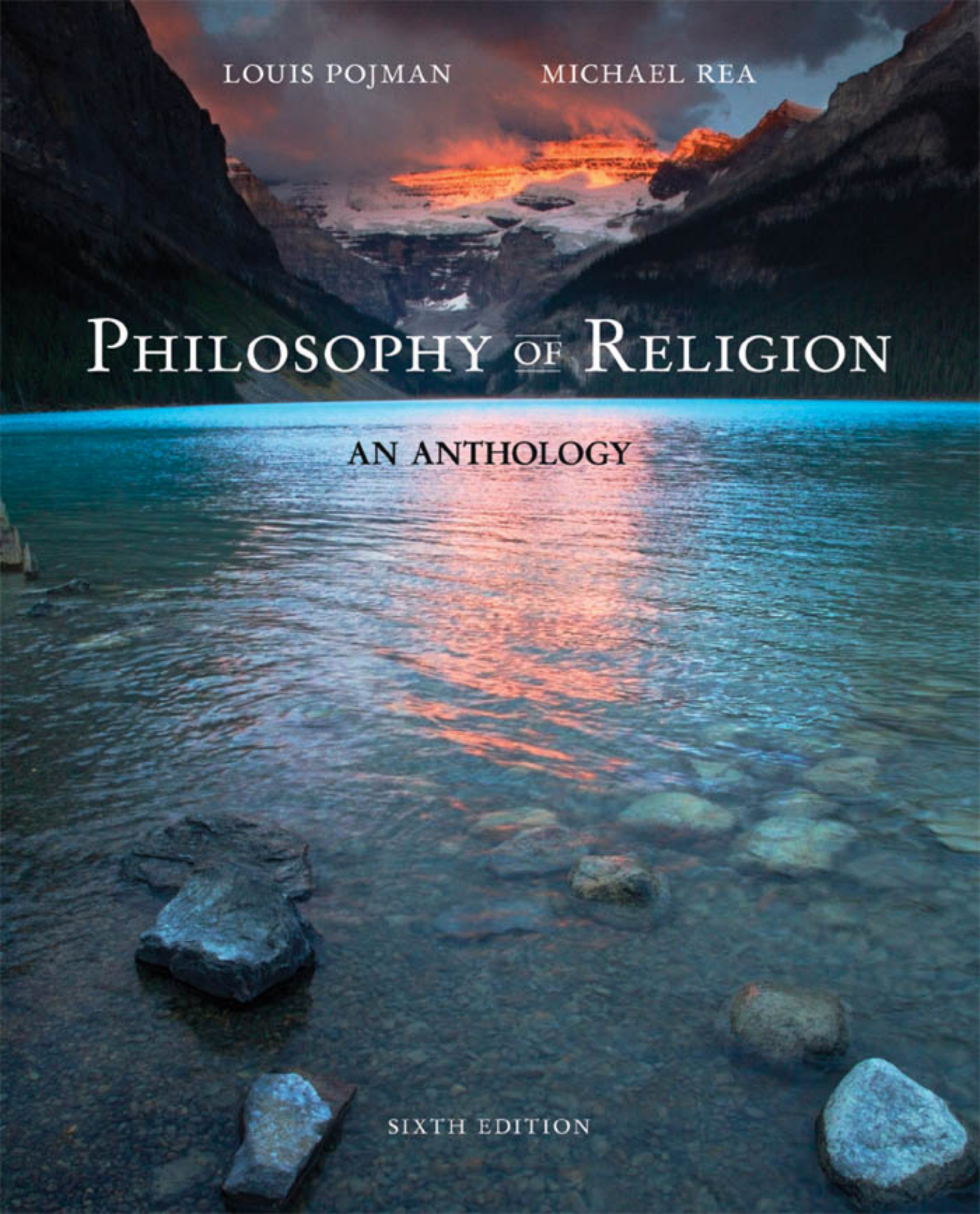

LOUIS POJMAN
MICHAEL REA
PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION
AN ANTHOLOGY
SIXTH EDITION

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Philosophy of Religion

An Anthology

SIXTH EDITION

LOUIS P. POJMAN
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Dedicated to the memory of Louis A. and Helen Pojman

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Preface

Welcome to the sixth edition of *Philosophy of Religion: An Anthology*. This volume, originally edited by the late Louis Pojman, has been in print for nearly twenty years, and it has enjoyed wide use throughout the profession. The purpose of the volume is to provide an accessible and engaging introduction to some of the most important ideas, topics and figures in contemporary philosophy of religion. It is exciting to have once again the opportunity to revise and update the text, breathing fresh air into several sections of the work while at the same time retaining what has consistently proven useful to a wide variety of instructors and students over the life of the anthology.

The most significant changes in the present edition are the inclusion of a new section entitled "Concepts of God and the Ultimate," and a somewhat different organizational structure. Since the revival of philosophy of religion in the 1960s, the field has focused primarily on questions having to do with belief in the God of the Judeo-Christian tradition. Moreover, the concept of God in play has tended to be the "classical" concept handed down from medieval philosopher-theologians like Anselm, Aquinas, Maimonides and others. But there is a wide variety of other ways of thinking about the divine, both within and outside of Jewish, Christian and Islamic theology; and many philosophers of religion have started to engage these other concepts of God both in their own research and in the textbooks they edit and write. The "concepts of God" section represents a step toward introducing readers to just a few of the more important alternative conceptions currently under discussion. Moreover, whereas previous editions of this anthology treated "the attributes of God" both without comment on which *conception* of God was in play and *after* arguments for and against the existence of God had already been covered, the present edition is organized differently. In the present edition, we discuss the *concept* of God first, before discussing arguments about God's existence. The new organizational structure also makes explicit the fact that the articles focused on "the attributes of God" are

discussing properties that belong in one way or another to the *classical theistic* conception of God.

In addition to these changes, several others are worth noting. First, I have taken steps to make sure that women's voices are heard in ways in which they weren't in previous editions of this anthology. Second, I have tried in small ways to move the volume in a more interdisciplinary direction. Thus, we now have readings by Sallie McFague, Martin Buber, Paul Tillich, Eleonore Stump, Marilyn Adams, and Laura Ekstrom. My hope is to continue moving in the direction of greater diversity in subsequent editions of the anthology. Third, the volume includes two brand new essays, published here for the first time: one by Michael Bergmann on reformed epistemology, and the other by me, on the hiddenness of God. Fourth, the section on Religion and Ethics has been removed, as well as a couple of readings on evolutionary theory. These seem to have been the least-used portions of the anthology, and their removal has made room for the inclusion of more important new material—like the "concepts of God" section, and several important readings in the section on the problem of evil. Finally, there have been several minor alterations to most of the sections—a few older papers have been either removed or replaced by newer or more "classic" material.

Despite the changes, much has remained the same. The same format of general introductions followed by individual classic and contemporary readings has been continued, and the same topics are still treated: traditional arguments for the existence of God, the argument from religious experience, the problem of evil, the attributes of God, miracles and revelation, death and immortality, faith and reason, religion and ethics, and religious pluralism. In some cases, more difficult readings have been replaced by simpler ones. There are also individual introductions to each reading. Some of the general introductions have been modified or updated, but here too I have tried to preserve as much as possible of what was already good and useful, making for the most part, only very modest changes for the sake of clarity or accuracy.

This book has been used successfully in both undergraduate and graduate courses, and Cengage Learning has two excellent single-author textbooks that may serve as an accompaniment to this anthology: William Rowe's *Philosophy of Religion: An Introduction* (2nd ed., 1992) and William Wainwright's *Philosophy of Religion* (1988). Naturally, I am also inclined to recommend my own *Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion*, co-authored with Michael Murray and published by Cambridge University Press.

I am grateful to the anonymous reviewers who offered advice that led to the various changes in the present edition of the text, and to Joann Kozyrev and Ian Lague at Cengage for helpful advice and support at each of the various stages of this project. Several people including John Firth, Lawrence Goodman, Kamran Swanson, and Ricardo Piñeda have shown me where corrections are needed, and several of the changes to the present volume were inspired by comments given by anonymous reviewers. Finally, Amy Seymour provided valuable assistance in updating the bibliography. I am grateful to all these people for their help.

As seems only right and natural, I have left Lou Pojman's original dedication of the volume intact. But I want to close with words of gratitude to those to

whom it would be natural for me to dedicate a volume like this—to my friends Darci (Cadis) Bradbury, Megan (Cadis) Hudzinski, Robert Timm, Tracy Peck, Kevin McClure, Mark Rodriguez, and Marc Bellaart; to my sister, Cheryl Marzano; to my children, Aaron, Kristina and Gretchen Rea; and to my wife Chris—all of whom in one way or another have influenced my thinking about the issues treated in this book and have inspired me to want to learn how to make those issues more accessible to others.

Michael C. Rea
University of Notre Dame
South Bend, Indiana

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PART I



The Concept of God

XENOPHANES (c. 570–c. 478 BC) SAID THAT "men create the gods in their own image." He said this in no small part because the gods worshipped by his ancient Greek contemporaries were remarkably human-like. They took human form, entered into human relationships, suffered from human vices and other imperfections, had very human desires, and so on. Similarly, Sigmund Freud (1858–1939) thought that we (monotheists) create God in the image of our fathers. In his view, belief in God was the result of projecting upon the heavens our need for a father figure who will serve as our protector and guarantor of justice, just as our earthly fathers did in our childhood. On his view, our concept of God is primarily just a reflection of our own ideals about fatherhood.

Views like these don't sit well with religious believers. We prefer to think that our concept of God comes from divine revelation or from sober philosophical reflection. It shouldn't just be a reflection of our ideals and anthropocentric biases. But the experiences and texts that we treat as divine revelation differ widely in their representations of God (or the gods). Philosophical intuitions vary widely as well. It is a challenge to sort through the competing voices, and the challenge is made all the more difficult by the fact that, in sorting them out, we know that we must take care to avoid falling into the trap of crafting God in our own image and likeness.

One way—maybe the best way—to avoid falling into that trap is to devote some effort to thinking through some of the different "models" for thinking about the divine that are suggested by our sacred texts and our philosophical intuitions. We probably can't avoid relying on some driving model (thinking of God as our heavenly Father, say) in our theorizing about God, but at least we can make ourselves aware that we are doing so, and we can see some of the limits and alternatives to the model(s) we have chosen. In Part I.A., we consider a few different models with just this aim in mind.

In Part I.B., we turn to a discussion of specific divine attributes. Although there are various models of God with which we might fruitfully work in our thinking about God, contemporary philosophy of religion has mostly been occupied with the "perfect being" model. As we shall see in Part I.A., working with

this model means taking as our starting point the idea that God is perfect and allowing that idea to play the dominant role in shaping our decisions about what attributes to ascribe to God. Philosophers working with this model generally agree that God, if God exists, is at least omniscient (all-knowing), omnipotent (all-powerful), and omnibenevolent (perfectly good). Indeed, *theism* is typically just *defined* as the view that there exists a being with those three attributes. *Classical* theism, however, goes a few steps further, adding to theism the claim that God is immutable (not subject to change), impassable (not subject to passion), simple (lacking parts), timeless (not subject to the flow of time), and in no way dependent upon other things. Because theism and classical theism have taken center stage in contemporary philosophy of religion, our treatment of divine attributes will focus on controversies associated with attributes drawn from these lists.

I.A. CONCEPTS OF GOD AND THE ULTIMATE

IN THE JEWISH AND CHRISTIAN SCRIPTURES, we are given a variety of "models" for structuring our thinking about God. Some are clearly metaphorical or analogical, others not. God is represented as our heavenly father, and as the stern employer of the parable of the talents. God is a farmer sowing seed or tending to a vineyard, our shepherd, and our companion in paradise. God is a winged protector under whose pinions we can take shelter, and a perfect being for whom nothing is impossible and compared with whom nobody is good. God is a righteous judge who will dutifully, even if grudgingly, respond to the persistent pestering of a neighbor, and the Ancient of Days, seated on a throne of fire. Philosophical reflection adds even more to this list: God is the uncaused cause, the ground of all being, and the ordering principle of the universe.

Theorizing about God in a systematic way involves decisions about which of these "models" to prioritize and which to deemphasize, especially when conflicts arise. Would a loving father *really* behave like a stern employer toward his beloved child? To some extent, yes; but there are lines to be drawn, and questions to be raised about whether God would be *more* like the loving father in some particular instance or more like the stern employer. We must also make decisions about which aspects of our models to take seriously and which not. Does God really have wings or any sort of body at all? Of course not, we think; but then does God even have gender? Is there something more correct about referring to God as "father" rather than "mother"? We must even make decisions about how to interpret our models. So God is a loving father, or a loving parent. What exactly does it *mean* to be a loving parent? Could one be a loving parent and withhold one's presence from one's child? Or: God is perfect, but what exactly does perfection involve? Can one be perfect and be subject to the flow of time? Can a perfect being be subject to passion or change? All of these decisions will be contentious; all are fodder for philosophical debate.

We begin here with selections from several ancient Greek philosophers: Xenophanes (mentioned in the main introduction to this part of the book), Aristotle (384–322 BC), the Stoic philosopher Cleanthes of Assos (c. 330–c. 230 BC), and Diogenes Laertius (3rd century, AD), who is reporting on the thought of Zeno of Citium (334–262 BC), the founder of Stoicism. Together, these lay out some of the most important ancient Greek philosophical conceptions of deity. For Xenophanes, as we have seen, the gods are merely human constructs. For Aristotle, God plays an explanatory role: the God of Aristotle is the first cause of all things, the "unmoved mover" whose motion serves as the ultimate explanation of the motion of everything else. For the Stoics, God is best thought of as the "soul" of the world. On their view, the soul of a *body* is its ordering principle: The activity of the soul is the ultimate explanation for the ordered and coordinated behavior of all of the body's parts. As they see it, the divine *logos*, or "reason," plays precisely the same role in the universe. The "Hymn of Cleanthes," which is included among the selections from ancient Greek philosophers, reflects some of these ideas and was, according to the New Testament book of Acts, quoted by Paul in his sermon on Mars Hill.

The Greek views just mentioned underlie some of the most important developments in medieval philosophical theology. But another, related idea about God has dominated Western philosophical theology (in the Christian tradition, anyway) since the time of Anselm (1033–1109). That idea is the *perfect-being* model of God. Perfect-being theology, described more fully in the essay by Thomas V. Morris, is a way of theorizing about God which takes as its starting point the idea that God is perfect and which uses intuitions about perfection to reach conclusions about what God is like. Of course, there is nothing in the enterprise of perfect being theology that would preclude using (say) scripture to arrive at truths about God. So it is not as if this method is *purely* philosophical. But part of what it means to allow the idea that God is a perfect being to structure our thinking about God is to allow that idea to color our interpretation of scripture even as we allow scripture to inform our understanding of the nature of perfection.

Earlier, in the main introduction to this part, we noted that the medieval philosopher-theologians endorsed what is now called "classical theism"—a view according to which God is not subject to change, passion, time, decomposition, or dependence. Classical theism is perhaps best seen as what one gets when one does perfect-being theology under the influence of ancient Greek philosophical notions about perfection. Indeed, when people speak of the "God of the philosophers," it is often the God of classical theism that they have in mind. One important question, however, is whether the so-called God of the philosophers has any real claim to being *the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob,* or *God, the Father of Jesus,* or *God, the object of our ultimate concern*.

Some critics of classical theism are more or less content to work within the framework of perfect-being theology but argue that scriptural representations of God need to be given a lot more weight than (Greek-influenced) philosophical intuitions in informing our understanding of perfection. The proponents of *open theism* are among those who support this way of thinking. As Clark Pinnock notes in the third reading of this section, the God of open theism is temporal, subject to

change and passion, responsive to his creatures, and endowed with less than fully detailed foreknowledge of what will happen as creation unfolds. There is no suggestion that thinking of God this way involves thinking of God as less than perfect, however; rather, the idea is simply that classical theism embodies inadequate assumptions about what it would be for God to be a perfect person.

Not everyone, however, is content to theorize about God in the way that the perfect-being theologians do. For some philosophers and (surprisingly) many theologians, we simply aren't equipped to build true theories about what God is like. Although there are many perspectives from which one might raise this concern, one common idea is that the main obstacle to our theoretical efforts is *divine transcendence*. To say that God is transcendent is to say that God is so different from us as to be largely—maybe even almost entirely—beyond human categories of thought. Thus, in the eyes of many contemporary theologians, although we can perhaps structure our thinking about God by way of various metaphors and models, we need to abandon the illusion that some particular model will help us to "get everything right" theoretically speaking.

For Sallie McFague, this is a freeing thought: We are free to explore the usefulness for our time and circumstances of a variety of different models for thinking about God, some of which are themselves ways of "imagining and expressing divine transcendence and immanence." (The term *immanence* refers to the idea that God is somehow *in* the world.) One such model—harking back to the ancient Stoics—involves the idea of the world as God's body.

Moving now to an earlier generation, Paul Tillich is another theologian who maintains that divine transcendence pushes much of our thought about God into the realm of "mere" metaphor and modeling. For Tillich, God is, first and foremost, our "ultimate concern." As such, God is beyond *everything* in the world—and so, for Tillich, God is even beyond the category of existence. This might seem to suggest that, on Tillich's view, God simply doesn't exist. But to say that would be misleading. For Tillich, God is the "ground of being" or, indeed, "being-itself." What this means—or, indeed, whether it means anything at all—is, of course, a serious and difficult question. But, according to Tillich, one consequence of it is that, apart from the bare "unsymbolic" claim that God is "being itself," nothing more can be said about God that is unsymbolic.

One concern that might be raised against views like Tillich's, however, is that, despite whatever virtues there might be in avoiding anthropomorphism and undue reliance on substantive philosophical intuitions in developing a conception of deity, Tillich's God still looks very much like just another "God of the philosophers." Among other things, one might worry that this way of understanding God undermines much of what is important in religious *practice*—perhaps most centrally, the *love of God*. Although Martin Buber's essay in this section was published eight years before the appearance of Tillich's *Systematic Theology*, Buber nevertheless raises something akin to this concern against ideas in some ways similar to Tillich's. Focusing on the work of Hermann Cohen, Buber notes the tension within Cohen's thought between thinking of God as, on the one hand, "beyond existence" (as Tillich does) and, on the other hand, as one whom we can love.

I.A.1

Selections from Ancient Greek Philosophers

XENOPHANES (Fragments)

[1] Homer and Hesiod ascribed to the gods whatever is infamy and reproach among men: theft and adultery and deceiving each other.

[2] Mortals suppose that the gods are born and have clothes and voices and shapes like their own.

[3] But if oxen, horses, and lions had hands or could paint with their hands and fashion works as men do, horses would paint horse-like images of gods and oxen ox-like ones, and each would fashion bodies like their own.

[4] The Ethiopians consider the gods flat-nosed and black; the Thracians blue-eyed and red-haired.

[5] There is one god, among gods and men the greatest, not at all like mortals in body or mind.

[6] He sees as a whole, thinks as a whole, and hears as a whole.

[7] But without toil he moves everything by the thought of his mind.

[8] He always remains in the same place, not moving at all, nor is it fitting for him to change his position at different times.

[9] Everything comes from earth and returns to earth in the end.

[10] No man knows or ever will know the truth about the gods and about everything I speak of: for even if one chanced to say the complete truth, yet oneself knows it not; but seeming is wrought over all things.

[11] Not from the beginning have the gods revealed all things to mortals, but by long seeking men find what is better.

ARISTOTLE (SELECTIONS FROM *METAPHYSICS* 12.3, 6–7, AND 9)

3. […]

There are three kinds of substance—the matter, which is a "this" by being perceived (for all things that are characterized by contact and not by organic unity are matter and substratum); the nature, a "this" and a state that it moves towards; and again, thirdly, the particular substance which is composed of these two, e.g. Socrates or Callias. Now in some cases the "this" does not exist apart from the composite substance,

[…]

6. Since there were three kinds of substance, two of them natural and one unmovable, regarding the latter we must assert that it is necessary that there should be an eternal unmovable substance. For substances are the first of existing things, and if they are all destructible, all things are destructible. But it is impossible that movement should either come into being or cease to be; for it must always have existed. Nor can time come into being or

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cease to be; for there could not be a before and an after if time did not exist. Movement also is continuous, then, in the sense in which time is; for time is either the same thing as movement or an attribute of movement. And there is no continuous movement except movement in place, and of this only that which is circular is continuous.

But if there is something which is capable of moving things or acting on them, but is not actually doing so, there will not be movement; for that which has a capacity need not exercise it. Nothing, then, is gained even if we suppose eternal substances, as the believers in the Forms do, unless there is to be in them some principle which can cause movement; and even this is not enough, nor is another substance besides the Forms enough; for if it does not *act,* there will be no movement. Further, even if it acts, this will not be enough, if its substance is potentiality; for there will not be *eternal* movement; for that which is potentially may possibly not be. There must, then, be such a principle, whose very substance is actuality. Further, then, these substances must be without matter; for they must be eternal, at least if anything else is eternal. Therefore they must be actuality.

Yet there is a difficulty; for it is thought that everything that acts is able to act, but that not everything that is able to act acts, so that the potentiality is prior. But if this is so, nothing at all will exist; for it is possible for things to be capable of existing but not yet to exist. Yet if we follow the mythologists who generate the world from night, or the natural philosophers who say that all things were together, the same impossible result ensues. For how will there be movement, if there is no actual cause? Matter will surely not move itself—the carpenter's art must act on it; nor will the menstrual fluids nor the earth set themselves in motion, but the seeds and the semen must act on them.

This is why some suppose eternal actuality—e.g. Leucippus and Plato; for they say there is always movement. But why and what this movement is they do not say, nor, if the world moves in this way or that, do they tell us the cause of its doing so. Now nothing is moved at random, but there must always be something present, e.g. as a matter of fact a thing moves in one way by nature, and in another by force or through the influence of thought or something else. Further, what sort of movement is primary? This makes a vast difference. But again Plato, at least, cannot even say what it is that he sometimes supposes to be the source of movement—that which moves itself; for the *soul* is later, and simultaneous with the heavens, according to his account. To suppose potentiality prior to actuality, then, is in a sense right, and in a sense not; and we have specified these senses.

That actuality is prior is testified by Anaxagoras (for his thought is actuality) and by Empedocles in his doctrine of love and strife, and by those who say that there is always movement, e.g. Leucippus.

Therefore chaos or night did not exist for any infinite time, but the same things have always existed (either passing through a cycle of changes or in some other way), since actuality is prior to potentiality. If, then, there is a constant cycle, something must always remain, acting in the same way. And if there is to be generation and destruction, there must be something else which is always acting in different ways. This must, then, act in one way in virtue of itself, and in another in virtue of something else—either of a third agent, therefore, or of the first. But it must be in virtue of the first. For otherwise this again causes the motion both of the third agent and of the second. Therefore it is better to say the first. For it was the cause of eternal movement; and something else is the cause of variety, and evidently both together are the cause of eternal variety. This, accordingly, is the character which the motions actually exhibit. What need then is there to seek for other principles?

7. Since this is a possible account of the matter, and if it were not true, the world would have proceeded out of night and "all things together" and out of non-being, these difficulties may be taken as solved. There is, then, something which is always moved with an unceasing motion, which is motion in a circle; and this is plain not in theory only but in fact. Therefore the first heavens must be eternal. There is therefore also something which moves them. And since that which is moved and moves is intermediate, there is a mover which moves without being moved, being eternal, substance, and actuality. And the object of desire and the object

of thought move in this way; they move without being moved. The primary objects of desire and of thought are the same. For the apparent good is the object of appetite, and the real good is the primary object of wish. But desire is consequent on opinion rather than opinion on desire; for the thinking is the starting-point. And thought is moved by the object of thought, and one side of the list of opposites is in itself the object of thought; and in this, substance is first, and in substance, that which is simple and exists actually. (The one and the simple are not the same; for "one" means a measure, but "simple" means that the thing itself has a certain nature.) But the good, also, and that which is in itself desirable are on this same side of the list; and the first in any class is always best, or analogous to the best.

That that for the sake of which is found among the unmovables is shown by making a distinction; for that for the sake of which is both that *for* which and that *towards* which, and of these the one is unmovable and the other is not. Thus it produces motion by being loved, and it moves the other moving things. Now if something is moved it is capable of being otherwise than as it is. Therefore if the actuality of the heavens is primary motion, then in so far as they are in motion, in *this* respect they are capable of being otherwise,—in place, even if not in substance. But since there is something which moves while itself unmoved, existing actually, this can in no way be otherwise than as it is. For motion in space is the first of the kinds of change, and motion in a circle the first kind of spatial motion; and this the first mover *produces*. The first mover, then, of necessity exists; and in so far as it is necessary, it is good, and in this sense a first principle. For the necessary has all these senses—that which is necessary perforce because it is contrary to impulse, that without which the good is impossible, and that which cannot be otherwise but is *absolutely* necessary.

On such a principle, then, depend the heavens and the world of nature. And its life is such as the best which we enjoy, and enjoy for but a short time. For it is ever in this state (which we cannot be), since its actuality is also pleasure. (And therefore waking, perception, and thinking are most pleasant, and hopes and memories are so because of their reference to these.) And thought in itself deals with that which is best in itself, and that which is thought in the fullest sense with that which is best in the fullest sense. And thought thinks itself because it shares the nature of the object of thought; for it becomes an object of thought in coming into contact with and thinking its objects, so that thought and object of thought are the same. For that which is *capable* of receiving the object of thought, i.e. the substance, is thought. And it is active when it *possesses* this object. Therefore the latter rather than the former is the divine element which thought seems to contain, and the act of contemplation is what is most pleasant and best. If, then, God is always in that good state in which we sometimes are, this compels our wonder; and if in a better this compels it yet more. And God *is* in a better state. And life also belongs to God; for the actuality of thought is life, and God is that actuality; and God's essential actuality is life most good and eternal. We say therefore that God is a living being, eternal, most good, so that life and duration continuous and eternal belong to God; for this *is* God.

Those who suppose, as the Pythagoreans and Speusippus do, that supreme beauty and goodness are not present in the beginning, because the beginnings both of plants and of animals are *causes*, but beauty and completeness are in the *effects* of these, are wrong in their opinion. For the seed comes from other individuals which are prior and complete, and the first thing is not seed but the complete being, e.g. we must say that before the seed there is a man,—not the man produced from the seed, but another from whom the seed comes.

It is clear then from what has been said that there is a substance which is eternal and unmovable and separate from sensible things. It has been shown also that this substance cannot have any magnitude, but is without parts and indivisible. For it produces movement through infinite time, but nothing finite has infinite power. And, while every magnitude is either infinite or finite, it cannot, for the above reason, have finite magnitude, and it cannot have infinite magnitude because there is no infinite magnitude at all. But it is also clear that it is impassive

and unalterable; for all the other changes are posterior to change of place. It is clear, then, why the first mover has these attributes.

9. The nature of the divine thought involves certain problems; for while thought is held to be the most divine of phenomena, the question what it must be in order to have that character involves difficulties. For if it thinks nothing, what is there here of dignity? It is just like one who sleeps. And if it thinks, but this depends on something else, then (as that which is its substance is not the act of thinking, but a capacity) it cannot be the best substance; for it is through thinking that its value belongs to it. Further, whether its substance is the faculty of thought or the act of thinking, what does it think? Either itself or something else; and if something else, either the same always or something different. Does it matter, then, or not, whether it thinks the good or any chance thing? Are there not some things about which it is incredible that it should think? Evidently, then, it thinks that which is most divine and precious, and it does not change; for change would be change for the worse, and this would be already a movement. First, then, if it is not the act of thinking but a capacity, it would be reasonable to suppose that the continuity of its thinking is wearisome to it. Secondly, there would evidently be something else more precious than thought, viz. that which is thought. For both thinking and the act of thought will belong even to one who has the worst of thoughts. Therefore if this ought to be avoided (and it ought, for there are even some things which it is better not to see than to see), the act of thinking cannot be the best of things. Therefore it must be itself that thought thinks (since it is the most excellent of things), and its thinking is a thinking on thinking.

But evidently knowledge and perception and opinion and understanding have always something else as their object, and themselves only by the way. Further, if thinking and being thought are different, in respect of which does goodness belong to thought? For being an act of thinking and being an object of thought are not the same. We answer that in some cases the knowledge is the object. In the productive sciences (if we abstract from the matter) the substance in the sense of essence, and in the theoretical sciences the formula or the act of thinking, is the object. As, then, thought and the object of thought are not different in the case of things that have not matter, they will be the same, i.e. the thinking will be one with the object of its thought.

A further question is left—whether the object of the thought is composite; for if it were, thought would change in passing from part to part of the whole. We answer that everything which has not matter is indivisible. As human thought, or rather the thought of composite objects, is in a certain period of time (for it does not possess the good at this moment or at that, but its best, being something different from it, is attained only in a whole period of time), so throughout eternity is the thought which has *itself* for its object.

CLEANTHES OF ASSOS
(HYMN TO ZEUS)

O God most glorious, called by many a name,
Nature's great King, through endless years the same;
Omnipotence, who by thy just decree
Controllest all, hail, Zeus, for unto thee
Behooves thy creatures in all lands to call.
We are thy children, we alone, of all
On earth's broad ways that wander to and fro,
Bearing thine image whereso'er we go.
Wherefore with songs of praise thy power I will forth show
Lo! yonder Heaven, that round the earth is wheeled,
Follows thy guidance, still to thee doth yield
Glad homage; thine unconquerable hand
Such flaming minister, the levin brand,
Wieldeth, a sword two-edged, whose deathless might
Pulsates through all that Nature brings to light;
Vehicle of the universal Word, that flows
Through all, and in the light celestial glows

Of stars both great and small. A King of Kings
Through ceaseless ages, God, whose purpose brings
To birth, whate'er on land or in the sea
Is wrought, or in high heaven's immensity;
Save what the sinner works infatuate.
Nay, but thou knowest to make crooked straight:
Chaos to thee in order: in thine eyes
The unloved is lovely, who didst harmonize
Things evil with things good, that there should be
One Word through all things everlastingly.
One Word—whose voice alas! the wicked spurn;
Insatiate for the good their spirits yearn:
Yet seeing see not, neither hearing hear
God's universal law, which those revere,
By reason guided, happiness who win.
The rest, unreasoning, diverse shapes of sin
Self-prompted follow: for an idle name
Vainly they wrestle in the lists of fame:
Others inordinately riches woo,
Or dissolute, the joys of flesh pursue.
Now here, now there they wander, fruitless still,
Forever seeking good and finding ill.
Zeus the all-bountiful, whom darkness shrouds,
Whose lightning lightens in the thunder-clouds;
Thy children save from error's deadly away:
Turn thou the darkness from their souls sway:
Vouchsafe that unto knowledge they attain;
For thou by knowledge art made strong to reign
O'er all, and all things rulest righteously.
So by thee honoured, we will honour thee,
Praising thy works continually with songs,
As mortals should; nor higher meed belongs
E'en to the gods, than justly to adore
The universal law for evermore.

ZENO OF CITIUM (SELECTIONS FROM DIOGENES LAERTIUS'S *LIVES AND OPINIONS OF EMINENT PHILOSOPHERS*)

They hold that there are two principles in the universe, the active principle and the passive. The passive principle, then, is a substance without quality, *i.e.* matter, whereas the active is the reason inherent in this substance, that is God. For he is everlasting and is the artificer of each several thing throughout the whole extent of matter. This doctrine is laid down by Zeno of Citium in his treatise *On Existence*, Cleanthes in his work *On Atoms,* Chrysippus in the first book of his *Physics* towards the end, Archedemus in his treatise *On Elements*, and Posidonius in the second book of his *Physical Exposition*. There is a difference, according to them, between principles and elements; the former being without generation or destruction, whereas the elements are destroyed when all things are resolved into fire. Moreover, the principles are incorporeal and destitute of form, while the elements have been endowed with form.

God is one and the same with Reason, Fate, and Zeus; he is also called by many other names. In the beginning he was by himself; he transformed the whole of substance through air into water, and just as in animal generation the seed has a moist vehicle, so in cosmic moisture God, who is the seminal reason of the universe, remains behind in the moisture as such an agent, adapting matter to himself with a view to the next stage of creation. Thereupon he created first of all the four elements, fire, water, air, earth. They are discussed by Zeno in his treatise *On*

the Whole, by Chrysippus in the first book of his *Physics*, and by Archedemus in a work *On Elements*. An element is defined as that from which particular things first come to be at their birth and into which they are finally resolved. The four elements together constitute unqualified substance or matter. Fire is the hot element, water the moist, air the cold, earth the dry. Not but what the quality of dryness is also found in the air. Fire has the uppermost place; it is also called aether, and in it the sphere of the fixed stars is first created; then comes the sphere of the planets, next to that the air, then the water, and lowest of all the earth, which is at the centre of all things.

The term universe or cosmos is used by them in three senses: (1) of God himself, the individual being whose quality is derived from the whole of substance; he is indestructible and ingenerable, being the artificer of this orderly arrangement, who at stated periods of time absorbs into himself the whole of substance and again creates it from himself. (2) Again, they give the name of cosmos to the orderly arrangement of the heavenly bodies in itself as such; and (3) in the third place to that whole of which these two are parts. Again, the cosmos is defined as the individual being qualifying the whole of substance, or, in the words of Posidonius in his elementary treatise on *Celestial Phenomena*, a system made up of heaven and earth and the natures in them, or, again, as a system constituted by gods and men and all things created for their sake. By heaven is meant the extreme circumference or ring in which the deity has his seat.

The world, in their view, is ordered by reason and providence: so says Chrysippus in the fifth book of his treatise *On Providence* and Posidonius in his work *On the Gods*, book iii.—inasmuch as reason pervades every part of it, just as does the soul in us. Only there is a difference of degree; in some parts there is more of it, in others less. For through some parts it passes as a "hold" or containing force, as is the case with our bones and sinews; while through others it passes as intelligence, as in the ruling part of the soul. Thus, then, the whole world is a living being, endowed with soul and reason, and having aether for its ruling principle: so says Antipater of Tyre in the eighth book of his treatise *On the Cosmos*. Chrysippus in the first book of his work *On Providence* and Posidonius in his book *On the Gods* say that the heaven, but Cleanthes that the sun, is the ruling power of the world. Chrysippus, however, in the course of the same work gives a somewhat different account, namely, that it is the purer part of the aether; the same which they declare to be preeminently God and always to have, as it were in sensible fashion, pervaded all that is in the air, all animals and plants, and also the earth itself, as a principle of cohesion.

[…]

The deity, say they, is a living being, immortal, rational, perfect or intelligent in happiness, admitting nothing evil [into him], taking providential care of the world and all that therein is, but he is not of human shape. He is, however, the artificer of the universe and, as it were, the father of all, both in general and in that particular part of him which is all-pervading, and which is called many names according to its various powers. They give the name Dia *(Dia)* because all things are due to *(dia)* him; Zeus *(Zana)* in so far as he is the cause of life *(zan)* or pervades all life; the name Athena is given, because the ruling part of the divinity extends to the aether; the name Hera marks its extension to the air; he is called Hephaestus since it spreads to the creative fire; Poseidon, since it stretches to the sea; Demeter, since it reaches to the earth. Similarly men have given the deity his other titles, fastening, as best they can, on some one or other of his peculiar attributes.

The substance of God is declared by Zeno to be the whole world and the heaven, as well as by Chrysippus in his first book *Of the Gods*, and by Posidonius in his first book with the same title. Again, Antipater in the seventh book of his work *On the Cosmos* says that the substance of God is akin to air, while Boëthus in his work *On Nature* speaks of the sphere of the fixed stars as the substance of God…

I.A.2

The Concept of God

THOMAS V. MORRIS

Thomas V. Morris (1952–) was professor of philosophy at the University of Notre Dame until the late 1990s, when he left to found the Morris Institute for Human Values. He is best known for his work in philosophical theology. In the present chapter, excerpted from his book Our Idea of God, *Morris explains and defends the method of* perfect-being theology.

In the fifth century B.C., the Greek poet Pindar posed the question "What is God?" and presented the answer "Everything." Whatever its intellectual merits, given the time and place of its utterance, this answer considered by Pindar was clearly not a very discriminating response. Nor was it a claim that would be accepted by many traditional religious believers.

The view which seems to have been expressed so succinctly by Pindar, the belief that God is everything or, as it is more typically stated, the belief that everything is God, is usually called *pantheism*. Most religious people, at least most people within the more advanced religious traditions of the world, have used the word 'God' and its correlates in other languages not to refer in this way to everything in general, but rather to refer only to something in particular, something quite ultimate, a being on whom we and our world depend. This is the religious view known as *theism*, the belief in a God distinct from all other things. Any belief that there are two or more such beings independent of one another, and each properly considered divine, is a brand of *polytheism*. The belief that there is only one ultimate divine being, the conviction proclaimed in one way or another by Judaism, Christianity and Islam, is called *monotheism*.

Throughout human history, there have been many different conceptions of the divine. And this fact in itself poses us a problem. The problem is not just how we can arrive at our own idea of God. The problem is how we can arrive at the best idea of God, a conception worthy of our greatest energies, intellectual and otherwise.

THE PROBLEM OF METHOD

When we reflect on ultimate religious issues, what precise concept of deity will we be employing? And how can this be decided? With this latter question, we confront the premier problem of method in philosophical theology. Is there some single method for arriving at an idea of God? And if so, then why are there so many differences among people as to how we should describe the divine? Are there rather many different rival methods for arriving at a basic conception of deity? And if there are, which method is to be preferred? How is this issue to be decided? Is there a way of rationally choosing a best method for thinking about God? Before we can hope to make any real progress in our attempt to think about God,

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we must confront this barrage of questions and seek to determine whether they can be answered with any significant degree of confidence.

In every science, the issue of method is of great importance. For without a reliable method of discovery or testing, we can never be confident of our ability to attain reliable beliefs, and thus knowledge, in any such area, where we are moving beyond the bounds of immediate experience. Individual sciences have begun to flourish only as their practitioners have come to agree on the appropriateness and basic trustworthiness of particular methods for dealing with their most fundamental problems. And in so far as theology, in its own unique way, purports to be, in effect, a science of God and things divine, it too must face and grapple with the issue of method if it is to flourish.

Intelligent and rational disagreement of any kind presupposes some level of agreement or shared understanding. A disagreement, for instance, over who is currently the best tennis player in the world will typically presuppose at least some basic agreement over what the game of tennis is, and thus over what sort of people are to count as tennis players. Theists and atheists disagree over whether there is a God. Christians and non-Christians often disagree over whether the story of Jesus is a true story of God living among us as a human being. In order for these disagreements to be intelligent and rational, the theist and the atheist must both have in mind some single idea of God, and so must the Christian and his non-Christian interlocutor. Otherwise, one party would not be denying what the other party is affirming. If they were not operating, at least at some level, with the same idea of God, however rough-edged or vague, their specific disagreements could not even be formulated We can think of the theist as believing that some particular idea of God is successfully reality-depicting. Along the same lines, we can think of the atheist who is in disagreement with him as believing that *the same idea of God* fails to be truly reality-depicting.

When a Christian and a non-Christian disagree over whether the story of Jesus presents God to us in a true and particularly distinctive way, their disagreement can occur over the basic issue of whether there is a God at all. Or it can occur as a disagreement between theists—the one believing that God once took human form and came to dwell among us as Jesus, the other asserting that the God who exists did no such thing. This disagreement over Jesus could not take place as an intelligent conflict of belief without some shared understanding of the basic idea of God. And where is this idea to come from? Exactly what idea is it to be?

The theist proposes; his opponent denies. The Christian proposes; his opponent denies. As a general rule, he who proposes must explain. It is his responsibility to articulate clearly what exactly the proposal is. It is thus up to the theist, and up to the Christian, to explain what exactly is meant by the word "God." But of course it is presumably in the interests of all parties to such religious disputes that the best idea of God which can be formulated be the one which is introduced for discussion. And so we need to ask what procedure or method for articulating an idea of God will best provide for this sort of result.

The problem of method in philosophical theology is posed by the fact that there are, in principle, many possible methods for arriving at, or articulating, an idea of God. One possible way of proceeding, for example, would be to attempt to consult all the purported revelations claimed by different religious traditions throughout human history, and draw from them a composite portrait of the divine. This possible method for arriving at a determinate conception of God can be referred to as the method of *universal revelational theology*. It is a procedure which has seemed attractive to many sincere inquiring people, and even to some ecumenically minded Christians, but it is a method with at least one fundamental flaw. Many of the purported revelations of God to be found throughout human history conflict. They offer incompatible accounts of the divine. How are we supposed to separate the sheep from the goats, the wheat from the chaff? The simple, apparently open-minded method of *universal revelational theology* does not itself provide us with a criterion of selection. It is not sufficiently discriminating, however ecumenically attractive it initially might appear to some people.

What is needed is a touchstone for theological acceptability, a standard, a measuring stick, a reliable guide for constructing our idea of God, a criterion which will help us avoid inconsistency. And of course, Christians have traditionally taken the Bible to provide exactly this.[1] Some Christian theologians have gone on to insist that the Bible provides us with our only fully reliable source of knowledge about God. In line with this, they sometimes go on to the extreme of recommending a distinct method for articulating a basic conception of deity which we can call, quite simply, *purely biblical theology*.[2] The guiding principle of this method is that we should go to the Bible, and only to the Bible, for our idea of God.

One problem for purely biblical theology is that, despite some theologians' claims to follow its strictures, it is not clear that anyone can manage to do so if they are seeking a philosophically adequate conception of the divine. The rule definitive of this method, as I understand it here, is that we should think or say about God only what is explicitly said about him in the Bible, or in addition what is strictly, logically implied by what the Bible manifestly contains. The reason why no philosopher or theologian seeking a philosophically adequate conception of God can manage finally to adhere to this rule is that, in our capacity of asking philosophical questions about the nature of God, we inevitably ask questions the biblical documents were not designed to answer.

The Bible is not a textbook of philosophical theology. Its texts on God are thus neither as complete nor as specific as the philosophical theologian needs in order to be able to answer fully his conceptual, or philosophical, questions.

Are these philosophical questions then illegitimate from a biblical standpoint? I see no reason to think so at all. From the fact that the biblical documents, written as they were to deal with burning practical questions of the greatest personal significance, do not address all the possible philosophical questions which can also, in their own way, be of the greatest intellectual significance, it does not follow at all that these more theoretical questions are illegitimate, or that they are unimportant. They can be quite important for the constructing of any comprehensive Christian world-view, and answers to them can help us to understand more deeply the biblical answers to more immediately practical questions. It can even be argued that it is incumbent upon any intelligent person who finds himself asking philosophical questions about matters of religious belief to do whatever it is in his power to do in order to find answers to them. Otherwise, such a person may be blocked from responding to God as a believer in the full integrity of his personality. It is never incumbent upon a Christian to eschew the quest for understanding, even when it leads him beyond the letter of the commitments of the Bible.

The challenge for the Christian philosopher or theologian should not be that of confining what he says about God to what the Bible has already said, but rather it should be that of constructing a philosophical theology which is thoroughly consonant with the biblical portrayal of God. What should be sought are not just philosophical ideas which happen to be logically consistent, or minimally compatible, with the biblical materials, but rather ideas which are deeply attuned to the biblical revelation, and thus consonant with the whole tenor of the Bible.

But if we are to build on the ideas of the Bible, we need a further method. We need a biblically based theology which is not as restrictive as the method of purely biblical theology. We need a method for drawing from, elaborating upon, and augmenting the content of the biblical materials in a way that will allow us to address any important philosophical issues concerning the nature of God which were not given fully developed answers by the biblical authors.

Some philosophers have suggested that the central idea of the Bible is its presentation of God as our creator, and as the creator of our world. It has also been said that the most central characterization of God in the Bible is its portrayal of him as the creator of all. In connection with these claims, we need to consider a method for thinking about deity which we can call *creation theology*. This method for articulating a conception of God centers around the claim that God is to be understood as the ultimate creator of every reality which exists distinct from himself. The precise method to be employed in connection with this claim is then explanatory in nature.

In this method for articulating a concept of God, it is said that, in order to explain the existence and nature of our universe, we must postulate the existence of a cause whose nature and activity would be sufficient for the production of such an astounding effect as the entire physical cosmos, with all its denizens, must be considered to be. Thus, according to the method of creation theology, the concept of God is properly taken to be the concept of a being who can serve the theoretical role of such an explanation.

As a way of thinking about God, creation theology has much to recommend it. First, as we have suggested, it has strong revelational backing. And second, it has seemed to many people to be an eminently rational method of thought. Indeed, it seems to consist in a procedure of postulational reasoning which, as used in the natural sciences, has proved its value time and again as a method of intellectual discovery: to explain the existence, occurrence or behavior of *A* we postulate the existence, occurrence or behavior of *B*; we postulate only what is strictly required for explaining *A*, and by so doing we quite often arrive at what is later confirmed as the truth. This method of thinking thus often appeals to people who consider themselves to be of a tough-minded, hard-nosed, scientific mindset. Even philosophers dubious of any claims to revelation, and thus disinclined to grant any special philosophical significance to the Bible as a source of ideas can find themselves strongly attracted to this basic method for articulating a concept of divinity. It seems to be a procedure which rationally can stand on its own.

But as a sole, independent method for articulating a conception of God, creation theology looks frustratingly incomplete. The idea of God arising exclusively out of this sort of explanatory reasoning inevitably has a rather minimal content which is both religiously and philosophically unsatisfying. Any being whose creative activity could explain adequately the existence of our universe would presumably have to be extraordinarily powerful and knowledgeable. But exactly how much power and knowledge should we think of him as enjoying? Creation theology will direct us to conceive of God as having enough power to create this cosmos. It will license us to ascribe to God at least this much power. But the problem is that a great many theists have wanted to ascribe to God the power to have created other sorts of universes instead, universes with more objects or with different kinds of objects. The belief is that he did not exhaust his power in his creation of this universe. Can creation theology authorize such a belief? It is hard to see how. And even if it could, it seems beyond the range of its method to specify exactly how much superabundant power God has.

And what of God's character? Is there enough evidence in the existence and nature of the universe to warrant fully the postulation of the idea of God as a morally perfect creator? In view of all the evil in the world—the pain, suffering and injustice—it would seem not. At least, it would be extremely difficult if possible at all to arrive at such an idea from nothing more than an explanatory extrapolation from our world. And yet this is something most theists would endorse as a central component in their idea of God.

There are two simple ways to augment creation theology in order to attempt to alleviate these inadequacies. First, for those who are suspicious of claims to revelation and who thus want to employ this sort of method on its own, it is possible to see creation theology as only the initial impetus to, and a mere partial application of, a broader *comprehensive explanatory theology*, a method which would take as its data to be explained not only the existence and basic nature of our universe, but also all those occurrences in human history deemed to be of religious significance: apparent miracles, signs of providential intent, and various sorts of religious experience. An explanatory method which casts its net more broadly in this way can be expected to arrive at a correspondingly more finely specified final explanation or explanatory postulation.

Although this broadening of method would probably result in some improvement, it is a bit difficult to see how it would help in resolving the specific questions which have been raised. Some idea of divine character in relation to humans could be hypothesized, but the result would probably still fall far short of the extreme claims theists,

and in particular Christian theists, have thought it important to make for God. And there is no evident way at all that this broadening could deal with the problem of specifying the full degree of power enjoyed by God. So a good deal of incompleteness would still remain.

We should not forget, however, that we introduced the method of creation theology as a biblically based idea. As the psalmist wrote, "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament proclaims his handiwork" (Ps 19:1). If it, or even its broader relative, is thought of as a method for augmenting the descriptions of God already to be found in the Bible, it matters somewhat less what this method, operating under its own steam, can produce. Its results are automatically viewed as augmented by what the Bible already contains, and when it comes to questions about the character of God, that augmentation is considerable. For the God of the Bible is "righteous and upright" (Deut 32:4), "gracious and compassionate, slow to anger, abounding in lovingkindness" (Joel 2:13); "all his works are truth, and his ways justice" (Dan 4:37); "great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised" (Ps 48:1).

But questions still remain unanswered. Even a biblically based creation theology, or a broader, biblically based comprehensive explanatory theology, seem to leave certain central and relevant philosophical questions about the nature of God unanswered. How do we specify the precise scope of God's power and knowledge, the full strength of his character, the mode of his being or the nature of his reality? The Bible clearly points us in a certain direction, toward an exalted, ultimate conception of God. It just does not address all our relevant philosophical questions. Both creation theology and comprehensive explanatory theology offer us help in that regard. But they too, for all their value, seem to stop short of providing sufficient guidance for dealing with all our legitimate questions about the grandeur of deity. So the issue naturally arises: Is there a method which is both revelational and rational, compatible with both the insights of the Bible and sound explanatory methods, which will offer, in principle, a complete philosophical perspective on God, and thus will result in the best conception of God we can attain? An idea stated quite succinctly by Saint Anselm, archbishop of Canterbury (A.D. 1033–1109), can be taken to have provided us with at least the elements of just that sort of method, if properly understood and developed.

PERFECT BEING THEOLOGY

According to Anselm, God is to be thought of most fundamentally as "that than which no greater can be conceived."[3] Most contemporary philosophers have taken Anselm's basic idea here to be best interpreted to mean that God is to be thought of as *the greatest possible being*, an individual exhibiting *maximal perfection*. This core conception of deity is both very general and at the same time highly focused. It does not explicitly give us many specifics concerning God, hence its generality. But it provides a single focus for all our reflections about divinity, one point of light to guide all our thinking about the nature of God. The idea of God as the greatest possible being is not itself a full-blown conception of deity; rather, it is more like the main element in a recipe for cooking up our idea of God in detail. This core idea, along with an accompanying method for its development, will be what constitutes Anselm's most distinctive contribution to religious thinking, the philosophical procedure known as *perfect being theology*.

The ideas to be found in perfect being theology are not altogether original with Anselm. The conception of God as unsurpassably great is clearly itself a central biblical idea. But what Anselm provided was a precise philosophical statement of that idea and an examination of some of its implications. It was thus Anselm who pioneered the clarification and use of this biblically based and philosophically attuned method of thinking about God.

We can characterize the core of perfect being theology as the thesis that:

> (G) God is a being with the greatest possible array of compossible great-making properties.

Clearly, the terms in this thesis require some elucidation. A *great-making property* is any property, or attribute, or characteristic, or quality which it is intrinsically good to have, any property which endows its bearer with some measure of value, or greatness, or metaphysical stature, regardless of external circumstances. The key idea here is of course that of *intrinsic goodness*. By contrast, *extrinsic goodness* has to do with value determined by external relations or outward circumstances. For example, if there is a sniper on the roof of my office building prepared to shoot anyone who leaves during the next hour, then the property of staying inside this building for more than an hour is a good property or attribute for me to have. But its value clearly depends entirely on external circumstances.

Very often, when we say of something that it is good, what we mean is that it is extrinsically good. Some nutritionists and physicians tell us nowadays that the habit of eating oatmeal for breakfast almost every morning is a good thing. But this surely has nothing to do with the intrinsic experience or event of eating oatmeal. Eating oatmeal regularly is *good* only because it is *good for* maintaining low blood cholesterol. And maintaining low blood cholesterol is in turn a good thing because it is good for avoiding heart trouble and maintaining general good health. It will help us to get a precise philosophical grasp of extrinsic goodness and its relation to intrinsic goodness if we symbolize the conditions under which claims to goodness hold true.

When it is said of some object, or property, *A*, that *A* is extrinsically good, what is really meant is that having *A* or standing in some particular relation to *A* is good for standing in some distinct relation *R* to some object or state of affairs *B*, something extrinsic or external to *A*. To say that *A* is *good for* this is to say that standing in the right relation to *A* is conducive to, or productive of, this further relation. But then we will in this way think of *A* as good or a good only if we also think of standing in *R* to *B* as itself a good thing. And if we here again have in mind extrinsic goodness, then standing in *R* to *B* must in turn be good for standing in some further relation *R1* to some object *C*. That's just what extrinsic goodness requires, as we have seen. Let "*P*" name the property of standing in relation *R* to object *B*, and "*P1*" name the property of standing in *R1* to *C*. In the realm of extrinsic goodness, *P* will be thought of as good in so far as, and only in so far as, it leads to *P1*. But this will make no sense unless *P1* is itself judged a good thing. And if this judgment is again one of extrinsic goodness, then *P1* must be good in virtue of leading to some further relation *R2* to some object *C*, the property of standing in which we can denote as "*P2*."

What we are now in position to see is something very interesting. Some modern philosophers with world views very different from Anselm's have thought that all goodness is extrinsic, and thus that there is nothing which is intrinsically good. If this were true, then perfect being theology could not even get off the ground, for there would be no great-making properties to attribute to God. But could all goodness be extrinsic goodness? It seems highly problematic to think so, for supposing this to be true lands us in a perplexing dilemma. If all goodness is extrinsic goodness, then *P* cannot be good unless it leads to *P1,* which cannot be good unless it in turn leads to some value-endowing *P2,* which itself cannot be good or a source of value unless it leads to some value-endowing *P3,* and so forth. At some point, either we arrive at a value-endowing *Pn* which is identical with some earlier *Pn-m,* in which case we are faced with a perplexing circularity of explanation, or else there never arises such an identity, in which case we are faced with what philosophers call an "infinite regress" of explanations. But to be posed with the prospect that all ascriptions of goodness are either circular or infinitely complex is to be posed with an unsatisfying dilemma.

The other possibility, the alternative envisioned by Anselm and many theists, is that some things are intrinsically good, good in themselves, and thus are proper ultimate stopping points in explanations of goodness. That is to say, the recognition of something as an intrinsic good can be an appropriate terminus, or endpoint, to any explanation of value. Thus, a conception of value which countenances intrinsic as well as extrinsic values would seem to be more intellectually or rationally satisfying than one endorsing only extrinsic value. And it

is just such a broader conception of value which Anselm's understanding of God requires.

So a great-making property is to be thought of as a property it is intrinsically good to have. And the core thesis of perfect being theology, proposition (G), ascribes to God the greatest possible array of *compossible* great-making properties. An array or collection of properties is compossible just in case it is possible that they all be had by the same individual at the same time, or all together. A simple example of a pair of noncompossible properties would be the property of being married and the property of being a bachelor. Knowledge and benevolence, on the other hand, are compossible properties. If God is thought of as having the greatest possible array of compossible great-making properties, we are thinking of God's nature as consisting in a cluster of properties intrinsically good to have, properties which can all be exemplified together, and which are such that their additive value, as a group, is unsurpassable by any other possible array of great-making properties. And if God is being thought of singularly as *the* greatest possible being, he is thought to be the sole possessor of such an array of properties. He is being thought of as being so great that no other, independent being could possibly rival him in greatness. With this, we arrive at the supreme conception of perfection, and moreover at the greatest possible idea that a human being could ever entertain. For what idea could possibly be greater than the idea of a unique, greatest possible being, necessarily without peer?

But we are still at a level of high abstraction and generality here. We are in need of more specifics. We have at this point only the core of a detailed conception of deity. To begin to fill out this conception of the divine, to employ the full method of perfect being theology, we need to begin to consult our value intuitions. What properties can we intuitively recognize as great-making properties, and what clusters of properties can be seen likewise to correspond to a high value, or an exalted metaphysical stature? It is part of the method of perfect being theology for us to consult our intuitions on these matters. It is one of the assumptions of this method that there will be at least widespread agreement among people who are rightly positioned and well disposed concerning at least many such intuitions.

Now, it should be pointed out that by the word "intuition" we do not necessarily mean to denote here some mysterious faculty for information gathering. Nor do we refer to anything which is an infallible guide to truth. Intuition is much more commonplace than that. Someone intuitively judges a proposition or claim to be true just in case, on merely considering the proposition, or the content of the claim, it appears true to him, and that appearance does not derive entirely from either perceptual belief-forming mechanisms (such as sight, hearing or smell) or from mere definitional conventions (from our human decisions) to use a word to have a certain meaning, as could be the case in the proposition: *The sentence "A triangle is a closed plane figure with three straight sides" expresses a truth*. Simply put, an intuitively formed belief seems to be a sort of naturally formed belief, a belief whose acceptance does not derive entirely from linguistic definition, evidence, testimony, memory, inference or sense experience. Our intuitions are among our most basic judgments about the world around us. We intuitively judge that $2 + 2 = 4$, that nothing could be colored without being extended, that the basic properties of matter are the same in different regions of the universe, that there are some fundamental principles of logical reasoning which are reliable, and that it is wrong to torture innocent people for no reason. And these are just a few examples. We could not even begin to use logic, mathematics or scientific method without an intuitive judgment that their most basic assumptions, propositions and principles are true. Some critics ask why we should trust such intuitions, or any intuitions at all. But to ask why anyone should ever rely on intuition is like asking why anyone should ever believe what seems to him to be true. The point, however, should be made that not all intuitions are equal. It seems that there are degrees of intuitive support a proposition can have—some intuitions are just stronger than others. And some are reliable, whereas others are not. Most practitioners of perfect being theology take our intuitions about matters of value, as they do most other intuitions, to be innocent until proven guilty, or reliable

until proven deceptive. The alternative is a form of skepticism with few attractions.

In order to elaborate an Anselmian idea of God, all practitioners of perfect being theology consult their value intuitions about what basic properties are great-making properties. Beginning with one of the least controversial candidates for the status of great-making property, we can represent schematically the development of a conception of a perfect being which I think would accord in one way or another with the intuitions of most of those who employ this method. In one representative example of an ascending order of discovery concerning the various aspects of his greatness in metaphysical stature, God can be conceived of in this way as:

(1) conscious (a minded being capable of and engaged in states of thought and awareness),

(2) a conscious free agent (a being capable of free action),

(3) a thoroughly benevolent, conscious agent,

(4) a thoroughly benevolent conscious agent with significant knowledge,

(5) a thoroughly benevolent conscious agent with significant knowledge and power,

(6) a thoroughly benevolent conscious agent with unlimited knowledge and power, who is the creative source of all else,

(7) a thoroughly benevolent conscious agent with unlimited knowledge and power who is the necessarily existent, ontologically independent creative source of all else.

And with this, we have arrived at what, with all its implications, is the highest conception of all, the conception of a unique, maximally perfect, or greatest possible, being. It is some such cumulative development of intuitions concerning intrinsic goodness, great-making properties, and the comparative greatness of different arrays of such properties that every practitioner of perfect being theology must undertake.

This representative list of seven stages of development in the elaboration of an Anselmian conception of God was constructed quite simply. First, it is agreed by many people that a being capable of conscious awareness is of greater intrinsic value or metaphysical stature than a thing with no such capacity, a rock for example. But then, it would be even greater not to be just a passive perceiver of things, or a conscious being confined to its own thoughts, but rather to be a conscious being capable of acting out its values and intentions into the world. And if to be an agent is good in itself, then to be an agent whose agency is thoroughly characterized by morally good or benevolent intentions is even better. Likewise, it is better for such an agent to have significant knowledge and power than to be extremely limited in these respects; and, finally, it would seem to be greater still to suffer no limits in these areas. Ultimately, a being unlimited in power and knowledge who was the source of all other beings would seem to be superior to one who, for all his excellence, was just one among other independent beings. And, at the limit of our conceptions, it would seem to be the greatest possible status to be such a being, exalted in all other respects, whose foothold in reality was so firm that it is impossible that the being not exist. Each level in our schematic ascent thus represents a development in our conception of greatness appropriate for the greatest possible being, which is God.

QUESTIONS AND REFINEMENTS: THE ULTIMATE METHOD

Do all practitioners of perfect being theology agree at every point concerning what God is like? Any look at the history of philosophical theology, or at the current literature on our idea of God, will show that the answer is no.[4] No method for thinking about God is a fully mechanical procedure, capable of turning out precisely the same results regardless of who employs it. There is plenty of room for disagreement among those who conceptualize God in Anselm's way, as we shall have occasion to see in later chapters.

Some philosophers think of God as timelessly eternal, an individual existing outside the bounds of time as well as space. Others conceive of God as an everlasting individual, existing throughout the entirety of time. Their disagreement can sometimes be seen to be a dispute over which of these alternate relations to time would be a more perfect form of existence. Value intuitions here and elsewhere can differ, as can intuitions over what is or is not possible. Our intuitions thus have *defeasible epistemic status*. The epistemic status of a belief or judgment is its status with respect to the goal of knowledge (in Greek, *episteme*). A belief has positive epistemic status, we can say, in case the person with the belief is justified in holding it, given the goal of attaining knowledge. But the status of a belief is defeasible in case it is possible that it be undermined or overturned. To say that our intuitions are defeasible is thus to say that, whatever positive degree of warrant or support they supply for a judgment or belief, they are in principle, and often in practice, correctable. They are not, to emphasize the point made earlier, infallible.

Our construction of an Anselmian conception of God is fueled by our value intuitions and by our modal intuitions—our intuitions concerning what is possible and impossible. But because intuitions are correctable, and because our intuitions are typically not comprehensive, that is to say, because we do not typically have intuitions clearly leading us on every issue relevant to attaining a full conception of deity which might arise, the method of perfect being theology is not in principle cut off from creative interaction with other methods for conceiving of God. And, in fact, I think it is best seen as the primary method for integrating all other plausible methods for thinking of God.

Let us first consider for a moment the fact that we do not have any reason to believe that we human beings have a comprehensive capacity for generating all the intuitions which might be needed for recognizing all the great-making properties that ought to enter into our idea of God. We thus might miss some important divine attributes if we rely upon perfect being theology and our value intuitions alone for our idea of deity. Now, some such attributes could conceivably be supplied by the method of creation theology, or the broader comprehensive explanatory theology. Consider for example the property of being powerful. Some people claim to have no value intuitions that support the judgment that this is a great-making property. They may feel that the property of being powerful is in itself, or intrinsically, value-neutral and that it can take on extrinsic value only as a function of what kind of being has the property, and how the power in question is used. If people with these judgments about power were to think about God using only the method of perfect being theology, they would have difficulty arriving at any satisfactory judgment concerning the resources and scope for divine agency. But it is a basic postulation of creation theology that God is to be thought of as having great power. The only difficulty for creation theology might be in specifying the precise extent of that power, as we have seen. But at this point, once we have granted that God has great power, the perspective of perfect being theology can kick in and specify that God's power will have no limits that imply imperfection or inferiority. His power will be viewed as being as exalted as possible. In some such way, it could be possible for perfect being theology to be supplemented by creation theology, which would then in turn be supplemented by Anselmian thinking. In this way a dynamic interaction of the two methods could be possible.

But it is also possible that our intuitions fail to settle some question about the nature of God, and the property in question is not such that it would have to be postulated as a characteristic of the divine by either creation theology or comprehensive explanatory theology. It is quite plausible to think that if there were any such divine attributes that would be important for us to know of, and yet which are such as to slip through the net of our intuitions and of our explanatory needs, God would reveal them to us. The goodness of God conceptualized by perfect being theology would seem to guarantee that. Thus, it behooves us to be open to consulting the apparent data of revelation available to us.

But even more importantly, the intuitions we do have, and the explanatory postulations we do

make might not all be trustworthy. They might thus need to be corrected at the bar of special revelation. Consider as an example one particular case having to do with value intuitions. In recent years, Nicholas Wolterstorff has pointed out that many Christians, unduly influenced by ancient Stoic thought, have supposed it to be a perfection to be absolutely undisturbed by any passion or emotion whatsoever. Accordingly, they have characterized God as *impassible,* incapable of perturbation by any emotion or passion. Wolterstorff argues that this is out of step with the biblical portrayal of God as a suffering God.[5] The upshot of his argument is that some classical theological intuitions about impassibility must be corrected by the content of the biblical revelation. As the nature of Wolterstorff's case makes clear, it is possible for our value intuitions to be skewed or distorted by a dominant or powerful philosophical tradition. Any well-attested data from revelation should be allowed to overturn, or correct, contrary value intuitions such as these.

So the method of perfect being theology needs a revelational control. But it's also true that perfect being theology itself can act as an interpretive constraint on how we read the Bible. For example, from earliest times biblical commentators have assured us that when in the Old Testament the Bible speaks of "the hand of God" or "the mouth of God," we are not to suppose that God has, literally, bodily parts such as hands and a mouth. Why? Because it is more perfect not to be by nature limited to such a form of indirect agency as that of having to work by means of hands and speak by means of a mouth. The dynamic of interactions among the plausible methods for thinking about God is thus a complex matter. Each method can provide its own input data for our conception of God, and can offer constraints on the data to be gained from the other methods. For Christians, creation theology, comprehensive explanatory theology, and perfect being theology are to be endorsed in so far as they capture leading ideas or directions of thought to be found in the Bible, and provide for a philosophical extension of these ideas. Perfect being theology, capturing as it does the most majestic conception of God imaginable, rightly provides a leading method for our thinking and a touchstone for our employment and integration of the procedures of all the other plausible methods for thinking about the nature of God. In its intuitive and integrative force, I think, it is without parallel and thus properly establishes for us priorities in our conceiving of God. God is to be thought of as a being without any limitations that imply imperfection or inferiority. God is to be thought of as the greatest possible being. And he is to be conceived as the greatest possible creative source of being.

Creation theology and perfect being theology pick up on different strands of biblical thinking, strands of thought that are deeply intertwined throughout the whole history of Judeo-Christian thought. They can also be thought of as echoes of Platonism, in the case of perfect being theology, with its stress on value, and Aristotelianism, in the case of creation theology, with its emphasis on causation. Both the concern with value and the concern with causation are enduring and legitimate preoccupations within the enterprises of general philosophical reflection and theology inquiry. It is my suggestion that not only do these concerns complement one another in our thinking about God, but that, properly understood, the methods to which they give rise not only interact in a natural way, but finally coincide in their ultimate results. It can be argued that anyone who begins with creation theology and endorses a few simple and independently plausible metaphysical theses, widely endorsed by theists of all kinds throughout the centuries, will find himself with the conclusion that stands as the core of perfect being theology.[6] Simply put, if God is conceived of as, necessarily, the ultimate cause of every other being, and we endorse some principle to the effect that no effect can equal or exceed its ultimate cause in plenitude of being, or metaphysical stature, or intrinsic value, then it will follow that this creator God is the greatest possible being. That is to say, starting with creation theology can plausibly be thought to result in the endorsement of the fundamental tenet of perfect

being theology, the full explication of which will require the use of its attendant method. And I think it is also quite plausible to hold that a reasonable development of perfect being theology will result in an endorsement of the core thesis of creation theology, the claim that God is the creator of anything which might exist distinct from himself. For as we have already seen while working through a representative seven-step development of the Anselmian idea of God, if we imagined any existing universe as existing wholly independent of God, as depending in no way on God for its existence and activity, it would seem that the conception of God with which we were operating was not that of a greatest possible being after all. For, surely, a being would have greater value, or greater metaphysical stature, if it was an absolute source of existence, such that nothing else could exist without deriving its reality from this being. Thus, in order for God truly to be thought of as the greatest possible being, he would also have to be thought of as what we can call an "absolute creator." Such, I think, is the link from perfect being theology to creation theology.

And once the practitioner of perfect being theology has arrived at this point, it stands to reason that he will find the method of creation theology to be important for filling out that conception of God as absolute creator. Thus, when it comes to the two distinctively philosophical methods for conceiving of God used by Christians and others through the centuries more than any other procedure, it seems reasonable to think that, regardless of which one might seem initially most attractive as a procedure, a theist will end up also endorsing the core claim and employing the procedures distinctive of the other method as well. There is something intellectually satisfying about this. For perfect being theology focuses on the intrinsic properties of God, whereas creation theology emphasizes the actual and potential relations holding between God and all else possible. They both seek, in their own ways, to explicate one important facet or another of metaphysical ultimacy, the intent they both have in common. Thus, they both can function in our attempt to articulate a philosophically adequate, as well as a biblically responsible, concept of God.

NOTES

1. For an argument supporting the appropriateness of this, see William Charlton, *Philosophy and Christian Belief* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1988).
2. This sort of suggestion can be found in the work of the evangelical theologian J. I. Packer. See, for example, "What Do You Mean When You Say God?" *Christianity Today,* September 19, 1986, pp. 27–31.
3. See S. N. Deane, trans., *St. Anselm: Basic Writings*, 2d ed. (LaSalle, Ill.: Open Court Publishing Company, 1968). More recently available is M. J. Charlesworth, trans., *St. Anselm's Proslogion* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1979). Objections that can be raised against the Anselmian perspective are discussed at some length in Thomas V. Morris, *Anselmian Explorations* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1987), especially in chapter one. This perspective is further developed and defended in George Schlesinger, *New Perspectives on Old-Time Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988).
4. For more on this, see the editorial introduction to Thomas V. Morris, ed., *The Concept of God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987).
5. Nicholas Wolterstorff, "Suffering Love," in *Philosophy and the Christian Faith,* ed. Thomas V. Morris (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), pp. 196–237.
6. For an argument to this effect, see Thomas V. Morris, "A Theistic Proof of Perfection," *Sophia* 26 (July 1987): 31–35.

I.A.3

The Openness of God—Systematic Theology

CLARK H. PINNOCK

Clark H. Pinnock (1937–) is professor emeritus of systematic theology at McMaster Divinity School in Canada. His most important recent work has focused on the development and advocacy of open theism*, a view that stands in contrast to "classical theism" and maintains that God is, among other things, temporal, subject to change and passion, and limited in his knowledge of the future. In the present selection, Pinnock presents a variety of systematic theological considerations that speak in favor of this way of thinking about God.*

The concept of God is the most important topic in theology—and the most mysterious. Dealing with it makes one aware of the limitations of our finite understanding. We are not starting from scratch, though, or operating only from the light of human wisdom, but are reflecting on those perfections that must be ascribed to the divine Being on the basis of God's own self-disclosure in Jesus Christ. On the basis of revelation we strive for a biblically and conceptually sound understanding of God and of the package of divine properties that contribute to a coherent understanding. Each attribute needs to be explained coherently and the attributes together shown to be compatible with one another and with the vision of God as a whole. I believe that unless the portrait of God is compelling, the credibility of belief in God is bound to decline.

In Christian theology we are not dealing with just any old concept of God, but with the surprising God and Father of our Lord Jesus. This is a God who does not remain at a safe distance, worrying about his own honor, but one who bares his holy arm and rescues humankind through sharing their distress and affliction. We are not dealing with an unapproachable deity but with God who has a human face and who is not indifferent to us but is deeply involved with us in our need.

Doctrines are important because they express the truth-claims of religion both for insiders and outsiders. They try faithfully to state what we believe and to describe the realities that underlie these commitments in a timely way. Doctrines explore the cognitive substance of the Christian message. A doctrine of God seeks to distill in conceptual form what we know about God through revelation, truth that bears ultimate significance for humanity.

No doctrine can be more important than the doctrine of God. It is the principal doctrine in any theology, because apart from it the vision of faith cannot be stated. The whole creation is grounded in God, and the flow of history is the sphere of the

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Most endnotes omitted.

outworking of his purposes. The doctrine is of more than academic interest; it is also of great missiological and practical importance. How can we commend belief unless we have formed a convincing conception of God for ourselves? Modern atheism has resulted in part from distortions that were allowed to enter the doctrine of God from the direction of philosophy. We cannot believe if we have conceptualized God in existentially repugnant ways. It makes a difference whether God is portrayed as genuinely related to human life or as standing aloof from it and indifferent to human needs. On the other hand, formulating this doctrine in a way that shows the relevence of belief in God has great apologetic value as people learn that God shares in their sorrows and is touched by the feelings of their infirmities.

Humility is essential when thinking about such lofty matters. What the apostle said about our knowing "only in part" is very apt and his exclamation rings true: "O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!" (Rom 11:33 NRSV). In theology, as in the Christian life generally, we are pilgrims traveling en route to God's kingdom. Some things are too high for us, and we can always learn more in conversation with others. Nevertheless, we hope to get a little closer to the truth by our efforts; if we reach a dead end, we will not be too proud to retrace our steps and try a different path. We insist on distinguishing between the Bible and our attempts to interpret it, and we believe that God always has more light to shed on his Word than we have received.

BASIC MODELS

Interpretation is a human activity in which we distinguish between the primary biblical data and any presuppositions and interests we bring to the task. In theology, as in science, we also make use of models. Models help us to deal with complex subjects like Christology, ecclesiology, salvation and so forth. We face a great variety of data needing interpretation and are compelled to choose an angle of approach to them. In the case of the doctrine of God, we all have a basic portrait of God's identity in our minds when we search the Scriptures, and this model influences our exposition. What a great difference it makes, for example, whether we think of God as a stern judge, a loving parent or an indulgent grandfather. In theology we experiment with plausible angles of vision and try them out.

Two models of God in particular are the most influential that people commonly carry around in their minds. We may think of God primarily as an aloof monarch, removed from the contingencies of the world, un-changeable in every aspect of being, as an all-determining and irresistible power, aware of everything that will ever happen and never taking risks. Or we may understand God as a caring parent with qualities of love and responsiveness, generosity and sensitivity, openness and vulnerability, a person (rather than a metaphysical principle) who experiences the world, responds to what happens, relates to us and interacts dynamically with humans. These correspond to … differences … between the God of Greek philosophy and the God of the Bible. God is sovereign in both models, but the mode of his sovereignty differs.

In this book we are advancing the second, or the open, view of God. Our understanding of the Scriptures leads us to depict God, the sovereign Creator, as voluntarily bringing into existence a world with significantly free personal agents in it, agents who can respond positively to God or reject his plans for them. In line with the decision to make this kind of world, God rules in such a way as to uphold the created structures and, because he gives liberty to his creatures, is happy to accept the future as open, not closed, and a relationship with the world that is dynamic, not static. We believe that the Bible presents an open view of God as living and active, involved in history, relating to us and changing in relation to us. We see the universe as a context in which there are real choices, alternatives and surprises. God's openness means that God is open to the changing realities of history,

that God cares about us and lets what we do impact him. Our lives make a difference to God—they are truly significant. God is delighted when we trust him and saddened when we rebel against him. God made us significant creatures and treats us as such. We are significant to God and the apple of his eye (Ps 17:8).

We hope to persuade people both inside and outside the church to regard God in this fashion, because we believe it is more biblical and meaningful to do so. Some critics may speak of "a battle of the gods," as if we were advocating a God other than the God of historic Christianity. What we are really doing is conducting a competition between models of God. We are trying to understand the God of Christian revelation better. I realize that reconsidering one's model of God may be a delicate issue for some readers. It may feel as if, when a familiar way of thinking about God is questioned, God himself is lost or has become distant. But the experience of reconceptualizing can be positive. After the initial anxiety of rethinking, one will find God again in a fresh way around the next bend in the reflective road. Rather than worry about *our* discomfort, perhaps we should be concerned about *God's* reputation. Does it not concern us that God's name is often dishonored because of poor theologies of God? How can we expect Christians to delight in God or outsiders to seek God if we portray God in biblically flawed, rationally suspect and existentially repugnant ways? We cannot expect it.

SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

Many contemporary Christians will not be surprised by the model we call the openness of God or free will theism. They already enjoy a vital personal relationship with God and experience God as dynamically responding to them. Few doubt that what they do in life has an impact on God and calls forth appropriate responses from God. The problem actually lies more in systematic theology than it does in religious experience. For some reason, when we do theology we lose sight of the openness of God that we experience. There is resistance to conceptualizing it, even though it is existenually familiar.

This is because of tradition. The history of doctrine has seen a tilt toward divine transcendence over against God's immanence. Theology emphasized one set of divine properties to the neglect of another and disturbed the delicate balance between them. Though God is both transcendent and immanent, theology has tended to be one-sided. In Isaiah we hear the balance as God says: "I dwell in the high and holy place, *and* also with him who is of a contrite and humble spirit" (Is 57:15 RSV). Though acknowledging the truth of divine immanence, theologians usually place the preponderance of their emphasis on God's transcendence. They prefer to speak more of God's power than of weakness, more of God's eternity than of temporality, and more of God's immutability than of loving changeableness in relation to us. This represents a theological distortion that must be corrected, without being overcorrected. I hope the reader will not see my position as an overreaction; it is not my intention.

It is important to recognize that God (according to the Bible) is both transcendent (that is, self-sufficient, the Creator of the world, ontologically other than creation, sovereign and eternal) and at the same time immanent (that is, present to the world, active within history, involved, relational and temporal). Combining the two, we say that God is so transcendent that he creates room for others to exist and maintains a relationship with them, that God is so powerful as to be able to stoop down and humble himself, that God is so stable and secure as to be able to risk suffering and change. Theology must strive to do greater justice to the two truths and hold them in proper balance. God must not be situated in our thinking so far away that he becomes irrelevant to human life or so near that he becomes dependent on the world, not by volition but necessarily.

Traditional theology has been biased in the direction of transcendence as the result of undue philosophical influences. Greek thinking located the ultimate and the perfect in the realm of the immutable and absolutely transcendent. This led early theologians (given that the biblical God is also transcendent) to experiment with equating

the God of revelation with the Greek ideal of deity. However, a price had to be paid in terms of faithfulness to Scripture and relevance to human life. A striking example of this is the way they distorted the divine self-ascription "I AM WHO I AM" (Ex 3:14). This text, which points to the living God of the exodus, was transmuted into a principle of metaphysical immutability, as the dynamic "I AM" of the Hebrew text became the impersonal "being who is" of the Greek Septuagint (LXX), enabling theologians like Philo and Origen to link a changeless Greek deity with the God who acts in history. What God is saying to Moses in this verse is not "I exist" or even "I will be present." God is saying that he will be a faithful God for his people. This is an example of the way in which the image of God as defined on the horizon of Greek thinking threatened to replace the image of the living God of the biblical revelation in theology. The God of promise who acts in history tended to be replaced by a metaphysical statement about abstract being.

No one should criticize the fathers for trying to integrate current philosophical beliefs and biblical insights. If God is the God of the universe and if truth is one, theologians should try to integrate all of the truth that they know from any quarter. But it is essential to integrate the various insights in such a way that the biblical message is not negated or compromised. In the integration the insights of revelation must be normative and not swept aside.

Fortunately the tilt toward transcendence in traditional dogmatics was not always extreme. Christians did not consistently lose sight of the dynamic portrait of God in the Scriptures. It was present in hymns, sermons and liturgies, which tend to be more conservative in relation to biblical language. It was even present in theology, particularly in dealing with a subject like the incarnation. When contemplating this mystery, the same theologians would often admit that in becoming flesh the logos underwent change, because of God's desire to be gracious to humanity. The doctrine of the incarnation requires nuanced thinking about God's immutability, and this was not lost upon the fathers. Nevertheless, the one-sided stress on God's transcendence (on God turned away from us, not toward us) would continue to distort Catholic and Protestant theology to the present time.

My task here is to correct this imbalance in the handling of the transcendence and immanence of God. This requires allowing Scripture to challenge tradition and not permitting theology to be Hellenic where that would be unbiblical. While open to everything that is good in Greek thinking, we must discard what is not good. We cannot allow undue loyalty to traditional paradigms and esteemed theologians to prevent needed revision of the doctrine of God for today.

Modern culture can actually assist us in this task because the contemporary horizon is more congenial to dynamic thinking about God than is the Greek portrait. Today it is easier to invite people to find fulfillment in a dynamic, personal God than it would be to ask them to find it in a deity who is immutable and self-enclosed. Modern thinking has more room for a God who is personal (even tripersonal) than it does for a God as absolute substance. We ought to be grateful for those features of modern culture which make it easier to recover the biblical witness.

Let me attempt now to correct the imbalance in theology's handling of transcendence and immanence by expounding on the relevent divine perfections. In doing so, I will take care not to engage in overcorrection or to reverse the tilt, this time in the direction of immanance, as liberal theology has customarily done. Let us seek a way to revise classical theism in a dynamic direction without falling into process theology.

THE TRINITY

The doctrine of the Trinity is the centerpiece of Christian theism. The church has always confessed that the God who created all things is one and many (not an undifferentiated simple unity) and embodies a relational fullness and richness of being in himself. Given the fact that Father and Son are persons and that the Spirit is spoken of in personal terms in the Scriptures, it is appropriate to speak of God as a community of persons rather than as modes of being.

This doctrine is relevant to the openness of God because the social trinity is an open and dynamic structure. It does not portray God as a solitary, domineering individual but as the essence of loving community. When presented as a solitary potentate, God appears as the enemy of human freedom and atheism flourishes, but when seen as social trinity, God is the ultimate in community, mutuality and sharing. The doctrine enables us to break with substantialist assumptions about God being a "thing" and puts the idea of three relationally interconnected persons in its place. The Trinity points to a relational ontology in which God is more like a dynamic event than a simple substance and is essentially relational, ecstatic and alive. God exists as diverse persons united in a communion of love and freedom. God is the perfection of love and communion, the very antithesis of self-sufficiency.

The Trinity lets us say simultaneously two very important things about God—that God is (on the one hand) self-sufficient in fullness and (on the other hand) open to the world in overflowing love. It sheds light on God's genuine delight in creatures as social beings themselves and on why he would invite them to share the richness of the divine fellowship as his friends. His love for us is not the benevolence of a distant king but like the tender love of a nursing mother (Is 49:15).

The trinitarian model seems superior to process theism in this matter of the divine openness. It lets us criticize classical theism without moving in that direction. Process thinking does not have a patent on the dynamic, relational and temporal nature of God. The triune God (unlike God in process theism) does not need the world to make up for a love and mutuality lacking in his nature. The Trinity allows the church to confess that God is both self-sufficient and loving at the same time. The problem in process theology seems to be the fact that it requires us to view the world as necessary to God, with the implication that God is not free in creation but necessarily tied to a world. The Trinity, being an event of relationship, can be open to the world by choice and can work toward the mutuality in history already present in God's being.

The Trinity depicts a relational God who is ontologically other and a dynamic world that has real value. As internally social and self-sufficient, God does not need the world but creates it out of the abundance of his rich inner life. This makes God free to create and respond to the world, free to be gracious and take the initiative where necessary. Gregory Boyd writes:

> Only if God is antecedently actual, relational, and self-sufficient in relation to the world can God be free enough to do what scripture proclaims that God did in fact do in Jesus Christ. Only a God who is internally social within Godself can perform the more than necessary feat of opening up this sociality to what is fundamentally other than Godself. Only a God who is socially and self-sufficiently triune as lover, beloved, and loving can take the radical and completely unprovoked initiative to take on within this One's self the full nature of a non-divine self in order to effect wholeness in the whole of the non-divine creation.

THE CREATION

The triune God is the Creator of the world out of nothing. This means that God does not simply influence preexisting matter but that everything depends on God for its existence. Belief in creation captures an essential dimension of the theistic worldview because it posits the world as the creation of God, as having its origin in God. Each being owes its existence to God, whose own being is independent of any world, making any relationship with the world voluntary, not necessitated. It also implies that God has the power to intervene in the world, interrupting (if need be) the normal causal sequences.

However, contrary to the opinions of some, this act of creation does not entail that God controls and determines everything. God is free to make such creatures as he wills and has chosen to

make some with the capacity for choice. God has given them a relative and derived autonomy. As H. P. Owen puts it, "God can create such beings as as he wills; and has chosen to make some creatures with the capacity for free choice."

Being socially triune, God has made a world with freedom, in which loving relationships can flourish. It is an ecosystem capable of echoing back the triune life of God. We may think of humanity as the created image of God's social nature, enacting on the finite level the relational movements that occur eternally in God. This must be why in the beginning God said the creation was "good"—because it brings such pleasure to God in this respect As triune, God would be self-sufficient without creating any world, but as triune, God delights in a world in which he can interact with creatures for whom his love can overflow. God does not need a world in the sense of having a deficiency in his nature but wants one that delights his heart and pleases him.

This helps to explain why God made human beings—because they are able to respond to God and to hear his Word. Their lives, like God's own life, are dynamic and oriented toward fulfillment in the coming kingdom. God wanted a world where personal relations and loving communion could occur. It would be a world not wholly determined but one peopled with creaturely free agents. Without having to do so metaphysically, God seeks fellowship with us, out of grace and overflowing love. Sovereign and free, God chooses to be involved with us.[1] He does not remain in spendid isolation but enters into relationship with his creatures. In the incarnation God stoops down, shares our lives and involves himself in our joys and sorrows. God chooses to express his deity not in the mode of aloofness, independency and total control but in creating free beings on the finite level and entering lovingly into their lives.[2]

Thus God has created a world that in a creaturely way reflects the goodness that characterizes God's own experience as triune. At great cost, God is leading the world forward to the place where it will reflect more perfectly the goodness that God himself enjoys. God does all this without having to do it, without being compelled by anything outside of himself. God's bliss cannot be increased, but it can express itself in the world. The creation is an occasion for the expression of God's experience outside of God. In the spirit of the ancient image of the ecstatic dance of the triune God, we can say that the purpose of creation is to express this same delightful movement on the level of the creature, ever summoning new partners to the dance. Beyond metaphysical necessity, God creates a non-divine world with real significance and accepts the risks of entering into a relationship with it. The aim was to create an echo in space and time of the communion that God experiences in eternity, a reflection on the creaturely level of the loving movement within God. The decision gave God the possibility of reflecting on himself in the created other and of enjoying the delight of real interaction. It should be plain why the creation is so dear to God's heart.

TRANSCENDENCE AND IMMANENCE

In relation to the world, God the Creator is both transcendent and immanent. There are many polarities in theology: one and many, three persons and one essence, one person and two natures, and so forth. In a dialectical way, God both transcends the world and participates in it, is both high and lifted up and at the same time very close to it. God transcends and surpasses the world as its Maker but also indwells it and is active within it. Though transcendent, God is committed to us and wills to be in relation with us. As Isaiah says, God the Holy One is in our midst (Is 12:6). Though sovereign and free, God decides not to dwell alone but to establish communion with us. He has chosen to be God for us, even God for us in a human form.

A partial analogy is that of the artist, one who transcends her work and shapes it outside of herself and yet also imparts something of herself to it. The analogy cannot capture the intimacy and

penetration of God's indwelling the world, though, for in a much greater way God, though ontologically distinct from created forms, creates a world external to himself and chooses to be present and immanent within it. On the one hand, God is sovereign and free and does not need the world; on the other hand, God has decided not to be alone but uses his freedom to establish communion with creatures and to exist in openness to the unfolding world.

By divine immanence I mean that God is everywhere present in all that exists. The world and God are not radically separated realities—God is present within every created being. As Paul said, quoting a Greek poet, "In him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28). Today we understand the world as an interconnected ecosystem, a dynamic and developing whole, which has made this idea of God's immanence even more meaningful. It has become easier for us to imagine God the Spirit everywhere working as creativity in the whole cosmic situation. God is not detached from the world. Creation is not an event that happened and is done with. It is an ongoing process in which every particle, every atom, every molecule is held in existence by the Creator. Divine creativity has been taking place from the beginning until now, respecting what has already been made and calling forth new possibilities for the future. The whole world in which we dwell expresses God's continuous activity.

Process theology denies ontological independence, maintaining that God needs the world as much as the world needs God. This drops out the crucial distinction between God and the world so central to the scriptural portrayal. It makes God too passive, able only to experience the world and to organize the elements that present themselves to him. The Bible describes God as more present to the world than that, as a deity working out salvation in history and moving all things forward to a new creation.

The relation of God and creation is asymmetrical. The Creator gives life and freedom to the creature and voluntarily limits the exercise of his power in relation to it, God's openness to the world is freely chosen, not compelled. Process theism deserves commendation for opposing a static concept of God and for seeking a dynamic model, but not just any dynamic model will do. It is important to have a dynamic model that is biblically and theologically sound. Social trinitarian metaphysics (a relational ontology) gives us a God who is ontologically other but at the same time is ceaselessly relating and responsive.

In the second verse of Genesis we read about God's Spirit soaring over the creation. God not only created out of nothing—God also sustains the world, calls forth life and renews the face of the ground. God is on the inside of creation, in the processes not in the gaps. God is immanent throughout the universe in all of its changeableness and contingency and active in the whole long process of its development. The Creator has a mysterious relationship with every bit of matter and with every person. We need to recover the immanence of God, which helps us to relate to the new creation story being supplied by modern science.

THE POWER OF GOD

As Creator, God is unquestionably the superior power. His is the power to exist and the power to control all things. God depends on nothing else in order to be and is therefore free at the most fundamental level. But almightiness is not the whole story. In a world reflecting a triune community, God does not monopolize the power. Were he to do so, there could be no created order, certainly not a dynamic one with free agents, and not one producing love and communion. To achieve that kind of creation, God needs to deploy his power in more subtle ways. Though no power can stand against him, God wills the existence of creatures with the power of self-determination. This means that God is a superior power who does not cling to his right to dominate and control but who voluntarily gives creatures room to flourish. By inviting them to have dominion over the world (for example), God willingly surrenders power and makes possible a partnership with the creature.

Condescension is involved in God's decision to make this kind of a world. By willing the existence of significant beings with independent status alongside of himself, God accepts limitations not imposed from without. In other words, in ruling over the world God is not all-determining but may will to achieve his goals through other agents, accepting the limitations of this decision. Yet this does not make God "weak," for it requires more power to rule over an undetermined world than it would over a determined one. Creating free creatures and working with them does not contradict God's omnipotence but requires it. Only omnipotence has the requisite degree and quality of power to undertake such a project. God has the power and ability to be (in Harry Boer's words) an "ad hoc" God, one who responds and adapts to surprises and to the unexpected. God sets goals for creation and redemption and realizes them ad hoc in history. If Plan A fails, God is ready with Plan B.[3]

Divine condescension is apparent in the realm of redemption, where God manifests his power paradoxically in the cross of Christ. What an astounding way for God to deploy power, in the form of servanthood and self-sacrifice. This was the mode of power God knew in his wisdom to be appropriate for bringing about reconciliation, and it reveals that love rather than almighty power is the primary perfection of God. When love says that power will not work in a situation, power is allowed to withdraw in favor of powerlessness. God does not overcome his enemies (for example) by forcing but by loving them. God works, not in order to subject our wills but to transform our hearts. Love and not sheer power overcomes evil—God does not go in for power tactics.[4]

We could also say that love is the mode in which God's power is exercised. God neither surrenders power in order to love nor denies love in the need to rule, but combines love and power perfectly. This power creates life and then awakens and stimulates it in others. The question is not whether but in what manner God exercises power. The model cannot be domination but is one of nurturing and empowering.[5]

We must not define omnipotence as the power to determine everything but rather as the power that enables God to deal with any situation that arises. Plainly God is not at the moment all in all—this has yet to happen when the kingdom comes (1 Cor 15:28). God's power presently is more subtle, much greater in fact than the coercive power of a puppeteer. Monopoly power is easy to manage—more difficult is a power that makes free agents and governs a universe where creatures can disobey. Omnipotence does not mean that nothing can go contrary to God's will (our sins go against it) but that God is able to deal with any circumstance that may arise. The idea that it means a divine decree and total control is an alarming concept and contrary to the Scriptures. Total control is not a higher view of God's power but a diminution of it. The biblical narrative plainly reveals that God has rivals and has to struggle with them.

In an attempt to preserve the notion of God's power as total control, some advocate what they call biblical compatibilism, the idea that one can uphold genuine freedom and divine determinism at the same time. This is sleight of hand and does not work. Just the fact of our rebellion as sinners against God's will testifies it is not so. The fall into sin was against the will of God and proves by itself that God does not exercise total control over all events in this world. Evils happen that are not supposed to happen, that grieve and anger God. Free will theism is the best way to account for this fact. To say that God hates sin while secretly willing it, to say that God warns us not to fall away though it is impossible, to say that God loves the world while excluding most people from an opportunity of salvation, to say that God warmly invites sinners to come knowing all the while that they cannot possibly do so—such things do not deserve to be called mysteries when that is just a euphemism for nonsense.

The all-powerful God delegates power to the creature, making himself vulnerable. In giving us dominion over the earth, God shares power with the creature. The fact of sin in history reveals the adverse effect that disobedience has on God's purpose. God allows the world to be affected by the power of the creature and takes risks accompanying

any genuine relatedness. There is a paradox of strength and vulnerability of God according to the Scriptures. Though ontologically strong, God can be vulnerable because of the decision to make a world like this. The Lord of the universe has chosen to limit his power by delegating some to the creature. God gives room to creatures and invites them to be covenant partners, opening up the possibility of loving fellowship but also of some initiative being taken away from God and creatures coming into conflict with his plans. God gives us room to rebel against him, and when that happens patiently waits for the prodigal to return.

The theme of God's kingdom helps us to understand divine sovereignty from another angle. Jesus announces that God's rule is near but not yet in full effect. At present, God's will is resisted by powers of darkness, but the day will come when his will shall triumph. At present, evil is mounting a challenge to God's rule with considerable effect. The powers of darkness put up stiff resistance and to a degree block God's plans; that is, they can restrict God's ability to respond to a given crisis. Hence Paul says that the Spirit groans and waits with us for the final redemption (Rom 8:23). God's ability to turn things around is circumscribed in ways we cannot understand, yet this is more than countered by the hope of the coming kingdom. Evil may have its day, but it will not finally triumph.[6] By his decision to create a world like ours, God showed his willingness to take risks and to work with a history whose outcome he does not wholly decide. Theology does not work with an abstract idea of power that confuses sovereignty with tyranny.[7]

Divine sovereignty involves a flexible outworking of God's purposes in history. It refers to his ability, as the only wise God, to manage things, despite resistance to his will. Owing to the emphasis in theology on almightiness, we have tended to neglect the form of power called persuasion. It is not the only kind of power God has at his disposal, but it is a noble form that has been neglected in the tradition, where power tends to be associated, even equated, with coercion. The power of God's love (for example) does not command but woos and transforms us. This power can deliver us from evil and transform the wicked heart. Yet to reduce God's power to persuasion would make God too passive—it would be an overreaction against almightiness.

At the same time, however, the power of persuasion is an admirable power. Is God's power not as wonderfully displayed in his condescension to our weakness as in the starry heavens? It is so clear from Scripture, illustrated in God's dealings with Moses, that God does not overpower his servants, even though he could easily do so, but rather works with mortals and all of their hesitations and uncertainties. God honors Moses' dignity to the extent that when he cannot persuade him to accept the call, he resorts to an alternate plan, calling Aaron into the picture. God aims for the best in every situation and is even willing to work with options that are less than the best. God accepts what people decide to do with the powers they have been given. The future is determined by God not alone but in partnership with human agents. God gives us a role in shaping what the future will be. He is flexible and does not insist on doing things his way. God will adjust his own plans because he is sensitive to what humans think and do.

Understanding God's power gives us some help with the vexed problem of evil. If this is a world in which evil is possible but not inevitable, then it can be seen as stemming primarily from the misuse of freedom. The full display of God's sovereignty would not be a present reality but something to come at the end of history, when his glory is revealed, rather than at the present time, when the Spirit suffers with us and the universe groans.

We can call this model of divine openness free will theism. Upholding God's power, it understands God to be voluntarily self-limited, making room for creaturely freedom. Without making God finite, this definition appreciates God's delighting in a universe which he does not totally control.

THE IMMUTABLITY OF GOD

The Trinity is unchangeably what it is from everlasting to everlasting—and nothing can change that. Furthermore, we can always rely on God to be

faithful to his promises; he is not in any way fickle or capricious. Immutability ought to focus on the faithfulness of God as a relational, personal being.

But the tradition has taken immutability far in the direction of immobility and inertness. Some have claimed that God is wholly actual and not at all potential and thus cannot change in any way. They have equated the biblical idea of faithfulness with the Greek idea that requires any changes related to God to occur only on the human side. This is the error that tempted some of the early theologians to explain the incarnation without admitting that God changed, and to explain away dozens of biblical references to God's repenting and changing.

This is a mistake from a biblical standpoint. The God of the Bible is a God of action, not inaction. God is immutable in essence and in his trustworthiness over time, but in other respects God changes. For example, God changes in his response to events in history. The Bible states that when God saw the extent of human wickedness on the earth, he was sorry that he had made humankind (Gen 6:5). The book of Jonah says that when God saw the conversion of Nineveh, he repented of the evil he said he would do to it (Jon 3:10). This latter passage is very revealing because it tells us that God experiences temporal passage, learns new facts when they occur and changes plans in response to what humans do.

God is unchanging in nature and essence but not in experience, knowledge and action. In nature, God is consistently reliable and loving and can be depended on completely. God's character is faithful and reliable—he is a steadfast friend who binds himself to us and does not forsake us. His concern for the creature is constant and unaffected by anything. From the point of view of experience, however, God responds to the changing needs of his children and changes direction when necessary. God is changeless in nature, but his nature is that of a creative person who interacts. God's immutability does not rule out God's responsiveness, the quality that enables God to deal with every new happening and to bend it toward his objectives without violating its integrity.

When I say that God is subject to change, I am referring to a uniquely divine kind of changeability. I do not mean that God is subject to change involuntarily, which would make God a contingent being, but that God allows the world to touch him, while being transcendent over it.

THE IMPASSIBILITY OF GOD

Impassibility is the most dubious of the divine attributes discussed in classical theism, because it suggests that God does not experience sorrow, sadness or pain. It appears to deny that God is touched by the feelings of our infirmities, despite what the Bible eloquently says about his love and his sorrow. How can God be loving and not pained by evil? How can God be impassible when the incarnate Son experienced suffering and death?[8]

The suffering or pathos of God is a strong biblical theme—God's love, wrath, jealousy and suffering are all prominent. God suffers when there is a broken relationship between humanity and himself. In this context, God agonizes over his people and says: "My heart recoils within me, my compassion grows warm and tender" (Hosea 11:8 RSV). God is not cool and collected but is deeply involved and can be wounded. The idea of God's impassibility arises more from Plato than from the Bible.

The theme of suffering strongly brings out God's openness to the world. Not aloof and impassive, God does not just imagine what it would be like to suffer, he actually suffers because of his decision to love. God has chosen to be open to the world and to share in its suffering because of his love. God's transcendence over the world does not prevent him from interacting with the world or from being affected by the world.

What does it mean to say that God suffers? This is a mystery of God's inner life. Plato was not altogether wrong to say that God must be free of certain kinds of passion and emotion. After all, God is not a creature; therefore, he does not suffer in exactly the ways that we do. Responding to pain, for example, must in some ways be an imaginative

response to the suffering of a creature. How could God experience physical pain, if he is not physical? How could he suffer the pain of loneliness, if he is triune? Or the pain of fear when he is securely God? What we should say is that God sympathizes in his relationship with us. God risked suffering when he opened himself up to the world, when he made it possible for the creature to have an impact on him. God risked suffering when he decided to love and be loved by the creature. A lover's existence is inescapably affected by the other, especially when the loved one acts in ways that grieve and disappoint. Listen to the suffering in God's yearning for his wayward son: "Is Ephraim my dear son? Is he my darling child? For as often as I speak against him, I do remember him still. Therefore my heart yearns for him; I will surely have mercy on him" (Jer 31:20 RSV). Obviously God feels the pain of broken relationships.

At the same time, impassibility is a subtle idea with a grain of truth. We have to distinguish ways in which God can suffer from ways in which God cannot suffer. God is beyond certain modes of suffering, just as he is beyond certain modes of change. We could say that God is impassible in nature but passible in his experience of the world. Change occurs in the world and affects God when he becomes aware of it. When that change involves innocent suffering (for example), God responds tenderly to it.

GOD'S ETERNITY

Should we say that God is temporally everlasting or timelessly eternal? Classical theism has made the strong claim that God is timeless, in the sense of existing outside of time and sequence. This view strongly emphasizes God's transcendence over the world. And since a timeless being would be totally actualized, it implies strong immutability and impassibility as well.

However, timelessness presents many difficulties from a theological standpoint. First, it is hard to form any idea of what timelessness might mean, since all of our thinking is temporally conditioned. A timeless being could not make plans and carry them out. Second, it creates problems for biblical history, which portrays God as One who projects plans, experiences the flow of temporal passage and faces the future as not completely settled. How can a timeless God be the Creator of a temporal world? Why is God described as being involved in temporal realities? Third, it seems to undermine our worship of God. Do we not praise God, not because he is beyond time and change but because he works redemptively in time and brings about salvation? Fourth, if God did not experience events as they transpire, he would not experience or know the world as it actually is. If God's eternity were timeless, God could not be related to our temporal world. In actual fact, though, the biblical symbols do not speak of divine timelessness but of God's faithfulness over time. Though we wither and die, God abides and is not threatened or undone by time. We need an understanding of God's eternity that does not cancel or annihilate time but stands in a positive relation to it, which is for us not against us.

Experiencing temporal passage, God confronts a future that is open. The distinction between what is possible and what is actual is valid for God as well as for us. The past is actual, the present is becoming, and the future is possible. The everlasting One is active and dynamic through all of this flow, envisaging future possibilities and working to realize them. Transcendent to temporal passage, God is in the process without being involuntarily subject to it.

When I say that God is eternal, I mean that God transcends our experience of time, is immune from the ravages of time, is free from our inability to remember, and so forth. I affirm that God is with us in time, experiencing the succession of events with us. Past, present and future are real to God. This underlies the biblical claim that God is an agent who works in history, who makes plans and carries them out, who remembers the past and gives promises about the future. God's eternity embraces time and takes temporal events into the divine life.

The God of the Bible is not timeless. His eternity means that there has never been and never will be a time when God does not exist. Timelessness limits

God. If he were timeless, God would be unable to work salvation in history, would be cut off from the world, have no real relationship with people and would be completely static. God is not temporal as creatures are, however, but can enter into time and relate to sequence and history. When I say that God is in time, I do not mean that God is exhaustively in time. Even in human experience, we partially transcend time through memory, imagination and reason. God's transcendence over time is vastly more perfect than is ours. Putting it positively, the Creator of time and space is at the same time the One who most perfectly experiences time. God loves time and enters into the experience of time, not only in the incarnation but always. The Bible sees God as present to the flow of history, facing the future as partly an unsettled matter. I say partly because much of the future is settled by what has already happened and by what God plans to do.[9]

DIVINE KNOWLEDGE

Obviously God must know all things that can be known and know them truly. To be able to know all that can be known is a dimension of God's power. Ignorance, or not to know something God needs to know in order to govern the universe and pursue his will, would be a serious limitation. However, omniscience need not mean exhaustive foreknowledge of all future events. If that were its meaning, the future would be fixed and determined, much as is the past. Total knowledge of the future would imply a fixity of events. Nothing in the future would need to be decided. It also would imply that human freedom is an illusion, that we make no difference and are not responsible.

What does the Bible say about God's knowledge? Many believe that the Bible says that God has exhaustive foreknowledge, but it does not. It says, for example, that God tested Abraham to see what he would do and after the test says through the angel: "Now I know that you fear God" (Gen 22:12). This was a piece of information that God was eager to secure. In another place Moses said that God was testing the people to order to know whether they actually love him or not (Deut 13:3). Total foreknowledge would jeopardize the genuineness of the divine-human relationship. What kind of dialogue is it where one party already knows what the other will say and do? I would not call this a personal relationship. Commenting on Israel's wickedness, God expresses frustration: "nor did it enter my mind that they should do this abomination" (Jer 32:35 NRSV). God had not anticipated it. In the book of Jonah, God threatens Nineveh with destruction and then calls it off (much to Jonah's chagrin) when the people repent (Jon 3:10). Their repenting was not something God knew in advance would happen. He was planning to destroy them but changed his mind when they converted.

Often God says things like this in the Bible: "Perhaps they will understand" or "It may be that they will listen." From such phrases we must deduce that God has different options depending on people's responses that are still outstanding (see Jer 26:3; Ezek 12:3; etc.). In saying "perhaps," God also indicates that he does not possess complete knowledge of the future. The dozens of examples like this throughout Scripture establish that the Bible thinks of an open future that is not completely certain. The popular belief in God's total omniscience is not so much a biblical idea as an old tradition.

The few verses that seem to go further do not require exhaustive foreknowledge. God's knowledge is wonderful and far-reaching (Ps 139:1–6) but need not be limitless with respect to the future. Isaiah records prophecies about things to come (Is 44:23–28), but these chiefly establish what God promises to do and do not prove limitless foreknowledge. Prophecies are generally open-ended and dependent in some way on the human response to them.

We should not think of God's omniscience as a vast encyclopedia of past, present and future facts. The Bible does not see it this way, nor is it a helpful way to think of it. When God gave creatures freedom, he gave them an open future, a future in a degree to be shaped by their decisions, not a future already determined in its every detail. We do not limit God by saying that he can be surprised by

what his creatures do. It would be a serious limitation if God could not experience surprise and delight. The world would be a boring place without anything unexpected ever happening.

Those who are unsure of this should ask themselves if they think God *could* create a world where he would not be in total control of everything, where he would experience risk and where he would not foreknow all decisions of his creatures in advance. Surely this must be possible if God is all-powerful. Then is this world not just like that? Has God not already made just such a world? Does the Bible not assume it—do we not experience it as such?

Philosophically speaking, if choices are real and freedom significant, future decisions cannot be exhaustively foreknown. This is because the future is not determinate but shaped in part by human choices. The future is not fixed like the past, which can be known completely. The future does not yet exist and therefore cannot be infallibly anticipated, even by God. Future decisions cannot in every way be foreknown, because they have not yet been made. God knows everything that can be known—but God's foreknowledge does not include the undecided.

It would seriously undermine the reality of our decisions if they were known in advance, spelled out in a heavenly register and absolutely certain to happen. It would make the future fixed and certain and render illusory the sense of our making choices between real options. We might think of this with the analogy of parents and children. As a parent, God knows what he needs to know to deal with any contingency that might arise but does not know or need to know every detail of the future. God is a person and deals with us as persons. This means that God understands us, has intuition into every situation we face and is able to deal appropriately with every situation.

This implies that God learns things and (I would add) enjoys learning them. It does not mean that God is anybody's pupil or that he has to overcome ignorance and learn things of which he should have been aware. It means that God created a dynamic and changing world and enjoys getting to know it. It is a world of freedom, capable of genuine novelty, inexhaustible creativity and real surprises. I believe that God takes delight in the spontaneity of the universe and enjoys continuing to get to know it in a love that never changes, just as we love to get to know our children as they grow up. God is the best learner of all because he is completely open to all the input of an unfolding world, whereas we are finite and slow to react, reluctant to learn and inclined to distort reality in our own interest. Rather than supposing God cannot learn, we should try to learn as God learns. If this matter of God's learning surprises anyone, be reminded that simple foreknowledge also implies that God learns from what creatures do. I am not speaking in a temporal sense now but in the sense that part of what God knows depends on what creatures do.

Thus, God does not foreknow every future choice or the outcome of every human decision. God is all-knowing in the sense that he knows all that it is possible to know and powerful enough to do whatever is needed. Under these circumstances, more power and wisdom are required for God to bring his will to pass in a world that he does not control than in one that he did control. As Gregory Boyd remarks, "It takes far more self-confidence, far more wisdom, far more love and sensitivity to govern that which is personal and free than it does to govern that over which one has absolute control."[10] As a political aside, what would we think of those who contend that total control is praiseworthy as a mode of governance?

CONCLUSION

The God whom we love and worship is the living God who is metaphysically social and desires relationship with us. God is One whose ways are marked by flexibility and dynamism, who acts and reacts on behalf of his people, who does not exist in splendid isolation from a world of change, but relates to his creatures and shares life with them. God not only directs but interacts. No unmoved mover, God responds sensitively to what happens on earth and relates to us. God is the omnipotent Creator but exercises his power subtly and carefully

in the world. By bringing other free agents into being and entering into their lives in love, God is open.

We are seeking to correct the tradition without overcorrecting the error. God is high above all yet fills all things. God is unchanging yet relates to us in a changing world. God cannot be perplexed but suffers with his people. God's power is limitless but is deployed in ways that may appear weak. God is not subject to change or decay but can relate to temporal passage. God knows everything but is still learning what the world is becoming.

The open view of God stresses qualities of generosity, sensitivity and vulnerability more than power and control. It allows us to think of God as taking risks. Instead of locating God above and beyond history, it stresses God's activity in history, responding to events as they happen, in order to accomplish his purposes. Rather than deciding the future all by himself, God made creatures with the capacity to surprise and delight him. Like a loving parent, he rejoices with them when they are happy and suffers with them when they are in pain. In and through everything, God is committed to their welfare and continually works to achieve what is best for them.

The picture of God that I receive from the Bible is of One who takes risks and jeopardizes his own sovereignty in order to engage in historical interactions with created reality. The triune God pursues this path out of the love that is fundamental to his very being. This does not make history the author of God. It portrays God as the author of history who delights in meaningful interaction with creatures as his purposes for the world are realized.[11]

NOTES

1. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* 2/1 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1957), pp. 272–321.
2. Otto Weber, *Foundations of Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1981), 1:440–47.
3. Harry R. Boer, *An Ember Still Glowing: Humankind in the Image of God* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1990), chap. 8. As an Arminian I can only wish for more Calvinists like this. For a rendition of divine providence after this fashion by an Arminian, see Jack Cottrell, *God the Ruler* (Joplin, Mo.: College Press, 1984).
4. Douglas J. Hall, *God and Human Suffering* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1986), chap. 4.
5. Elizabeth A. Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (New York: Crossroad, 1992), pp. 369–70. This book parallels my thesis about the openness of God despite the fact that Johnson identifies her position with panentheism (pp. 230–31). In reality she denies that the world exists necessarily and that God needs the world ontologically. She uses the word *Asymmetrical* to describe the relation between God and the world and therefore should not be using the term *panentheism*. Not to be overbold, I would say that Johnson needs a term like *the openness of God* to describe her view.
6. Walter Wink, "Prayer and the Powers," chap. 16 in *Engaging the Powers* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992).
7. Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, vol 1: (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1991), 416.
8. Terence E. Fretheim, *The Suffering of God: An Old Testament Perspective* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), and Paul S. Fiddes, *The Creative Suffering of God* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1988).
9. Nelson Pike, *God and Timelessness* (New York: Schocken Books, 1970), and Hasker, *God, Time and Knowledge*.
10. Gregory A. Boyd, *Trinity and Process, A Critical Evaluation and Reconstruction of Hartshorne's Di-polar Theism Towards a Trinitarian Metaphysics* (New York: Peter Lang, 1992), p. 336.
11. Anticipating the criticism that the open view of God is a form of process theology, let me reiterate two chief ways in which it differs. First, God is ontologically other than the world, which is not necessary to God—the world exists only because God wills it. Therefore, God is not dependent on

the world out of necessity but willingly, because he chose to create a world in which there would be mutuality and relational interdependence. Second, God not only sustains the world as the ground of its being but also acts in history to bring about salvation. God was particularly active in that stream of human history which culminated in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, and involved himself in marvelous actions that go beyond his undergirding of the world process. God is also active in the entire history of the world by the Spirit, which sustains and directs all things.

I.A.4

God and the World

SALLIE McFAGUE

Sallie McFague (1933–) is a well-known feminist theologian whose work on metaphor in theology has been highly influential. Among her best-known books are Metaphorical Theology: Models of God in Religious Language *and* The Body of God: An Ecological Theology*, from which the present selection is taken. Here, McFague explores the idea that the world is God's body and contrasts this model for thinking about God with other models that have been prominent within the Jewish and Christian traditions. She denies that her model is* pantheistic. *(Pantheism is the view that the world* is *God. By way of contrast, pan*en*theism—the sort of view that McFague seems to recommend—is the view that the world is, or is very much like, a* part *of God.)*

A MEDITATION ON EXODUS 33:23B: "AND YOU SHALL SEE MY BACK; BUT MY FACE SHALL NOT BE SEEN"

When Moses in an audacious moment asks of God, "Show me your glory," God replies that "no one can see me and live," but he does allow Moses a glimpse of the divine body—not the face, but the back (Exodus 33:20–23). The passage is a wonderful mix of the outrageous (God has a *backside*?!) and the awesome (the display of divine glory too dazzling for human eyes). The passage unites guts and glory, flesh and spirit, the human and the divine, and all those other apparent dualisms with a reckless flamboyance that points to something at the heart of the Hebrew and Christian traditions: God is not afraid of the flesh. We intend to take this incarnationalism seriously and see what it does, could, mean in terms of the picture of reality from postmodern science. Were we to imagine "the Word made flesh" as not limited to Jesus of Nazareth but as the body of the universe, all bodies, might we not have a homey but awesome metaphor for both divine nearness *and* divine glory? Like Moses, when we ask, "Show me your glory," we might see the humble bodies of our own planet as

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Most endnotes omitted.

visible signs of the invisible grandeur. Not the face, not the depths of divine radiance, but enough, more than enough. We might begin to see (for the first time, perhaps) the marvels at our feet and at our fingertips: the intricate splendor of an Alpine forget-me-not or a child's hand. We might begin to realize the extraordinariness of the ordinary. We would begin to delight in creation, not as the work of an external deity, but as a sacrament of the living God. We would see creation as bodies alive with the breath of God. We might realize what this tradition has told us, although often shied away from embracing unreservedly: we live and move and have our being *in* God. We might see ourselves and everything else as the living body of God.

We would, then, have an entire planet that reflects the glory, the very being—although not the face—of God. We would have a concrete panorama for meditation on divine glory and transcendence: wherever we looked, whether at the sky with its billions of galaxies (only a few visible to us) or the earth (every square inch of which is alive with millions of creatures) or into the eyes of another human being, we would have an image of divine grandeur. The more we meditated on these bits of the divine body, the more intricate, different, and special each would become. Such meditation is a suitable way for limited, physical creatures with lively imaginations such as ourselves to contemplate the divine being. It is enriching for it does not occur only at one place but everywhere and not just in one form but in an infinite myriad of forms. It is neither otherworldly nor abstract, but is a this-worldly, concrete form of contemplating divine magnificence. It is a way for limited, physical beings like ourselves to meditate on divine transcendence in an immanent way. And it is based on the assumption, central to the Christian tradition, that God not only is not afraid of the flesh but loves it, *becomes* it.

If we are allowed, indeed, invited as Moses was to see God's glory in the divine back, then we experience not only awe as we meditate on the wonders of our planet but also compassion for all bodies in pain. If God is available to us in bodies, then bodies become special. The metaphor of the world as God's body knits together the awe we feel for the magnificent intricacy and splendor of all the diverse kinds of bodies *and* the pain we feel for a suffering human or animal body. We cannot in good conscience marvel with aesthetic delight at the one and not identify with the pain of the other: bodies are beautiful and vulnerable. If God is physical, then the aesthetic and the ethical unite: praising God in and through the beauty of bodies entails caring for the most basic needs of all bodies on the planet. If God is physical, then the divine becomes part of the everyday, part of the pain and pleasure of bodily existence.

We begin to see a new way of imagining and expressing divine transcendence and immanence. It is not a model of transcendence in which God is king and the world is the realm of a distant, external ruler who has all power and expects unquestioned obedience from his subjects, human beings. Nor is it a model of immanence in which God the king once entered the world by becoming a servant in the form of one human being. Rather, it is a radicalization of both divine transcendence and immanence. The model of the universe as God's body radicalizes transcendence for *all* of the entire fifteen-billion-year history and the billions of galaxies is the creation, the outward being, of the One who is the source and breath of all existence. In the universe as a whole as well as in each and every bit and fragment of it, God's transcendence is embodied. The important word here is "embodied": the transcendence of God is not available to us except as embodied. We do not see God's face, but only the back. But we *do* see the back.

The world (universe) as God's body is also, then, a radicalization of divine immanence, for God is not present to us in just one place (Jesus of Nazareth, although also and especially, paradigmatically there), but in and through all bodies, the bodies of the sun and moon, trees and rivers, animals, and people. The scandal of the gospel is that the Word became flesh; the radicalization of incarnation sees Jesus not as a surd, an enigma, but as a paradigm or culmination of the divine way of enfleshment.

We are suggesting, then, that the model of the universe as God's body is a way of expressing both

radical transcendence *and* immanence, but in a fashion that limits our perception and knowledge to the back of God. In other words, we are dealing here with a model or metaphor, not a description: the universe as God's body is a rich, suggestive way to radicalize the glory, the awesomeness, the beyond-all-imagining power and mystery of God in a way that at the same time radicalizes the nearness, the availability, the physicality of divine immanence. In this one image of the world as God's body, we are invited to see the creator *in* the creation, the source of all existence in and through what is bodied forth from that source. And yet, as we contemplate divine transcendence immanently in the bodies of all things and creatures, we know what we see is the back, not the face, of God. The very recognition and acceptance of that limit gives us permission, as the Hebrew psalmists also felt, to revel in the many embodiments divine transcendence takes: the clouds and winds, thunder and water, deer and young lambs, midwives and mothers, kings and shepherds. Everything can be a metaphor for God, because no *one* thing *is* God. The body of God is not the human body nor any other body; rather, all bodies are reflections of God, all bodies are the backside of divine glory.

Radicalizing the incarnation, therefore, by using the model of the universe as God's body is neither idolatry nor pantheism: the world, creation, is not identified or confused with God. Yet it is the place where God is present to us. Christianity's most distinctive belief is that divine reality is always mediated through the world, a belief traditionally expressed in the Chalcedonian formula that Christ was "fully God, fully man." For our time when we understand human existence in continuity with all other forms of life and hence must think of our relation to God in an ecological context, that mediation is appropriately radicalized and expanded to include the entire cosmos. In both instances, the Word is made flesh, God is available to us only through the mediation of embodiment. We are offered not the face of God, but the back. God is neither enclosed in nor exhausted by the body shown to us, but it is a body that is given.

It is enough and it is a body. "It is enough" acknowledges that for those who are persuaded to live within this model, it provides guidance and significance to life, a way of being in the world. Those who wager on this construct believe it tells them something about the way things are; in other words, that it gives them intimations of how God and the world are related. That intimation is suggested by the metaphor of body. "It is a body" suggests content, substance, for what it means to live within this particular construct. It places a premium on the physical, the lowly, the mundane, the specific, the vulnerable, the visible, the other, the needy, for all these words describe aspects of bodies of various kinds. No body, no material form, is absolute, eternal, general, abstract, otherworldly, self-sufficient, invincible, or invisible. Bodies in the universe, in all their differences, share some characteristics that suggest a focus, an area of concern, for those who would live within the construct of the body of God. At one level our model—the universe as God's body—moves us in the direction of contemplating the glory and grandeur of divine creation, an aesthetic awe at unending galactic wonders, while at another level it moves us in the direction of compassionate identification with and service to the fragile, suffering, oppressed bodies that surround us. The model embraces both the guts and the glory, both the mud and the mystery—or, more precisely, suggests that the peculiar form of divine glory available to us, if we live within this model, is *only* through the guts, the mud. Incarnationalism, radicalized, means that we do not, ever, at least in this life, see God face to face, but only through the mediation of the bodies we pay attention to, listen to, and learn to love and care for.

We have used Exodus 33:20–23b as a meditation to help us reflect on some of the most important dimensions of the model of the universe as God's body within a Christian context. In the rest of this chapter and the next, we will analyze the model in more formal terms. First, we will look at five major models within the Christian tradition for understanding the relationship of God and the world: the deistic, the dialogic, the monarchical, the agential, and the organic. We will conclude that combining the organic (the world as the body of God) and the agential (God as the spirit

of the body) results in a personal and ecological way of reimagining the tradition's Lord of creation in terms compatible with contemporary science. In the next chapter we will turn to the Christic paradigm as the place where, within that tradition, we gain some guidance on the "shape" of the body, the forms or patterns with which to understand divine immanence. This paradigm suggests a trajectory or direction for creation. It is not one that we find in evolutionary history, but from our wager of faith in the liberating, healing, and inclusive teachings, life, and death of Jesus of Nazareth, we *can* read it back into natural, historical, and cultural evolution as a way to express its goal. We will suggest that the model of the body of God, when seen within a Christic framework, can serve as a unifying metaphor, encompassing in scope both creation and salvation—the liberation, healing, and fulfillment of all bodies. We will also ask in what ways the model of God as spirit of the body is a continuation and a revision of the tradition's understanding of divine transcendence and immanence as expressed in its trinitarian formula.

MAJOR MODELS OF GOD AND THE WORLD

The First Vatican Council (1890) expressed a view of the relation of God and the world that is, with some variations, a common one in major creeds of various Christian churches since the Reformation:

"The Holy, Catholic, Apostolic, Roman Church believes and confesses that there is one true and living God, Creator and Lord of Heaven and earth, almighty, eternal, immense, incomprehensible, infinite in intelligence, in will, and in all perfection, who, as being one, sole, absolutely simple and immutable spiritual substance, is to be declared really and essentially distinct from the world, of supreme beatitude in and from himself, and ineffably exalted above all things beside himself which exist or are conceivable."[1]

What drives this statement is the passion to remove God from any real connection with the world—"really and essentially distinct from the world" sums it up. In fact, it is difficult to imagine how a God so described could have a genuine, significant relationship with anything outside the divine reality. And yet the Christian tradition has insisted that God not only created the world but admired it and loved at least its human creatures sufficiently so that when they "fell," God became one of them, suffering and dying to redeem them from their sins. The two images of God—one as the distant, all-powerful, perfect, immutable Lord existing in lonely isolation, and the other as the One who enters human flesh as a baby to eventually assume the alienation and oppression of all peoples in the world—do not fit together. Jesus as the immanent, loving image of God is a surd, an enigma, against the background of the distant, exalted, incomprehensible deity. In its credal statements on God and Jesus the tradition attempts to express this view of radical transcendence and radical immanence: the totally distant, "other" God, exalted and perfect, entered into human flesh in Jesus of Nazareth, so that this one man is fully divine and fully human. In the worldview current in first-century Mediterranean times and operable through the Middle Ages, that way of radicalizing and relating transcendence and immanence had some credibility; but it does not in our time. This view seems neither sufficiently radical (God is transcendent only over our world and especially human beings and immanent only in one human being) nor believable (it assumes a dualistic view of reality with God dwelling somewhere external to and exalted above the world and yet entering it at one particular point).

What other options are there for relating God and the world? The principal criteria guiding our analysis and critique of various options will be the radicalization of divine transcendence and immanence as well as those mentioned earlier (embodied experience, usefulness, and compatibility with Christian faith and the contemporary picture of reality). We will suggest that the model of God the spirit, the giver and renewer of her body, the universe, is one that is compatible with readings of both Christianity and postmodern science. A couple of brief comments about this proposal are

necessary before setting it in the context of other traditional and contemporary models. First, it is a personal model of God, assuming that we will inevitably imagine God in our image, but to do so with the notion of spirit rather than self, soul, or mind suggests that divine agency is concerned not only with human beings but with all forms of life: God's spirit is the breath of life in all lifeforms. Second, recalling our discussion of the face and back of God, the model of God as spirit of his body, the universe, implies that both terms, *spirit* and *body*, are backside terms: they are both metaphors. Spirit is not really God, while body is a metaphor, nor is spirit closer to divine reality; rather, they are both forms of God's visible being, ways of expressing immanent transcendence and transcendent immanence suitable for creatures like us who are inspirited bodies. The depth and mystery of God are not available to us in this or any other model: the glory of God is only reflected in the world and then in a dim and distorted mirror. It is this dim, distorted mirror that we attempt to model.

We will have much more to say about our model, but with this sketch in mind let us look briefly at some alternatives in order to place the model within a broader context. First, the deistic model, the simplest and least satisfying one, arose during the sixteenth-century scientific revolution. It imagines God as a clockmaker who winds up the clock of the world by creating its laws and then leaves it to run by itself. The model has the advantage of freeing science to investigate the world apart from divine control but essentially banishes God from the world. It is, sadly, the view of many contemporary scientists as well as Christians, with the qualification that some Christians allow periodic, personal interventions of God in times of crisis such as natural disasters, accidents, and death. The view encourages an irresponsible, idolatrous attitude in the scientific community, allowing it to claim for itself sole rights both to interpret and to dispose of the world. On the part of Christians it encourages an interventionist, God-of-the-gaps view of divine activity.

The second view of God and the world, the dialogic one, has deep roots in both Hebrew and Christian traditions: God speaks and we respond. It has been a central view within Protestantism and was highlighted in twentieth-century existentialism. In its contemporary form the relation between God and the world is narrowed to God and the individual: the I-Thou relation between God and a human being. As seen, for instance, in the writings of Søren Kierkegaard or Rudolf Bultmann, this position focuses on sin, guilt, and forgiveness and has the advantage of allowing for a continuous relationship with God, but does so at the expense of indifference to the natural and social worlds. The dialogic position assumes two tracks, religion versus culture (the latter including scientific knowledge and all social institutions such as government, the economy, the family), with each left to run its own affairs. God and the human being meet, not in the world, whether of nature or culture, but only in the inner, internal joy and pain of human experiences. Liberation theologies have protested the focus on individual (usually white, male, Western, affluent) alienation and despair, insisting that God's relation to the world must include the political and social dimensions as well.

The monarchical model, the relation of God and the world in which the divine, all-powerful king controls his subjects and they in turn offer him loyal obedience, is the oldest and still the most prevalent one. It is both a personal and a political model, correcting the impersonalism of the deistic model and the individualism of the dialogic. It also underscores the "godness" of God, for the monarchical imagery calls forth awe and reverence, as well as vocational meaningfulness, since membership in the kingdom entails service to the divine Lord. But since all power is controlled by the king, issues of human freedom and theodicy are highly problematic. Moreover, and most critical for our concerns, the king is both distant from the natural world and indifferent to it, for as a political model it is limited to human beings. The continuing power of this model in liturgical use is curious, since contemporary members of royalty scarcely call up responses of awe, reverence, and obedience, but its nostalgic appeal, as evidenced in the gusto with which we all sing Christmas carols that are rife

with this imagery, cannot be underestimated. Any model that would attempt to criticize or partially subvert it ought to look carefully at the main reason for its attraction: it is the only model that attempts to dramatize divine transcendence. Nonetheless, the model of God as king is domesticated transcendence, for a king rules only over human beings, a minute fraction of created reality. The king/realm model is neither genuinely transcendent (God is king over one species recently arrived on a minor planet in an ordinary galaxy) nor genuinely immanent (God as king is an external superperson, not the source, power, and goal of the entire universe).

A fourth model, the agential, also has strong backing in the Hebrew and Christian traditions. Here God is assumed to be an agent whose intentions and purposes are realized in history, especially human history. It has been revived during this century as a way of talking about divine purpose throughout the entire span of cosmic history. The analogy that is often used in this model to explain divine action in the world is the human self realizing its purposes through its body: God is related to the world and realizes the divine intentions and purposes in the world, in a way similar to how we use our bodies to carry out our purposes. This view of divine action has the advantage of internalizing divine action within cosmic processes; however, since these actions are one with the processes, it is difficult if not impossible to differentiate divine action from evolutionary history. Moreover, since the human being is the prototype for divine action, the human body emerges implicitly as the model for God's body, suggesting anthropomorphism: God is understood as a superperson with a high degree of control over the world in a way similar to our control over the actions of our bodies. Finally, at least in its contemporary form, the model has been advanced largely to satisfy intellectual puzzles: How might we imagine divine action in an internal rather than an external, supernatural fashion? The classic agential model, which is at heart personal (God as father, mother, lord, lover, king, friend), God as actor and doer, creating and redeeming the world, has profound ethical and liturgical dimensions, while the contemporary version does not. But if the model were God as spirit (breath, life) of the body (the world, universe) rather than the mind or self that directs and controls creation, the ethical and liturgical dimensions might reemerge.

The agential model should, I believe, be joined with the fifth and final major model, the organic, for either alone is lacking in light of our criteria but together they suggest a more adequate model. The organic model is the one on which this essay is focused: the world or universe as God's body. However, alone, that is, apart from the agential model, which suggests a center of being not exhausted by or completely identified with the world or universe, the organic model is pantheistic. The world is, becomes, divine. Christian thinking, with its ancient commitment to a transcendent deity who created a world distinct from himself has had, as we have seen, a highly ambivalent relationship to the organic model.

Two recent instances of serious reconsideration of it, both under pressure from the view of reality in postmodern science and both combining agency and organism, are process theology and the work of Teilhard de Chardin. Process thought moves toward a social view of agency (every entity or actual occasion is an agent, including God), while Teilhard suggests a more traditional view of God as the supreme agent guiding the evolutionary process toward more and more complex, unified agents. The process version of organicism emphasizes the interdependence and reciprocity of all agents, with God as one among many, though the preeminent one, while Teilhard's version gives a greater role to divine purpose and direction. These are both exciting, provocative proposals with profound implications for an ecological sensibility. Process ontology, with its insistence on the agency or subjectivity of all entities, provides a basis for the intrinsic value of every created being, living and nonliving. Teilhard's view also underscores the value of each and every aspect of evolutionary reality, although in a more traditional sacramental mode. All things are being transformed through their processes of natural growth toward the divine source and goal of their

existence. Both of these variations on the organic model are pan*en*theistic, not pantheistic; in both, divine transcendence and immanence are radicalized, with Teilhard expressing the radicalization mythologically and process theology conceptually. In differing degrees both are credible, persuasive readings of postmodern science and Christianity.

My essay is a continuation and development of these projects at the metaphorical level. While Teilhard certainly did work poetically and mythologically, as I have suggested, his images were rather esoteric (Omega Point, noogenesis), referring to parts of the process of evolutionary teleology. Process theologians, although conceptually oriented, have also suggested some powerful metaphors, notably A. N. Whitehead's notion of God as the Great Companion. They have also revived a limited use for the model of the world as God's body.[2] Both process theology and Teilhard are radical revisionings of the relation of God and the world; however, neither suggests an overall *model* for reimaging that relation.

SPIRIT AND BODY

My essay undertakes such a task, although with a profound debt to the organic and agential models of Teilhard and process theology. The agential model preserves transcendence, while the organic model underscores immanence. Alone, the agential model overemphasizes the transcendent power and freedom of God at the expense of the world. Alone, the organic model tends to collapse God and the world, denying the freedom and individuality of both. But if the model were that God is related to the world as spirit is to body, perhaps the values of both the agential and organic models could be preserved.

Two related issues, however, face us immediately. The first is the suitability of *any* personal language for God as being compatible with contemporary science. The second, assuming that we can provide reasons for retaining agential language, is the *kind* of personal imagery that is most appropriate. The dilemma set by these issues is an acute one: the Hebrew and Christian traditions are profoundly and, 1 would argue, indelibly agential; yet postmodern science, as we have seen, does not appear to permit any purpose or agency apart from local causation. This dilemma has caused some theologians to retreat from personal language for God except in worship. The implication is that personal language does not really refer to God but is necessary for liturgical purposes, while the proper way to speak of God in the context of postmodern science is impersonally. One unfortunate result of this position is a willingness to continue to use traditional metaphors for God such as God as lord and father (since they are "only" liturgical images), without working toward more appropriate ones.

This approach permits, I believe, too strong a control of science over theology. If it can be shown that *all* personal metaphors are incompatible with postmodern science, the case becomes stronger. But since little reconstructive work on such models has been attempted, the images in question are traditional ones, not necessarily all personal ones. I agree that the monarchical, triumphalistic, patriarchal imagery for God is impossible to square with an evolutionary, ecological, cosmological framework. Even some of the more intimate models—God as mother (and father), lover, and friend—need to be balanced by other, less anthropocentric ones. But are all personal models worthless, discordant, incongruous from the perspective of contemporary science? Moreover, if we do discard them all and speak of God only or principally in impersonal terms, can we any longer pretend that we still belong within the Western religious paradigm? Finally, is not the refusal to imagine God in personal terms a gesture in the direction of disembodiment: *we* are embodied agents, and is it not therefore natural and appropriate, as the outermost contemporary evolutionary phylum, to imagine our creator "in our image"?

The major model we are investigating in depth is the combined agential-organic one of the universe (world) as God's body, a body enlivened and empowered by the divine spirit. We have dealt in some detail with the organic aspect of the model, the universe as God's body, but what of the

agential or personal aspect, the spirit? To begin framing an answer to this question, we need to start with ourselves as the concrete, embodied beings we are. We are embodied personal agents, and if we are not to be surds or outcasts in the world, we need to imagine God's relationship to the world in a way that includes us, that makes us feel at home. Mechanistic, impersonal models exclude us; personal, organic ones include us. If the history of the universe and especially the evolutionary history of our planet makes it clear that we do, in fact, belong here and that evolution has resulted in self-conscious beings, then does it not make sense to imagine the relationship between God and the world in a manner that is continuous with that evolutionary history, especially if, as we shall suggest, there is a way of modeling personal agency that also touches one of the deepest traditions of Christian thought?

That tradition is of God as spirit—not Holy Ghost, which suggests the unearthly and the disembodied, nor initially the Holy Spirit, which has been focused largely on human beings and especially the followers of Christ, but the spirit of God, the divine wind that "swept over the face of the waters" prior to creation, the life-giving breath given to all creatures, and the dynamic movement that creates, recreates, and transcreates throughout the universe. Spirit, as wind, breath, life is the most basic and most inclusive way to express centered embodiment. All living creatures, not just human ones, depend upon breath. Breath also knits together the life of animals and plants, for they are linked by the exchange of oxygen and carbon dioxide in each breath inhaled and exhaled. Breath is a more immediate and radically dependent way to speak of life than even food or water, for we literally live from breath to breath and can survive only a few minutes without breathing. Our lives are enclosed by two breaths—our first when we emerge from our mother's womb and our last when we "give up the ghost" (spirit).

Spirit is a wide-ranging, multidimensional term with many meanings built upon its physical base as the breath of life. We speak of a person's spirit, their vigor, courage, or strength; of team spirit, the collective energy of people at play; of the spirit of '76 or the spirit of Tienanmen Square, the vitality, grit, and resolution of a people banding together in a common cause to oppose oppression; of a spirited horse or the spirit of a sacred grove—animals, trees, and mountains can also have spirit. All these connotations are possible because of the primary meaning of spirit as the breath of life: "Then the Lord God formed man [sic] from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life" (Gen. 2:7). Bracketing the sexism of the Genesis 2 creation story, it nonetheless suggests the prime analogy of this essay: the dust of the universe enlivened by the breath of God. Each of us, and each and every other part of the body as well, owes our existence, breath by breath as we inhale and exhale, to God. We "live and move and have our being" in God (Acts 17:28). Indeed we do. That is, perhaps, the most basic confession that can be made: I owe my existence at its most fundamental level—the gift of my next breath—to God. God is my creator and recreator, the One who gives and renews my life, moment by moment, at its most basic, physical level. And so does everything else in creation also live, moment by moment, by the breath of God, says our model.

We are suggesting, then, that we think of God metaphorically as the spirit that is the breath, the life, of the universe, a universe that comes from God and could be seen as the body of God. Both of these terms, *spirit* and *body*, are metaphors: both refer properly to ourselves and other creatures and entities in our experience of the world. Neither describes God, for both are *back*, not *face*, terms. Nonetheless, even with these qualifications, questions abound. Let us look at a few of them. Why choose *spirit* rather than other personal, agential terms such as *self, mind, heart, will, soul*, and the like? Does spirit language for God make sense in terms of postmodern science and the Christian tradition? Does contemporary science substantiate such language, or does it accommodate or allow it? Can Christians use the model of God as embodied spirit, and, more pointedly, in a transcendent sky-God tradition, is it pantheistic? Does it collapse God and the world?

One reason for suggesting spirit as the way to speak of divine agency is that it undercuts anthropocentricism and promotes cosmocentricism. Only

a human being has a mind or self, whereas spirit, while able to include mind and self, has a much broader range. Most attempts to use the body metaphor in regard to God rely on the analogy of mind/body: God relates to the world as the mind (self) relates to the body. Not only does this form of the analogy involve difficult, often dualistic, arguments concerning the mind/body correlation, but, just as important for our considerations, it implies that divine activity in relation to the world is primarily intellectual and controlling: God is Mind or Will. This is an old, deep tradition in the Hebrew and Christian traditions as manifest in Wisdom and Logos theologies: God creates the universe as its orderer, as the One who gives it direction, limits, and purpose. The emphasis is on the work of the mind, the work of intelligence and control. It is precisely this concern that surfaces in the ancient enterprise of natural theology: the need to answer the questions of why and how. But a spirit theology suggests another possibility: that God is not primarily the orderer and controller of the universe but its source and empowerment, the breath that enlivens and energizes it. The spirit perspective takes seriously the fecundity, diversity, range, and complexity of life and of life-supporting systems. It does not claim that the divine mind is the cause of what evolutionary theory tells us can have only local causes; rather, it suggests that we think of these local causes as enlivened and empowered by the breath of God. A spirit theology focuses attention not on how and why creation occurred either in the beginning or over the evolutionary aeons of time, but on the rich variety of living forms that have been and are *now* present on our planet. The breath of God enlivening each and every entity in the body of the universe turns our attention to a theology of nature, a theology concerned with the relationship of God and our living, breathing planet. The principal reason, then, for preferring spirit to alternative possibilities is that it underscores the connection between God and the world as not primarily the Mind that orders, controls, and directs the universe, but as the Breath that is the source of its life and vitality. The connection is one of *relationship* at the deepest possible level, the level of life, rather than *control* at the level of ordering and directing nature. And since, as we recall, our tendency is not only to model God in our image but to model ourselves on the models with which we imagine God, the metaphor of breath rather than mind might help us to support, rather than control, life in all its forms. Thus, in a spirit theology, we might see ourselves as united with all other living creatures through the breath that moves through all parts of the body, rather than as the demilords who order and control nature.

But is this model commensurate with twentieth-century science? If one understands the spirit of God as the source of the dynamic vitality of the universe and especially as the breath of all lifeforms, then our focus is not on the purpose or direction of divine activity but on our dependence on God as the present and continuing creator. Our concern is not primarily intellectual but aesthetic and ethical: wonder and awe at the immensity, richness, and diversity of creation as well as gratitude and care for all its forms of life. Our response to this model is as grateful recipients of life rather than puzzlers over its mysteries. Contemporary science does not mandate or even imply such a model, but it is commensurate with an organic interpretation of its story. Since we and all other creatures and entities are in some sense inspirited bodies (even trees and oceans move with the winds), then if we were to think of God as in some sense continuous with this evolutionary history, one way to do so would be as the spirit of the entire body of the universe. This is not, of course, a scientific description nor is it a theological one; rather, it is a way of thinking about God and the world that makes sense in terms of postmodern science. It allows us to understand ourselves who have evolved into spiritual, embodied creatures as neither freaks nor surds in our world. It also allows us to think of God as the source of our being, the source of all being, not as the one who intervenes from the outside to initiate creation, patch it up, or direct it, but as the one who supplies us with the breath for all the incredible rich, teeming fecundity and variety of life.

It is a model of God and the world that focuses on "the wonderful life" that has emerged from evolutionary history, rather than on the divine ordering of the process. It does not attempt to enter into

scientific discussions on the how and why of that history, but suggests that if one is *already* a person of faith (which cannot be arrived at or substantiated by postmodern science), then the picture of reality as an organic whole, a body, dependent on and sustained by the spirit of God, is one that fits with, is appropriate to, evolutionary history. This theology of nature is not a natural theology: it does not say that the scientific story gives evidence (even the tiniest bit) for belief in this or any other model of God and the world. All it says is that this way of conceiving of God and the world makes more sense in terms of the scientific picture than alternatives such as the deistic, dialogic, and monarchical models. But this is enough. A theology of nature does not ask for scientific proof, only for a picture to help us think and act holistically about God, ourselves, and our world.

Where does this model stand in regard to the Christian tradition? We can answer that question on one level simply and forth-rightly by recalling the theme of the 1991 World Council of Churches assembly in Canberra, Australia: "Come, Holy Spirit—Renew the Whole Creation," or the affirmation from the Nicene Creed: "I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of Life." While the spirit of God, now the Holy Spirit, has often played a lackluster role in relation to the Father and the Son in Christian trinitarian thought, its credentials in both the Hebrew Scriptures and in the New Testament are more than solid. The motif that runs throughout is the spirit as the source of life and the renewer of life: a theology of the spirit focuses on God as the creator and redeemer of life. The trajectory begins with the spirit of God hovering over the waters of chaos and breathing life into living beings; the spirit renews creation in the gift of baptism, the second birth; and fulfills it in the eschatological vision of all creation in harmonious union. One of the great assets of the model is precisely its amorphous character in contrast to the highly human, personal, and androcentric nature of Father and Son: spirit is not necessarily human, personal (though it is relational), or male. In fact, it often has been designated female; but it may be best that, for once in Christian reflection, we let God be "it." "It" (the divine spirit) roams where it will, not focused on the like-minded (the fathers and the sons—or even the mothers and daughters), but permeating, suffusing, and energizing the innermost being of each and every entity in creation in ways unknown and unknowable in our human, personal categories.

The joining of the spirit that gives life to every creature with the Holy Spirit that renews all creation suggests a connection between Christian theology and the two forms of evolution—biological and biocultural. Creation, the gift of the spirit, could be seen as the action of God in the aeons of evolutionary development, which has resulted in the wonderful life we see about us as well as in ourselves. (This is a retrospective reading of creation in evolutionary terms.) In the model of the universe as God's body, divine incarnation is not limited to redemption but is everywhere evident in the bodies that live through the breath of the spirit. Within this model of the universe as God's body, God's presence and action are evident as the breath of life that gives all bodies, all forms of matter, the energy or power to become themselves. This understanding of divine action in light of evolutionary development focuses on *empowerment*, not direction. It does not claim that God is guiding the process in general or in particular; rather, it suggests that *all* life, regardless of which individuals or species prosper, is dependent upon God. God's creative action is not intermittent or occasional; on the contrary, it is continuous and universal, for without the sustaining breath of God, all the wonderful life, including our own, would fade and die. The "purpose" of creation from this perspective, however, is not human beings (or any other species), but the fecundity, richness, and diversity of *all* that is bodied forth from God and sustained in life by the breath of God. Needless to say, creation in this picture involves enormous waste, suffering, and death for all kinds of bodies—to suggest anything less or different is sentimental and false to the contemporary scientific picture of reality.

In Christian theology, however, the spirit of God is also the Holy Spirit, the spirit shaped and made known in the Hebrew Scriptures as well as in the life, teachings, and death of Jesus of Nazareth and the community that formed around him.

Moreover, evolution is not only biological; with self-conscious creatures it enters a historical, cultural phase. At this point divine purpose can be spoken of within the evolutionary process in a new and special way. It is not only empowerment of but also a *direction* for all that teeming life, a direction expressed by Christians in the stories, images, and ideas of the Hebrew people, its paradigmatic founder Jesus, and all the lives and understandings of disciples over the centuries. The guide for interpreting that direction is called the Holy Spirit, and it works *through* human beings: we become the mind and heart as well as the hands and feet of the body of God on our planet. Christians claim that God has been in the natural process as its creator and sustainer (the spirit of the body) since the beginning, but now that process has been given a particular direction (a "new creation") characterized by inclusive love, especially for the vulnerable and oppressed. For Christians, the spirit has been qualified or given shape and scope by the Holy Spirit and is a direction or purpose for life that depends on our cooperation as God's partners.

Hence, we can say that God's action as the spirit of the body is twofold. The spirit is the source of life, the breath of creation; at the same time, the Holy Spirit is the source of the renewal of life, the direction or purpose for all the bodies of the world—a goal characterized by inclusive love.

One central issue remains in regard to our model of God as the spirit of life bodied forth in the universe: Is it pantheistic? This is a complex issue in Christian theology with intricate historical dimensions we cannot settle here. Nonetheless, the criteria for models of God and the world operative in this essay—commensurability with postmodern science as well as our own embodied experience and the well-being of our planet—cause us to lean toward an interpretation of Christian faith that accommodates this model. Since the model is commensurate with contemporary science, mirrors our own experience as embodied spirits, and connects us at the basic level of life-giving breath with all other lifeforms on our planet, we are encouraged to look to those traditions within Christianity that emphasize the spirit in similar ways. These traditions can be characterized as neither theist nor pantheist, but pan*en*theist: "God is not exhausted by finite beings, not even all finite beings, yet God is *in* all finite creatures and apart from God there is nothing; nor is God 'apart' from anything."[3] This description of a panentheistic view of the relation of God and the world is compatible with our model of God as the spirit that is the source, the life, the breath of all reality. Everything that is is *in* God and God is *in* all things and yet God is not identical with the universe, for the universe is dependent on God in a way that God is not dependent on the universe. We joined the agential and organic models in order to express the asymmetrical and yet profoundly interrelational character of the panentheistic model of God and the world: while we, as members of the body, are radically dependent upon the life-giving breath from the spirit, God, as the spirit, is not so dependent upon the universe. Pantheism says that God is embodied, necessarily and totally; traditional theism claims that God is disembodied, necessarily and totally; panentheism suggests that God is embodied but not necessarily or totally. Rather, God is sacramentally embodied: God is mediated, expressed, in and through embodiment, but not necessarily or totally. It is, as we recall, the back and not the face of God that we are allowed to see.

Panentheism is, I would suggest, a strong motif in both Hebrew and Christian traditions that take seriously the mediation of God to the world. These traditions deny, on the one hand, a picture of God as an external superperson (or Unmoved Mover) distant from and alien to the world and, on the other hand, a view of God as immediately available to the mind of human beings or as identified with natural processes. Rather, the panentheistic tradition is found in all those passages in the Hebrew Scriptures that mediate the divine presence through human words and acts as well as natural phenomena and in the New Testament in its central declaration that "the Word was made flesh" in Jesus of Nazareth. In all these instances, mediation and incarnation are central and, therefore, are open to, or ought to be open to, the embodiment of God, especially in its panentheistic form of the world (universe) as God's body and God as its spirit.

To sum up: we have suggested that God as the embodied spirit of the universe is a personal/

organic model that is compatible with interpretations of both Christian faith and contemporary science, although not demanded by either. It is a way of speaking of God's relation to all matter, all creation, that "makes sense" in terms of an incarnational understanding of Christianity and an organic interpretation of postmodern science. It helps us to be *whole* people within our faith and within our contemporary world. Moreover, the model does not reduce God to the world nor relegate God to another world; on the contrary, it radicalizes both divine immanence (God is the breath of each and every creature) and divine transcendence (God is the energy empowering the entire universe). Finally, it underscores our bodiliness, our concrete physical existence and experience that we share with all other creatures: it is a model on the side of the well-being of the planet, for it raises the issue of ethical regard toward *all* bodies as all are interrelated and interdependent.

NOTES

1. Vincent McNabb, ed., *The Decrees of the Vatican Council* (London, 1907) as quoted by Grace Jantzen, *God's World, God's Body* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984), 102.
2. A. N. Whitehead, *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology* (New York: Macmillan, 1929), 16f. The classic process theology essay on the model of the world as God's body is by Charles Hartshorne, "The Theological Analogies and the Cosmic Organism," *Man's Vision of God and the Logic of Theism* (New York: Willett, Clark, and Co., 1941), 171–211. While Hartshorne uses the human body as the base of his organic model, he does so with a fine eye to sociality and diversity by focusing on the complex cellular constitution of the body.
3. Raymond Keith Williamson, *Introduction to Hegel's Philosophy of Religion* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1984), 254.

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I.A.6

The Love of God and the Idea of Deity

MARTIN BUBER

Martin Buber (1878–1965) was an extremely influential Jewish philosopher and theologian. He is best known for his book I and Thou. *The present selection is an essay written in 1943 and reprinted, among other places, in his* The Eclipse of God. *Here he explores the tension in Hermann Cohen's thought between the idea of a transcendent God and the love of God that is so important to the religious life.*

1

IN THOSE scribbled lines affecting us as cries of the very soul, which Pascal wrote after two ecstatic hours, and which he carried about with him until his death, sewn into the lining of his doublet, we find under the heading *Fire* the note: "God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob—not of the philosophers and scholars."

These words represent Pascal's change of heart. He turned, not from a state of being where there is no God to one where there is a God, but from the God of the philosophers to the God of Abraham. Overwhelmed by faith, he no longer knew what to do with the God of the philosophers; that is, with the God who occupies a definite position in a definite system of thought. The God of Abraham, the God in whom Abraham had believed and whom

Translated by I.M. Lask, and reprinted from Martin Buber, *Israel and the World: Essays in a Time of Crisis* (Farrar, Straus, and Young, Inc., 1948). Used with permission.

Abraham had loved ("The entire religion of the Jews," remarks Pascal, "consisted only of the love of God"), is not susceptible of introduction into a system of thought precisely because He is God. He is beyond each and every one of those systems, absolutely and by virtue of His nature. What the philosophers describe by the name of God cannot be more than an idea. But God, "the God of Abraham," is not an idea; all ideas are absorbed in Him. Nor is that all. If I think even of a state of being in which all ideas are absorbed, and think some philosophic thought about it as an idea—then I am no longer referring to the God of Abraham. The "passion" peculiar to philosophers is, according to a hint dropped by Pascal, pride. They offer humanity their own system in place of God.

"What!" cries Pascal, "the philosophers recognized God and desired not merely that men should love him, but that they should reach their level and then stop!" It is precisely because the philosophers replace him by the image of images, the idea, that they remove themselves and remove the rest of us furthest from him. There is no alternative. One must choose. Pascal chose, during one of those all-overthrowing moments, when he felt his sick-bed prayer was answered: "To be apart from the world, divested of all things, lonely in your Presence, in order to respond to your justice with all the motions of my heart."

Pascal himself, to be sure, was not a philosopher but a mathematician, and it is easier for a mathematician to turn his back on the God of the philosophers than for a philosopher. For the philosopher, if he were really to wish to turn his back on that God, would be compelled to renounce the attempt to include God in his system in any conceptual form. Instead of including God as one theme among others, that is, as the highest theme of all, his philosophy both wholly and in part would be compelled to point toward God, without actually dealing with him. This means that the philosopher would be compelled to recognize and admit the fact that his idea of the Absolute was dissolving at the point where the Absolute *lives*; that it was dissolving at the point where the Absolute is loved; because at that point the Absolute is no longer the "Absolute" about which one may philosophize, but God.

2

Those who wish clearly to grasp the nature of the endless and hopeless struggle which lay in wait for the philosopher of the critical period should read the very long notes in Kant's unfinished posthumous work, written over a period of seven years during his old age. They reveal a scene of incomparable existential tragedy. Kant calls the principle constituting the transition to the completion of the transcendental philosophy by the name of the "Principle of Transcendental Theology"; here his concern is with the questions, "What is God?" and "Is there a God?"

Kant explains: "The function of transcendental philosophy is still unresolved: Is there a God?" As long as there was no reply to that question, the task of his philosophy was still unfulfilled; at the end of his days, when his spiritual powers were waning, it was "still unresolved." He toiled on at this problem, constantly increasing his efforts, from time to time weaving the answer, yet time and again unraveling the woof. He reached an extreme formulation: "To think Him and to believe in Him is an identical act." Furthermore, "the thought of Him is at one and the same time the belief in Him and his personality." But this faith does not result in God's becoming existent for the philosophy of the philosopher. "God is not an entity outside of me, but merely a thought within me." Or, as Kant says on another occasion, "merely a moral relation within me."

Nevertheless, He possesses a certain kind of "reality." "God is only an idea of reason, but one possessing the greatest practical internal and external reality." Yet it is obvious that this kind of reality is not adequate to make the thought about God identical with the "belief in Him and His personality." Transcendental philosophy, whose task was to ascertain whether there is a God, finally found itself compelled to state: "It is preposterous to ask whether there is a God."

The contradiction goes even deeper when Kant treats belief from this point of view. He incidentally outlines a fundamental distinction between "to believe God" and "to believe in God." "To believe God" obviously means God's being the ideational content of one's faith. This is a deduction from the fact that "to believe in God" means in the terminology of Kant, as he himself expressly states, to believe in a living God. To believe in God means, therefore, to stand in a personal relationship to that God; a relationship in which it is possible to stand only toward a living entity.

This distinction becomes still clearer through Kant's addendum: to believe "not in an entity which is only an idol and is not a personality." It follows that a God who is not a living personality is an idol. Kant comes that close at this point to the *reality* of faith. But he does not permit its validity to stand. His system compels him decisively to restrict what he has said. The same page of manuscript contains the following passage: "The idea of God as a living God is nothing but the inescapable fate of man." But if the idea of God is only that, then it is totally impossible to "believe in God" legitimately; that is, it is impossible to stand in a personal relationship with him. Man, declares the philosopher, is compelled to believe in him the moment he thinks God. But the philosopher is compelled to withdraw the character of truth from this faith, and together with it the character of reality (any reality, that is, which is more than merely psychological). Here, apparently of necessity, that which was decisive for Pascal, as it was for Abraham, is missing; namely, the love of God.

3

But a philosopher who has been overwhelmed by faith *must* speak of love.

Hermann Cohen, the last in the series of great disciples of Kant, is a shining example of a philosopher who has been overwhelmed by faith.

Belief in God was an important point in Cohen's system of thought as early as in his youth, when it interested him as a psychological phenomenon. His explanations of "the origin of the mythology of gods" and of the "poetic act" involved in "god-creating fantasy," contained in his study on "Mythological Conceptions concerning God and Soul" which appeared in 1868 in Steinthal's periodical, *Zeitschrift fuer Voelkerpsychologie,* was an expression of this interest. Faith was there treated as relative to psychological distinction; but in the course of the development of Cohen's philosophical system faith's status as an independent concept, distinct from knowledge, was to become questionable.

In his "Ethics of Pure Will" (1904), Cohen writes: "God must not become the content of belief, if that belief is to mean something distinct from knowledge." Of the two kinds of belief which Kant distinguishes in his posthumous work, namely, "to believe God" (that is, to introduce the idea of God into a system of knowledge), and "to believe in a living God" (that is, to have a vital relationship to him as a living entity), Cohen rejects the second even more strongly than Kant. In this way he means to overcome the "great equivocality" of the word "belief." Whereas Kant saw in the idea of God only the "fate" of the human species, Cohen wishes to "separate the concept of life from the concept of God." He finds support for his argument in Maimonides (though he limited the extent of that support three years later, saying that Maimonides had been careful to distinguish between the concept of life when applied to God and the same concept when applied to man; a distinction on the part of Maimonides which entirely differs from Cohen's distinction).

God is an idea for Cohen, as he was for Kant. "We call God an idea," says Cohen, "meaning the center of all ideas, the idea of truth." God is not a personality; as such He only appears "within the confines of myth." And He is no existence at all, neither a natural existence nor a spiritual, "just as in general the idea cannot be linked with the concept of existence." The concept of God is introduced into the structure of ethical thought, because, as the idea of truth, it is instrumental in establishing the unity of nature and morality. This view of God as an idea Cohen regards as "the true religiosity,"

which can evolve only when every relation involving belief in a living God is shown to be problematical, and nullified. God's only place is within a system of thought. The system defends itself with stupendous vigour against the living God who is bound to make questionable its perfection, and even its absolute authority. Cohen, the thinker, defends himself against the belief which, rising out of an ancient heritage, threatens to overwhelm him. He defends himself with success; the success of the system-creator. Cohen has constructed the last home for the God of the philosophers.

And yet Cohen has been overwhelmed by faith in more exemplary fashion than any other of the contemporary philosophers, although his labours to incorporate God into a system were in no way hindered. On the contrary: from that moment his labours turned into an admirable wrestle with his own experience.

Cohen objectified the results of his succumbing to faith by merging it in his system of concepts. Nowhere in his writings does he directly state it; but the evidence is striking. When was it that the decisive change occurred?

4

The answer lies in the change that crept into Cohen's way of thinking about the love of God. It was only at a late period that Cohen, who concurrently with the development of his system was dealing in a series of essays with the heritage of the Jewish faith, gave an adequate place to the cornerstone of that faith, the love of God, the essential means by which the Jewish faith realized its full and unique value. Only three years after the "Ethics," in his important research into "Religion and Morality," whose formulations, even keener than those of the "Ethics," interdict "interest in the so-called person of God and the so-called living God," declaring that the prophets of Israel "combatted" the direct relation between man and God, do we find a new note about the love of God. "The more that the knowledge of God is simultaneously felt to be love of God, the more passionate becomes the battle for faith, the struggle for the knowledge of God and for the love of God." It is evident that at this point Cohen is beginning to approach the *vital* character of faith. Yet the love of God still remains something abstract and not given to investigation.

Once again, three years later, Cohen's short essay on "The Love of Religion" begins with the curious sentence, "The love of God is the love of religion," and its first section ends with the no less curious sentence, "The love of God is therefore the knowledge of morality." If we carefully consider the two uses of the word "is," we are able to distinguish a purpose: which is to classify something as yet unclassified but nevertheless obtruding as central; to classify it by a process of identification with something else already comprehended, and thus put it in its place; but that identification does not prove successful. All that is necessary to see this clearly is to compare the above-cited sentences with any one of the Biblical verses which enjoin or praise the love of God, which are the origin of that concept. What Cohen is enjoining and praising at this point is something essentially and qualitatively different from the love of religion and the knowledge of morality, although it includes both. Yet in Cohen's revision of his Berlin lectures of 1913–14, published in 1915 under the title, "The Concept of Religion in the System of Philosophy," he gives expression to a love which does away once and for all with that curious "is."

"If I love God," says Cohen (and this use of his of "I" touches the heart of the reader, like every genuine "I" in the work of every genuine philosopher), "then I no longer think Him …" (and that "no longer" is almost direct testimony) "… only the sponsor of earthly morals…." But what? But the avenger of the poor in world history. "It is that avenger of the poor whom I love." And later, to the same effect: "I love in God the father of man." At this point "father" means the "shield and aid of the poor," for, "Man is revealed to me in the poor man."

How long a way have we come from the "love of religion"! Yet the new element in Cohen is expressed with even greater clarity and energy:

"Therefore shall the love of God exceed all knowledge…. A man's consciousness is completely filled when he loves God. Therefore, this knowledge, which absorbs all others, is no longer merely knowledge, but love." And it is extremely logical that the Biblical commandment to love God is cited and interpreted at this point in the same connection: "I cannot love God without devoting my whole heart as living for the sake of my fellowmen, without devoting my entire soul as responsive to all the spiritual trends in the world around me, without devoting all my force to this God in His correlation with man."

At this point I wish to introduce an objection related, admittedly, not to these sentences of Cohen's, but to another that has a connection with them. Cohen speaks of the paradox "that I have to love man." "Worm that I am," he continues, "consumed by passions, cast as bait for egoism, I must nevertheless love man. If I am able to do so, and so far as I am able to do so, I shall be able to love God." Strong words these, yet the lives of many important persons controvert the last sentence. The teaching of the Bible overcomes the paradox in a precisely contrary fashion. The Bible knows that it is impossible to command the love of man. I am incapable of feeling love toward every man, though God himself command me. The Bible does not directly enjoin the love of man, but by using the dative puts it rather in the form of an *act* of love (Lev. 19:18, 34). I must act lovingly toward my *rea*, my "companion" (usually translated "my neighbour"), that is toward every man with whom I deal in the course of my life, including the *ger*, the "stranger" or "sojourner"; I must bestow the favours of love on him, I must treat him with love as one who is "like unto me." (I must love "to him"; a construction only found in these two verses in the Bible.) Of course I must love him not merely with superficial gestures but with an essential relationship. It lies within my power to will it, and so I can accept the commandment. It is not my will which gives me the emotion of love toward my "neighbour" aroused within me by my behaviour.

On the other hand, the Torah commands one to love God (Deut. 6:5; 10:12; 11:1); only in that connection does it enjoin heartfelt love of the sojourner who is one's "neighbour" (Deut. 10:19)—because God loves the sojourner. If I love God, in the course of loving Him I come to love the one whom God loves, too. I can love God as God from the moment I know Him; and Israel, to whom the commandment is addressed, does know Him. Thus I can accept the injunction to love my fellow-man.

Cohen is, to be sure, actually referring to something else. For now he raises the question whether he should take offense at God's being "only an idea." "Why should I not be able," he replies, "to love ideas? What is man after all but a social idea, and yet I can love him as an individual only through and by virtue of that fact. Therefore, strictly considered, I can only love the social idea of man."

To me, it seems otherwise. Only if and because I love this or that specific man can I elevate my relation to the social idea of man into that emotional relationship involving my whole being which I am entitled to call by the name of love. And what of God? Franz Rosenzweig warned us that Cohen's idea of God should not be taken to mean that God is "only an idea" in Cohen's eyes. The warning is pertinent: Rosenzweig is right to emphasize that an idea for Cohen is not "only an idea." Yet, at the same time, we must not ignore that other "only," whose meaning is quite different indeed in Cohen's phrase, "a God who is only an idea." Let us, if we will, describe our relation to the idea of the beautiful and the idea of the good by the name of love—though in my opinion all this has content and value for the soul only in being rendered concrete and made real. But to love God differs from that relationship in essential quality. He who loves God loves Him precisely insofar as He is not "only an idea," and can love Him *because* He is not "only an idea." And I permit myself to say that though Cohen indeed thought of God as an idea, Cohen too loved Him as—God.

5

In the great work prepared after "The Concept of Religion" and posthumously published under the

title of "Religion of Reason, from the Sources of Judaism," Cohen returns to this problem with even greater prominence: "How can one love an idea?"—and replies, "How can one love anything save an idea?" He substantiates his reply by saying, "For even in the love of the senses one loves only the idealized person, only the idea of the person." Yet even if it were correct that in the love of "the senses" (or more correctly, in the love which comprehends sensuality) one loves only the idealized person, that does not at all mean that nothing more than the idea of the person is loved; even the idealized person remains a person, and has not been transformed into an idea. It is only because the person whom I idealize actually exists that I can love the idealized one. Even though for Dante it was *la gloriosa donna della mia mente*, yet the decisive fact is that first he saw the real Beatrice, who set the "spirit of life" trembling in him. But does not the motive force which enables and empowers us to idealize a beloved person arise from the deepest substance of that beloved person? Is not the true idealization in the deepest sense a *discovery* of the essential self meant by God in creating the person whom I love?

"The love of men for God," says Cohen, "is the love of the moral ideal. I can love only the ideal, and I can comprehend the ideal in no other way save by loving it." Even on this level, the very highest for the philosopher who is overwhelmed by faith, he declares what the love of God is, and not what it includes. But man's love for God *is not* love of the moral ideal; it only includes that love. He who loves God only as the moral ideal is bound soon to reach the point of despair at the conduct of the world where, hour after hour, all the principles of his moral idealism are apparently contradicted. Job despairs because God and the moral ideal seem diverse to him. But He who answered Job out of the tempest is more exalted even than the ideal sphere. He is not the archetype of the ideal, but he contains the archetype. He issues forth the ideal, but does not exhaust himself in the issuing. The unity of God is not the Good; it is the Super-good. God desires that men should follow His revelation, yet at the same time He wishes to be accepted and loved in His deepest concealment. He who loves God loves the ideal and loves God more than the ideal. He knows himself to be loved by God, not by the ideal, not by an idea, but even by Him whom ideality cannot grasp, namely, by that *absolute personality* we call God. Can this be taken to mean that God "is" a personality? The absolute character of His personality, that paradox of paradoxes, prohibits any such statement. It only means that God loves as a personality and that He wishes to be loved like a personality. And if He was not a person in Himself, He, so to speak, became one in creating Man, in order to love man and be loved by him—in order to love me and be loved by me. For, even supposing that ideas can also be loved, the fact remains that persons are the only ones who love. Even the philosopher who has been overwhelmed by faith, though he afterward continue to hug his system even more closely than before, and to interpret the love between God and man as the love between an idea and a person—even he, nevertheless, testifies to the existence of a love between God and man that is basically reciprocal. That philosophy too, which, in order to preserve the Being (*esse; Sein*) of God, deprives Him of existence (*existentia; Dasein*), indicates however unintentionally the bridge standing indestructibly on the two pillars, one imperishable and the other ever crumbling, God and man.

6

Cohen once said of Kant, "What is characteristic of his theology is the non-personal *in the usual sense,* the truly spiritual principle: the sublimation of God into an idea." And he adds, "And nothing less than this is the deepest basis of the Jewish idea of God." As far as Kant is concerned, Cohen was correct in this judgment. But throughout Kant's posthumous work we can see emerging every now and then resistance to this sublimation of God into an idea; a sublimation which later even more prominently prevents in Cohen the linking of the idea with the concept of existence.

"Under the concept of God," writes Kant, "Transcendental Philosophy refers to a substance possessing the greatest existence," but he also qualifies God as "the ideal of a substance which we create ourselves." What we have in these notes, which sometimes appear chaotic, are the records of a suit at law, the last phase which the thought of the idea of God assumes for its thinker, of a suit between the two elements, "idea" and "God," which are contained in the idea of God; a suit which time and again reverts to the same point, until death cuts it short. Cohen set out to put the idea into a sequence so logical as to make it impossible for any impulse to opposition to develop. Even when overwhelmed by faith, Cohen continued the struggle to preserve this sequence. In so doing, he was of the opinion that "the deepest basis of the Jewish idea of God" was on his side. But even the deepest basis of the Jewish idea of God can be achieved only by plunging into that word by which God revealed Himself to Moses, "I shall be there."* It gives exact expression to the personal "existence" of God (not to His abstract "being"), and expression even to His living presence, which most directly of all His attributes touches the man to whom He manifests Himself. The speaker's self-designation as the God of Abraham, God of Isaac, and God of Jacob (Exod. 3:15) is indissolubly united with that manifestation of "I shall be there," and He cannot be reduced to a God of the philosophers.

But the man who says, "I love in God the father of man" has essentially already renounced the God of the philosophers in his innermost heart, even though he may not confess it to himself. Cohen did not consciously choose between the God of the philosophers and the God of Abraham, rather believing to the last that he could succeed in identifying the two. Yet his inmost heart, that force from which thought too derives its vitality, had chosen and decided for him. The identification had failed, and of necessity had to fail. For the idea of God, that masterpiece of man's construction, is only the image of images, the most lofty of all the images by which man imagines the imageless God. It is essentially repugnant to man to recognize this fact, and remain satisfied. For when man learns to love God, he senses an actuality which rises above the idea. Even if he makes the philosopher's great effort to sustain the object of his love as an object of his philosophic thought, the love itself bears witness to the existence of the Beloved.

I.B. CLASSICAL THEISTIC ATTRIBUTES

Introduction

Classical theism, as we have already noted, attributes to God properties like omnibenevolence (being perfectly good), timelessness (being outside the flow of time), immutability (changelessness), omnipotence (being all-powerful), and omniscience (being all-knowing). Each of these attributes, however, raises difficult philosophical puzzles—puzzles that have sometimes been used to challenge the very coherence of the traditional Judeo-Christian concept of God. In this section of our text, we explore some of the most well-known and widely discussed of these puzzles. We focus on four main issues: (1) God's relationship to time, (2) the nature of divine omnipotence, (3) the tension between divine moral

*Exod. 3:14, part of the phrase commonly translated: "I am that I am."

perfection and divine freedom, and (4) the tension between divine omniscience and human freedom.

1. God and Time

Virtually all theists would agree that God's life is immune to the ravages of time—God lasts forever—and that God somehow transcends time and space. But what do these claims mean? Does God last forever by being wholly outside of time, or by having a temporal life that goes on forever? Is God's life wholly unmarked by temporal succession? Or does the claim that God transcends time and space mean only that God exists outside of our physical spacetime, even if his own life still unfolds sequentially? Some philosophers use the terms *eternal* and *everlasting* to mark the distinction between timeless and temporally infinite existence (respectively); others—as in our first two readings in this section—simply distinguish between atemporal eternity and temporal eternity. Either way, the central question about God's relationship to time is whether, to use the oft-quoted words of Boethius, God enjoys "the complete possession of illimitable life all at once," or whether instead God experiences his life in sequences like every other person with whom we are acquainted.[1]

The notion of timeless eternity first appears in Parmenides' poem "The Way to Truth," in which he says of the One, "It neither was at any time nor will be since it is now all at once a single whole." He and his disciple, Zeno, denied the reality of time. The concept of the timeless eternal was further developed by Plato in the *Timaeus*, in which it is glorified as infinitely superior to the temporal. The *Timaeus* deeply influenced the early Church, and through Augustine and Boethius the doctrine of eternity (as timelessness) made its way into Christian thought, becoming the dominant position in mainstream Christianity. In the Middle Ages and the Reformation period, it was embraced by Anselm, Aquinas, Luther, Calvin, and the vast majority of theologians, but challenged by Duns Scotus and William of Ockham. In recent times, Anthony Kenny, Nelson Pike, and Nicholas Wolterstorff, among others, have argued that the notion of timelessness is unbiblical and incoherent, and that God should instead be viewed as everlasting.

In our readings, Hugh McCann defends the traditional timeless notion of God's eternity, whereas Stephen T. Davis defends the notion of temporal eternity. In the first reading, Davis offers three arguments in favor of temporal eternity: (1) The concept of God's creative activity makes far more sense if we accept the notion that he exists in time. For if God creates a given temporal thing, his act of creation itself must be temporal. (2) A timeless being cannot be the personal, caring, involved God of the Bible. (3) The idea that God's timeless eternity is somehow simultaneous with this-worldly events seems to result in absurd consequences. For if events in 3021 BC are no earlier than the events of 1986 for

[1]E. K. Rand, ed. In H. F. Stewart, E. K. Rand, and S. J. Tester, *Boethius: The Theological Tractates and the Consolation of Philosophy* (London: Heinemann; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard 1973). Quoted in, among other places, Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann's "Eternity," *Journal of Philosophy* 78 (1981): 429–58.

God, then time must be illusory. But there is no good reason to deem time illusory. Hence the notion of timeless eternity seems incoherent. Davis answers several objections to his view, concluding that the concept of temporal eternity is more coherent than the notion of timeless eternity.

In his contribution, "The God Beyond Time," McCann argues just the opposite. He examines objections to the atemporal notion of God and tries to answer them, beginning with Davis's first argument, that the concept of God's creative *activity* makes far more sense if we accept the notion that he exists in time. McCann argues that although things may be said to be brought about at some *time*, this does not entail that God must *exist at some time* in order to bring them about. He contends that it is coherent to talk about temporal differences from our point of view but not from God's. Hence, the idea of timelessness is coherent. The whole of Creation is one eternal fiat. Furthermore, McCann argues, the notion of an atemporal God makes better sense of God's sovereignty and omniscience without creating problems for human freedom.

2. Omnipotence

Theists maintain that God is omnipotent—all-powerful. But what is omnipotence? Is it the ability to do just anything at all? Some philosophers, following Descartes, hold that it is, and that it even includes the ability to violate logical truths. But this is a hard view even to grasp, much less believe, since all rational thought and discourse seem to presuppose the truths of logic. Hence, the overwhelming majority of philosophers and theologians, at least since Aquinas, have not thought that omnipotence includes the ability to do the logically impossible. Following their lead, we may roughly define omnipotence as the ability to do whatever is not logically impossible. God can create a universe, but (for example) he cannot make outright contradictions true.

Still, there are problems with this definition. On the surface, at least, it does not seem contradictory to say that God could make a stone heavier than he could lift or that he could sin if he wanted to (though his being perfectly good keeps him from exercising this power). Consider the paradox of the stone argument, as formulated by Wade Savage:[2]

1. Either *x* can create a stone that *x* cannot lift, or *x* cannot create a stone that *x* cannot lift.
2. If *x* can create a stone that *x* cannot lift, then, necessarily, there is at least one task that *x* cannot perform (namely, lift the stone in question).
3. If *x* cannot create a stone that *x* cannot lift, then, necessarily, there is at least one act that *x* cannot perform (namely, create the stone in question).
4. Hence, there is at least one task that *x* cannot perform.
5. If *x* is an omnipotent being, then *x* can perform any task.
6. Therefore, *x* is not omnipotent.

[2] *The Philosophical Review* 76 (1967): 75f.

Since *x* could be any being whatsoever, the paradox apparently proves that the notion of omnipotence is incoherent.

In our readings, George Mavrodes argues that since God is *essentially* omnipotent, the act of creating a stone heavier than he can lift is a logical impossibility. Thus, he cannot do it; but, since omnipotence requires only the ability to do the logically possible, the fact that he cannot do it does not count against his omnipotence. This solution has been criticized by Wade Savage as a case of question begging, supposing as it does that the statement "God is omnipotent" is necessarily true. A second line of thought is taken by Harry Frankfurt, who argues that if God is able to do one impossible thing, make a stone heavier than he can lift, he can also do a second impossible thing and lift that stone. So the paradox of the stone does not show that the notion of omnipotence is incoherent. Other philosophers have developed still further responses to this puzzle.

Similar to the paradox of the stone but more crucial to our idea of God is the question of whether God's omnipotence gives him the power to sin. Again, Aquinas and many medieval theologians argue that such power would be pseudo-power, in fact, impotence. Others, following William of Ockham, have argued that God necessarily cannot sin because sin is defined as simply being that which is opposed to God's will and God cannot oppose his own will at one and the same time. Still others argue that an omniscient and perfectly free being cannot sin because sin necessarily involves a failure in reason or freedom.

3. Omniscience and Human Freedom

An omniscient being knows everything. More exactly, an omniscient being knows every truth and has no false beliefs. But the concept of omniscience raises some challenging questions. One of the more important questions—the one that is the focus of our sixth, seventh, and eighth readings in this section—asks what happens to human freedom if God has exhaustive knowledge of the future. Suppose you are now considering a marriage proposal. Either it's true now that you will accept, or it is true now that you won't—there seems to be no other option. Suppose it's true that you will accept. Then God has believed from time immemorial that you will accept this marriage proposal. How then can you possibly refuse? It seems that in order to refuse, you would have to bring it about either that God never believed that you would accept, or that God has a false belief. But you can't do either of those things. So, it seems, you can't refuse. But if you can't refuse, then it seems that your accepting will not be free, since there is no alternative available to you.

Our sixth reading in this section is Augustine's classic discussion of the problem of divine freedom and foreknowledge. Following that is one of the most widely discussed contemporary formulations of the problem: Nelson Pike argues forcefully for the conclusion that divine foreknowledge is incompatible with human freedom. Finally, in our eighth reading, Alvin Plantinga responds to Pike's argument, arguing that it is a mistake to think that if God knows the future, then human freedom would require the ability to change the past or to make God have a false belief.

4. Omnibenevolence and Divine Freedom

Our final pair of readings in this section explores a tension between God's moral perfection and God's *own* freedom. Traditionally, theists have maintained that God is morally unsurpassable: Nobody *is* better than God, and, indeed, it is a necessary truth that nobody is or can be better than God. Suppose that this is what is involved in being morally perfect. Now consider this dilemma: Either there is a best creatable world, or there isn't. If there is, then God would have to create it. For suppose he were to create less than the best. Then, so the reasoning goes, God *would have been* morally surpassable. For he would have been such that he could have done better; and if God could have *done* better, so it is argued, then God could have *been* (morally) better. On the other hand, suppose there is no best creatable world: Suppose the space of worlds God could have created is such that, for any world you pick, there is a better one that God could have created. Then it seems that for anything God might have done, God might have done something better—in which case, by the same reasoning we have just given, God would have been morally surpassable. Thus, if this line of reasoning is sound, either there is a best creatable world and God is not free to refrain from creating it, or there no best creatable world and so the world could not have been the creation of a morally perfect God. In our ninth reading, William Rowe presses this line of reasoning and defends it against a variety of objections. In our tenth reading, Edward Wierenga responds, defending the conclusion that a morally unsurpassable God can be free after all.

I.B.1

Temporal Eternity

STEPHEN T. DAVIS

Stephen T. Davis is professor of philosophy at Claremont McKenna College. He is the author of several books and numerous articles in the philosophy of religion. Among his works are Christian Philosophical Theology *(2006) and* The Debate about the Bible: Inerrancy versus Infallibility *(1977). In the present article, he defends the view that God is temporally eternal against the classical view that God is atemporal.*

Stephen T. Davis, *Logic and the Nature of God*, published 1983 (MacMillan Press, LTD: London & Basingstoke). Reproduced with permission of Palgrave MacMillan.

One divine property that we will deal with early in the book is God's eternality. It will be best if we discuss it here because one's opinion on this subject is likely to affect opinions one has about several other divine properties, especially omnipotence, omniscience and immutability. Thus we must now raise the thorny question of God's relation to time.

It is part of the Judeo-Christian tradition that God is eternal.

> *Lord, thou has been our dwelling place in all generations.*
> *Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting thou art God.*
> *Thou turnest man back to the dust, and sayeth, "Turn back, O children of man!"*
> *For a thousand years in thy sight are but as yesterday when it is past, or as a watch in the night.* (Ps. 90:1–4)
> *Of old thou didst lay the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of thy hands.*
> *They will perish, but thou dost endure; they will all wear out like a garment.*
> *Thou changest them like raiment, and they pass away; but thou art the same and thy years have no end.* (Ps. 102:25–7)
> *I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.* (Rev. 22:13)

But what does it mean to say that God is eternal? Jews and Christians agree that God's eternality entails that he has always existed and always will exist, that he has no beginning and no end. But from this central point there are two routes that might be taken. One is to say that God is *timelessly eternal* and the other is to say that he is *temporally eternal*.

Let us first consider the view that God is timelessly eternal or "outside of time." There are a variety of reasons a Christian might be tempted by this thesis. One might be to emphasize God's transcendence over his creation as much as possible. Another might be to reconcile divine foreknowledge and human freedom. (Boethius and others have argued that human beings can be free despite God's knowledge of what they will do in their future because God's knowledge is timeless.) Another might be to retain consistency with other things one says about God, for example that he is immutable. (And it certainly does seem true that a timeless being—to be defined below—must be immutable.)

Whatever the reasons, a variety of Christian theologians and philosophers have claimed that God is timeless. For example, Anselm graphically depicts God's relation to time as follows:

> Thou wast not, then, yesterday, nor wilt thou be tomorrow; but yesterday and today and tomorrow thou art; or, rather, neither yesterday; nor today nor tomorrow thou art; but, simply, thou art, outside all time. For yesterday and today and tomorrow have no existence, except in time; but thou, although nothing exists without thee nevertheless dost not exist in space or time, but all things exist in thee.[1]

That God is timeless was also claimed by Augustine and Boethius before Anselm, and was also held after him, notably by Aquinas and Schleiermacher. In a famous definition, Boethius called eternity "the complete possession all at once of illimitable life"; it is a kind of "now that stands still." (Notice that Boethius is using "eternal" as a synonym for "timeless," which I am not.) Since God is eternal, he lives in what might be called an "everlasting present"; he has an infinity of movable time—past, present and future—all at once everlastingly present to him. Boethius is perhaps most clear on this point when he speaks of divine foreknowledge:

> Wherefore since… God hath always an everlasting and present state, his knowledge also surpassing all motions of time, remaineth in the simplicity of his presence, and comprehending the infinite spaces of that which is past and to come, considereth all things in his simple knowledge, as though they were now in doing. So that, if thou wilt

> weigh his foreknowledge with which he discerneth all things, thou wilt more rightly esteem it to be the knowledge of a never fading instant than a foreknowledge as of a thing to come.[2]

Following Boethius, Aquinas stressed that for God there is no past, present and future, and no before and after, that all is "simultaneously whole" for him.[3]

These statements are not easy to understand. What precisely is meant by the term "timeless" or "timeless being"? Following Nelson Pike, let us say that a given being is timeless if and only if it:

(1) lacks temporal location
and
(2) lacks temporal extension.[4]

A being lacks temporal location if it does not make sense to say of it, for example, that it existed before the French Revolution or that it will exist on Jimmy Carter's seventieth birthday. Thus, if God is timeless, statements like these cannot meaningfully be made about him. A being lacks temporal extension if it has no duration, i.e. if it makes no sense to say of it, for example, that it has lived for eighty years or that it was alive during the entire period of the Truman administration.

It is not easy to feel that one has fully grasped the notion of a timeless being. Perhaps this is in part because it is difficult to see precisely what criteria (1) and (2) imply. Very possibly they imply another characteristic of a timeless being, one which is also difficult to state and explicate precisely:

(3) Temporal terms have no significant application to him.

What is a "temporal term"? Without wishing to suggest that my list is exhaustive, let me stipulate that a temporal term is one like those included in the following list: "past," "present," "future," "before," "after," and other similar terms like "simultaneous," "always," "later," "next year," "forever," "at 6:00 P.M.," etc. Now there appears to be a sense in which temporal terms cannot meaningfully be predicated of a being that lacks temporal location and temporal extension. Neither the timeless being itself, nor its properties, actions or relations with other beings can be significantly modified by temporal terms. Thus if God is a timeless being, the following sentences are either meaningless or necessarily false:

- God existed before Moses.
- God's power will soon triumph over evil.
- Last week God wrought a miracle.
- God will always be wiser than human beings.

Does this imply that time as we understand it is unreal, a kind of illusion? If the timeless being in question is God, the ultimate reality of the universe, the creator of the heavens and the earth, one might well push the argument in this way: if from God's point of view there is no past, present and future, and no before and after, then—it might well be argued—there is no ultimately real past, present and future, and no ultimately real relationship of before and after. Thus time as we experience it is unreal.

But the argument need not be pushed in this direction. Even if God is a timeless being, it can be argued that time is real and that our temporal distinctions are apt just because God created time (for us to live "in"). Perhaps an analogy from space will help. Just because God is spaceless (he has no spatial location or extension) no one wants to say that space is unreal. It is just that God does not exist in space as we do. Similarly, he does not exist "in" time, but time is still real, both for us and for God. Well then—one might want to ask at this point—if God is timeless is it or is it not meaningful to say that "God existed before Moses" or that "God will always be wiser than human beings"? The answer is that it depends on who you are: for us these statements are meaningful and true; for God they are meaningless or at least necessarily false.

Is the doctrine of divine timelessness coherent? I do not know. I suspect it is possible for a philosopher to lay out a concept of divine timelessness which I am unable to refute, i.e. prove incoherent. I will discuss one such attempt later in this chapter.

However, throughout this book, for reasons I will presently explain, I do not propose to assume that God is timeless. In fact, I plan to make and argue for the assumption that God is "temporally eternal." In my view, this is a far simpler procedure, with far fewer theological dangers, as I will explain. For the fact is that every notion of divine timelessness with which I am familiar is subject to difficulties which, at the very least, seem serious.

I will argue against the doctrine of divine timelessness on two counts: first, that a timeless being cannot be the Christian God; and second, that the notion of a timeless being is probably incoherent. The first point has been convincingly argued by both Nelson Pike and Richard Swinburne.[5] I will not mention all of the traditional attributes of God they claim timelessness rules out; I will instead concentrate on just two: the claim that God is the creator of the universe, and the claim that God is a personal being who acts in human history, speaking, punishing, warning, forgiving, etc. Both notions are obviously crucial to Christianity; if timelessness really does rule them out this will constitute a very good reason for a Christian to reject the doctrine.

Notice the following argument:

(5) God creates x.

(6) x first exists at T.

(7) Therefore, God creates x at T.

If this argument is valid, it seems to rule out the possibility of a timeless God creating anything at all, the universe or anything in it, for "x" here is a variable ranging over anything at all about which it is logically possible that it be created. The reason the argument rules out the doctrine that God is creator is that (7) cannot be true if God lacks temporal location. For we saw earlier that no temporal term like "at T" can meaningfully be applied to a being or to the actions of a being that lacks temporal location and temporal extension. God is not the creator Christians have traditionally believed in if he is not the creator of things like me and the eucalyptus tree outside my office. But no timeless being can be the creator of such things since they came into existence at various points in time. Thus timelessness is inconsistent with the Christian view of God as creator.

But cannot God, so to speak, timelessly create something temporal? Aquinas, at least, argued that he can. God may create something at a certain point in time (say, create me in the year 1940), but it does not follow from this, Aquinas would say, that God's act of creating occurred at that point in time (or indeed at any point in time); his creating may well be based on changeless and eternal aspects of his will. Thus Aquinas says:

> God's act of understanding and willing is, necessarily, His act of making. Now, an effect follows from the intellect and the will according to the determination of the intellect and the command of the will. Moreover, just as the intellect determines every other condition of the thing made, so does it prescribe the time of its making; for art determines not only that this thing is to be such and such, but that it is to be at this particular time, even as a physician determines that a dose of medicine is to be drunk at such a particular time. So that, if his act of will were of itself sufficient to produce the effect, the effect would follow anew from his previous decision, without any new action on his part. Nothing, therefore, prevents our saying that God's action existed from all eternity, whereas its effect was not present from eternity, but existed at that time when, from all eternity, He ordained it.[6]

Thus—so Aquinas would say—(5) and (6) in the above argument do not entail (7) after all.

Is Aquinas correct? It depends on what he means by "eternity" in the above lines. If he means temporal eternity I believe he is correct. It may well be true that God can, so to speak, "from all eternity create x at T." I have no wish to deny this, at any rate. A temporally eternal being apparently can eternally (that is, at all points in time) will

that a given temporal being come to exist at a certain point in time. Of course, this case is not precisely parallel to the case of Aquinas's physician at a given point in time willing that a dosage be taken at a later point in time. But nevertheless, as concerns temporal eternality, Aquinas appears to be correct: as it stands, the (5)–(7) argument is invalid.

But Aquinas's argument, which in my opinion successfully applies to temporally eternal things, does not apply to timeless things. (Notice that the physician in his example is not timeless.) Even if it is true that I was created in 1940 not because of a choice God made in 1940 (or at some other time) but because of a temporally eternal divine choice, this does not make the choice *timeless* in the sense of lacking temporal location and extension. Temporally eternal things certainly do have temporal extension. It would still make sense and quite possibly be true to say, "God willed in 1940 that Davis exist" (although it would also be meaningful and perhaps equally true to make the same statement with 3469 B.C. or A.D. 2610 or any other date substituted for 1940). Equally, if all God's decisions and actions are temporally eternal they are *simultaneous* with each other; and statements like "x's desire to create a and x's decision to do b are simultaneous" cannot, as we saw, meaningfully be made about a timeless being.[7] This too is to apply a temporal term—"simultaneous"—to it.

Of course, nothing prevents a defender of timelessness from simply insisting that an action (e.g. the causing of something to exist) can be timeless and the effect (e.g. its coming into existence) temporal. Such a person can ask why the temporality of the effect requires that the cause be temporal. But to anticipate a point I will make in more detail later, the answer to this is that we have on hand no acceptable concept of atemporal causation, i.e. of what it is for a timeless cause to produce a temporal effect. Surely, as Nelson Pike argues, in all the cases of causation with which we are familiar, a temporal relationship obtains between an action and its effect. We are in no position to deny that this need always be the case unless we are armed with a usable concept of atemporal causation, which we are not.

Let us return to the argument mentioned above:

(5) God creates x.

(6) x first exists at T.

(7) Therefore, God creates x at T.

What we need to notice is that (7) is ambiguous between (7a) and (7b):

(7a) God, at T, creates x.

(7b) God creates x, and x first exists at T.

Now (7a) clearly cannot be true of God if God is timeless—a being that performs some action at a certain point in time is temporal. So (7b) is the interpretation of (7) that will be preferred by the defender of divine timelessness. Notice that (7b) is simply the conjunction of (5) and (6), and accordingly is indeed entailed by (5) and (6). But can (7b) be true of God if God is timeless? Only if we have available a usable concept of atemporal causation, which, as I say, we do not have. Therefore, we are within our rights in concluding that (5) and (6) entail that God is temporal, i.e. that a timeless being cannot be the creator of the universe.

Accordingly, it is not clear how a timelessly eternal being can be the creator of this temporal universe. If God creates a given temporal thing, then God's act of creation is itself temporal (though it may be temporally eternal). If God is timelessly eternal in the sense defined earlier, he cannot create temporal things.

Second, a timeless being cannot be the personal, caring, involved God we read about in the Bible. The God of the Bible is, above all, a God who cares deeply about what happens in history and who acts to bring about his will. He makes plans. He responds to what human beings do, e.g. their evil deeds or their acts of repentance. He seems to have temporal location and extension. The Bible does not hesitate to speak of God's years and days (see Psalm 102:24, 27; Hebrews 1:12). And God seems to act in temporal sequences— first he rescues the children of Israel from Egypt and later he gives them the Law; first he sends his son to be born of a virgin and later he

raises him from the dead. These are generalizations meant to be understood as covering the whole Bible rather than specific passages; nevertheless here are two texts where such points seem to be made:

> If you obey the commandments of the Lord your God … by loving the Lord your God, by walking in his ways, and by keeping his commandments and his statutes and his ordinances, then you shall live and multiply, and the Lord your God will bless you…. But if your heart turns away, and you will not hear, but are drawn away to worship other gods and serve them, I declare to you this day, that you shall perish. (Deut. 30:16–18)
>
> In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son. (Heb. 1:1–2)

But the obvious problem here is to understand how a timeless being can plan or anticipate or remember or respond or punish or warn or forgive. All such acts seem undeniably temporal.[8] To make plans is to formulate intentions about the future. To anticipate is to look forward to what is future. To remember is to have beliefs or knowledge about what is past. To respond is to be affected by events that have occurred in the past. To punish is to cause someone to suffer because of something done in the past. To warn is to caution someone about dangers that might lie in the future. To forgive someone is to restore a past relationship that was damaged by an offense.

On both counts, then, it is difficult to see how a timeless being can be the God in which Christians have traditionally believed. It does not seem that there is any clear sense in which a timeless being can be the creator of the universe or a being who acts in time.

The other and perhaps more important argument against divine timelessness is that both the notion of a timeless being per se and the notion of a timeless being who is also omniscient are probably incoherent. The incoherence of the notion per se can be seen by considering carefully the Boethius-Anselm-Aquinas claim that for God all times are simultaneously present. Events occurring at 3021 B.C., at 1982, and at A.D. 7643, they want to say, are all "simultaneously present" to God. If this just means that at any point in time God knows in full and complete detail what happens at any other point in time, I can (and do) accept it. But it clearly means something different and much stronger than this, and in this stronger sense (whatever precisely it comes to) the claim does not seem possibly true.[9]

That is, if the doctrine of timelessness requires us to say that the years 3021 B.C. and A.D. 7643 are simultaneous, then the doctrine is false, for the two are not simultaneous. They may of course be simultaneous in some sense if time is illusory. But since I see no good reason to affirm that time is illusory and every reason to deny that it is illusory, I am within my rights in insisting that the two indicated years are not simultaneous and that the doctrine of divine timelessness is accordingly probably false.

Suppose an event that occurred yesterday is the cause of an event that will occur tomorrow, e.g. suppose your having thrown a banana peel on the pavement yesterday will cause me to trip and break a bone tomorrow. How can the throwing of the banana peel and the breaking of the bone be simultaneous? Surely if the first caused the second the first must be temporally prior to the second; and if so, they are not simultaneous. (Perhaps some causes are simultaneous with their effects, but not causes of events of this sort.)

But the following objection might be raised: "Any argument for the conclusion that timeless beings cannot exist must be mistaken for the simple reason that timeless beings do exist." It has been seriously suggested, for example, that numbers are timeless beings. Thus William Kneale says:

> An assertion such as "There is a prime number between five and ten" can never be countered sensibly by the remark "You are out of date: things have altered recently." And this is the reason why the

> entities discussed in mathematics can properly be said to have a timeless existence. To say only that they have a sempiternal or omnitemporal existence (i.e., an existence at all times) would be unsatisfactory because this way of talking might suggest that it is at least conceivable that they should at some time cease to exist, and that is an absurdity we want to exclude.[10]

Is the number seven, for example, timeless? I do not think so. (I agree that it is eternal and that it would be absurd to suggest that it might not exist; it is, in short, a sort of "necessary being.") But if the number seven is not just eternal but timeless, then on our earlier definition of "timeless," the following statements cannot meaningfully be made:

- The number seven existed on 27 July 1883.
- The number seven was greater than the number six during the whole of the Punic wars.
- The number seven existed yesterday and will exist tomorrow.

But the number seven is not a timeless being; all three of these sentences, in my opinion, are not only meaningful but true. (The fact that the first might be taken by someone to suggest that the number seven might not exist at some time other than 27 July 1883 is only an interesting psychological fact about the person who misreads it in this way. The statement implies nothing of the sort.)

But defenders of divine timelessness can raise an objection to this argument that their notion is incoherent. They can say something like this:

> Of course talk about "eternal present," "simultaneously whole," etc. seems incoherent to us. This is because such talk is at best a stumbling way of understanding a mystery—the mystery of God's transcendence over time—that we cannot really understand. Statements like "my nineteenth birthday occurred before my twentieth" only seem indubitable to us because, unlike God, our minds are limited. If we had God's intellectual prowess, if we understood temporal reality as he does, we would see that this statement is false or inadequate or misleading. We would then see time correctly.

There may be some sense in which the claims being made here are true. I will not deny them, at any rate…. God's consciousness of time may indeed so far transcend ours that the best way we have of expressing it is by making apparently incoherent statements. But whether or not these claims are true, I am quite sure that we have no good reason to believe them. Like it or not, we are stuck with these limited minds of ours; if we want to be rational we have no choice but to reject what we judge to be incoherent. It may be true, in some sense, that some statements we presently consider true (like "my nineteenth birthday occurred before my twentieth") are really false or inadequate or misleading when understood in some way which we cannot now understand. But it is irrational for us now to affirm that this is true….

We have been discussing the notion of timelessness as an attempt to understand the Christian tradition that God is eternal. It can now be seen why I find the notion inadequate and why I much prefer the other alternative, which is to say that God is temporally eternal. Let us say that a temporally eternal being is (1) eternal in the sense that there never was or will be a moment when it does not exist, (2) temporal in the sense that it has both temporal location and temporal extension, and (3) temporal in the sense that the distinctions among past, present and future, and between before and after, can meaningfully be applied to it. If God is such a temporally eternal being, there are still several ways of understanding his relation to time.

Perhaps the simplest way is to say that time has always existed alongside God. This is difficult to state coherently—"Time has always existed" reduces to the tautology "There is no moment of time in which time does not exist." Perhaps it is better to state this view as the simple claim that time is not a contingent, created thing like the universe.

A second possibility is espoused by Augustine. He says that time was created by God, exists, and then will cease to exist. Before the creation of the universe and after the universe ceases to exist there exists not time but timeless eternity. Thus God has control over time—he created it and can presumably destroy it whenever he wants. While this view has some attractions—time or at least our consciousness of it does seem in some sense dependent on the existence of mutable things—a possible problem is that the notion of timeless eternity before the creation of the universe and after it ceases to exist may be just as difficult to understand as the doctrine of timeless eternity itself. This problem may well be solvable, however. In timeless eternity there will presumably be no appearance of temporal succession, i.e. of events occurring before or after each other, which is at least one of the fundamental problems connected with regarding God as timeless at the same time that we live in a world of apparent temporal succession.

A third possibility was suggested by the eighth century church father John of Damascus. Time has always existed, John appears to say, yet is only measurable when things like the sun and moon exist. Thus before the creation there existed non-measurable time, and after the end of the heavens and the earth non-measurable time will again exist. Measurable time is what exists from the point of creation of the world to the point of its destruction.

Since it is probably the simplest, and since I see no danger in it for Christianity (as I will argue below), I will adopt the first alternative: time was not created; it necessarily exists (like numbers); it depends for its existence on nothing else. Time, perhaps, is an eternal aspect of God's nature rather than a reality independent of God. But the point is that God, on this view, is a temporal being. Past, present and future are real to him; he has simultaneity and succession in his states, acts and knowledge. He knows statements like "Today is 24 April" and "My nineteenth birthday occurred before my twentieth." He has temporal location. It makes good sense to say: "God exists today" and "God was omniscient on Napoleon's birthday." And he has temporal extension. It makes good sense to say "God existed during the entire period of the Punic wars" and to ask, "How long has God existed?" The answer to the latter is: forever.

The three main motives for the theory of timeless eternity, I suggested, were to reconcile human freedom and divine foreknowledge, to retain consistency with other things one says about God, and to exalt God's transcendence as much as possible. As to the first, I believe foreknowledge and freedom can be reconciled without appealing to any doctrine of timelessness…. As to the second, I do not believe that anything I say about God in this book (or indeed anything said about God in the Bible) logically requires that he be timeless. And as to the third, I feel no need to exalt God's transcendence in every possible way. What Christians must do, I believe, is emphasize God's transcendence over his creation in the ways that scripture does and in ways that seem essential to Christian theism. And I do not believe that the Bible teaches, implies or presupposes that God is timeless. Nor do I feel any theological or philosophical need to embrace timelessness.

Nor is there any reason to doubt that a temporal God who is "in" time just as we are is everything the Judeo-Christian God is traditionally supposed to be. He can still be an eternal being, i.e. a being without beginning or end. He can still be the creator of the universe. He can still be immutable in the sense of remaining ever true to his promises and purposes and eternally retaining his essential nature. (But he cannot be immutable in other stronger senses.) He can still have complete knowledge of all past, present and future events. (If he "transcends time," it is only in the sense that he has this power—a power no other being has.) He can still be the loving, omnipotent redeemer Christians worship.

Some might still wish to object to this as follows: "Surely God must be free of all temporal limitations if he is truly God. But a temporal God is not so free. Thus God must be timeless." The answer to this is that a temporally eternally God such as I have described is free of certain temporal limitations, e.g. he is free of our inability to remember things that happened hundreds of years ago.

Furthermore, not even a timelessly eternal God is free of all temporal limitations, for he is actually unable to experience "before" or "after." His nature limits him; he is unable to experience such things, for if he did experience them he would be temporal. There is temporal limitation whichever view we take. It appears that however we look at it, the doctrine of divine temporal eternity is greatly preferable to timeless eternity. So it is the former that I will embrace.

NOTES

1. Anselm, *St Anselm: Basic Writings* (LaSalle, Illinois: Open Court Publishing Company, 1958), p. 25.
2. Boethius, *The Theological Treatises and the Consolation of Philosophy* (Loeb Classical Library, London: William Heinemann, 1918), pp. 403–5; cf. also pp. 21–3, 401–5.
3. The *Summa Theologica of St. Thomas Aquinas* (London: Burns, Oates and Washbourne, 1920), Pt. I, Q. X, Arts. 2 and 4.
4. These points are taken from Nelson Pike's *God and Timelessness* (New York: Schocken Books, 1970), p. 7. Pike's work is an outstanding study of this subject and has influenced me at several points.
5. Ibid., pp. 97–118, 125–8; Richard Swinburne, *The Coherence of Theism* (Oxford University Press, 1977), pp. 221–2.
6. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, trans A. C. Pegis (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975), II, 35.
7. This has been argued by Nicholas Woltersdorff in his "God Everlasting." See *God and the Good*, ed. Clifton J. Orlebeke and Lewis B. Smedes (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 1975), pp. 181–203.
8. See Pike, *God and Timelessness*, pp. 128–9; Swinburne, *The Coherence of Theism*, pp. 220–1.
9. See Swinburne, *The Coherence of Theism*, pp. 220–1.
10. William Kneale, "Time and Eternity in Theology," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, vol. 61 (1961), p. 98.

I.B.2

The God Beyond Time

HUGH J. McCANN

Hugh J. McCann is emeritus professor of philosophy at Texas A&M University and works primarily in the areas of metaphysics, philosophy of action, and philosophy of religion. In this essay, he opposes the position of the last essay (Stephen Davis's "Temporal Eternity") and defends the classical doctrine that God is atemporal.

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By both tradition and common agreement, God is supposed to be eternal. But the agreement is today more apparent than real, for there is profound conflict over how this claim is to be understood. Traditional theologians, for the most part, took it to mean that God is completely outside of time, and is in fact the Creator of it. Only such a God, they reasoned, could justly be called the Creator of heaven and earth, could have full knowledge of what for us is the future, and could have the sovereignty and immutability appropriate to the divine essence. More recently, however, all of this has come into dispute. It is argued that only a God who is in time could create anything at all, and that only a temporal God could be the loving father Scripture describes, who periodically intervenes in nature and history for our sake. Furthermore, a timeless God's knowledge would be woefully inadequate: Being outside of time, he would be unable to know what is true now, and hence unable to know *any* tensed proposition, not just certain ones about the future. Hence, it is claimed, God's eternity must be understood as *sempiternity*. He is an everlasting God, one who always was and will be, but who is otherwise subject to temporal passage just like you and me. Such a God may not match the ideal of eternalists, but he has as much sovereignty as a God can have, and knows all that a God can know. And if he is not unchanging in knowledge and action, he can still be unchanging in character and temperament.

In what follows I want to defend the first of the above conceptions. I shall argue that there is no reason to think a timelessly eternal God cannot create, or act so as to alter the course of events in the world, and that only a timeless creator can exercise rational and complete sovereignty over creation. As for knowledge, I will claim it is, if anything, a time-bound God whose knowledge of tensed propositions must be limited, whereas a timeless God's knowledge of them is complete. I want to begin by getting clear on the two notions of eternity at stake in the dispute, and giving some reasons why God was traditionally understood as timelessly eternal.

I. SEMPITERNITY VERSUS TIMELESSNESS

The more familiar of these two concepts is that of sempiternity or everlastingness. Under this conception God is a temporally persistent or enduring entity just like you and me.[1] He is located within time, and subject to the restrictions of tense and temporal passage. So like us, he has a history and a future; he remembers and anticipates, presumably observes the course of the universe, and acts at his pleasure to produce change in the world he has created. The difference is that God's career extends through all of time, which on this sort of view is usually taken to be without beginning or end. He always was, is now, and always will be. On this conception of eternity, it makes sense to say of God that he always knew you would be reading this sentence at this moment, that he knows now that you are doing so, and that he will always know hereafter that you did. In short, but for its being unbounded at either end, the life and experience of an everlasting God need not in principle be much different from yours and mine.

The conception of God as timelessly eternal is less familiar, and radically different. On this view God, unlike you and I, is not located within time, and tense and related temporal conceptions have no application to him whatever. Strictly speaking, therefore, it is false to say of God that he ever has existed, that he exists now, or that he ever will exist. At best, such claims are a clumsy way of indicating what we who are within time can always truthfully *assert*. And that is simply this: that God exists—where the verb, though in the grammatical present, signifies nothing of temporal presentness, but rather a reality that stands completely outside of time, untouched by becoming or transition of any kind. God exists timelessly on this account, and his life and experience, while they may concern the world of change, are themselves unchanging. So it would also be wrong to say God ever has known or will know about your reading this or any other sentence. Yet, it would be true that he knows, timelessly, that you are reading this

sentence—even, if he is omniscient, that you are reading it now. God knows this, and everything else as well, in a single, timeless act of awareness that encompasses all of heaven and earth, in its complete history. His action as Creator is from the same vantage point. There is no time at which he creates the universe, for time itself is an aspect of the world of change and that is what God creates. In a single *fiat* he produces the entire universe, in all of its history, all of it with equal directness and absolute control. This does not prevent its being the case that from our perspective within time, not everything does, or even could, occur at once. But that is tensed talk, which does not apply to God. From his perspective, the production of all that, as we would say, ever was or will be, occurs in a single, unified act, in timeless eternity.

Timeless eternity is, to say the least, not familiar to us, and the conception of it is not easy to grasp. One may wonder, therefore, how it gained ascendancy in accounts of God's nature. Scripture, it is fair to say, leans heavily in the opposite direction. The God of the Bible creates the world over a six-day period, and then desists from his labors on the seventh (Gen. 1:1–2:2). At intervals, he speaks to Moses and the prophets, and he intervenes repeatedly in his people's history to save them from disaster. Above all, he is portrayed as *reacting* to the behavior of humankind; he adjusts his behavior to our own, as when he desists from his plan to destroy Nineveh (Jon. 3:10). Obviously, this is not a God who is remote from the world. His involvement in it is deep, and his actions as a loving father are attuned to the needs of each situation.

There is no denying that such an interactive God is more easily understood as temporal. As always with the reading of Scripture, however, one must be cautious, for too much literalism leads straight into trouble. Indeed, the very first phrase of the entire Bible tells us that the God about to be described as creating the world in six days did so "in the beginning." How could this be if time had no beginning? Furthermore, this same God is presented as a spatial being: as having a head, hands and feet, as dwelling in cities and tabernacles, as moving from place to place. If it is fair to take this kind of talk as metaphorical, then surely passages that portray God as temporal can in principle be so taken as well. Finally, the Bible contains clear hints of a much more sophisticated conception. The name God gives himself from the burning bush, "I am" (Exod. 3:14), becomes entirely unimpressive when taken to mean only that he existed at that moment. Or consider the sudden shift to the grammatical present in such passages as, "Before the mountains were born, or thou didst give birth to the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God" (Ps. 90:2), or, "I say to you, before Abraham was born, I am" (John 8:58). It is not unreasonable to think passages like this aim at an atemporal conception. Finally, despite his seeming change of mind about the Ninevites, the Bible is at points fairly decisive in claiming that in God there is no change, not even a shadow of it (Mal. 3:6, James 1:17).

This kind of conflict is familiar. It has been said that the Bible is a book not of theology but of life, and so cannot be expected to offer a unified and seamlessly consistent theory of the divine nature. That is the work of philosophers and theologians, who have usually aimed at an account that respects the rigors of metaphysics as well as the content of faith. And from a metaphysical perspective, it is not surprising that some theories would call for a timeless God. The view that ultimate reality is timeless is as old as Parmenides, and its association with theories of the divine nature was probably inevitable. But there are reasons for the alliance. Both in Scripture and in cosmological proofs for the existence of God, he is portrayed as the Creator of everything but himself and as ruling the universe with complete power and authority. But if God is in time, his sovereignty is restricted: There is something other than himself that he did not create— namely, time itself—and his experience and action are made subject to the limitations of opportunity. Better, then, if possible, to have a God who in creating the world creates time, but whose own being lies beyond it. A second consideration, of which we will see more below, has to do with human freedom. If it is true that God gives us wills that escape the reach of causal determination, then to treat him as

temporal is to threaten his omniscience. How could he know today what I will do tomorrow if I have not yet decided? A timelessly eternal God, by contrast, should be able to know as much about tomorrow as he does about today: everything, presumably.

But perhaps the deepest running argument for a timelessly eternal God is that the divine essence, as well as we are able to understand it, seems incompatible with any sort of change. A thing changes either by coming to have a characteristic it previously lacked, or by losing a characteristic it previously had. Thus an apple might change colors by ceasing to be green and becoming red; or it may fall to the earth, thereby exchanging its position at the end of a branch for one on the ground. Now the characteristics with respect to which a thing changes must be accidental rather than essential ones, at least if the thing is to continue existing, for the essential properties of a thing are by definition characteristics without which it cannot continue in being. An apple may change its color or position, but it cannot cease to be colored or positioned at all and remain in existence, for color and position are essential to apples. The same considerations apply to God. If he is to undergo change without ceasing to be, it must be by gaining or losing accidental features. Perhaps he comes to have a thought he previously did not, or to act in a new way. It turns out, however, that unlike created beings, God cannot have accidental features.

The reason for this is that if God does have accidental properties, his authority over the universe has to be limited. It is fair to demand that any accidental properties God has will have a sufficient explanation. Otherwise, his having them would be arbitrary and not in accordance with the concept of a perfect being. But unfortunately, the explanation for the presence of an accidental property in a thing can never arise entirely from the thing's own nature. If it did, the property would be entailed by the entity's essence, and so be essential rather than accidental. But if it is essential, then it is not a property with respect to which the thing could change after all. So the accidental properties of a thing must always be explained at least in part from without: The color of the apple will depend in part on its environment, and its location will hinge on the forces to which it is subject. And the same applies to God. If his thought and activity change from time to time, there will have to be an explanation, and the explanation will have to invoke things other than the divine nature. Perhaps what he is thinking will be explained by the events of the moment, or his activity by the opportunity they present. But whatever the explanation is, it will have to invoke something extrinsic to the divine nature, and it cannot do so without introducing dependence and passivity into God. His experience will depend on the stage of world history, and he will have to await his chances to redirect it. For traditional theology at least, that is not what one expects of the Sovereign Lord of heaven and earth.

A perfectly sovereign God cannot, then, have accidental properties; and of course a being that cannot even have accidental properties cannot change with respect to them. On the traditional conception, therefore, God must be completely immutable, completely beyond the reach of becoming. It does not even make sense to put him in time, since he would then have shifting relations of simultaneity with the events of the world, which is not possible. It is unlikely, however, that proponents of the temporal conception of eternity would be persuaded by this argument. For one thing, they may have misgivings about the very idea of there being timelessly eternal entities and states of affairs. Secondly, they might claim the conception of the divine nature called for by atemporalists is simply too demanding. Perhaps it *is* wrong, strictly speaking, to think of there being any change in a being whose essence is to be, and who enjoys complete sovereignty over the world. But, the temporalist might point out, the fact is that we do this with God all the time: we speak of him as learning about things as they occur, and as causing different events at different times. And although we may try to observe protocol by insisting that all of God's knowledge and activity occurs in a single, eternal act, it is not clear that this advances our understanding very much. Indeed, the temporalist may go

further. He may argue that causation and knowing, or at least some knowing, are in themselves *intrinsically* temporal operations, so that if we apply these concepts to God at all, we must conceive of him as a temporal being. I want to address these concerns in order, beginning with the one about there being timelessly eternal things.

II. ATEMPORAL STATES OF AFFAIRS

A number of reasons might be given for doubting that there is a realm of timeless entities or timeless facts about them. Some are based on misunderstandings. It may be thought, for example, that if for God there is no time, then time must somehow be unreal—an illusion, perhaps, that accompanies our own creaturely perceptions, but not a genuine aspect of the real world. And it might well be argued that this is too much to swallow; time is too central, too inexpungible from our experience to be plausibly considered an illusion. There is no reason, however, why defenders of timeless eternity need be committed to such a view. After all, no one takes the fact that God is not a spatial entity to imply that space is an illusion, so why take such a position with respect to time? Furthermore, atemporalism is not committed to the view that for God there is no time. It holds, to be precise, that God is not *in* time, that his life and experience transcend change and temporal passage. It does not follow from this that time is unreal or even that God is unfamiliar with it. Indeed, if he is both omniscient and the Creator of time, precisely the opposite would have to be the case. The only restriction is that his activity and awareness must not involve change, even though the world that is their object does. It may, of course, be argued that this is not possible, and we shall shortly be examining such arguments. But the important thing to see at this point is that an argument is needed; it is in no way obvious that the atemporalist position here is untenable.

A second reason for doubting that there are timeless states of affairs stems from the way in which defenders of timeless eternity have been prone to express their view. Boethius described timeless eternity as "the complete possession, all at once, of illimitable life," and held that the God who possesses this life comprehends "the infinite spaces of that which is past and to come … as though they were now in doing."[2] Following this precedent, it is not uncommon for timeless eternity to be described in terms that are at least partly temporal rather than timeless. God's experience is held to be of an "eternal present," for example, or we may be told that in eternity all of the world's history is "simultaneously present" to God. As a stepping stone to understanding timeless eternity such language is probably to be expected, and it is useful in some ways. It conveys the point that God's experience of the world is single and unchanging, that it involves no serial presentation of events or alteration of content. It also suggests something else to which the defender of timeless eternity should be committed: that the *content* of God's experience of the world includes its temporal features, that he is aware of things in their temporality as well as in all other aspects of their being.

But to say that all of history is eternally or simultaneously *present* to God leads to implications that are not intended, and that we should not accept. It suggests, first, that besides having temporal content, God's act of experiencing the world is itself a temporal thing, that it occurs in a kind of unchanging present moment, notwithstanding the fact that it is supposed to be completely outside time. This in itself is a contradiction, to which defenders of timeless eternity need not be committed. A lot more contradictions threaten if we add that God's experience must be of all of history, which now must be conceived as *simultaneously* present to God. This makes all of history present "at once" to God's now retemporalized act of awareness, and the effect is that all of history must be held to be simultaneous. So we would have to say that the American Civil War is simultaneous with the Protestant Reformation, that yesterday's events are simultaneous with tomorrow's, etc.[3] Obviously, however, these things are false.

One way of dealing with these problems is to seek to define notions of presentness and simultaneity that would be appropriate to the timeless order and would not carry unacceptable implications.[4] But I think it is better, at least for present purposes, simply to drop the idea that history is "present" to God, in any sense other than being given to him timelessly in experience or awareness. This is not to say the events of which God is aware are not temporal, but it is to say his awareness of them is not. God creates and is aware of all of history neither simultaneously nor at different times, but eternally. His activity as Creator and Knower is unified and unchanging, but it does not occur at any present moment, not even a supposed eternal one. It simply is. To proceed in this way deprives us of some handy ways for describing timeless eternity, but it also forces us to describe the realities it involves in ways that do not threaten immediate contradiction.[5]

But are there any timeless realities? After all, the sempiternalist might urge, apart from its supposed indispensability for describing how things are with God, we would have no need of the notion of timeless reality at all. Nothing in our earthly experience, it seems, is usefully described in terms of timelessness; and since heavenly experience is not now available to us, it may well be that the timeless realities eternalists suppose pertain to it are not really there, but instead are just figments of our inability to comprehend. To this atemporalists have replied that we are in fact familiar with timeless entities, namely, those of the conceptual and mathematical realms. Such entities as propositions and numbers, they have held, are incapable of intrinsic change, and truths about them represent timelessly eternal states of affairs. Consider the fact that the number 2 is even. This, obviously, is not something we expect to change, for we do not view the number 2 as capable of change. And when we say that 2 is even, we mean to assert more than just a fact we take to hold at that particular moment. That 2 is incapable of change, according to the atemporalist, makes the number 2 as timeless a reality as any. And the fact that it is even, along with all other mathematical and conceptual facts, counts as a timelessly eternal state of affairs.[6]

The temporalist rejoinder here is that this view of things goes too far. Granted, mathematical entities and facts do not change. But, it is insisted, all this means is that these are sempiternal, or everlasting, realities, not that they are atemporal. And while "2 is even" does have import beyond the present moment, it need not be taken as reporting a timeless fact. Instead, it can be taken as *omnitemporal*—that is, as speaking about all times. We can understand "2 is even" as saying that 2 always was even, is even now, and always will be even. To do this is to understand 2 as sempiternal rather than timeless, and it accommodates the unchanging character of the fact that 2 is even. What need is there to go further than this, and commit ourselves to an ontology of timeless states of affairs? And of course the same applies to truths about Euclidean triangles, trigonometric functions, or any other conceptual entity you like. In short, there is just no need to invoke the concept of timeless eternity to deal with conceptual realities. Any entity we might view as timelessly eternal can equally well be treated as sempiternal, and any statement we might think describes something timeless can be effectively replaced with one that is omnitemporal—which describes unchanging, but nevertheless temporal, realities.

Unfortunately, however, the replacement does not always work—a fact that emerges when we consider how the sempiternalist would have to formulate the very issues over which the he and the atemporalist disagree. Presumably, the sempiternalist would endorse the following two statements:

(a) There are no timelessly eternal states of affairs.

(b) There is no timelessly eternal God.

The atemporalist, by contrast, would be expected to reject (a) and (b), since he holds that there *are* timelessly eternal facts and a timeless God. But in fact the atemporalist *cannot* reject (a) and (b), if they are understood in the way sempiternalists must understand them—that is, as meaning:

(c) There never have been, are not now, and never will be any timelessly eternal states of affairs.

(d) There never has been, is not now, and never will be a timelessly eternal God.

On the contrary, defenders of timeless eternity must agree with (c) and (d), since they deny that temporal existence pertains to any timeless entity, God or otherwise. But then (c) and (d) cannot express what (a) and (b) mean. In order to capture what the disagreement is about, (a) and (b) have to be taken as atemporal statements, and cannot be replaced by omnitemporal ones. The only way the sempiternalist can express his disagreement with the atemporalist, then, is to accept the idea of there being timeless states of affairs, at least of a negative variety. And once that is done the notion of timeless states of affairs can no longer be considered suspect.

Indeed, it is a mistake to think it is even permissible to treat entities like numbers, propositions, and the like—that is, entities that are incapable of intrinsic change—as temporal. It is tempting to think of time as a matter of there being some cosmic clock "out there," beyond any specific type of change, but nevertheless ticking away inexorably the destiny of anything we can find an expression to refer to. But there is no such thing, and if there were, it would have nothing to do with the temporality of the world as we know it. In that world, things are not made subject to change by being temporal; rather, they are made temporal by being subject to change. It makes sense to treat atoms, or the heavens, or you and me as temporal beings because all of these things are subject to intrinsic changes, and because some of these changes can be used to measure others. Outside of this, the idea of becoming loses its empirical hold, and with it goes any useful notion of time.

Once this is realized, it becomes pointless to treat entities not subject to change as temporal—especially if, as we have just seen, timeless states of affairs have to be accepted anyway. Nothing about abstract entities can usefully be held to be simultaneous with anything in the world of becoming. There is nothing about any supposed career of the number 2, for example, that we are justified in claiming to be simultaneous with my writing this sentence. To be sure, relations between the number and other things can come to be and pass away, as when I think about the number during my writing. But as far as the number 2 is concerned this is only a relational, not an intrinsic change. The intrinsic change is only in me: I begin to have a thought, and later cease to have it. And, of course, that change could occur whether 2 is in time or not. Only if there are intrinsic changes in the number itself would it be correct to say 2 undergoes an alteration simultaneous with my writing this sentence or with any other genuine event. There are, however, no such changes. Hence, there is nothing about the number 2 that is simultaneous with anything that goes on in the world of genuine becoming. But if this is so, what justification could there be for claiming 2 is an entity "in time"? None, I submit, short of a conception of time that borders on outright mythology. And if that is correct, then 2 and all other abstract entities are eternal, and intrinsic facts about them must be counted as timelessly eternal states of affairs. Does it follow, as Stephen Davis has complained, that we can no longer meaningfully assert, say, that the number 7 was greater than the number 6 during the whole of the Punic Wars?[7] Of course not. Such statements are perfectly meaningful, just as it is meaningful to assert that the interior angles of a triangle total 360 degrees. It is just that they are false: numbers, and triangles, are simply not that sort of thing.

III. ETERNITY AND CREATION

The God of tradition is causally involved with the universe in what appear to be two ways. First, he is responsible for its existence. Popular accounts of this are usually quasi-deistic: God is held to have created the universe "in the beginning," in a series of phases, and then ceased activity. Thus, the universe had a beginning in time and presumably has since continued to exist on its own. But even if it is denied that the universe had a beginning in time, standard theology still makes God responsible for its existence. He must, it is claimed, have been responsible for the existence of the historical whole, since

even the existence of a sempiternal universe demands an explanation. God's second causal role is as a worker of wonders. Periodically, he intervenes in history's course to produce unusual and sometimes titanic events for the sake of our well-being. Now both as Creator and as Providential Intervener, God causes specific events to occur at specific times. And it may be argued that no one can cause an event to occur at a given time without being active at that time. So if the parting of the Red Sea occurred in, say, 1500 B.C., then God would have to have been active in 1500 B.C. to cause it, and similarly for any other change he produces. If this is true, then a God who is not in time cannot create or cause anything.[8]

Why should it be, however, that in order to produce a change which occurs at *t*, the agent of the change must be active at *t*? One possibility is that causation itself is an intrinsically temporal concept, signifying an operation that must occur in time. This appears to be the position of Stephen Davis, who holds that God's activity as Creator can only be understood to occur in time, on the ground that we do not have what he calls a "usable concept of atemporal causation."[9] In fact, however, causation is not an intrinsically temporal concept at all. It could not possibly be, for one simple reason: Causation is not a process. When a cue ball strikes an object ball, thereby causing it to accelerate, there is not, between the impact and the acceleration, a third event tucked in, which is the former's causing the latter. Indeed, if there were such an event we would most likely have to invent a second sort of causation to explain its relation to the other two. But as things are there is no need, for causation is not in itself a kind of change. Rather, it signifies a relation of explanation, wherein one thing is held to account for the occurrence of another. There is nothing intrinsically either temporal or atemporal about the notion of explanation, hence to know that a causal relation exists tells us nothing whatever about whether the cause is operative in time or outside it.

If the concept of causation, taken by itself, is neutral on the issue of temporality, then whether a particular causal operation is temporal or not has to depend on how the effect is produced, and whether the agent must change in order to produce it. And where our own activity as agents is concerned, that certainly is necessary. It is worth noting here that we do not require human agents to be active at the very moment an effect is produced. There can be wide temporal gaps—as when by planting bulbs in my garden in the fall, I cause it to have daffodils in the spring. But such gaps are permissible only when my activity as agent occurs before the effect in question, and is connected to it by a continuous process. The reason for this is important: When we, as agents, cause changes in the world beyond ourselves, we have to do so indirectly, by taking advantage of natural processes that begin in us. Natural processes are, of course, temporal, and they do not permit gaps between cause and effect. So for me to cause changes in this way, there has to be a continuous natural process that begins with some doing of mine, and issues in the effect. The process need not, of course, be lengthy: When I ring a doorbell, it is so brief that my activity of pressing the button may well overlap with the sound it causes. Always, however, I have to be active at or before the time of the effect to which my action leads when I produce effects in this way.

Now, of course, it cannot be that every effect I produce as an agent is produced indirectly. If it were, each means I employ would require another, and I would never get anything done. So the doing on my part that initiates a sequence of natural change must be a *direct* product of my agency. This is a controversial topic, but we can see that at least two things would have to be true of such an activity. First, whatever makes it a manifestation of my agency would have to be intrinsic to it.[10] I would have to be active *in* the doing, rather than producing it by some further means, or by some fictitious process of "causing." Second, if this activity is supposed to initiate a process by which I produce further changes, then it is going to have to be found *in me*, since I do not have the capacity to affect the external world directly. But, of course, I am a being in time, and what that means is that even when my agency is directly exercised, I am going to have to be active in time for the exercise

to occur. That is, I am going to have to change. As to what the fundamental activity through which I effect changes in the world is, that is part of the controversy. The most plausible candidate is probably my willing the sorts of physical exertion by which I perform voluntary bodily movements. And obviously, willing involves change. I cannot will all of my movements at once, and if I could, it would accomplish nothing. Rather, I must engage in the appropriate exertion at the appropriate time, taking advantage of the opportunities the world presents as they arise. And the same would be true no matter what events we took as direct manifestations of human agency. We would have to change in their production, and so could give rise to them only by being active in time.

We have good reasons for thinking, then, that where human agency is concerned, one can produce an effect at *t* only by being active at or before *t*. But do such reasons apply to God? The answer is that they do not. Obviously, God cannot create the world by exploiting any natural process, for there are no natural processes independent of the very world he creates. Moreover, it would be a violation of God's sovereignty to suppose his creative power was limited by available means or in any way hostage to principles external to it. Rather, God's creative activity must be viewed as direct: The results he produces are *ex nihilo*. They are not the outgrowth of changes in anything else or of any manufacturing process, but instead are direct manifestations of his agency. Yet, unlike direct manifestations of human agency, the results of God's creative activity are not changes in him. Rather, the world whose being is owing to God exists as a being in its own right. It cannot be identified with God; for although its existence requires an explanation his does not. And unlike God, who is simple and immaterial, the world is a material entity, composed of parts. It turns out, then, that the reasons why a human agent can produce a change at t only by acting at or before t do not apply to God. Creation cannot involve the exploitation of natural processes, and although the results produced through it are in time, they are not modifications of God.

Are there any other reasons for thinking a being who produces a temporal result must be acting in time? I can think of none, and if that is correct, then there is no reason to suppose a timelessly eternal God is precluded from being the Creator of heaven and earth. Such a being could create the entire universe in a single, unchanging, timeless act. Moreover, in the single act of creating the universe, he would be responsible for its entire existence, through all of its history. It is important to recognize this, for a lot of our tendency to believe that God, as agent, has to be temporal is owing to the fact that, from our position within the bounds of time, God often seems to be more involved in some events than in others. This is reinforced by the biblical story of Creation, which seems to make God directly responsible only for the first existence of things, and by popular conceptions of miracles as involving God occasionally bestirring himself to alter the course of history. Now, in fact, there is nothing about being timelessly eternal that would prevent God from being more directly involved in some of history than the rest. Nevertheless, this model of God's involvement in the universe is adequate neither to the needs of creation nor to divine providence. On the first point, God cannot just cause the world to exist "at *t*." Indeed, if the atemporalist view is correct, then independent of God's creating the world of change, there is no "*t*" at which he could cause it to exist. Furthermore, we have no reason to suppose a world that requires a God to create it could somehow keep itself existing once it appears, nor can we imagine any mechanism it might use to do so. On the contrary, God must sustain the world in existence: He must be just as responsible for its surviving another instant as he is for it being here at all. Second, as for providence, a perfectly loving father, one who knows the fall of every sparrow, has to be fully and intimately involved in each aspect of the world's career. This does not prevent there being extraordinary events. If the concept of a miracle requires that there be events that are discontinuous with others as far as natural explanations go, well and good. But we should not let that lead us to believe the occurrence of the others is somehow less a manifestation of

God's power. Were it not for his creative activity, nothing would be going on at all, and the most mundane events fall as much within the purview of providence as the most spectacular. Even from our own, timebound perspective, then, God's creative involvement and concern with the world must be understood as complete and all-embracing. And this should help us to see that the Creator of heaven and earth can after all be timelessly eternal.[11]

But he cannot be temporally eternal, for several reasons. First, if, contrary to what is suggested above, there really is an absolute time "out there," uncreated by God but restrictive of his behavior, then God is not the Creator of heaven and earth, and that is that. There is a pervasive aspect of the universe he has not put there. And if we try to fix this by making him the Creator of time after all, then we give up the claim that God is essentially temporal. God could not create time unless his own being transcends it, and his act of creating it could not be temporal. Second, if time exists independently of the world then God would have had to decide when to produce the world, when to begin his activity as Creator. But what reason could there have been for creating it at one time rather than another? Nor can we avoid this problem by making the created world everlasting too, for even then God would have had to decide whether to have things occur at the times they do, or to move everything forward or backward by, say, twenty-four hours. Again, however, there could not possibly be a reason for such a choice. This is not to say, of course, that God might not have plunged ahead. After all, he might have had good reason for creating a universe at sometime or other, rather than never doing so. All the same, a God who creates in this way could not be fully rational. He would have justification for creating the world, but not for creating it "at *t*."[12]

But the strongest reason for rejecting a temporal creator is what this notion does to God's sovereignty. An all-powerful God should be not just the producer of the universe but its complete master, the absolute ruler of everything that is not himself. To make him subject to the limitations of time flies in the face of this conception. Once launched on the enterprise of creation, at least, such a creator must busy himself with whatever tasks are at hand. If he has goals to achieve by his action, then like us he must await his opportunities, which are now limited by the stern taskmaster of becoming. And like us, his experience of his creation must be hemmed in by time: limited, in the case of the past, to memories that, however vivid, must be of events that can never be retrieved; limited, in the case of the future, to anticipations each of whose fulfillment takes literally forever to come, only to vanish like smoke. Such a God may be the master of much, but of time he is a slave. And that is a high price to pay for accepting the groundless supposition that only a temporal being can produce temporal effects.

IV. ETERNITY AND OMNISCIENCE

An omniscient God should know of every true proposition that it is true, and of every false proposition that it is false. And it is probably fair to say that when it comes to omniscience, proponents of timeless eternity have traditionally thought they had the upper hand. Suppose John mows his lawn next Saturday. If so then it would have been correct to assert now that he will. That is, the statement "John will mow his lawn next Saturday" is true. But suppose also that John's action is free, in the sense that until he decides one way or the other, there are no conditions in place that determine which way he will act. If so, then it does not appear that a temporal being could *know*, prior to the event, what John will do. One could, of course, make a lucky guess: I might venture a prediction that John will mow his lawn next Saturday, believe it is true, and turn out to be right. But it does not follow that I *knew* what John would do; my prediction, though correct, appears to have lacked sufficient grounds.

Needless to say, the same argument applies to God if he is temporal. If the behavior of rational agents is free in the sense described—and it is often

claimed that moral responsibility requires this—then no conditions obtain in advance that would enable God to predict such behavior with certainty. It seems the only way he could avoid mistakes would be by an incredible series of lucky guesses or by simply not entertaining beliefs about future free actions. In neither case would he be omniscient. So unless another way can be found for God to know about future free actions, defenders of temporal eternity must make do with a restricted notion of divine omniscience. Contrast this with the situation of a timelessly eternal God. Such a God does not know about events either before or after their occurrence, or even simultaneously with it. Rather, he knows them timelessly, in a single act of awareness whose content comprises all of history. But then free actions on our part impose no deficit of knowledge on him. A timeless God cannot be in the dark about what for us is the future, since he is directly aware of all of it. He knows, therefore, about John's mowing his lawn next Saturday because he is eternally aware of that very action. And, of course, this does not compromise John's freedom, any more than it would if next Saturday had already arrived, and you and I were watching him mow his lawn.[13]

Initially, then, it would appear defenders of timeless eternity are able to offer a more robust and satisfying account of divine omniscience. Recently, however, sempiternalists have mounted a counterattack, claiming that in fact the limitations on God's omniscience are far worse if he is timelessly eternal than if he is temporal. For suppose in fact John is mowing his lawn right now, and that I report his activity to you by asserting:

(e) John is mowing his lawn.

It would be a mistake to interpret (e) as reporting some timeless state of affairs. That is, (e) says more than that there is (timelessly) some act of lawn mowing on John's part, or even that such an act is (timelessly) located at the point in history which happens to be today. These readings fail to respect the tense of (e), which does not reduce to any timeless reality. Rather, the full force of (e) is that John's act of mowing his lawn is occurring *now*, that it is actually *present*. The situation with the other tenses is similar: If I predict John will mow his lawn again next Saturday, I am saying that act will occur after the present; and if I say he mowed it last Saturday, I am saying the act in question occurred before the present.

Always, then, tensed statements are indexed to a certain temporal location *as present*. But then, it may be argued, knowing which tensed statements are true requires knowing what the present moment is. And, it is claimed, that is something a timelessly eternal God cannot know. Being outside of time, he cannot, as we would say, know what time it is. That is, he cannot know which moment in time is the present one, and hence cannot know which ones are past and which future. But then it must be that a timelessly eternal God cannot know *any* tensed proposition. He cannot know what John will do next week, what he is doing now, or what he has ever done, and the same for any other tensed state of affairs. Not an enviable position for a supposedly omniscient God, and a far worse one than simply being unable to tell about John's future free actions.[14]

A hint that there is something wrong here can be gotten from the fact that an exactly analogous argument could have been given for propositions that are spatially indexed.[15] Suppose I assert that it is raining *here*. My assertion has to mean more than that there is a rainstorm, or that rain is falling outside my study. Neither of the latter statements respects the element of perspective the word "here" introduces, an element that does not reduce to other spatial relations. And surely if God is omniscient and it is raining here, he must know that. Yet no one argues on these grounds that God must be located in space or in any way subject to its limitations. So some sort of mistake appears to have been made. But to have a hint that something is wrong and to be able to say what it is are two different things, and the sources of the present error are not easy to locate. One possible source can, I think, be dismissed pretty quickly. It cannot be the case that when I assert (e), I am in part asserting something about myself—such as that I am in the same temporal location as John's act of lawn mowing, or that

I am experiencing that act now. Any temptation to think this is the problem can be overcome simply by realizing that if in fact (e) is true—if John is now mowing his lawn—then this would have been true even if I had never lived. That would be impossible if (e) contained information about me, since it would then be rendered incorrect simply by my failing to exist. Tensed propositions involve a perspective on the world of change, just as spatially indexed propositions involve one on space; but they say nothing about anyone occupying that perspective.

But if this is not the source of the error, then what is? Here is one way in which it can begin: It might be thought that tensed propositions change their truth value, depending on whether the events they report are actually occurring. One might think, for example, that proposition (e) was false before John began mowing his lawn, is true only while he mows it, and thereafter will become false again. And one might think that only a God in time could detect changing truth values. Now, in fact, this last claim is in no way obvious. Atemporalists might well insist that here as elsewhere, there is no reason to think awareness of change requires a changing awareness, and that a God outside of time could be as much aware of truth value changes as of any others. But there is a more fundamental error here, for the fact is that tensed propositions do not change in truth value. What misleads us about this, I think, is a belief that when we employ the same *sentence* assertively on different occasions, we must be asserting the same proposition—so that if twenty-four hours ago I had also uttered the sentence "John is mowing his lawn" assertively, I would then have been asserting exactly the same proposition— namely, (e)—that I assert using the sentence now. But that is mistaken. We might express (e) more carefully as:

John is (this moment) mowing his lawn.

This is to be distinguished from the proposition I would have asserted had I said yesterday that John was mowing his lawn. For even if I had used exactly the same words, the phrase "this moment" would yesterday have referred to a different time. This means the proposition I would have asserted yesterday—let us call it (f)—would have been indexed to a different "now," and that gives the two propositions different truth conditions. What happened yesterday is decisive for the truth of (f) but irrelevant to that of (e); and what happens today has everything to do with the truth of (e) and nothing to do with that of (f). In short, (e) and (f) count as entirely different pieces of information, and so are different propositions.

This is borne out by our attitudes when we make tensed statements. If I had asserted yesterday that John was mowing his lawn, I would have meant he was mowing it *then*. Were I wrong, I would not have claimed vindication when he began mowing it today, holding that what I said yesterday had now become true. Rather, I need to make a new statement, (e), to cover the present case. Or, suppose John also mowed his lawn two weeks ago, and that I said so at the time. When, upon seeing him mowing it today, I assert (e), you would not accuse me of repeating myself, of stating the same fact I asserted two weeks ago. That fact was an entirely different one. The situation is similar with other tenses. If today I assert that Lincoln will be assassinated, I am not saying something that used to be true. Rather, my statement is false: Lincoln is not going to be assassinated; he already was. If, on the other hand, I report that Lincoln was assassinated, I am not asserting a proposition that used to be false. My assertion is true, because it is indexed to the present, and only what holds from the perspective of the present counts for its truth or falsity.

Each time I use a tensed sentence to make an assertion, then, I am asserting a *different* proposition, even if the sentences are indistinguishable.[16] Each proposition is tied to the perspective of a particular temporal moment, and different conditions determine its truth or falsity. With this in mind, consider again the idea that propositions can change truth values. It is, of course, a suspect idea from the outset. Propositions are abstract entities, which we have seen are incapable of intrinsic change. And propositions that describe timeless states of affairs, like "2 is even," could not change truth values

anyway. The state of affairs they describe will either obtain (timelessly) or not, and that is the end of the matter. So change in truth value would have to be confined to tensed propositions, and it would have to be owing to some change outside the proposition itself. But now it turns out that tensed propositions depend for their truth only on what obtains from the perspective in time to which they are indexed. It follows that tensed propositions cannot change in truth value either. Their truth conditions are defined by a perspective that is localized to a single instant. And any conditions thus defined must simply either be satisfied or not. They cannot change within the bounds of a single point in time, and nothing that occurs at any other time matters. How could it? If when I assert (e) my statement does not even concern yesterday or tomorrow, how could conditions yesterday or tomorrow have anything to do with its truth? Obviously, they could not. So even tensed propositions do not change truth values. Indeed, for all that is capable of "happening" to the truth or falsity of a proposition, there is no good reason even for taking the predicates "is true" and "is false" to be tensed predicates. On the contrary, there is every reason to think the truth or falsity of propositions, even tensed ones, is in itself a timelessly eternal state of affairs, one that is not even capable of change.

Where does this leave us on the issue of whether a God beyond time can know tensed propositions? If the above argument is correct, the truth or falsity of a tensed proposition is not an elusive thing at all. It is, rather, a timeless and unchanging state of affairs, just like the truth or falsity of a statement in mathematics. But then surely it should not be a difficult assignment for a timeless God to know a tensed proposition. What would be required, presumably, is the same thing such knowledge requires in our own case—namely, direct experience of the world of change. We have seen no reason to deny such experience to a timeless God, who traditionally has been held to have direct and unchanging awareness of the entire sweep of history. So it looks like God can know tensed propositions after all. Yet it might be thought that something is still missing. What of the point about what time it is? If tensed propositions are indexed to times, wouldn't God have to know what time it is in order to know that it is (e) rather than, say, (f) that actually describes what John is presently doing? And doesn't this require more than simply having John's action presented to him in awareness? Wouldn't God also have to know that, as opposed to all the other stages of history of which he is aware, the one in which John's act is embedded is the one that is really going on right now? And how could he know this further fact from outside of time?

The answer is that there is no such fact to be known, for there is never anything to "what time it is" beyond the events whose simultaneous occurrence constitutes any given stage of the world's history. The belief that there is more arises from a pervasive but misleading way of representing our experience of change, which underlies the above objection. It begins with our analogizing time to space: We think of the events that make up the world's history as being lined up "out there" in order of their occurrence, rather like a row of barges floating on a river. Then, to account for the fact that our experience is a changing one, we put the river in motion. We think of time itself as flowing past us, sweeping along with it a history all of which is equally real, but only some of which is present. The question what time it "really" is is then just the question, What part of history is really before us? But the question is bogus, as is this picture of temporal transition. It may be useful for some purposes to analogize time to space. But once I do, I have used time up. There is no second time to accommodate or measure any supposed flow of the first or of the events within it. Yet a second time is precisely what we demand if we insist that the truth of statement (e) requires, in addition to the event of John mowing his lawn, a further event of the mowing being present. There is no such event, and the demand for it is just one more manifestation of the myth that there is a time "out there," independent of change. The truth is quite the opposite: The presence of John's mowing his lawn is to be found in the event itself. When it is not present, it does not exist at all. As for the elusive sense of "passage" that characterizes our

experience of the world, it is simply a manifestation of the fact that we belong to that world: that our experience of it is not just an experience of change but also a changing experience. Admittedly, this is a difficult thing to describe, and in trying to do so we may feel almost compelled to fall back on the idea of time as a kind of quasi-space that we traverse in living out our lives. But that is a deception. Becoming is a reality; but it consists neither in our marching through time nor in time marching past us.

There is, perhaps, more that could be said about temporal transition and our awareness of it. But the above considerations are enough to show that it is not a matter of an additional change that accrues to events which are somehow already there. Rather, temporal transition lies in the phenomenon of change itself, in the fact that there are entities that undergo alteration of their characteristics. Because this is so, to be aware of the temporal features of events cannot require any more than that one be aware of the events themselves. It is a mistake, therefore, to think that in order to know which tensed proposition describes John's behavior God must, in addition to being directly aware of that behavior, know that it is "really" happening. There is no other way to be directly aware of an event than to be aware of it as really happening. The most we could require in addition is that God know the *setting* of John's behavior: which events are simultaneous with it, which come before, and which after. This, presumably, would be necessary in order to know the other tensed propositions that hold from the perspective of that setting. And to be sure, a timeless God cannot learn about relations of before and after in the way we do, by experiencing different events seriatim. But there is no more reason to think a God beyond time must be ignorant of the distribution of events within it than there is to think a God outside space cannot know the relative positions of physical objects. If he is timelessly aware of all events, then surely he is aware of how they are positioned with respect to each other.

If this is correct, then the God who is beyond time knows all there is to know about what time it is. More important, he knows each and every tensed proposition that is true, from each and every temporal perspective the entire history of the universe has to offer. Furthermore, his position in this respect is far superior to that of a temporal God. For consider again proposition (f), which we said was the proposition I would have asserted yesterday had I then claimed "John is mowing his lawn." And let us suppose (f) is (timelessly, of course) true. John, we may imagine, has a large lawn that takes two days to mow. Now we seem to have a pretty clear idea what proposition (f) is; and certainly we can know *that* (f) is true, since we can know John was mowing his lawn yesterday. Yet it may be questioned whether I could ever *assert* (f) from my present temporal vantage point. It looks as though I am confined in my assertions of tensed propositions to those which are temporally indexed to the point in time at which the assertion is made. If that is so, then even though I can always know that (f) is true, the time is forever gone when (f) could have been a *vehicle* of knowledge for me. As a temporal being, I can only grasp the world from one temporal perspective at a time, and that has to be reflected in the way my knowledge is formulated. In a way, then, I lack access to (f), even though I know it is true. And of course the same limitation would apply to a temporal God. It may not be a serious limitation in terms of the usual definition of omniscience, for it does not prevent him from knowing of each true proposition *that* it is true, and of each false one that it is false. Nevertheless, it reflects the confinement we place upon God when we make him temporally eternal. He, like us, can only see things a certain way. And if that means there are other ways which are closed to him, the result can only be a limitation on his knowing.

V. CONCLUSION

The case for thinking God is timelessly eternal is, then, far stronger than the case for thinking he is temporal. Timeless eternity is more in keeping with God's nature as traditionally defined, and there is no persuasive reason to think it impairs either

his creative power or his ability to know. Admittedly, it is the more difficult conception. To say that God can produce and comprehend the universe in all its history in a single timeless act is to attribute to him powers far beyond our own. And even if the attribution is justified, we have far less feel for what it would be like to be such a God than we do for the God of sempiternalism, who is by contrast rather comforting. His experience and abilities are very like our own, even if vastly greater, and we may find it far easier to see in a temporal God the loving father of religious tradition. Nevertheless, I think the timeless conception is to be preferred. The acceptability of a theory of God's nature cannot, after all, be a function of its anthropomorphism. Rather, we must try to understand God's nature in terms that maximize his perfection, both in himself and in his hegemony over creation. Where eternity is concerned, I think it is the timeless conception that does that. And although the task may be more difficult, there is no real reason for pessimism about finding in such a God the personal traits traditionally ascribed to him. It may be that all we need is a higher conception of those as well, a conception commensurate with a God whose ways are as far above our own as the heavens are above the earth.[17]

NOTES

1. The terminology of *enduring* or *persistence* is to be preferred over that which treats God as temporally "extended." The latter suggests God is spread out in time as a physical object is in space, which is an unacceptable analogy. One consequence of it is that just as a physical object cannot exist in its entirety at a single spatial point, so God would be unable to exist at any point in time. But then he could not exist now or at any other time, which is precisely the opposite of what defenders of sempiternity wish to claim.
2. Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy*, Bk. V, sec. 6.
3. Cf. Richard Swinburne, *The Coherence of Theism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), pp. 220–21.
4. For this approach, see Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann, "Eternity," *The Journal of Philosophy* 78 (1981): 429–58.
5. For further discussion see Paul Helm, *Eternal God* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), chap. 2.
6. William Kneale, "Time and Eternity in Theology," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 61 (1960–61): 87–108.
7. Stephen T. Davis, *Logic and the Nature of God* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1983). [Reprinted in this anthology. See previous reading.]
8. Arguments of this kind are given by Stephen Davis, op. cit., Nelson Pike, *God and Timelessness* (New York: Schocken Books, 1970), pp. 104–107; and Swinburne, op. cit., p. 221.
9. Stephen Davis, *Logic and the Nature of God*, op. cit.
10. This assumes that human agency does not reduce to a causal relation between passive states like desire and biological events such as the motion of a limb. I have defended this claim in a number of places. See, for example, "Intrinsic Intentionality," *Theory and Decision* 20 (1986): 247–73.
11. These themes are further elaborated by Jonathan Kvanvig and myself in "Divine Conservation and the Persistence of the World," in *Divine and Human Action*, ed. T. V. Morris (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1988), pp. 13–19; and in "The Occasionalist Proselytizer: A Modified Catechism," in *Philosophical Perspectives* 5 (1991), ed. J. E. Tomberlin (Atascadero, Calif.: Ridgeview Publishing Company), pp. 587–615.
12. This argument stems from Leibniz. *The Leibniz-Clarke Correspondence*, ed., H. G. Alexander (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1956), pp. 26–27.
13. The problem of divine foreknowledge and human freedom is a difficult one, and recent discussions of it have become complicated indeed. For an excellent summary see John Martin Fischer,

"Recent Work on God and Freedom," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 29 (1992): 91–109.

14. Arguments like this stem from A. N. Prior, "The Formalities of Omniscience," *Philosophy* 37 (1962): 114–29. See also Norman Kretzmann, "Omniscience and Immutability," *The Journal of Philosophy* 63 (1966): 409–21.
15. Helm, op. cit., pp. 43–44.
16. Similar treatments of tensed sentences can be found in Richard Swinburne, "Tensed Facts," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 27 (1990): 117–30; and in E. J. Lowe, "The Indexical Fallacy in McTaggart's Proof of the Unreality of Time," *Mind* 96 (1987): 62–70.
17. I am grateful to my colleague Jonathan Kvanvig, and to Philip Quinn, Eleonore Stump, and Louis Pojman for helpful discussions of earlier versions of this paper.

I.B.3

Is God's Power Limited?

ST. THOMAS AQUINAS

Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274), one of the greatest theologians in the Western tradition, argues that although it is difficult to explain what God's omnipotence is, it requires only the ability to do those things that are logically possible. Because God possesses all perfections and sinning is an imperfection, the ability to sin is not part of his omnipotence.

We proceed thus to the Third Article:

***Objection* 1**. It seems that God is not omnipotent. For movement and passiveness belong to everything. But this is impossible for God, since He is immovable, as was said above. Therefore He is not omnipotent.

***Obj.* 2**. Further, sin is an act of some kind. But God cannot sin, nor *deny Himself*, as it is said *2 Tim.* ii. 13. Therefore He is not omnipotent.

***Obj.* 3**. Further, it is said of God that He manifests His omnipotence *especially by sparing and having mercy*. Therefore the greatest act possible to the divine power is to spare and have mercy. There are things much greater, however, than sparing and having mercy; for example, to create another world, and the like. Therefore God is not omnipotent.

***Obj.* 4**. Further, upon the text, *God hath made foolish the wisdom of this world* (*I Cor.* i. 20), the *Gloss* says: *God hath made the wisdom of this world foolish* by showing those things to be possible which it judges to be impossible. Whence it seems that nothing is to be judged possible or impossible in reference to inferior causes, as the wisdom of this world judges them; but in reference to the divine power. If God, then were omnipotent, all things would be possible; nothing, therefore, impossible. But if we take away the impossible, then we destroy also the necessary; for what necessarily exists cannot possibly not exist.

From *Summa Theologica*, part 1 in *The Basic Writings of St. Thomas Aquinas*, vol. 1, edited by Anton C. Pegis (New York: Random House, 1945), 262–64, by permission of the Anton Pegis Estate.

Therefore, there would be nothing at all that is necessary in things if God were omnipotent. But this is an impossibility. Therefore God is not omnipotent.

On the contrary, It is said: *No word shall be impossible with God* (*Luke* i:37).

I answer that, All confess that God is omnipotent; but it seems difficult to explain in what His omnipotence precisely consists. For there may be a doubt as to the precise meaning of the word "all" when we say that God can do all things. If, however, we consider the matter aright, since power is said in reference to possible things, this phrase, *God can do all things*, is rightly understood to mean that God can do all things that are possible; and for this reason He is said to be omnipotent. Now according to the Philosopher a thing is said to be possible in two ways. First, in relation to some power; thus whatever is subject to human power is said to be possible to man. Now God cannot be said to be omnipotent through being able to do all things that are possible to created nature; for the divine power extends farther than that. If, however, we were to say that God is omnipotent because He can do all things that are possible to His power, there would be a vicious circle in explaining the nature of His power. For this would be saying nothing else but that God is omnipotent because He can do all that He is able to do.

It remains, therefore, that God is called omnipotent because he can do all things that are possible absolutely; which is the second way of saying a thing is possible. For a thing is said to be possible or impossible absolutely, according to the relation in which the very terms stand to one another: possible, if the predicate is not incompatible with the subject, as that Socrates sits; and absolutely impossible when the predicate is altogether incompatible with the subject, as, for instance, that a man is an ass.

It must, however, be remembered that since every agent produces an effect like itself, to each active power there corresponds a thing possible as its proper object according to the nature of that act on which its active power is founded; for instance, the power of giving warmth is related, as to its proper object, to the being capable of being warmed. The divine being, however, upon which the nature of power in God is founded, is infinite; it is not limited to any class of being, but possesses within itself the perfection of all being. Whence, whatsoever has or can have the nature of being is numbered among the absolute possibles, in respect of which God is called omnipotent.

Now nothing is opposed to the notion of being except non-being. Therefore, that which at the same time implies being and non-being is repugnant to the notion of an absolute possible, which is subject to the divine omnipotence. For such cannot come under the divine omnipotence; not indeed because of any defect in the power of God, but because it has not the nature of a feasible or possible thing. Therefore, everything that does not imply a contradiction in terms is numbered among those possibles in respect of which God is called omnipotent; whereas whatever implies contradiction does not come within the scope of divine omnipotence, because it cannot have the aspect of possibility. Hence it is more appropriate to say that such things cannot be done, than that God cannot do them. Nor is this contrary to the word of the angel, saying: *No word shall be impossible with God* (*Luke* i. 37). For whatever implies a contradiction cannot be a word, because no intellect can possibly conceive such a thing.

***Reply Obj.* 1.** God is said to be omnipotent in respect to active power, not to passive power, as was shown above. Whence the fact that He is immovable or impassible is not repugnant to His omnipotence.

***Reply Obj.* 2.** To sin is to fall short of a perfect action; hence to be able to sin is to be able to fall short in action, which is repugnant to omnipotence. Therefore it is that God cannot sin, because of His omnipotence. Now it is true that the Philosopher says that *God can deliberately do what is evil*. But this must be understood either on a condition, the antecedent of which is impossible—as, for instance, if we were to say that God can do evil things if He will. For there is no reason why a conditional proposition should not be true, though both the antecedent and consequent are impossible: as if one were to say: *If man is an ass, he has four feet*. Or he may be understood to mean that God can do some things which now seem to be evil: which, however, if He did them, would then be good. Or he is, perhaps, speaking after the common manner of the pagans, who thought that men became gods, like Jupiter or Mercury.

***Reply Obj.* 3.** God's omnipotence is particularly shown in sharing and having mercy, because in this it is made manifest that God has supreme power, namely, that He freely forgives sins. For it is not for one who is bound by laws of a superior to forgive sins of his own free choice. Or, it is thus shown because by sparing and having mercy upon men, He leads them to the participation of an infinite good; which is the ultimate effect of the divine power. Or it is thus shown because, as was said above, the effect of the divine mercy is the foundation of all the divine works. For nothing is due anyone, except because of something already given him gratuitously by God. In this way the divine omnipotence is particularly made manifest, because to it pertains the first foundation of all good things.

***Reply Obj.* 4.** The absolute possible is not so called in reference either to higher causes, or to inferior causes, but in reference to itself. But that which is called possible in reference to some power is named possible in reference to its proximate cause. Hence those things which it belongs to God alone to do immediately—as, for example, to create, to justify, and the like—are said to be possible in reference to a higher cause. Those things, however, which are such as to be done by inferior causes, are said to be possible in reference to those inferior causes. For it is according to the condition of the proximate cause that the effect has contingency or necessity, as was shown above. Thus it is that the wisdom of the world is deemed foolish, because what is impossible to nature it judges to be impossible to God. So it is clear that the omnipotence of God does not take away from things their impossibility and necessity.

I.B.4

Some Puzzles Concerning Omnipotence

GEORGE MAVRODES

George Mavrodes (1926–) is emeritus professor of philosophy at the University of Michigan. In this reading he applies the Thomistic view of God's omnipotence to the paradox of the stone (previous selection), arguing that, since creating a stone too heavy for God to lift involves doing something that is logically impossible, God's inability to do this doesn't count against his omnipotence.

The doctrine of God's omnipotence appears to claim that God can do anything. Consequently, there have been attempts to refute the doctrine by giving examples of things which God cannot do; for example, He cannot draw a square circle.

Responding to objections of this type, St. Thomas pointed out that "anything" should be here construed to refer only to objects, actions, or states of affairs whose descriptions are not self-contradictory.[1] For it is only such things whose nonexistence might plausibly be attributed to a lack of power in some agent. My failure to draw a circle on the exam may indicate my lack of geometrical skill, but my failure to draw a square circle

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does not indicate any such lack. Therefore, the fact that it is false (or perhaps meaningless) to say that God could draw one does no damage to the doctrine of His omnipotence.

A more involved problem, however, is posed by this type of question: can God create a stone too heavy for Him to lift? This appears to be stronger than the first problem, for it poses a dilemma. If we say that God can create a stone, then it seems that there might be such a stone. And if there might be a stone too heavy for Him to lift, then He is evidently not omnipotent. But if we deny that God can create such a stone, we seem to have given up His omnipotence already. Both answers lead us to the same conclusion.

Further, this problem does not seem obviously open to St. Thomas' solution. The form "x is able to draw a square circle" seems plainly to involve a contradiction, while "x is able to make a thing too heavy for x to lift" does not. For it may easily be true that I am able to make a boat too heavy for me to lift. So why should it not be possible for God to make a stone too heavy for Him to lift?

Despite this apparent difference, this second puzzle *is* open to essentially the same answer as the first. The dilemma fails because it consists of asking whether God can do a self-contradictory thing. And the reply that He cannot does no damage to the doctrine of omnipotence.

The specious nature of the problem may be seen in this way. God is either omnipotent or not.[2] Let us assume first that He is not. In that case the phrase "a stone too heavy for God to lift" may not be self-contradictory. And then, of course, if we assert either that God is able or that He is not able to create such a stone, we may conclude that He is not omnipotent. But this is no more than the assumption with which we began, meeting us again after our roundabout journey. If this were all that the dilemma could establish it would be trivial. To be significant it must derive this same conclusion *from the assumption that God is omnipotent*; that is, it must show that the assumption of the omnipotence of God leads to a *reductio*. But does it?

On the assumption that God is omnipotent, the phrase "a stone too heavy for God to lift" becomes self-contradictory. For it becomes "a stone which cannot be lifted by Him whose power is sufficient for lifting anything." But the "thing" described by a self-contradictory phrase is absolutely impossible and hence has nothing to do with the doctrine of omnipotence. Not being an object of power at all, its failure to exist cannot be the result of some lack in the power of God. And, interestingly, it is the very omnipotence of God which makes the existence of such a stone absolutely impossible, while it is the fact that I am finite in power which makes it possible for me to make a boat too heavy for me to lift.

But suppose that some die-hard objector takes the bit in his teeth and denies that the phrase "a stone too heavy for God to lift" is self-contradictory, even on the assumption that God is omnipotent. In other words, he contends that the description "a stone too heavy for an omnipotent God to lift" is self-coherent and therefore describes an absolutely possible object. Must I then attempt to prove the contradiction which I assume above as intuitively obvious? Not necessarily. Let me reply simply that if the objector is right in this contention, then the answer to the original question is "Yes, God can create such a stone." It may seem that this reply will force us into the original dilemma. But it does not. For now the objector can draw no damaging conclusion from this answer. And the reason is that he has just now contended that such a stone is compatible with the omnipotence of God. Therefore, from the possibility of God's creating such a stone it cannot be concluded that God is not omnipotent. The objector cannot have it both ways. The conclusion which he himself wishes to draw from an affirmative answer to the original question is itself the required proof that the descriptive phrase which appears there is self-contradictory. And "it is more appropriate to say that such things cannot he done, than that God cannot do them."[3]

The specious nature of this problem may also be seen in a somewhat different way.[4] Suppose that some theologian is convinced by this dilemma that he must give up the doctrine of omnipotence. But he resolves to give up as little as possible, just enough to meet the argument. One way he can do so is by retaining the infinite power of God with regard to lifting, while placing a restriction on the sort of stone

He is able to create. The only restriction required here, however, is that God must not be able to create a stone too heavy for Him to lift. Beyond that the dilemma has not even suggested any necessary restriction. Our theologian has, in effect, answered the original question in the negative; and he now regretfully supposes that this has required him to give up the full doctrine of omnipotence. He is now retaining what he supposes to be the more modest remnants which he has salvaged from that doctrine.

We must ask, however, what it is which he has in fact given up. Is it the unlimited power of God to create stones? No doubt. But what stone is it which God is now precluded from creating? The stone too heavy for Him to lift, of course. But we must remember that nothing in the argument required the theologian to admit any limit on God's power with regard to the lifting of stones. He still holds that to be unlimited. And if God's power to lift is infinite, then His power to create may run to infinity also without outstripping that first power. The supposed limitation turns out to be no limitation at all, since it is specified only by reference to another power which is itself infinite. Our theologian need have no regrets, for he has given up nothing. The doctrine of the power of God remains just what it was before.

Nothing I have said above, of course, goes to prove that God is, in fact, omnipotent. All I have intended to show is that certain arguments intended to prove that He is not omnipotent fail. They fail because they propose, as tests of God's power, putative tasks whose descriptions are self-contradictory. Such pseudo-tasks, not falling within the realm of possibility, are not objects of power at all. Hence the fact that they cannot be performed implies no limit on the power of God, and hence no defect in the doctrine of omnipotence.

NOTES

1. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Ia, q. 25, a. 3.
2. I assume, of course, the existence of God, since that is not being brought in question here.
3. St. Thomas, *loc. cit.*
4. But this method rests finally on the same logical relations as the preceding one.

I.B.5

The Logic of Omnipotence

HARRY G. FRANKFURT

Harry G. Frankfurt (1929–) is emeritus professor of philosophy at Princeton University and the author of many important works in philosophy, including an influential study of René Descartes. In this essay he argues that even if Mavrodes' solution to the paradox of the stone (previous selection) is

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incorrect, the critic of omnipotence is not helped. For if God can do the impossible and create a stone heavier than he can lift, he can also do another impossible thing and lift that stone.

George Mavrodes has recently presented an analysis designed to show that, despite some appearances to the contrary, a certain well-known puzzle actually raises no serious difficulties in the notion of divine omnipotence.[1] The puzzle suggests a test of God's power—can He create a stone too heavy for Him to lift?—which, it seems, cannot fail to reveal that His power is limited. For He must, it would appear, either show His limitations by being unable to create such a stone or by being unable to lift it once He had created it.

In dealing with this puzzle, Mavrodes points out that it involves the setting of a task whose description is self-contradictory—the task of creating a stone too heavy for an omnipotent being to lift. He calls such tasks "pseudo-tasks" and he says of them: "Such pseudo-tasks, not falling within the realm of possibility, are not objects of power at all. Hence the fact that they cannot be performed implies no limit on the power of God, and hence no defect in the doctrine of omnipotence."[2] Thus his way of dealing with the puzzle relies upon the principle that an omnipotent being need not be supposed capable of performing tasks whose descriptions are self-contradictory.

Now this principle is one which Mavrodes apparently regards as self-evident, since he offers no support for it whatever except some references which indicate that it was also accepted by Saint Thomas Aquinas. I do not wish to suggest that the principle is false. Indeed, for all I know it may even be self-evident. But it happens to be a principle which has been rejected by some important philosophers.[3] Accordingly, it might be preferable to have an analysis of the puzzle in question which does not require the use of this principle. And in fact, such an analysis is easy to provide.

Suppose, then, that God's omnipotence enables Him to do even what is logically impossible and that He actually creates a stone too heavy for Him to lift. The critic of the notion of divine omnipotence is quite mistaken if he thinks that this supposition plays into his hands. What the critic wishes to claim, of course, is that when God has created a stone which He cannot lift He is then faced with a task beyond His ability and is therefore seen to be limited in power. But this claim is not justified.

For why should God not be able to perform the task in question? To be sure, it is a task—the task of lifting a stone which He cannot lift—whose description is self-contradictory. But if God is supposed capable of performing one task whose description is self-contradictory—that of creating the problematic stone in the first place—why should He not be supposed capable of performing another—that of lifting the stone? After all, is there any greater trick in performing two logically impossible tasks than there is in performing one?

If an omnipotent being can do what is logically impossible, then He can not only create situations which He cannot handle but also, since He is not bound by the limits of consistency, He can handle situations which He cannot handle.

NOTES

1. George Mavrodes, "Some Puzzles Concerning Omnipotence," *The Philosophical Review* 72 (1963), 221–23.
2. Ibid., p. 223.
3. Descartes, for instance, who in fact thought it blasphemous to maintain that God can do only what can be described in a logically coherent way: "The truths of mathematics … were established by God and entirely depend on Him, as much as do all the rest of His creatures. Actually, it would be to speak of God as a Jupiter or Saturn and to subject Him to the Styx and to the Fates, to say that these truths are independent of Him.… You will be told that if God established these truths He would be able to change them, as a king does his laws; to which it is necessary

to reply that this is correct.… In general we can be quite certain that God can do whatever we are able to understand, but not that He cannot do what we are unable to understand. For it would be presumptuous to think that our imagination extends as far as His power" (letter to Mersenne, 15 April 1630). "God was as free to make it false that all the radii of a circle are equal as to refrain from creating the world" (letter to Mersenne, 27 May 1630). "I would not even dare to say that God cannot arrange that a mountain should exist without a valley, or that one and two should not make three; but I only say that He has given me a mind of such a nature that I cannot conceive a mountain without a valley or a sum of one and two which would not be three, and so on, and that such things imply contradictions in my conception" (letter to Arnauld, 29 July 1648). "As for the difficulty in conceiving how it was a matter of freedom and indifference to God to make it true that the three angles of a triangle should equal two right angles, or generally that contradictions should not be able to be together, one can easily remove it by considering that the power of God can have no limit.… God cannot have been determined to make it true that contradictions cannot be together, and consequently He could have been determined to make it true that contradictions cannot be together, and consequently he could have done the contrary" (letter to Mesland, 2 May 1644).

I.B.6

Divine Foreknowledge and Human Free Will

ST. AUGUSTINE

St. Augustine (354–430) was Bishop of Hippo in North Africa and one of the greatest thinkers in the history of the Christian Church. Among his most well-known works are The City of God, Confessions, On Christian Doctrine*, and* On the Trinity*. In the present selection he argues that God's foreknowledge of human actions does not necessitate those actions. Specifically, human sin was not committed because God knew that it would happen, but God knew that it would happen because he knows how humans will choose. We enter the dialogue with a question by Augustine's disciple, Evodius.*

EVODIUS:… Since these things are true, I very much wonder how God can have foreknowledge of everything in the future, and yet we do not sin by necessity. It would be an irreligious and completely insane attack on God's foreknowledge to say that something could happen otherwise than as God foreknew. So suppose that God foreknew that the first human being was going to sin. Anyone who admits, as I do, that God foreknows everything in the future will have to grant me that. Now I won't say that God would not have made him—for God made him good, and no sin of his can harm God, who not only made him good but showed His own goodness by creating him, as He also shows His

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justice by punishing him and His mercy by redeeming him—but I will say this: *since God foreknew that he was going to sin, his sin necessarily had to happen. How, then, is the will free when such inescapable necessity is found in it?*

AUGUSTINE: … Surely this is the problem that is disturbing and puzzling you. How is it that these two propositions are not contradictory and inconsistent: (1) God has foreknowledge of everything in the future; and (2) We sin by the will, not by necessity? For, you say, if God foreknows that someone is going to sin, then it is necessary that he sin. But if it is necessary, the will has no choice about whether to sin; there is an inescapable and fixed necessity. And so you fear that this argument forces us into one of two positions: either we draw the heretical conclusion that God does not foreknow everything in the future; or, if we cannot accept this conclusion, we must admit that sin happens by necessity and not by will. Isn't that what is bothering you?

EVODIUS: That's it exactly.

AUGUSTINE: So you think that anything that God foreknows happens by necessity and not by will.

EVODIUS:Precisely.

AUGUSTINE: Now pay close attention. Look inside yourself for a little while, and tell me, if you can, what sort of will you are going to have tomorrow: a will to do right or a will to sin?

EVODIUS: I don't know.

AUGUSTINE: Do you think that God doesn't know either?

EVODIUS: Not at all—God certainly does know.

AUGUSTINE: Well then, if God knows what you are going to will tomorrow, and foresees the future wills of every human being, both those who exist now and those who will exist in the future, he surely foresees how he is going to treat the just and the irreligious.

EVODIUS: Clearly, if I say that God foreknows all of my actions, I can much more confidently say that he foreknows his own actions and foresees with absolute certainty what he is going to do.

AUGUSTINE: Then aren't you worried that someone might object that God himself will act out of necessity rather than by his will in everything that he is going to do? After all, you said that whatever God foreknows happens by necessity, not by will.

EVODIUS: When I said that, I was thinking only of what happens in his creation and not of what happens within himself. For those things do not come into being; they are eternal.

AUGUSTINE: So God does nothing in his creation.

EVODIUS: He has already established, once for all, the ways in which the universe that he created is to be governed; he does not administer anything by a new act of will.

AUGUSTINE: Doesn't he make anyone happy?

EVODIUS: Of course he does.

AUGUSTINE: And he does this when that person is made happy.

EVODIUS: Right.

AUGUSTINE: Then suppose, for example, that you are going to be happy a year from now. That means that a year from now God is going to make you happy.

EVODIUS: That's right too.

AUGUSTINE: And God knows today what he is going to do a year from now.

EVODIUS: He has always foreknown this, so I admit that he foreknows it now, if indeed it is really going to happen.

AUGUSTINE: Then surely you are not God's creature, or else your happiness does not take place in you.

EVODIUS: But I am God's creature, and my happiness does take place in me.

AUGUSTINE: Then the happiness that God gives you takes place by necessity and not by will.

EVODIUS: His will *is* my necessity.

AUGUSTINE: And so you will be happy against your will.

EVODIUS: If I had the power to be happy I would be happy right now. Even now I will to be happy, but

I'm not, since it is God who makes me happy. I cannot do it for myself.

AUGUSTINE: How clearly the truth speaks through you! You could not help thinking that the only thing that is within our power is that which we do when we will it. Therefore, nothing is so much within our power as the will itself, for it is near at hand the very moment that we will. So we can rightly say, "We grow old by necessity, not by will"; or "We become feeble by necessity, not by will"; or "We die by necessity, not by will," and other such things. But who would be crazy enough to say "We do not will by the will"? Therefore, although God foreknows what we are going to will in the future, it does not follow that we do not will by the will.

When you said that you cannot make yourself happy, you said it as if I had denied it. Not at all; I am merely saying that when you do become happy, it will be in accordance with your will, not against your will. Simply because God foreknows your future happiness—and nothing can happen except as God foreknows it, since otherwise it would not be foreknowledge—it does not follow that you will be happy against your will. That would be completely absurd and far from the truth. So God's foreknowledge, which is certain even today of your future happiness, does not take away your will for happiness once you have begun to be happy; and in the same way, your blameworthy will (if indeed you are going to have such a will) does not cease to be a will simply because God foreknows that you are going to have it.

Just notice how imperceptive someone would have to be to argue thus: "If God has foreknown my future will, it is necessary that I will what he has foreknown, since nothing can happen otherwise than as he has foreknown it. But if it is necessary, then one must concede that I will it by necessity and not by will." What extraordinary foolishness! If God foreknew a future will that turned out not to be a will at all, things would indeed happen otherwise than as God foreknew them. And I will overlook this objector's equally monstrous statement that "it is necessary that I will," for by assuming necessity he tries to abolish will. For if his willing is necessary, how does he will, since there is no will?

Suppose he expressed it in another way and said that, since his willing is necessary, his will is not in his own power. This would run up against the same problem that you had when I asked whether you were going to be happy against your will. You replied that you would already be happy if you had the power; you said that you have the will but not the power. I answered that the truth had spoken through you. For we can deny that something is in our power only if it is not present even when we will it; but if we will, and yet the will remains absent, then we are not really willing at all. Now if it is impossible for us not to will when we are willing, then the will is present to those who will; and if something is present when we will it, then it is in our power. So our will would not be a will if it were not in our power. And since it is in our power, we are free with respect to it. But we are not free with respect to anything that we do not have in our power, and anything that we have cannot be nothing.

Thus, we believe both that God has foreknowledge of everything in the future and that nonetheless we will whatever we will. Since God foreknows our will, the very will that he foreknows will be what comes about. Therefore, it will be a will, since it is a will that he foreknows. And it could not be a will unless it were in our power. Therefore, he also foreknows this power. It follows, then, that his foreknowledge does not take away my power; in fact, it is all the more certain that I will have that power, since he whose foreknowledge never errs foreknows that I will have it.

EVODIUS: I agree now that it is necessary that whatever God has foreknown will happen, and that he foreknows our sins in such a way that our wills remain free and are within our power…

I.B.7

God's Foreknowledge and Human Free Will Are Incompatible

NELSON PIKE

Nelson Pike (1930–) is emeritus professor of philosophy at the University of California at Irvine and is one of the leading figures in the philosophy of religion. In this article he argues that given commonly held theological assumptions about God's nature, no human action is free.

In Part V, Section III of his *Consolatio Philosophiae*, Boethius entertained (though he later rejected) the claim that if God is omniscient, no human action is voluntary. This claim seems intuitively false. Surely, given only a doctrine describing God's *knowledge*, nothing about the voluntary status of human actions will follow. Perhaps such a conclusion would follow from a doctrine of divine omnipotence or divine providence, but what connection could there be between the claim that God is *omniscient* and the claim that human actions are determined? Yet Boethius thought he saw a problem here. He thought that if one collected together just the right assumptions and principles regarding God's knowledge, one could derive the conclusion that if God exists, no human action is voluntary. Of course, Boethius did not think that all the assumptions and principles required to reach this conclusion are true (quite the contrary), but he thought it important to draw attention to them nonetheless. If a theologian is to construct a doctrine of God's knowledge which does not commit him to determinism, he must first understand that there is a way of thinking about God's knowledge which would so commit him.

In this paper, I shall argue that although his claim has a sharp counterintuitive ring, Boethius was right in thinking that there is a selection from among the various doctrines and principles clustering about the notions of knowledge, omniscience, and God which, when brought together, demand the conclusion that if God exists, no human action is voluntary. Boethius, I think, did not succeed in making explicit all of the ingredients in the problem. His suspicions were sound, but his discussion was incomplete. His argument needs to be developed. This is the task I shall undertake in the pages to follow. I should like to make clear at the outset that my purpose in rearguing this thesis is not to show that determinism is true, nor to show that God does not exist, nor to show that either determinism is true or God does not exist. Following Boethius, I shall not claim that the items needed to generate the problem are either philosophically or theologically adequate. I want to concentrate attention on the implications of a certain set of assumptions. Whether the assumptions are themselves acceptable is a question I shall not consider.

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I

A. Many philosophers have held that if a statement of the form "*A* knows *X*" is true, then "*A* believes *X*" is true and "*X*" is true. As a first assumption, I shall take this partial analysis of "*A* knows *X*" to be correct. And I shall suppose that since this analysis holds for all knowledge claims, it will hold when speaking of God's knowledge. "God knows *X*" entails "God believes *X*" and "'*X*' is true."

Secondly, Boethius said that with respect to the matter of knowledge, God "cannot in anything be mistaken."[1] shall understand this doctrine as follows. Omniscient beings hold no false beliefs. Part of what is meant when we say that a person is omniscient is that the person in question believes nothing that is false. But, further, it is part of the "essence" of God to be omniscient. This is to say that any person who is not omniscient could not be the person we usually mean to be referring to when using the name "God." To put this last point a little differently: if the person we usually mean to be referring to when using the name "God" were suddenly to lose the quality of omniscience (suppose, for example, He came to believe something false), the resulting person would no longer be God. Although we might call this second person "God" (I might call my cat "God"), the absence of the quality of omniscience would be sufficient to guarantee that the person referred to was not the same as the person formerly called by that name. From this last doctrine it follows that the statement "if a given person is God, that person is omniscient" is an a priori truth. From this we may conclude that the statement "If a given person is God, that person holds no false beliefs" is also an a priori truth. It would be conceptually impossible for God to hold a false belief. "'*X* is true" follows from "God believes *X*." These are all ways of expressing the same principle—the principle expressed by Boethius in the formula "God cannot in anything be mistaken."

A second principle usually associated with the notion of divine omniscience has to do with the scope or range of God's intellectual gaze. To say that a being is omniscient is to say that he knows everything. "Everything" in this statement is usually taken to cover future, as well as present and past, events and circumstances. In fact, God is usually said to have had foreknowledge of everything that has ever happened. With respect to anything that was, is, or will be the case, God knew, *from eternity*, that it would be the case.

The doctrine of God's knowing everything from eternity is very obscure. One particularly difficult question concerning this doctrine is whether it entails that with respect to everything that was, is, or will be the case, God knew *in advance* that it would be the case. In some traditional theological texts, we are told that God is *eternal* in the sense that He exists "outside of time," that is, in the sense that He bears no temporal relations to the events or circumstances of the natural world.[2] In a theology of this sort, God could not be said to have known that a given natural event was going to happen before it happened. If God knew that a given natural event was going to occur *before* it occurred, at least one of God's cognitions would then have occurred before some natural event. This, surely, would violate the idea that God bears no temporal relations to natural events.[3] On the other hand, in a considerable number of theological sources, we are told that God *has always* existed—that He existed long *before* the occurrence of any natural event. In a theology of this sort, to say that God is eternal is not to say that God exists "outside of time" (bears no temporal relations to natural events), it is to say, instead, God has existed (and will continue to exist) at each moment.[4] The doctrine of omniscience which goes with this second understanding of the notion of eternity is one in which it is affirmed that God *has always* known that what was going to happen in the natural world. John Calvin wrote as follows:

> When we attribute foreknowledge to God, we mean that all things have ever been and perpetually remain before, his eyes, so that to his knowledge nothing is future or past, but all things are present; and present in such manner, that he does not merely conceive of them from ideas formed in his mind, as things remembered by us appear to

> our minds, but really he holds and sees them as if (*tanquam*) actually placed before him.[5]

All things are "present" to God in the sense that He "sees" them as if (*tanquam*) they were actually before Him. Further, with respect to any given natural event, not only is that event "present" to God in the sense indicated, it has *ever been and has perpetually remained* "present" to Him in that sense. This latter is the point of special interest. Whatever one thinks of the idea that God "sees" things as if "actually placed before him," Calvin would appear to be committed to the idea that God has *always known* what was going to happen in the natural world. Choose an event (E) and a time (T_2) at which E occurred. For any time (T_1) prior to T_2 (say, five thousand, six hundred, or eighty years prior to T_2), God knew at T_1 that E would occur at T_2. It will follow from this doctrine, of course, that with respect to any human action, God knew well in advance of its performance that the action would be performed. Calvin says, "when God created man, He foresaw what would happen concerning him." He adds, "little more than five thousand years have elapsed since the creation of the world."[6] Calvin seems to have thought that God foresaw the outcome of every human action well over five thousand years ago.

In the discussion to follow, I shall work only with this second interpretation of God's knowing everything *from eternity*. I shall assume that if a person is omniscient, that person has always known what was going to happen in the natural world—and, in particular, has always known what human actions were going to be performed. Thus, as above, assuming that the attribute of omniscience is part of the "essence" of God, the statement "For any natural event (including human actions), if a given person is God, that person would always have known that that event was going to occur at the time it occurred" must be treated as an a priori truth. This is just another way of stating a point admirably put by St. Augustine when he said: "For to confess that God exists and at the same time to deny that He has foreknowledge of future things is the most manifest folly…. One who is not prescient of all future things is not God."[7]

B. Last Saturday afternoon, Jones mowed his lawn. Assuming that God exists and is (essentially) omniscient in the sense outlined above, it follows that (let us say) eighty years prior to last Saturday afternoon, God knew (and thus believed) that Jones would mow his lawn at that time. But from this it follows, I think, that at the time of action (last Saturday afternoon) Jones was not able—that is, it was not *within Jones's power*—to refrain from mowing his lawn.[8] If at the time of action, Jones had been able to refrain from mowing his lawn, then (the most obvious conclusion would seem to be) at the time of action, Jones was able to do something which would have brought it about that God held a false belief eighty years earlier. But God cannot in anything be mistaken. It is not possible that some belief of His was false. Thus, last Saturday afternoon, Jones was not able to do something which would have brought it about that God held a false belief eighty years ago. To suppose that it was would be to suppose that, at the time of action, Jones was able to do something having a conceptually incoherent description, namely something that would have brought it about that one of God's beliefs was false. Hence, given that God believed eighty years ago that Jones would mow his lawn on Saturday, if we are to assign Jones the power on Saturday to refrain from mowing his lawn, this power must not be described as the power to do something that would have rendered one of God's beliefs false. How then should we describe it vis-à-vis God and His belief? So far as I can see, there are only two other alternatives. First, we might try describing it as the power to do something that would have brought it about that God believed otherwise than He did eighty years ago; or, secondly, we might try describing it as the power to do something that would have brought it about that God (who, by hypothesis, existed eighty years earlier) did not exist eighty years earlier— that is, as the power to do something that would have brought it about that any person who believed eighty years ago that Jones would mow his lawn

on Saturday (one of whom was, by hypothesis, God) held a false belief, and thus was not God. But again, neither of these latter can be accepted. Last Saturday afternoon, Jones was not able to do something that would have brought it about that God believed otherwise than He did eighty years ago. Even if we suppose (as was suggested by Calvin) that eighty years ago God knew Jones would mow his lawn on Saturday in the sense that He "saw" Jones mowing his lawn as if this action were occurring before Him, the fact remains that God knew (and thus believed) eighty years prior to Saturday that Jones would mow his lawn. And if God held such a belief eighty years prior to Saturday, Jones did not have the power on Saturday to do something that would have made it the case that God did not hold this belief eighty years earlier. No action performed at a given time can alter the fact that a given person held a certain belief at a time prior to the time in question. This last seems to be an a priori truth. For similar reasons, the last of the above alternatives must also be rejected. On the assumption that God existed eighty years prior to Saturday, Jones on Saturday was not able to do something that would have brought it about that God did not exist eighty years prior to that time. No action performed at a given time can alter the fact that a certain person existed at a time prior to the time in question. This, too, seems to me to be an a priori truth. But if these observations are correct, then, given that Jones mowed his lawn on Saturday, and given that God exists and is (essentially) omniscient, it seems to follow that at the time of action, Jones did not have the power to refrain from mowing his lawn. The upshot of these reflections would appear to be that Jones's mowing his lawn last Saturday cannot be counted as a voluntary action. Although I do not have an analysis of what it is for action to be *voluntary*, it seems to me that a situation in which it would be wrong to assign Jones the *ability* or *power* to do *other* than he did would be a situation in which it would also be wrong to speak of his action as voluntary. As a general remark, if God exists and is (essentially) omniscient in the sense specified above, no human action is voluntary.[9]

As the argument just presented is somewhat complex, perhaps the following schematic representation of it will be of some use.

1. "God existed at T_1" entails "If Jones did *X* at T_2, God believed at T_1 that Jones would do *X* at T_2."
2. "God believes *X*" entails "*X* is true."
3. It is not within one's power at a given time to do something having a description that is logically contradictory.
4. It is not within one's power at a given time to do something that would bring it about that someone who held a certain belief at a time prior to the time in question did not hold that belief at the time prior to the time in question.
5. It is not within one's power at a given time to do something that would bring it about that a person who existed at an earlier time did not exist at that earlier time.
6. If God existed at T_1 and if God believed at T_1 that Jones would do *X* at T_2, then if it was within Jones's power at T_2 to refrain from doing *X*, then (1) it was within Jones's power at T_2 to do something that would have brought it about that God held a false belief at T_1, or (2) it was within Jones's power at T_2 to do something which would have brought it about that God did not hold the belief He held at T_1, or (3) it was within Jones's power at T_2 to do something that would have brought it about that any person who believed at T_1 that Jones would do *X* at T_2 (one of whom was, by hypothesis, God) held a false belief and thus was not God—that is, that God (who by hypothesis existed at T_1) did not exist at T_1.
7. Alternative 1 in the consequent of item 6 is false (from 2 and 3).
8. Alternative 2 in the consequent of item 6 is false (from 4).
9. Alternative 3 in the consequent of item 6 is false (from 5).
10. Therefore, if God existed at T_1, and if God believed at T_1 that Jones would do *X* at T_2,

then it was not within Jones's power at T_2 to refrain from doing *X* (from 6 through 9).

11. Therefore, if God existed at T_1 and if Jones did *X* at T_2, it was not within Jones's power at T_2 to refrain from doing *X* (from 1 and 10).

In this argument, items 1 and 2 make explicit the doctrine of God's (essential) omniscience with which I am working. Items 3, 4, and 5 express what I take to be part of the logic of the concept of ability or power as it applies to human beings. Item 6 is offered as an analytic truth. If one assigns Jones the power to refrain from doing *X* at T_2 (given that God believed at T_1 that he would do *X* at T_2), so far as I can see, one would have to describe this power in one of the three ways listed in the consequent of item 6. I do not know how to argue that these are the only alternatives, but I have been unable to find another. Item 11, when generalized for all agents and actions, and when taken together with what seems to me to be a minimal condition for the application of "voluntary action," yields the conclusion that if God exists (and is essentially omniscient in the way I have described) no human action is voluntary.

C. It is important to notice that the argument given in the preceding paragraphs avoids use of two concepts that are often prominent in discussions of determinism.

In the first place, the argument makes no mention of the *causes* of Jones's action. Say (for example, with St. Thomas)[10] that God's foreknowledge of Jones's action was, itself, the cause of the action (though I am really not sure what this means). Say, instead, that natural events or circumstances caused Jones to act. Even say that Jones's action had no cause at all. The argument outlined above remains unaffected. If eighty years prior to Saturday, God believed that Jones would mow his lawn at that time, it was not within Jones's power at the time of action to refrain from mowing his lawn. The reasoning that justifies this assertion makes no mention of a causal series preceding Jones's action.

Secondly, consider the following line of thinking. Suppose Jones mowed his lawn last Saturday. It was then *true* eighty years ago that Jones would mow his lawn at that time. Hence, on Saturday, Jones was not able to refrain from mowing his lawn. To suppose that he was would be to suppose that he was able on Saturday to do something that would have made false a proposition that was *already true* eighty years earlier. This general kind of argument for determinism is usually associated with Leibniz, although it was anticipated in Chapter IX of Aristotle's *De Interpretatione*. It has been used since, with some modification, in Richard Taylor's article, "Fatalism."[11] This argument, like the one I have offered above, makes no use of the notion of causation. It turns, instead, on the notion of its being *true eighty years ago* that Jones would mow his lawn on Saturday.

I must confess that I share the misgivings of those contemporary philosophers who have wondered what (if any) sense can be attached to a statement of the form "it was true at T_1 that *E* would occur at T_2."[12] Does this statement mean that had someone believed, guessed, or asserted at T_1 that *E* would occur at T_2, he would have been right?[13] (I shall have something to say about this form of determinism later in this paper.) Perhaps it means that at T_1 there was sufficient evidence upon which to predict that *E* would occur at T_2.[14] Maybe it means neither of these. Maybe it means nothing at all.[15] The argument presented above presupposes that it makes straightforward sense to suppose that God (or just anyone) held a true belief eighty years prior to Saturday. But this is not to suppose that *what* God believed *was true eighty years prior to Saturday*. Whether (or in what sense) it was true eighty years ago that Jones would mow his lawn on Saturday is a question I shall not discuss. As far as I can see, the argument in which I am interested requires nothing in the way of a decision on this issue.

II

I now want to consider three comments on the problem of divine foreknowledge which seem to be instructively incorrect.

A. Leibniz analyzed the problem as follows:

> They say that what is foreseen cannot fail to exist and they say so truly; but it follows

> not that what is foreseen is necessary. For necessary truth is that whereof the contrary is impossible or implies a contradiction. Now the truth which states that I shall write tomorrow is not of that nature, it is not necessary. Yet, supposing that God foresees it, it is necessary that it come to pass, that is, the consequence is necessary, namely that it exist, since it has been foreseen; for God is infallible. This is what is termed a *hypothetical necessity*. But our concern is not this necessity; it is an abso*lute* necessity that is required, to be able to say that an action is necessary, that it is not contingent, that it is not the effect of free choice.[16]

The statement "God believed at T_1 that Jones would do X at T_2" (where the interval between T_1 and T_2 is, for example, eighty years) does not entail "'Jones did X at T_2' is necessary." Leibniz is surely right about this. All that will follow from the first of these statements concerning "Jones did X at T_2" is that the latter is true, not that it is necessarily true. But this observation has no real bearing on the issue at hand. The following passage from St. Augustine's formulation of the problem may help to make this point clear.

> Your trouble is this. You wonder how it can be that these two propositions are not contradictory and incompatible, namely that God has foreknowledge of all future events, and that we sin voluntarily and not by necessity. For if, you say, God foreknows that a man will sin, he must necessarily sin. But if there is necessity there is no voluntary choice of sinning, but rather fixed and unavoidable necessity.[17]

In this passage, the term "necessity" (or the phrase "by necessity") is not used to express a modal-logical concept. The term "necessity" is here used in contrast with the term "voluntary," not (as in Leibniz) in contrast with the term "contingent." If one's action is necessary (or by necessity), this is to say that one's action is not voluntary. Augustine says that if God has foreknowledge of human actions, the actions are necessary. But the form of this conditional is "P implies Q," not "P implies $N(Q)$." "Q" in the consequent of this conditional is the claim that human actions are not voluntary—that is, the one is not able, or does not have the power, to do other than he does.

Perhaps I can make this point clearer by reformulating the original problem in such a way as to make explicit the modal operators working within it. Let it be *contingently* true that Jones did X at T_2. Since God holds a belief about the outcome of each human action well in advance of its performance, it is then *contingently true* that God believed at T_1 that Jones would do X at T_2. But it follows from this that it is *contingently* true that at T_2 Jones was not able to refrain from doing X. Had he been (contingently) able to refrain from doing X at T_2, then either he was (contingently) able to do something at T_2 that would have brought it about that God held a false belief at T_1, or he was (contingently) able to do something at T_2 that would have brought it about that God believed otherwise than He did at T_1, or he was (contingently) able to do something at T_2 that would have brought it about that God did not exist at T_1. None of these latter is an acceptable alternative.

B. In *Concordia Liberi Arbitrii*, Luis de Molina wrote as follows:

> It was not that since He foreknew what would happen from those things which depend on the created will that it would happen; but, on the contrary, it was because such things would happen through the freedom of the will, that He foreknew it; and that He would foreknow the opposite if the opposite was to happen.[18]

Remarks similar to this one can be found in a great many traditional and contemporary theological texts. In fact, Molina assures us that the view expressed in this passage has always been "above controversy"—a matter of "common opinion" and "unanimous consent"—not only among the

Church fathers, but also, as he says, "among all catholic men."

One claim made in the above passage seems to me to be truly "above controversy." With respect to any given action foreknown by God, God would have foreknown the opposite if the opposite was to happen. If we assume the notion of omniscience outlined in the first section of this paper, and if we agree that omniscience is part of the "essence'" of God, this statement is a conceptual truth. I doubt if anyone would be inclined to dispute it. Also involved in this passage, however, is at least the suggestion of a doctrine that cannot be taken as an item of "common opinion" among *all* catholic men. Molina says it is not because God foreknows what He foreknows that men act as they do: it is because men act as they do that God foreknows what He foreknows. Some theologians have rejected this claim. It seems to entail that men's actions determine God's cognitions. And this latter, I think, has been taken by some theologians to be a violation of the notion of God as self-sufficient and incapable of being affected by events of the natural world.[19] But I shall not develop this point further. Where the view put forward in the above passage seems to me to go wrong in an interesting and important way is in Molina's claim that God can have foreknowledge of things that will happen "through the freedom of the will." It is this claim that I here want to examine with care.

What exactly are we saying when we say that God can know in advance what will happen *through the freedom of the will*? I think that what Molina has in mind is this. God can know in advance that a given man is going to choose to perform a certain action sometime in the future. With respect to the case of Jones mowing his lawn, God knew at T_1 that Jones would *freely* decide to mow his lawn at T_2. Not only did God know at T_1 that Jones would mow his lawn at T_2. He also knew at T_1 that this action would be performed freely. In the words of Emil Brunner, "God knows that which will take place in freedom in the future as something which happens in freedom."[20] What God knew at T_1 is that Jones would *freely* mow his lawn at T_2.

I think that this doctrine is incoherent. If God knew (and thus believed) at T_1 that Jones would do X at T_2,[21] I think it follows that Jones was not able to do other than X at T_2 (for reasons already given). Thus, if God knew (and thus believed) at T_1 that Jones would do X at T_2, it would follow that Jones did X at T_2, but not freely. It does not seem to be possible that God could have believed at T_1 that Jones would freely do X at T_2. If God believed at T_1 that Jones would do X at T_2, Jones's action at T_2 was not free; and if God also believed at T_1 that Jones would freely act at T_2, it follows that God held a false belief at T_1—which is absurd.

C. Frederich Schleiermacher commented on the problem of divine foreknowledge as follows:

> In the same way, we estimate the intimacy between two persons by the foreknowledge one has of the actions of the other, without supposing that in either case, the one or the other's freedom is thereby endangered. So even the divine foreknowledge cannot endanger freedom.[22]

St. Augustine made this same point in *De Libero Arbitrio*. He said:

> Unless I am mistaken, you would not directly compel the man to sin, though you knew beforehand that he was going to sin. Nor does your prescience in itself compel him to sin even though he was certainly going to sin, as we must assume if you have real prescience. So there is no contradiction here. Simply you know beforehand what another is going to do with his own will. Similarly God compels no man to sin, though he sees beforehand those who are going to sin by their own will.[23]

If we suppose (with Schleiermacher and Augustine) that the case of an intimate friend having foreknowledge of another's action has the same implications for determinism as the case of God's foreknowledge of human actions, I can imagine two positions which might then be taken. First,

one might hold (with Schleiermacher and Augustine) that God's foreknowledge of human actions cannot entail determinism—since it is clear that an intimate friend can have foreknowledge of another's voluntary actions. Or, secondly, one might hold that an intimate friend cannot have foreknowledge of another's voluntary actions—since it is clear that God cannot have foreknowledge of such actions. This second position could take either of two forms. One might hold that since an intimate friend *can* have foreknowledge of another's actions, the actions in question cannot be voluntary. Or, alternatively, one might hold that since the other's actions *are* voluntary, the intimate friend cannot have foreknowledge of them.[24] But what I propose to argue in the remaining pages of this paper is that Schleiermacher and Augustine were mistaken in supposing that the case of an intimate friend having foreknowledge of other's actions has the same implications for determinism as the case of God's foreknowledge of human actions. What I want to suggest is that the argument I used above to show that God cannot have foreknowledge of voluntary actions cannot be used to show that an intimate friend cannot have foreknowledge of another's actions. Even if one holds that an intimate friend *can* have foreknowledge of another's voluntary actions, one ought not to think that the case is the same when dealing with the problem of divine foreknowledge.

Let Smith be an ordinary man and an intimate friend of Jones. Now, let us start by supposing that Smith believed at T_1 that Jones would do *X* at T_2. We make no assumption concerning the truth or falsity of Smith's belief, but assume only that Smith held it. Given only this much, there appears to be no difficulty in supposing that at T_2 Jones was able to do *X* and that at T_2 Jones was able to do not-*X*. So far as the above description of the case is concerned, it might well have been within Jones's power at T_2 to do something (namely, *X*) which would have brought it about that Smith held a true belief at T_1, and it might well have been within Jones's power at T_2 to do something (namely, not-*X*) which would have brought it about that Smith held a false belief at T_1. So much seems apparent.

Now let us suppose Smith *knew* at T_1 that Jones would do *X* at T_2. This is to suppose that Smith correctly believed (with evidence) at T_1 that Jones would do *X* at T_2. It follows, to be sure, that Jones did *X* at T_2. But now let us inquire about what Jones was *able* to do at T_2. I submit that there is nothing in the description of this case that requires the conclusion that it was not within Jones's power at T_2 to refrain from doing *X*. By hypothesis, the belief held by Smith at T_1 was true. Thus, by hypothesis, Jones did *X* at T_2. But even if we assume that the belief held by Smith at T_1 was *in fact* true, we can add that the belief held by Smith at T_1 *might* have turned out to be false.[25] Thus, even if we say that Jones *in fact* did *X* at T_2, we can add that Jones *might not* have done *X* at T_2— meaning by this that it was within Jones's power at T_2 to refrain from doing *X*. Smith held a true belief which might have turned out to be false, and, correspondingly, Jones performed an action which he was able to refrain from performing. Given that Smith correctly believed at T_1 that Jones would do *X* at T_2, we can still assign Jones the *power* at T_2 to refrain from doing *X*. All we need add is that the power in question is one which Jones *did not exercise*.

These last reflections have no application, however, when dealing with God's foreknowledge. Assume that God (being essentially omniscient) existed at T_1, and assume that He believed at T_1 that Jones would do *X* at T_2. It follows, again, that Jones did *X* at T_2. God's beliefs are true. But now, as above, let us inquire into what Jones was *able* to do at T_2. We cannot claim now, as in the Smith case, that the belief held by God at T_1 was *in fact* true but *might* have turned out to be false. No sense of "might have" has application here. It is a conceptual truth that God's beliefs are true. Thus, we cannot claim, as in the Smith case, that Jones *in fact* acted in accordance with God's beliefs but had the *ability* to refrain from so doing. The ability to refrain from acting in accordance with one of God's beliefs would be the ability to do something that would bring it about that one of God's beliefs was false.

And no one could have an ability of this description. Thus, in the case of God's foreknowledge of Jones's action at T_2, if we are to assign Jones the ability at T_2 to refrain from doing *X*, we must understand this ability in some way other than the way we understood it when dealing with Smith's foreknowledge. In this case, either we must say that it was the ability at T_2 to bring it about that God believed otherwise than He did at T_1; or we must say that it was the ability at T_2 to bring it about that any person who believed at T_1 that Jones would do *X* at T_2 (one of whom was, by hypothesis, God) held a false belief and thus was not God. But, as pointed out earlier, neither of these last alternatives can be accepted.

The important thing to be learned from the study of Smith's foreknowledge of Jones's action is that the problem of divine foreknowledge has as one of its pillars the claim the truth is *analytically* connected with God's *beliefs*. No problem of determinism arises when dealing with human knowledge of future actions. This is because truth is not analytically connected with human belief even when (as in the case of human knowledge) truth is contingently conjoined to belief. If we suppose that Smith knows at T_1 that Jones will do *X* at T_2, what we are supposing is that Smith believes at T_1 that Jones will do *X* at T_2 and (as an additional, contingent, fact) that the belief in question is true. Thus having supposed that Smith knows at T_1 that Jones will do *X* at T_2, when we turn to a consideration of the situation of T_2 we can infer (1) that Jones *will* do *X* at T_2 (since Smith's belief is true), and (2) that Jones does not have the power at T_2 to do something that would bring it about that Jones did not *believe* as he did at T_1. But paradoxical though it may seem (and it seems paradoxical only at first sight), Jones can have the power at T_2 to do something that would bring it about that Smith did not have *knowledge* at T_1. This is simply to say that Jones can have the *power* at T_2 to do something that would bring it about that the belief held by Smith at T_1 (which was, in fact, true) was (instead) false. We are required only to add that since Smith's belief was in fact true (that is, was knowledge) Jones *did not* (in fact) *exercise* that power. But when we turn to a consideration of God's foreknowledge of Jones's action at T_2 the elbowroom between belief and truth disappears and, with it, the possibility of assigning Jones even the *power* of doing other than he does at T_2. We begin by supposing that God *knows* at T_1 that Jones will do *X* at T_2. As above, this is to suppose that God believes at T_1 that Jones will do *X* at T_2, and it is to suppose that this belief is true. But it is *not* an additional, contingent fact that the belief held by God is true. "God believes *X*" entails "*X* is true." Thus, having supposed that God knows (and thus believes) at T_1 that Jones will do *X* at T_2, we can infer (1) that Jones *will do X* at T_2 (since God's belief is true); (2) that Jones does not have the power at T_2 to do something that would bring it about that God did not hold the belief He held at T_1, and (3) that Jones does not have the power at T_2 to do something that would bring it about that the belief held by God at T_1 was false. This last is what we could *not* infer when truth and belief were only factually connected—as in the case of Smith's knowledge. To be sure, "Smith knows at T_1 that Jones will do *X* at T_2" and "God knows at T_1 that Jones will do *X* at T_2" both entail "Jones will do *X* at T_2" ("*A* knows *X*" entails "*X* is true"). But this similarity between "Smith knows *X*" and "God knows *X*" is not a point of any special interest in the present discussion. As Schleiermacher and Augustine rightly insisted (and as we discovered in our study of Smith's foreknowledge) the mere fact that someone knows in advance how another will act in the future is not enough to yield a problem of the sort we have been discussing. We begin to get a glimmer of the knot involved in the problem of divine foreknowledge when we shift attention away from the *similarities* between "Smith knows *X*" and "God knows *X*" (in particular, that they both entail "'*X*' is true") and concentrate instead on the logical *differences* which obtain between Smith's knowledge and God's knowledge. We get to the difference which makes the difference when, after analyzing the notion of knowledge as true belief (supported by evidence) we discover the radically dissimilar relations between truth and belief in the two cases. When truth is only factually

connected with belief (as in Smith's knowledge) one can have the power (though, by hypothesis, one will not exercise it) to do something that would make the belief false. But when truth is analytically connected with belief (as in God's belief) no one can have the power to do something which would render the belief false.

To conclude: I have assumed that any statement of form "*A* knows *X*" entails a statement of the form "*A* believes *X*" as well as a statement of the form "'*X*' is true." I have then supposed (as an analytic truth) that if a given person is omniscient, that person (1) holds no false beliefs, and (2) holds beliefs about the outcome of human actions in advance of their performance. In addition, I have assumed that the statement "if a given person is God that person is omniscient" is an a priori statement. (This last I have labeled the doctrine of God's essential omniscience.) Given these items (plus some premises concerning what is and what is not within one's power), I have argued that if God exists, it is not within one's power to do other than he does. I have inferred from this that if God exists, no human action is voluntary.

As emphasized earlier, I do not want to claim that the assumptions underpinning the argument are acceptable. In fact, it seems to me that a theologian interested in claiming both that God is omniscient and that men have free will could deny any one (or more) of them. For example, a theologian might deny that a statement of the form "*A* knows *X*" entails a statement of the form "A believes *X*" (some contemporary philosophers have denied this) or, alternatively, he might claim that this entailment holds in the case of human knowledge but fails in the case of God's knowledge. This latter would be to claim that when knowledge is attributed to God, the term "knowledge" bears a sense other than the one it has when knowledge is attributed to human beings. Then again, a theologian might object to the analysis of "omniscience" with which I have been working. Although I doubt if any Christian theologian would allow that an omniscient being could believe something false, he might claim that a given person could be omniscient although he did not hold beliefs about the outcome of human actions *in advance* of their performance. (This latter is the way Boethius escaped the problem.) Still again, a theologian might deny the doctrine of God's essential omniscience. He might admit that if a given person is God that person is omniscient, but he might deny that this statement formulates an a priori truth. This would be to say that although God is omniscient, He is not *essentially* omniscient. So far as I can see, within the conceptual framework of theology employing any one of these adjustments, the problem of divine foreknowledge outlined in this paper could not be formulated. There thus appears to be a rather wide range of alternatives open to the theologian at this point. It would be a mistake to think that commitment to determinism is an unavoidable implication of the Christian concept of divine omniscience.

But having arrived at this understanding, the importance of the preceding deliberations ought not to be overlooked. There is a pitfall in the doctrine of divine omniscience. That knowing involves believing (truly) is surely a tempting philosophical view (witness the many contemporary philosophers who have affirmed it). And the idea that God's attributes (including omniscience) are essentially connected to His nature, together with the idea that an omniscient being would hold no false beliefs and would hold beliefs about the outcome of human actions in advance of their performance, might be taken by some theologians as obvious candidates for inclusion in a finished Christian theology. Yet the theologian must approach these items critically. If they are embraced together, then if one affirms the existence of God, one is committed to the view that no human action is voluntary.

NOTES

1. *Consolatio Philosophiae*, Bk. V, sec. 3, par. 6.
2. This position is particularly well formulated in St. Anselm's *Proslogium*, ch. xix and *Monologium*, chs. xxi–xxii; and in Frederich Schleiermacher's *The Christian Faith*, Pt. 1, sec. 2, par. 51. It is also explicit in Boethius, op. cit., secs. 4–6, and in St. Thomas' *Summa Theologica*, Pt. 1, Q. 10.
3. This point is explicit in Boethius, op. cit., secs. 4–6.
4. This position is particularly well expressed in William Paley's *Natural Theology*, ch. xxiv. It is also involved in John Calvin's discussion of predestination, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Bk. III, ch. xxi; and in some formulations of the first cause argument for existence of God, e.g., John Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Bk. IV, ch. x.
5. *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Bk. III, ch. xxi; this passage trans. by John Allen (Philadelphia, 1813), II, 145.
6. Ibid., p. 144.
7. *City of God*, Bk. V, sec. 9.
8. The notion of someone being *able* to do something and the notion of something being within one's power are essentially the same. Traditional formulations of the problem of divine foreknowledge (e.g., those of Boethius and Augustine) made use of the notion of what is (and what is not) *within one's power*. But the problem is the same when framed in terms of what one is (and one is not) *able* to do. Thus, I shall treat the statements "Jones was able to do *X*," "Jones had the ability to do *X*," and "It was within Jones's power to do *X*" as equivalent. Richard Taylor, in "I Can," *Philosophical Review*, LXIX (1960), 78–89, has argued that the notion of ability or power involved in these last three statements is incapable of philosophical analysis. Be this as it may, I shall not here attempt such an analysis. In what follows I shall, however, be careful to affirm only those statements about what is (or is not) within one's power that would have to be preserved on any analysis of this notion having even the most distant claim to adequacy.
9. In Bk. II, ch. xxi, secs. 8–11 of the *Essay*, John Locke says that an agent is not *free* with respect to a given action (i.e., that an action is done "under necessity") when it is not within the agent's power to do otherwise. Locke allows a special kind of case, however, in which an action may be *voluntary* though done under necessity. If a man chooses to do something without knowing that it is not within his power to do otherwise (e.g., if a man chooses to stay in a room without knowing that the *room* is locked), his action may be voluntary though he is not free to forbear it. If Locke is right in this (and I shall not argue the point one way or the other), replace "voluntary" with (let us say) "free" in the above paragraph and throughout the remainder of this paper.
10. *Summa Theologica*, Pt. 1, Q. 14, a. 8.
11. *Philosophical Review*, LXXI (1962), 56–66. Taylor argues that if an event E fails to occur at T_2, then at T_1 it was true that E would fail to occur at T_2. Thus, at T_1, a necessary condition of anyone's performing an action sufficient for the occurrence of E at T_2 is missing. Thus at T_1, no one could have the power to perform an action that would be sufficient for the occurrence of E at T_2. Hence, no one has the power at T_1 to do something sufficient for the occurrence of an event at T_2 that is not going to happen. The parallel between this argument and the one recited above can be seen very clearly if one reformulates Taylor's argument, pushing back the time at which it was true that E would not occur at T_2.
12. For a helpful discussion of difficulties involved here, see Rogers Albritton's "Present Truth and Future Contingency," a reply to Richard Taylor's "The Problem of Future Contingency," both in the *Philosophical Review*, LXVI (1957), 1–28.
13. Gilbert Ryle interprets it this way. See "It Was to Be," *Dilemmas* (Cambridge, 1954).
14. Richard Gale suggests this interpretation in "Endorsing Predictions," *Philosophical Review*, LXX (1961), 378–385.
15. This view is held by John Turk Saunders in "Sea Fight Tomorrow?" *Philosophical Review*, LXVII (1958), 367–378.
16. *Theodicée*, Pt. 1, sec. 37. This passage trans. by E. M. Huggard (New Haven, 1952), p. 144.
17. *De Libero Arbitrio*, Bk. III. This passage trans. by J. H. S. Burleigh, *Augustine's Earlier Writings* (Philadelphia, 1955).

18. This passage trans. by John Mourant, *Readings in the Philosophy of Religion* (New York, 1954), p. 426.
19. Cf. Boethius' *Consolatio*, Bk. V, sec. 3, par. 2.
20. *The Christian Doctrine of God*, trans. by Olive Wyon (Philadelphia, 1964), p. 262.
21. Note: no comment here about freely doing *X*.
22. *The Christian Faith*, Pt. 1, sec. 2, par. 55. This passage trans. by W. R. Matthew (Edinburgh, 1928), p. 228.
23. Loc. cit.
24. This last seems to be the position defended by Richard Taylor in "Deliberation and Foreknowledge," *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 1 (1964).
25. The phrase "might have" as it occurs in this sentence does not express mere *logical* possibility. I am not sure how to analyze the notion of possibility involved here, but I think it is roughly the same notion as is involved when we say, "Jones might have been killed in the accident (had it not been for the fact that at the last minute he decided not to go)."

I.B.8

God's Foreknowledge and Human Free Will Are Compatible

ALVIN PLANTINGA

Alvin Plantinga was, until his retirement, professor of philosophy at the University of Notre Dame and is one of the most important figures in the fields of metaphysics, epistemology, and the philosophy of religion. His works include God and Other Minds *(1957),* The Nature of Necessity *(1974), and* God, Freedom, and Evil *(1974). In this article, Plantinga appeals to the notion of possible worlds in order to show that Pike's logic misfires and that there really is no incompatibility between divine foreknowledge and human free will.*

The last argument I wish to discuss is perhaps only mildly atheological. This is the claim that God's omniscience is incompatible with *human freedom.* Many people are inclined to think that if God is omniscient, then human beings are never free. Why? Because the idea that God is omniscient implies that at any given time God knows not only what *has* taken place and what is taking place, but also what *will* take place. He knows the future as well as the past. But now suppose He knows that Paul will perform some trivial action tomorrow—having an orange for lunch, let's say. If God knows in advance that Paul will have an orange for lunch tomorrow, then it must be the case that he'll have an orange tomorrow; and if it *must* be the case that Paul will have an orange tomorrow, then it isn't possible that Paul will *refrain* from so doing—in which case he won't be free to refrain, and hence won't be free with respect to the action of taking the orange. So if God knows in advance that a person

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will perform a certain action A, then that person isn't free with respect to that action. But if God is omniscient, then for any person and any action he performs, God knew in advance that he'd perform that action. So if God is omniscient, no one ever performs any free actions.

This argument may initially sound plausible, but the fact is it is based upon confusion. The central portion can be stated as follows:

(49) If God knows in advance that *X* will do *A*, then it must be the case that *X* will do *A*

and

(50) If it must be the case that *X* will do *A*, then *X* is not free to refrain from *A*.

From (49) and (50) it follows that if God knows in advance that someone will take a certain action, then that person isn't free with respect to that action. But (49) bears further inspection. Why should we think it's *true*? Because, we shall be told, if God knows that *X* will do *A*, it *logically follows* that *X* will do *A*: it's necessary that if God knows that *p*, then *p* is true. But this defense of (49) suggests that the latter is *ambiguous*; it may mean either

(49a) Necessarily, if God knows in advance that *X* will do *A*, then indeed *X* will do *A*

or

(49b) If God knows in advance that *X* will do *A*, then it is necessary that *X* will do *A*.

The atheological argument requires the truth of (49b); but the above defense of (49) supports only (49a), not (49b). It is indeed necessarily true that if God (or anyone else) knows that a proposition *P* is true, then *P* is true; but it simply doesn't follow that if God knows *P*, then *P* is necessarily true. *If I know that Henry is a bachelor, then Henry is a bachelor* is a necessary truth; it does not follow that if I know that Henry is a bachelor, then it is necessarily true that he is. I know that Henry is a bachelor: what follows is only that *Henry is married* is false; it doesn't follow that it is necessarily false.

So the claim that divine omniscience is incompatible with human freedom seems to be based upon confusion. Nelson Pike has suggested[1] an interesting revision of this old claim: he holds, not that human freedom is incompatible with God's being omniscient, but with God's being *essentially* omniscient. Recall … that an object *X* has a property *P* essentially if *X* has *P* in every world in which *X* exists—if, that is, it is impossible that *X* should have existed but lacked *P*. Now many theologians and philosophers have held that at least some of God's important properties are essential to him in this sense. It is plausible to hold, for example, that God is essentially omnipotent. Things could have gone differently in various ways; but if there had been no omnipotent being, then God would not have existed. *He* couldn't have been powerless or limited in power. But the same may be said for God's *omniscience*. If God is omniscient, then He is unlimited in knowledge; He knows every true proposition and believes none that are false. If He is *essentially* omniscient, furthermore, then He not only *is not* limited in knowledge; He *couldn't* have been. There is no possible world in which He exists but fails to know some truth or believes some falsehood. And Pike's claim is that this belief—the belief that God is essentially omnipotent—is inconsistent with human freedom.

To argue his case Pike considers the case of Jones who mowed his lawn at T_2—last Saturday, let's say. Now suppose that God is essentially omniscient. Then at any earlier time T_1—80 years ago, for example—God believed that Jones would mow his lawn at T_2. Since He is *essentially* omniscient, furthermore, it isn't possible that God falsely believes something; hence His having believed at T_1 that Jones would mow his lawn at T_2 entails that Jones does indeed mow his lawn at T_2. Pike's argument (in his own words) then goes as follows:

1. "God existed at T_1" entails "if Jones did *X* at T_2, God believed at T_1 that Jones would do *X* at T_2."
2. "God believes *X*" entails "*X* is true."
3. It is not within one's power at a given time to do something having a description that is logically contradictory.
4. It is not within one's power at a given time to do something that would bring it about that someone who held a certain belief at a time prior to the

time in question did not hold that belief at the time prior to the time in question.

5. It is not within one's power at a given time to do something that would bring it about that a person who existed at an earlier time did not exist at that earlier time.
6. If God existed at T_1 and if God believed at T_1 that Jones would do *X* at T_2, then if it was within Jones' power at T_2 to refrain from doing *X*, then (1) it was within Jones' power at T_2 to do something that would have brought it about that God held a false belief at T_1, or (2) it was within Jones' power at T_2 to do something which would have brought it about that God did not hold the belief He held at Tl, or (3) it was within Jones' power at T_2 to do something that would have brought it about that any person who believed at T_1 that Jones would do *X* at T_2 (one of whom was, by hypothesis, God) held a false belief and thus was not God— that is, that God (who by hypothesis existed at T_1) did not exist at T_1.
7. Alternative 1 in the consequent of item 6 is false (from 2 and 3).
8. Alternative 2 in the consequent of item 6 is false (from 4).
9. Alternative 3 in the consequent of item 6 is false (from 5).
10. Therefore, if God existed at T_1 and if God believed at T_1 that Jones would do *X* at T_2, then it was not within Jones' power at T_2 to refrain from doing *X* (from 1 and 10).[2]

What about this argument? The first two premises simply make explicit part of what is involved in the idea that God is essentially omniscient; so there is no quarreling with them. Premises 3–5 also seem correct. But that complicated premise (6) warrants a closer look. What exactly does it say? I think we can understand Pike here as follows. Consider

(51) God existed at T_1, and God believed at T_1 that Jones would do *X* at T_2, and it was within Jones' power to refrain from doing *X* at T_2.

What Pike means to say, I believe, is that either (51) entails

(52) It was within Jones' power at T_2 to do something that would have brought it about that God held a false belief at T_1

or (51) entails

(53) It was with Jones' power at T_2 to do something that would have brought it about that God did not hold the belief He did hold at T_1

or it entails

(54) It was within Jones' power at T_2 to do something that would have brought it about that anyone who believed at T_1 that Jones would do *X* at T_2 (one of whom was by hypothesis God) held a false belief and thus was not God—that is, that God (who by hypothesis existed at T_1) did not exist at T_1.

[The remainder of Pike's reasoning consists in arguing that each of (52), (53), and (54) is necessarily false, if God is essentially omniscient; hence (51) is necessarily false, if God is essentially omniscient, which means that God's being essentially omniscient is incompatible with human freedom.] Now suppose we look at these one at a time. Does (51) entail (52)? No. (52) says that it was within Jones' power to do something—namely, refrain from doing *X*—such that if he had done that thing, then God *would* have held a false belief at T_1. But this does not follow from (51). If Jones had refrained from *X*, then a proposition that God *did in fact* believe would have been false; but if Jones had refrained from *X* at T_2, then God (since He is omniscient) *would not have believed at* T_1 *that Jones will do X* at T_2. What follows from (51) is not (52) but only (52′):

(52′) It was within Jones' power to do something such that if he had done it, then a belief that God *did hold at* T_1 *would have been false*.

But (52′) is not at all paradoxical and in particular does not imply that it was within Jones' power to do something that would have brought it about that God held a false belief.

Perhaps we can see this more clearly if we look at it from the vantage point of possible worlds. We are told by (51) both that in the actual world God believes that Jones does *X* at T_2 and also that it is within Jones' power to *refrain* from doing *X* at T_2. Now consider any world *W* in which Jones *does* refrain from doing *X*. In *that* world, a belief that God holds in the actual world—in Kronos—is false. That is, if *W* had been actual, then a belief that God *does in fact* hold would have been false. But it does not follow that in *W* God holds a false belief. For it doesn't follow that if *W* had been actual, God would have believed that Jones would do *X* at T_2. Indeed, if God is essentially omniscient (omniscient in every world in which He exists) what follows is that in *W* God did not believe at T_1 that Jones will do *X* at T_2; He believed instead that Jones will *refrain* from *X*. So (51) by no means implies that it was within Jones' power to bring it about that God held a false belief at T_1.

What about

(53) It was within Jones' power at T_2 to do something that would have brought it about that God did not hold the belief He did hold at T_1?

Here the first problem is one of understanding. How are we to take this proposition? One way is this. What (53) says is that it was within Jones' power, at T_2, to do something such that if he had done it, then at T_1 God would have held a certain belief and also not held that belief. That is, (53) so understood attributes to Jones the power to bring about a contradictory state of affairs [call this interpretation (53a)]. (53a) is obviously and resoundingly false; but there is no reason whatever to think that (51) entails it. What (51) entails is rather

(53b) It was within Jones' power at T_2 to do something such that if he had done it, then God would not have held a belief that in fact he did hold.

This follows from (51) but is perfectly innocent. For suppose again that (51) is true, and consider a world *W* in which Jones refrains from doing *X*. If God is essentially omniscient, then in this world *W* He is omniscient and hence does not believe at T_1 that Jones will do *X* at T_2. So what follows from (51) is the harmless assertion that it was within Jones' power to do something such that if he had done it, then God would not have held a belief that in fact (in the actual world) He did hold. But by no stretch of the imagination does it follow that if Jones had done it, then it would have been true that God *did* hold a belief He didn't hold. Taken one way (53) is obviously false but not a consequence of (51); taken the other it is a consequence of (51) but by no means obviously false.

(54) fares no better. What it says is that it was within Jones' power at T_2 to do something such that if he had done it, then God would not have been omniscient and thus would not have been God. But this simply doesn't follow from (51). The latter does, of course, entail

(54') It was within Jones' power to do something such that if he'd done it, then anyone who believed at T_1 that Jones would do *X* at T_2 would have held a false belief.

For suppose again that (51) is in fact true, and now consider one of those worlds *W* in which Jones refrains from doing *X*. In that world

(55) Anyone who believed at T_1 that Jones will do *X* at T_2 held a false belief

is true. That is, if *W* had been actual, (55) would have been true. But again in *W* God does not believe that Jones will do *X* at T_2; (55) is true in *W* but isn't relevant to God there. If Jones had refrained from *X*, then (55) would have been true. It does not follow that God would not have been omniscient; for in those worlds in which Jones does not do *X* at T_2, God does not believe at T_1 that He does.

Perhaps the following is a possible source of confusion here. If God is *essentially* omniscient, then He is omniscient in every possible world in which He exists. Accordingly there is no possible world in which He holds a false belief. Now consider any belief that God does in fact hold. It might be tempting to suppose that if He is essentially

omniscient, then He holds that belief in every world in which He exists. But of course this doesn't follow. It is not essential to Him to hold the beliefs He does hold; what is essential to Him is the quite different property of holding only true beliefs. So if a belief is true in Kronos but false in some world *W*, then in Kronos God holds that belief and in *W* He does not.

Much more should be said about Pike's piece, and there remain many fascinating details. I shall leave them to you, however. And by way of concluding our study of natural atheology: none of the arguments we've examined has prospects for success; all are unacceptable. There are arguments we haven't considered, of course; but so far the indicated conclusion is that natural atheology doesn't work.

NOTES

1. Nelson Pike, "Divine Omniscience and Voluntary Action," *Philosophical Review* 74 (January 1965): 27.
2. Ibid., pp. 33–34.

I.B.9

Can God Be Free?

WILLIAM ROWE

William Rowe (1931–) is emeritus professor of philosophy at Purdue University and the author of numerous books and articles in the philosophy of religion, including Can God Be Free?, a book which develops at greater length the argument of the present selection. In this article, Rowe argues for the conclusion that if there is a best creatable world, then a morally perfect God would have to create that world; and if there is no best creatable world, then either there is no morally perfect God or God is not the creator.

The question, Can God Be Free?, is an important philosophical question. But before endeavoring to answer this question, there are two preliminary points that must be discussed. The first, and most important, is this: What conception of God is being presupposed when we ask whether or not God can be free? The conception of God presupposed here is the idea of God that has been dominant in the major religions of the West—Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. The dominant idea of God in these religious traditions is of a being who necessarily exists and is necessarily all-powerful, all-knowing, and perfectly good. Thus when we ask whether God exists, we here mean to be asking whether there

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is a being who necessarily exists and is necessarily all-powerful, all-knowing, and perfectly good. Of course, it is no easy matter to say in any precise way just what it is for a being to be all-powerful, all-knowing, and perfectly good. Nevertheless, we will presuppose here that some plausible account can be given of these attributes. Second, when we ask whether God can be free, we need to first ask: "free with respect to what?" Clearly, in an important sense God is not free with respect to doing evil, for if he were free with respect to doing evil he would be free to cease to be perfectly good. But if there is such a being as God he is no more free to cease to be perfectly good than he is free to cease to exist, to cease to be all-powerful, or to cease to be all-knowing. God is necessarily perfectly good, all-powerful, and all-knowing. He is, therefore, not free to cease to possess these perfections. Hence, in our question "Can God be Free?" we are not asking whether God can be free with respect to his essential attributes. For the answer to that question is clearly negative. What then are we asking about when we ask whether God can be free? We are asking whether God is free with respect to *creating a world*. And one persistent theme in the great religious traditions of the West is that God does enjoy freedom with respect to creating a world. This freedom is thought to be twofold:

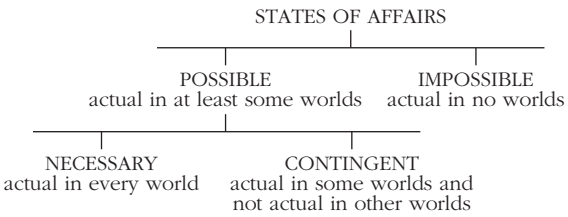
1. God was free to refrain from creating any world at all;

   and,

2. God was free to create other worlds instead of the world he did in fact create.

So, supposing there is such a being as God, the question we shall explore here is whether God was free not to create at all, and free to have created other worlds than the one he has created. If we assume with Leibniz that among possible worlds there is one that is best, it is difficult to see how the best possible being (God) would be free to create some world other than the best. But before we pursue the question of whether God must create the best possible world, it will be helpful here to pause in our discussion and try to get clearer about the notion of a possible world and some related concepts.

Often we think that although things are a certain way they didn't have to be that way, they could have been different. Suppose we were late getting to class today. We believe, however, that things could have turned out differently. Had we not stopped on the way to chat with a friend, for example, we almost certainly would have been on time. So, what we may call the *actual* state of affairs, our being late for class, need not have been actual at all. Here then we make a distinction between two possible states of affairs—ways things might be—and note that although one is actual (our being late for class today), the other (our being on time for class) was possible, it could have been actual instead. The link between possible states of affairs that are not actual and our common ways of thinking about the world lies in our frequent belief that things could have been otherwise. Whenever we correctly think that things could have gone in a way different from the way they actually went, we are distinguishing between some possible state of affairs that is actual (the way things did go) and some possible state of affairs that didn't become actual (the way things could have gone but didn't). Every state of affairs that is actual is clearly a *possible* state of affairs, one that, logically speaking, could be actual. But, as we've seen in the example of our not being late for class, possible states of affairs may fail to be actualized. Perhaps, then, we should think of a possible state of affairs as one that could be actual and could fail to be actual. But this view overlooks a useful distinction philosophers draw between a state of affairs that is *possible* and a state of affairs that is *contingent*. A contingent state of affairs is a possible state of affairs that may be actual or fail to be actual. Since a possible state of affairs is one that could be actual, if it is also such that it could fail to be actual (like, for example, our being on time for class today), then it is a *contingent* state of affairs. It can be actual and can fail to be actual. But some states of affairs are such that although they are possible, and therefore can be actual, they cannot fail to be actual, they *must be* actual. These possible states of affairs are necessary,



not contingent. Consider the state of affairs consisting in the number three's being larger than the number two. Certainly, this state of affairs is possible—it's not like there being an object that is both square and round, an impossible state of affairs. So, it is a possible state of affairs. But is it contingent? Could it have failed to be actual. No. The number three's being larger than the number two is not just possible, it is also necessary, it obtains in every possible world. So, while many possible states of affairs are contingent in that they obtain in some worlds but not in others,[1] many possible states of affairs are necessary, they obtain in every possible world. The Diagram above shows the way philosophers often distinguish among states of affairs.

In order to grasp the idea of a *possible world* it is helpful to consider two important relations among states of affairs: *inclusion* and *preclusion*. A state of affairs S *includes* a state of affairs S^* just in case it is impossible that S should obtain and S^* not obtain. (For example, *Gordie Howe's being the greatest hockey player of the 20th century* includes *someone's being the greatest hockey player of the 20th century*.) S precludes S^* just in case it is impossible that S obtain and S^* obtain. (So, *Gordie Howe's being the greatest hockey player of the 20th century* precludes *Wayne Gretsky's being the greatest hockey player of the 20th century*.) Following Alvin Plantinga, we can now say what it is for a state of affairs to be *maximal* and, therefore, a *possible world*. "A State of affairs S is … *maximal* if for every state of affairs S', S includes S' or S precludes S'. And a possible world is simply a possible state of affairs that is maximal."[2]

Having seen that a possible world is a maximal state of affairs, we can now consider what it is for a possible world to be better than some other possible world. Some states of affairs may be said to be intrinsically better than other states of affairs. For example, following Samuel Clarke we may say that *there being innocent beings who do not suffer eternally* is necessarily better than *there being innocent beings who do suffer eternally*. Of the second of these two states of affairs we would say that it is a bad state of affairs, something that ought not to be. But the first state of affairs is not a bad state of affairs. The basic idea here is that some states of affairs possess intrinsic value. That is, they may be intrinsically good, intrinsically bad, or intrinsically neutral (neither good nor bad). They are intrinsically good by virtue of containing intrinsically good qualities such as happiness, love, enjoyment, beauty, good intentions, or the exercise of virtue.[3] And states of affairs are intrinsically bad by virtue of containing intrinsically bad qualities such as unhappiness, hate, dissatisfaction, ugliness, bad intentions, or the exercise of vice. Still other states of affairs, may contain little or no intrinsic value. *There being stones*, for example; is a state of affairs that contains little if any intrinsic value. Such states of affairs are, we might say, intrinsically neutral. But *someone's being happy*, for example, is an intrinsically good state of affairs, while *someone's being unhappy* is an intrinsically bad state of affairs.

One might infer from the preceding paragraph that if God exists, the world he creates would not include any bad states of affairs.[4] However, supposing it would be in God's power to create such a world, there are at least two reasons to question this inference. First, as theodicists have argued since the time of Augustine, freedom of the will, if not itself a great intrinsic good, appears to be indispensable for some of the very important goods we know of—freely given love, freely sacrificing for the well-being of others, freely chosen acts of charity, etc. Indeed, from the point of view of the creator it might well be uninteresting to create beings who are programmed from the start to worship God, to honor him, to do good to others. From the perspective of the creator it may well be better to have beings who can freely choose to love and worship or not to love and worship, for love and worship that is freely given is of much greater value than love and worship that is compelled. But if God

does choose to create a world with creatures free to do good or evil, the world may include evil as a result of some of their free choices.[5] Second, there is a principle, *the Principle of Organic Unities*,[6] held by a number of philosophers from Leibniz to the present day. According to this principle, the intrinsic value of a whole may not be equal to the sum of the intrinsic value of each of its parts. Compare, for example, *Jones's feeling happy upon contemplating torturing an innocent human being* with *Jones's feeling unhappy upon contemplating torturing an innocent human being*. The difference between these two states of affairs is that the first contains an intrinsically good state (Jones's feeling happy) as a part, whereas the second contains an intrinsically bad state (Jones feeling unhappy) as a part. But surely the first state as a whole is a much worse state of affairs than the second. So, while a given part of a whole may be intrinsically good (Jones's feeling happy), the whole of which it is a part may be worse for the presence of the good part than it would be were a certain bad part (Jones's feeling unhappy) to be in its place. So, for all we know, the best world may include some intrinsically bad states of affairs. It hardly follows from this consideration that there may be tears in heaven, but it does suggest that we should hesitate to conclude too much from the mere presence of some tears on earth. For, as we've seen, a state of affairs that constitutes an *organic unity* may be better for the presence of a bad part than it would be were the bad part replaced by a good part. So, again, we must note that a possible world with some bad parts may be better than a possible world with no bad parts.

We've seen that the good-making qualities (happiness, love, enjoyment, beauty, good intentions, an exercise of virtue, etc.) figure in states of affairs (e.g., someone's being happy, someone's loving another, etc.) that are intrinsically good; whereas the bad-making qualities (unhappiness, hate, dissatisfaction, ugliness, bad intentions, or the exercise of vice) figure in states of affairs (e.g., someone's being unhappy, someone's hating another, etc.) that are intrinsically bad. It is important, however, to distinguish the *intrinsic* value of someone's being unhappy from the *extrinsic* value of someone's being unhappy. The intrinsic value of a state of affairs is inherent in that state of affairs—it necessarily belongs to that state of affairs no matter what that state of affairs is a part of or what the circumstances are in which it occurs. But the extrinsic value of a state of affairs may change from one set of circumstances to another. Sometimes, for example, a person's being unhappy is productive of good, in which case it may be a good thing (i.e., it may be extrinsically good) for that person to be unhappy. But that doesn't affect the matter of the intrinsic value of someone's being unhappy. For it is a good thing that the person was unhappy only in the sense of what that person's unhappiness leads to, or is a necessary part of, not in terms of its own intrinsic value. Unhappiness, in itself, is always bad. In addition, we should not confuse the intrinsic value of a state of affairs with the intrinsic value of a state of affairs of which it is a part. As we've noted someone's being unhappy on contemplating the undeserved suffering of others is a better state of affairs than someone's being happy on contemplating the undeserved suffering of others. But that truth is entirely compatible with someone's being happy necessarily being *intrinsically better than* someone's being unhappy. For the intrinsic value of the part, someone's being unhappy, must not be confused with the intrinsic value of the whole (someone's being unhappy on contemplating the undeserved suffering of others) of which it is a part.

Since a possible world just is a *maximal* state of affairs, its value will reflect the values of the states of affairs contained in it. So, possible worlds themselves will be intrinsically good, intrinsically bad, or intrinsically neutral. In addition one possible world will be intrinsically better than, equal to, or worse than another possible world. And, as Leibniz noted, it is by knowing the intrinsic values of the possible worlds that God is guided in his choice of a world to create.

We are now in a position to consider seriously our question: Is God free with respect to creating a world? Assuming that God exists, this question falls into two parts: (1) Was God free to refrain from creating any world at all?; (2) Was God free to

create other worlds instead of the world he did in fact create? Let's begin with our second question. We earlier noted that possible worlds can be ranked according to their value all the way from bad worlds, to neutral worlds, and then to good worlds. Suppose then that God chooses to display his goodness and power in creating a world. We can imagine God, as it were, surveying all these worlds and deciding which one to create. He considers all the bad worlds, the neutral worlds (neither good nor bad) and all the good worlds. Let's suppose, along with Leibniz and Samuel Clarke, that the series of increasingly good worlds culminates in the best possible world, a world than which no possible world is as good or better. Similarly, we can suppose that the series of increasingly bad worlds culminates in a world than which no possible world is as bad or worse.[7] Faced with choosing from among these two series of worlds the world he shall create, it is obvious that an infinitely good being would not, indeed *could not*, create one of the bad worlds. Which good world would he then create? Again, it seems obvious that he would create the very best world, the best of all possible worlds. As Leibniz points out since "to do less good than one could is to be lacking in wisdom or in goodness," the most perfect understanding "*cannot fail* to act in the most perfect way, and consequently to choose the best."[8] In a well-known essay[9] Robert Adams has argued on the basis of the doctrine of divine grace that God would not be morally obligated to create the best world that he can. But even if his argument is successful, it still may be necessary for God to create the best world he can. It just won't be his moral duty.[10] In short, his creating the best world may be a supererogatory act, the morally best act he can do, even if his failure to do it would not be a violation of his moral duty. And it appears to be inconceivable that a supremely perfect being would act to bring about less good than he can. On the assumption that God (the supremely perfect being) exists and that there is a best, creatable world, we've reached the conclusion that God is neither free not to create a world nor free to create a world less than the best creatable world. Indeed, God would of necessity create the best of the creatable worlds, leaving us with no basis for thanking him, or praising him for creating the world he does. For given that God exists and that there is a best creatable world, God's nature as an omnipotent, omniscient, perfectly good being would require him to create that best world. Doing less than the best he can do—create the best creatable world—would be inconsistent with his being the perfect being he is.

But what if there is no best world? What if, as Aquinas thought to be true, for each creatable world there is a better world that God can create instead?[11] In short, there is no best world. Here, I believe, in supposing that God exists and creates a world when for every creatable world there is a better creatable world, we are supposing a state of affairs that is simply impossible. I'm not suggesting here that there is an impossibility in the idea that God exists. Nor am I suggesting that there is an impossibility in the idea that for every creatable world there is a better creatable world. I am suggesting that there is an impossibility in the idea both that God exists and creates a world and that for every creatable world there is a better creatable world. For whatever world God would create he would be doing less good than he can do. And it is impossible for God to do less good than he can. The underlying principle yielding the conclusion that there is an impossibility in the idea both that God creates a world and that for every creatable world there is a better creatable world is the following:

> If an omniscient being creates a world when there is a better world it could create, then it would be possible for there be a being morally better than it.

Since God is a being than which it is not possible for there to be a morally better being, it is clear, given both the principle just cited and the no best world hypothesis, that God could not exist and be the creator of a world. For any being that exists and creates a world when there is a better world it could have created instead is, according to the principle cited above, a being than which a morally better being is possible, and, therefore,

not the best possible being. So the issue now before us is whether this principle (if an omniscient being creates a world when there is a better world it could create, then it would be possible for there to be a being morally better than it) is indeed true. My own view is that the principle in question will appear to many to be plausible, if not self-evident. For if an omniscient being creates a world when it could have created a better world, then that being has done something less good than it could do (create a better world). But any being who knowingly does something (all things considered) less good than it could do falls short of being the best possible being. So, unless we find some reason to reject the principle stated above or a reason to reject the line of argument supporting it, we are at the very least within our rights to accept it and use it as a principle in our reasoning. But the result of using this principle in our reasoning about God and the world is just this: if the actual world is not the best world that an omnipotent, omniscient being could create, God does not exist. God does not exist because were he to exist and create a world when there is a better world he could have created instead, then he would be a being than which a better being is possible. For he himself would have been a better being had he created a better world. But since it is not possible for any being (including God) to be better than God (the best possible being) in fact is, the world God has created must be the very best world he could have created. Therefore, if God does exist and creates a world W, W is the very best among the worlds that God could have created. W is the best creatable world. Hence, we see the problem of no best creatable world. For if for every creatable world there is a better creatable world and our principle is true, God does not exist. What then can be said against the principle: if an omniscient being creates a world when there is a better world it could create, then it would be possible for there to be a being morally better than it?

We may begin by considering the view set forth by Norman Kretzmann in his perceptive study of Aquinas's view of creation. In the course of his discussion of Aquinas, Kretzmann concludes with Aquinas that for any world God might create there is a better world he could create. (His disagreement with Aquinas concerns only whether God is free not to create at all.) Kretzmann's second conclusion—the one presently of interest to us—is that it is a *mistake* to think (as I do) that if God exists and cannot avoid choosing something less good than he could choose, then God cannot be essentially perfectly good. And he proceeds to explain why he thinks it is a mistake.

> Like Aquinas, I think that the logical truth that God's actions conform to the principle of noncontradiction entails no limit on his power. And if it would be a violation of the principle of noncontradiction for God to create a world better than any other world he could create, then a fortiori that logical truth which does not diminish his power also leaves his *goodness* undiminished. God's being that than which nothing better can be conceived of cannot entail his producing a world than which none better can be conceived of. No matter which possible world he actualizes, there must be infinitely many possible worlds better than the actual world in some respect or other.[12]

Kretzmann relies on what he takes to be an analogy or parallel between power and goodness. His idea is this. Since we agree that failure to bring about what is logically impossible does not imply any limit on God's power, we should also agree that failure to bring about what is logically impossible does not diminish God's goodness. Given that there is no best possible world, Kretzmann points out that it is logically impossible for God to create a world better than any other world he could create. So, the fact that God does not create such a world diminishes neither his power nor his goodness. And that being so, Kretzmann sees no difficulty in God's being perfectly good and creating a world less good that other creatable worlds.

Perhaps we can view Kretzmann as appealing to the following principle:

A. If S is a logically impossible state of affairs, then the fact that a being does not bring about S does not entail that the being in question lacks power or perfect goodness.

This principle strikes me as self-evidently true. The fact that God fails to do what *logically cannot be done* is a bad reason to think that God is morally imperfect or lacking in power. On Aquinas's view it is logically impossible for God to create the best possible world. And since he cannot do that, the fact that he doesn't do it, as Kretzmann notes, implies no imperfection in God. I entirely agree with Kretzmann's point on this. But the fact that there is a bad reason to conclude that God is not perfectly good does not mean that there is no good reason to conclude that God is not perfectly good. And the fact that God fails to do what *logically can be done* may be a good reason to conclude that God is not perfectly good.[13] The principle that provides this good reason is the principle we've already introduced and will now refer to as "Principle B."

B. If an omniscient being creates a world when there is a better world that it could have created, then it is possible that there exists a being morally better than it.[14]

If B is true, as I think it is, and if it is also true that

C. If a being is essentially perfectly good then it is not possible that there exist a being morally better than it,

then if it is true that for any creatable world there is another creatable world better than it, it is also true that *no* omnipotent, omniscient being who creates a world is essentially perfectly good. Moreover, if we add to this Kretzmann's first conclusion that a perfectly good, omnipotent, omniscient being *must* create, it will follow that there is no omnipotent, omniscient, perfectly good being.

Suppose Aquinas and Kretzmann are right in believing that for any creatable world there is another creatable world that is better man it. Our second objection emerges when we consider what the theistic God is to do in this situation. If some creatable world is better than any world God alone inhabits, then, on my principle B (slightly extended) it appears that God must create some world. On the other hand, as we've just seen, on my principle B it also follows that he cannot create a world if some other creatable world is better. "So," the objector now concludes, "on your principle B it follows that God must create a world and also must not create a world. Surely, then, since your principle leads to a contradiction, however plausible principle B sounds, we must reject it."

My response to this objection is that on the supposition that for every creatable world there is another world that is better than it, principle B does not lead to a contradiction. What principle B leads to is the conclusion that there is no essentially omnipotent, omniscient, perfectly good being.

But is principle B true? Daniel and Frances Howard-Snyder have endeavored to refute principle B by inviting us to consider three hypothetical world creators: Jove, Juno and Thor.[15] They suppose Jove to be an omnipotent, omniscient being who is confronted with an infinite number of increasingly better possible worlds from which to select one to create. Jove, they suggest, decides to create one of these good worlds by using a randomizing device. Being good, Jove has no interest in creating a world that isn't good.[16] Each of the infinite number of good worlds is assigned a positive natural number beginning with "1" for the least good world, "2" for a slightly better world, and so on. Jove uses the randomizing device to pick one of these good worlds, and, as a result, world no. 777 is created. Now, of course, Jove could have created a better world. But the Howard-Snyders think that it does not follow from this fact that Jove is *morally surpassable*. That is, from the fact that Jove could have created a better world than the world he did create (no. 777), they think that it does not follow that it is *logically possible* for there to have existed a being with a degree of moral goodness in excess of Jove's.[17]

In a response to their article[18] I suggested the following:

> In support of their view the Howard-Snyders, invite us to consider other possible omnipotent, omniscient[19] world creators, Juno and Thor, and argue that although they produce morally better worlds than Jove, they are not morally better creators. Juno does just what Jove did but her randomizing machine happens to select a better world, no. 999. Thor doesn't use a randomizing machine but selects world no. 888 over Jove's world no. 777 because he sees that it is better and prefers creating no. 888 to creating any lesser world. Even though Juno ends up producing a better world than Jove, the Howard-Snyder's are clearly right in viewing Jove and Juno as morally equivalent. For had her randomizing machine hit on world 777, rather than world 999, Juno would have created world 777. So, it was blind luck, not a higher standard of selection, that resulted in Juno's selection of world 999. But what of Thor? From their discussion it would seem that Thor is morally superior to Jove and Juno, for it looks as though Thor's degree of moral goodness is such that he is not prepared to settle for world no. 777 *unless* he is unable to create a better world. But the fact that Jove intentionally included worlds numbered 1–777 as possibilities for selection by his randomizing machine shows that Jove is morally prepared to settle for any of the worlds from 1–777 *even though* he is able to create a better world.[20] So, it does appear that, other things being equal, Thor is a morally better being than Jove.[21]

In a subsequent article[22] against principle B, the Howard-Snyders question my account of Thor, suggesting that it is incoherent. They wonder what principle or reason Thor acts on. They say:

> For example, suppose Thor's reason is this: worlds numbered 888 and higher are better than worlds numbered 887 and lower. (This seems to be the reason that Rowe has Thor act on. See the quotation above.) This reason relies on the general principle that if world w is better than world w-1, then w-1 is unacceptable for creation. Any being who accepted an instance of this principle when it involved the world no. 888 but did not accept other instances of it would be irrational, and hence not essentially omniscient. Any being who accepted the principle in its full generality would be led never to create, given (as we are supposing) that for each world there is a better.[23]

This leads them to suggest that my account of Thor is *incoherent*. But I believe it is clear from my article that I do not have Thor act on the principle "don't create if there is a better creatable world," for such a principle, given that for any world there is a better, can only result in Thor's not creating any world at all. Since Thor is *omniscient* and does in fact create world 888, it logically follows that he cannot act on the principle that they suggest I have him act on. Of course, while Thor, given his infinite intelligence, cannot act on such a principle, it doesn't follow that with finite intelligence I cannot make the mistake of attributing to Thor such a principle of action when he creates world 888. So, what principle do I have Thor act on? I believe that the principle on which Thor acts is very much like the principle on which Jove acts. Let's look again at Jove. Some worlds he sees as not good enough to be acceptable as candidates for creation. The worlds that are acceptable to him in terms of his own degree of goodness are then ordered in terms of increasing goodness, and one of them, world 777, is randomly selected for creation. Thor, as I have described him, does pretty much the same thing. The difference is that worlds 1–800 are insufficiently good to be acceptable to him as candidates for creation, given that there are

better worlds he can create. The worlds that are acceptable to him in terms of his own degree of goodness are then ordered in terms of increasing goodness and one of them, world 888, is randomly selected for creation. I conclude that the description the Howard-Snyder's give of Jove is logically consistent with there being a being who is better than Jove. And the story we have told about Thor is consistent and, if true, gives us reason to believe that Thor is a better being than Jove.

Can we state the principles on which both Jove and Thor act, and explain how it is that although they act on the same principles, they produce worlds that differ in their degree of goodness? I suggest that Jove and Thor may act on the following principles:

P1. Do not create any world that is not a good world.

P2. Do not create any good world whose goodness is less than what one judges as *acceptable*, given that one can create a better world.

Clearly, both Thor and Jove act in accordance with P1 and P2. Neither is prepared to create a less than good world. And neither is prepared to create a good world whose degree of goodness is less than what he judges as acceptable in a world, given that he can create a better world. The difference between them is this. Jove's standard of goodness in world creating is such that he is prepared to settle for *any* good world even if there is a better that he can create. Thor, however, has a higher standard. He is not prepared to create any of the good worlds from W1 to W800 *provided* there is a better world that he can create. Of course, Thor's allegiance to P2 does not preclude him absolutely from creating, say, W777. It prevents him only on the condition that there is a better world he can create. Gala apples taste much better than Jonathan apples. I know that, and my standard of apple selection is never to come home with Jonathan apples when Gala are available. But that doesn't mean I won't or can't select Jonathan apples when Gala apples are not available. A good apple, even if it's a Jonathan, is better than no apple at all.

In their article the Howard-Snyders suppose that it cannot be that Thor and Jove act on the *same* principle. They suppose that if my story about Thor being better than Jove is correct then Thor must be acting on a *higher principle* than the principle on which Jove acts. And, since there will be worlds better than the world Thor creates, they then conclude that "there is another principle which treats as unacceptable some of the worlds which were treated as acceptable by Thor's principle, and that other principle is such that there is a third principle which treats as unacceptable some of the worlds which were treated as acceptable by the second, and so on, *ad infinitum*." Lacking a proof of the impossibility of such an infinite array of world-creating principles, they say,

> It seems odd to say the least that there should be infinitely many such general principles. At least we see no reason to accept that there are.[24]

As I've tried to make clear above, the story I tell is quite consistent even if there is no such infinite progression of world-creating principles. Principles P1 and P2 will suffice so long as for any being in the position of Jove or Thor there is another being whose degree of goodness is such that its application of P1 and P2 results in the selection of a better world to create. And if we allow, as the Howard-Snyders do, an infinite number of possible worlds beginning with Jove's good world W1, why not allow the possibility of an infinite series of good world creators each being better than the preceding one. Indeed, why not allow, if needed, an infinite number of different but related world-creating principles. But, as I've suggested, I don't see the necessity of supposing that my story is coherent only if there is an infinite number of distinct world-creating principles. But suppose an infinite number of such principles is required. Perhaps it is odd at that there should be infinitely many world-creating principles. But even if it is odd, we should note that oddness and impossibility are far different matters. Many extremely odd things are logically possible. And if it is logically possible that there is an absolutely infinite number of increasingly better

worlds, why should it be impossible that there be an infinite number of principles of world creation? In any case, however, I see no reason to think that there need be an infinite number of such principles in order for the story of Thor and Jove to be coherent. Indeed, I have suggested that Jove and Thor can act on the very same principles. Moreover, since it is possible that there be world creators whose degrees of goodness increasingly exceed Thor's, it is possible that the very same principles would result in increasingly better beings creating increasingly better worlds than Thor's world.

The fundamental question at issue in the discussion concerning Jove and Thor is this: Is it logically possible both that for any creatable world there is a better creatable world and that there exists an omnipotent, omniscient, perfectly good being who creates one of these creatable worlds? My position is that it is not possible that both should be true.

Why do I hold this position? I hold it because, as I've stated earlier, I think the following [Principle B] is necessarily true.

> B. If an omniscient being creates a world when it could have created a better world, then it is possible that there be a being morally better than it.[25]

By telling their story about Jove, the Howard-Snyders hoped to cast doubt on Principle B. I believe that my alternative story about Thor undermines their attempt. Where does this leave us? I assert that B is necessarily true. Many theists assert the following [Principle A] to be true.

> A. It is logically possible both that for any creatable world there is a better creatable world and that there exists an omnipotent, omniscient, perfectly good being who creates one of these worlds.

Both of us cannot be right. But how can we hope to settle the question of who has the more plausible position? Are we simply at a stalemate, a situation where neither can show the other's position to be implausible without employing as a premise one of the principles that is at issue in the debate? I believe that the Howard-Snyders have endeavored to advance the debate in a way that does not beg the question. They suppose both that Jove is an omnipotent, omniscient creator of a good world (# 777) and that for every creatable world there is a better, but leave as an open question whether Jove's goodness can be unsurpassable. The question then is whether we have some good reason to think that an omnipotent, omniscient creator of a better world than # 777 may be better than Jove. As we've seen, the answer depends on the *reason* such a being has for creating a better world than # 777. If such a being (their Juno), given her degree of goodness, judges as acceptable for creation the *same* worlds as Jove, then the fact that her randomizer selects world # 999 for creation gives us no reason at all to think that Juno is a better being than Jove, even though she ends up creating a better world than does Jove. But if, like Thor, the being's degree of goodness is such that he judges that worlds of lesser value than # 800 are unacceptable candidates for creation, then the fact that its randomizer selects world # 800 or higher gives us reason to think that Thor is a better being than Jove. Of course, if we had simply concluded that Jove's goodness is surpassable because Jove could have created a world better than # 777, this would have been to beg the question at issue. For we would have been appealing to Principle B to rule out Jove being an unsurpassably good being. But no such appeal was made in reasoning to the conclusion that Thor is a better being than Jove.

Principle B, if true, does not refute theism. But if both Principle B and theism are true, then the world we live in is an unsurpassably good world—no possible world that an omnipotent being could have created would be better than the actual world. I suspect that part of the motivation for the theist to accept the view that there is no best creatable world is that the alternative seems (1) to limit severely God's freedom in creating, and (2) to leave the theist with the burden of defending the Leibnizian thesis that this world, with all its evil, is a world than which a better creatable world is not even a logical possibility.

Thomas Morris, like the Howard-Snyders and Kretzmann, thinks that among the worlds creatable by God there is no best world. He notes two difficulties in the Liebnizian idea that there is a best possible world. First, he points out that some philosophers are doubtful that there is a single scale on which all creaturely values can be weighted so as to determine what world possesses the maximum amount of value. "Some world A might be better than rival world B in some respects, but with B surpassing A in others, and the relevant values not such that they could be summed over and compared overall."[26] In short, if some valuable states of affairs are incommensurable with other valuable states of affairs, it may be impossible to rank the states of affairs in terms of one being better than, worse than, or equal to the other. And if that should be so, we could have two worlds such that neither is better than the other, worse than the other, or equal in value with the other. Second, Morris notes that a number of philosophers have thought that for any world containing "a certain number of goods, *n*, there is always conceivable a greater world with $n + 1$ goods, or good creatures. So, on the simplest grounds of additive value alone, it seems impossible there could be a single best possible world. And without this, of course, the Leibnizian demand collapses."[27] But Morris's main concern lies elsewhere. Like the Howard-Snyders and Kretzmann, Morris wants to show that there is no incoherence in the idea of a *perfectly good* creator creating a world when there is *no best world* for that being to create.

> For just as it seems initially very natural to suppose that a superlatively good, wise, and powerful being will produce only an unsurpassable perfect creation, so likewise it can seem every bit as natural to suppose that an incoherence or impossibility discovered in the latter notion indicates an incoherence or impossibility buried within the former.[28]

Since it is just that incoherence we have been arguing for, it is important to note Morris's efforts to show that the incoherence in question is imagined, and not real. Noting that Quinn holds that in the no best world scenario a creator of a world is such that "it is possible that there is an agent morally better than he is, namely an omnipotent moral agent who actualizes one of those morally better worlds," and Rowe holds "if a being were to create a world when there is a morally better world it could create, then it would be possible for there to be a being morally better than it, "Morris states that these views are "absolutely unacceptable to traditional theists, for whom both perfection and creation are important ideas."[29]

In developing his objection to the views expressed by Quinn and Rowe, Morris introduces a useful thesis—*the Expression Thesis: The goodness of an agent's actions is expressive of the agent's goodness*. I'm inclined to take something like this thesis as underlying the claim expressed in Principle B: If an omniscient being creates a world when it could have created a better world, then it is possible that there be a being morally better than it. Of course, the expression thesis depends on what Morris may well have supposed: that the agent's motive for performing the good action is to bring about a good state of affairs. Without supposing that motive we have no reason to think that the goodness of an agent's action—measured in terms of the quality of its result—is expressive of the agent's goodness. But what are we to say of a being who performs an action that he knows will bring about less good, all things considered, than he could have brought about by performing a slightly different action? In this case, applying the expression thesis, we should conclude that the agent's degree of goodness is something less that it could be. For the agent has acted to bring about less good than he knew would have been brought about by his performing a slightly different action. But clearly, if an agent knowingly acts to bring about less good overall than he could have brought about by performing a slightly different action that was in his power to perform, that agent's degree of moral goodness is somewhat less than it could be. And it is precisely this point that underlies the judgment that in the no best world scenario it is impossible for the creator to be perfectly good. For, as we saw in the discussion

of the Howard-Snyders story about Jove, Juno, and Thor, when a being creates a world that is less good than another world it could have created, the world it creates will satisfy its standard of world-creating, even given that it could create a better world. But then it is possible that there should be a being whose degree of goodness is such that it will not create that less good world given that it is able to create a better world. So, again I conclude that if a being creates a world when it could have created a better world, then it is possible that there should be a being morally better than it. And from this it follows that if for every creatable world there is a better creatable world, there is no absolutely perfect being who creates a world. And since it is better to create a good world rather than not create any world at all, on the no best creatable world scenario there is no maximally perfect being.

Morris's basic mistake, I believe, is his view, shared by Kretzmann, that to hold, as I do, that if there is no best world for a being to create then no being can create a world and be a being than which a better creator is impossible, just is to hold God accountable for not doing what is logically impossible to be done—creating the best world. Thus Morris writes:

> If you and I do less well than we're capable of doing, then those around us may conclude, and may sometimes justifiably conclude, that we are not at the level of goodness that could be exemplified. But failing to do the best you can is a flaw or manifests an incompleteness in moral character in this way only if doing the best you can is at least a logical possibility. If doing the best he can in creating a world is for God an impossibility,… then not doing his best in creating cannot be seen as a flaw or as manifesting an incompleteness in the character of God. The notion of a perfect expression of an unsurpassable character would then itself be an incoherence.[30]

Of course, if it is logically impossible for there to be a best world, then God's not creating the best possible world does not count against his perfect goodness. Nowhere do I suggest that it does. What counts against God's perfect goodness (specifically, his moral perfection) is his creating a world when he could have created a world better than it. The charge is not that a being who fails to do what is impossible to be done (create the best world when there is no best world to be created) is lacking in perfect goodness. The charge is that a being who creates a world when it could have created a better world is less man supremely perfect. And the plain fact is that if there is no best creatable world then God, if he creates a world, will create a world than which he could have created a better world.[31] Morris simply fails to address the issue at stake here.

It is important to distinguish three different principles:

a. Failing to do the best one can is a defect only if doing the best one can is possible for one to do.

b. Failing to do better than one did is a defect only if doing better than one did is possible for one to do.

c. Failing to do better than one did is a defect only if doing the best one can is possible for one to do.

Both (a) and (b) are true. But (c) is not true. And it is (c) that Morris needs to make his argument work.

Suppose, for the moment, that you are an omnipotent, omniscient being and are contemplating the infinite series of numbers: 1, 2, 3, 4, etc., etc. You are also contemplating the infinite series of creatable worlds containing creatures that are overall good worlds, as opposed both to bad worlds and neutral worlds—worlds that are neither good nor bad. You let each of the numbers represent the overall degree of good that a possible world possesses, where "1" represents the least good world—a world with no pain perhaps, and just one momentary experience of pleasure on the part of some lower animal. "2" represents the possible world that is one degree better than the world 1, "3" represents the possible world that is one degree

better than the world 2, etc., etc. Being omniscient you see that there is no best possible world for you to create. Just as the series of natural numbers increases infinitely so does the series of increasingly better worlds from which you will select one to create. Seeing that there is no best possible world to create, you realize that no matter how good a world you create there will be better worlds you could have chosen to create instead of it. Glancing at world 1, and comparing it with world 1000, you see that world 1000 is significantly better than world 1, just as you see that world 1,000,000 is significantly better than world 1000. Nevertheless, in spite of noticing the enormous disparity between the least good world and the goodness of some worlds numerically much greater, you decide that you will create the *least good* world and proceed to actualize world 1. Isn't it obvious that in deliberately choosing to create the *least good* of the infinite series of increasingly better possible, creatable worlds you display a degree of goodness in world-creating that is inconsistent with *perfect goodness*?

> "Wait!" you will say. "You judge me unfairly. I see that if I could have created a maximally good world I might be subject to some criticism here for creating a world so limited in value as world 1. But there is no maximally good world. So clearly I'm *perfectly justified* in creating the *poorest* in the infinite series of increasingly better worlds. You should not have any doubts at all about my being *perfectly good*!"

Surely this defense of one's "perfect goodness" is woefully inadequate. A perfectly good being cannot, consistent with its perfect goodness, consciously elect to create the least good world when there is an infinite number of increasingly better worlds as available for creation as the least good world. But it is just this conclusion that Morris's position would require us to accept. Since the conclusion is clearly false, if not absurd, we should reject it. Instead, we should say that the degree of goodness an omniscient being possesses is reflected in the degree of goodness in the world it creates. And what this reasoning leads us to is the conclusion Leibniz reached: An unsurpassably good, omnipotent, omniscient creator will create an unsurpassably good world. Indeed, unsurpassable goodness in an omnipotent, omniscient world-creator is consistent only with the creation of an unsurpassably good world. For there is an impossibility in the idea both that there exists an infinite series of increasingly better creatable worlds and that there also exists an unsurpassably good, omnipotent, omniscient being who creates one of these worlds.

The conclusion we've just reached points to an incompatibility between the necessary existence of the theistic God and the *possibility* Morris embraces: that the series of increasingly better creatable worlds goes on to infinity. But how could a mere possibility be inconsistent with the existence of the theistic God? After all, isn't it one thing to conclude that God's infinite perfection precludes his actualizing a bad possible world, and quite another thing to conclude that God's infinite perfection precludes there even being such a thing as a bad possible world? And if God's existence doesn't rule out bad possible worlds, why should it rule out an infinite series of increasingly better possible worlds? The answer to these questions consists in seeing that if God necessarily exists and is necessarily such that whatever world is actual can be so only by virtue of his creating it, then since it is impossible for God (an absolutely perfect being) to create a bad world, there cannot be any bad worlds. In short, given God's necessary perfections and necessary existence, the only possible, non-actual worlds are worlds God *can create*. And once we see that given God's necessary existence and necessary perfections no world creatable by God can be a bad world, we are well on our way to seeing that it is likewise impossible that there should be an unending series of increasingly better creatable worlds.

Morris nicely captures the essence of the view I've just described by noting that such a God "is a delimiter of possibilities."

> If there is a being who exists necessarily, and is necessarily omnipotent, omniscient,

> and good, then many states of affairs which otherwise would represent genuine possibilities, and by all non-theistic tests of logic and semantics do represent possibilities, are strictly impossible in the strongest sense. In particular, worlds containing certain sorts or amounts of disvalue or evil are metaphysically ruled out by the nature of God, divinely precluded from the realm of real possibility.[32]

Return now to our earlier contention that possible worlds include very good worlds, neutral worlds, and very bad worlds. In addition we suggested that just as for every good world there is a better possible world, so too for every bad world there is a possible world whose degree of badness is greater. Morris will allow that such worlds are "conceivable." But since he holds that God is a *delimiter of possibilities* and that it is impossible for God to create a world that is a bad world, the bad worlds we conceive of are not, at least for the theist, *genuinely possible*. For the only way such worlds could be genuinely possible is for it to be possible for God to create them. But God's perfect nature necessarily precludes him from creating such worlds. Therefore, such worlds aren't really possible all things considered.

Morris's general point here strikes me as sound. If p is necessarily true and q is inconsistent with p, then, even though we can conceive of q and q seems to us to be a paradigm case of a genuine possibility, q isn't really possible at all. So, if there is a necessarily perfect being who necessarily exists, then even though we can *conceive* of a bad world, that bad world is really not a *possible world* provided that for a world to be actual it must be actualized by the necessarily perfect being. Consider, for example, a world in which nearly all the sentient beings have lives so full of suffering that it would be better had they never existed. Such a world is a bad world. Is this world, so understood, a possible world? It certainly seems to be. But given that a possible world can be actual only if it is created by a necessarily perfect being, and such a being necessarily exists, then that world really isn't a possible world, it only seems to be possible. Of course, what is sauce for the goose (Morris) is sauce for the gander (Rowe). If this bad world, which certainly seems to be possible, really is a possible world, then it is simply *impossible* that there is a necessarily perfect being who is necessarily the creator of any world that is actual. Which then are we more sure of: that some bad world is genuinely possible or that there necessarily exists a being who is necessarily omnipotent, omniscient, and perfectly good? The former is a "delimiter of necessities" just as the latter is a "delimiter of possibilities." Just as what is necessary precludes certain "possibilities," so does what is possible preclude certain "necessities." The theist begins with the necessary existence of a being who is essentially perfect and concludes that a bad world isn't even a possibility. The non-theist begins with the possibility of there being a bad world and concludes that there is no essentially perfect being who necessarily exists.

Suppose we accept Morris's view about God as a delimiter of possibilities. Suppose, that is, that we agree with him that if there is a being who exists necessarily, and is necessarily omnipotent, omniscient, and good, then many states of affairs which otherwise would have been possible are strictly impossible. If so, then if there is such a being we should agree that there are no possible worlds that are overall bad worlds. For such a world is possible only if it is possible for God to actualize that world. But God's necessary perfections preclude him from actualizing it. Therefore, such a world is not really a possible world.

Having adopted Morris's view that God is a delimiter of possibilities, suppose we now return to the stalemate between the view I've argued for:

> *It is impossible for God to exist and create an inferior world when he could have created a better world;*

and the view my opponent maintains:

> *God is free to create some good world even though there is an unlimited number of better worlds any one of which he could have created instead.*

My opponent may well agree with me that given God's absolute perfection God could not

create a world less than the best world. In short, *if* there is a best world all things considered, we may both agree with Leibniz and Clarke that God will necessarily create that world. (Of course, there remains the problem of explaining the precise sense in which God could be *free* in creating the best possible world.) It is only when we come to the no best world scenario that our views clash so profoundly. But Morris, perhaps unwittingly, has shown us a way to resolve the problem. God is the ultimate *delimiter of possibilities*. Thus, if God exists the series of increasingly good possible worlds has a limit—the best possible world. A creator that is necessarily good could not possibly create a less than good world. So, given that this being is a delimiter of possibilities, there are no possible worlds that are not good worlds. Furthermore, a necessarily perfect being could not possibly create a world that is less good than some other world it could create. So, given that this being creates a world and is a delimiter of possibilities, the world he creates cannot be one than which there is a better creatable world. Thus, following the path that Morris has pointed out, we conclude that God's necessary existence and necessary perfections would rule out two seeming possibilities: (1) there being possible worlds that are bad; (2) there being no best possible world. If God exists, his necessary existence and necessary perfections rule out the apparent existence of possible worlds that are bad as well as the apparent possibility that for any world God can create there is a better world he could create. What then should we conclude about the *actual* world? We should conclude that if the theistic God does exist, the actual world is the best possible world.[33] And therein lies the seeds of another argument against the existence of the God of traditional theism. For however much we may succeed in trying to fit the terrible evils in our world into some rational plan, few are prepared to think with Leibniz that this world is as good as any world could possibly be.

NOTES

1. In saying that a state of affairs *obtains* (or is *actual*) in a given possible world we mean that that state of affairs would be actual were that world the actual world.
2. Alvin Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974), p. 45.
3. See Roderick M. Chisholm, "The Defeat of Good and Evil," in *The Problem of Evil*, ed. by Marilyn McCord Adams and Robert Merrihew Adams, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990).
4. Actually, since possible worlds necessarily exist, God doesn't create them. But from the fact that a possible world exists, it doesn't follow that it is *actual*. Only one world can be the actual world. And what God does is create particular things—stones, human beings, etc.— and enable them to be arranged in such a way that a particular possible world is actualized. So, it is not in the literal sense of "creates" that God creates a world. With this understood, we will continued to refer to some possible world as being "created" by God.
5. But surely there would be possible worlds in which creatures are free to do good or evil and, as it happens, always use their freedom to do good. Wouldn't God create one of those worlds? For an impressive argument as to why it might not be in God's power to create such a world see Alvin Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity* (Oxford University Press, 1974), Ch. IX.
6. See G. E. Moore, *Principia Ethica* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1903), pp. 187ff.
7. In the service of simplicity we will set aside the neutral worlds.
8. See Leibniz's *Theodicy*, trans. E. M. Huggard, ed. Austin Farrer (LaSalle, Ill: Open Court 1985), section 201. (Emphasis mine)
9. "Must God Create the Best?" *Philosophical Review* 81 (July 1972): 317–32.
10. I advance this point in "The Problem of Divine Perfection and Freedom," *Reasoned Faith*, ed. Eleonore Stump, Cornell University Press, 1993, 223–33.

11. Aquinas didn't understand a world to be a maximal state of affairs. But were he to have thought of a world in this way he would have asserted that there is no best world.
12. "A Particular Problem of Creation," 238.
13. In this discussion of Kretzmann I suppose, for effect, that it is possible for God to be less than perfectly good. What is true is that any being that fails to do what is the best it can do is not perfectly good and, therefore, not God.
14. As we noted earlier, a being may be perfectly morally correct in the sense of never failing in its obligations and still be such that it could be morally better by virtue of the performance of some supererogatory act.
15. Daniel and Frances Howard-Snyder, "How and Unsurpassable Being Can Create a Surpassable World," *Faith and Philosophy*, April, 1994.
16. In order not to beg the question at issue, the Howard-Snyders do not assume that Jove is morally unsurpassable.
17. In the context of this discussion, a being is morally unsurpassable only if it is logically impossible for there to be a morally better being.
18. "The Problem of No Best World," *Faith and Philosophy*, April, 1994.
19. For some reason the Howard-Snyders neglect to attribute omniscience to Juno and Thor. I assume this to be a slip. Clearly, if we want to compare their goodness to Jove's, we should attribute to them the infinite power and knowledge that was attributed to Jove. I'll return to this point in discussing Thor's degree of goodness.
20. And the same is true of Juno, even though she accidentally ends up with world no. 999.
21. It is important to note that to say one being is morally better than another is not to imply that the second being has done anything morally wrong or violated any moral obligation.
22. "The *Real* Problem of No Best World," *Faith and Philosophy*, July 1996.
23. Ibid., p. 423.
24. Ibid., p. 424.
25. Indeed, it is possible for that very being to have been better than it in fact is.
26. "Perfection and Creation," *Reasoned Faith*, ed. Eleonore Stump, Cornell University Press, 1993, 223–33.
27. Ibid, p. 237.
28. Ibid.
29. Ibid., p. 239.
30. Ibid., p. 244.
31. This is technically incorrect. For if there is no best world, but several worlds equally good and none better, then a being could freely chose one of these worlds to create. The reader is to understand that in supposing that there is no best world we are thinking only of the circumstance in which for every world there is a better world.
32. *Anselmian Explorations* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1987), p. 48.
33. If we countenance libertarian freedom among the creatures in the best possible world, it could be that the best possible world is not creatable by God. For if the creatures are free to do right or not do right, then it won't be entirely up to God whether the best world he can create is the best possible world. I ignore these complications here. But clearly they are important to a thorough discussion of the problem of divine freedom.

I.B.10

The Freedom of God

EDWARD WIERENGA

Edward Wierenga (1947–) is professor of philosophy at the University of Rochester. He is the author of The Nature of God*, and many other works in the philosophy of religion. In this article, Wierenga responds to William Rowe's argument for the conclusion that God cannot be free. After considering and rejecting several other responses to Rowe's argument, Wierenga defends the claim that God can be free with respect to an action even when a logically sufficient condition of God's performing the action obtains.*

Discussions of God and freedom typically focus on the relation of God's knowledge to human freedom. Of course, if there really is a conflict between divine foreknowledge and human free action, there might be the same conflict between divine foreknowledge and God's own free action. Thus, when Evodius confessed that "if I say that God foreknows all of *my* actions, I can much more confidently say that he foreknows *his own* actions and foresees with absolute certainty what he is going to do," Augustine responded, "Then aren't you worried that someone might object that God himself will act out of necessity rather than by his will in everything that he is going to do? After all, you said that whatever God foreknows happens by necessity, not by will."[1] In this paper, however, I want to investigate a different problem for God's own freedom, one that he would not share with other agents whose future actions he foreknows. Instead, it is a problem that arises precisely because, on classical theism, God is so different from his creatures. In particular, God is essentially omniscient, omnipotent, and perfectly good, whereas presumably no creature has those attributes, not even accidentally. It would seem to follow, therefore, that whenever God is in circumstances *C* in which a certain action *A* is the best action, he would know that *A* is the best action, he would want to do *A*, and he would be able to do *A*. That is, from

(1) In *C, A* is the best action for God to do,

it seems to follow, given God's essential possession of these divine attributes, that

(2) In *C* God knows that *A* is the best action, wants to do *A*, and is able to do *A*.

But it also seems to be true that

(3) If in *C* God knows that *A* is the best action, wants to do *A*, and is able to do *A*, then God does *A* in *C*.

Indeed, (3) would seem to be a necessary truth—how could an omnibenevolent, omnipotent, and omniscient God fail to do what he knew to be best, wanted to do, and was able to do?[2] But then in virtue of God's essential perfections, whenever he is in circumstances in which a certain action is the best, a logically sufficient condition obtains for his performing that action. But now a problem looms: if God is ever in such circumstances, it would seem that he is unable in those circumstances to refrain

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from performing the action in question. He could not refrain from performing the action in those circumstances, since it is impossible that he be in those circumstances and not perform it. As Thomas Flint puts it, characterizing this as a libertarian view of freedom, "an agent is truly free with respect to an action only if the situation in which he is placed is logically and causally compatible with both his performing and his not performing the action."[3] In this paper I will investigate the problem of divine freedom for an essentially perfect being, on the assumption that libertarianism is the correct view about freedom. In the following section I will consider a solution that holds that God need not do what is best. Next, I will consider the response that God at least sometimes finds himself in circumstances in which there is no unique best action, so there is at least a range of cases in which he is free. Finally, I shall offer my own solution that challenges some standard assumptions about what libertarianism requires.

I. MUST GOD CREATE THE BEST?

One way of avoiding this problem of divine freedom is to deny that God must do what is best. Robert Adams has defended this approach, holding that "*even if* there is a best among possible worlds, God could create another instead of it, and still be perfectly good."[4] Adams denies, in effect, the inference from (1) to (2). Now if God were in circumstances in which an action *A* is his best action, then it would be hard to reconcile his omniscience with his not knowing that *A* is best. And I take it that, as a more detailed presentation of the problem would have put it, if an action is the best action for an agent it is one of the agent's *alternatives*, that is, one of the actions *open to the agent*. So it would also be difficult to deny that God would be able to perform the best action, even apart from his omnipotence. But Adams' view holds that it does not follow from God's perfect goodness that he would *want* to perform that action. This is suggested by Adams' remark quoted above, that God could fail to actualize the best possible world "and still be perfectly good." Moreover, Adams' defense of his position involves considering and rejecting reasons why God's failing to perform the best action would be wrong.

Adams concedes that "by utilitarian standards it is a moral obligation to bring about the best state of affairs that one can," but he rejects those standards in favor of ones he takes to be "more typical of Judeo-Christian religious ethics."[5] Accordingly, he casts about for other reasons why God's failing to actualize the best world would be wrong. He first considers the possibility that failing to actualize such a world would violate someone's rights, or involve treating someone unkindly, or harm someone. Adams has an ingenious response to this suggestion. He argues that if God were to harm anyone in his choice of a world, it would have to be someone he created. But by not actualizing the best possible world God would not harm the creatures existing in *it if* he failed to create them, since he could only have obligations to existing creatures. Next Adams claims that God could actualize a world having these features:

(i) None of the individual creatures in it would exist in the best of all possible worlds.

(ii) None of the creatures in it has a life which is so miserable on the whole that it would be better for that creature if it had never existed.

(iii) Every individual creature in the world is at least as happy on the whole as it would have been in any other possible world in which it could have existed.[6]

He then claims that if God does actualize a world having these features he does not wrong any of the creatures existing in it, "for none of them would have been benefitted by his creating any other world instead."[7] Hence if God does actualize a world satisfying these conditions, none of the creatures who would then exist would be harmed by God creating that world rather than a far better one. So if God could actualize a world satisfying these three traits, it looks as though Adams is

correct in holding that God need not harm anyone or violate any creature's rights if he were to do less than the best that is open to him. That still leaves it open that there might be another reason why a perfectly good being might want to do what is best, but it would not be for wanting to refrain from harming anyone.

Adams' second attempt to find a reason why a perfectly good being would want to do what is best is somewhat more complicated. Adams begins by inquiring whether choosing to make a world less good than he could have made would reveal a defect in God's *character*.[8] He notes that an ideal of Judeo-Christian moral theory is *grace*, which he defines as "a disposition to love which is not dependent on the merit of the person loved."[9] Adams then claims that "a God who is gracious with to respect to creating might well choose to create and love less excellent creatures than he could have chosen."[10] Now if this is merely to identify *some* virtue God has that is compatible with doing less than his best, it would not *establish* that doing so is compatible with his moral goodness, for he might have *other virtues* not thus compatible. And it is not surprising that some virtues would be compatible with doing less than one's best. Adams in fact identifies as virtues being noble, being high-minded, and being free from envy,[11] all of which would seem to be compatible with doing less than what was best. So either Adams' defense is incomplete or else God's exercise of grace plays some positive role or makes some contribution to the value of his action (or to a world he actualizes) which enables it to provide a moral justification of God's doing less than his best.

However, Adams says something that initially suggests that he would deny that the exercise of grace makes such a contribution. After claiming that "a God who is gracious with respect to creating might well choose to create and love less excellent creatures than he could have chosen," he adds

> This is not to suggest that grace in creation consists in a preference for imperfection as such. God could have chosen to create the best of all possible creatures, and still have been gracious in choosing them. God's graciousness in creation does not imply that the creatures he has chosen to create must be less excellent than the best possible. It implies, rather, that even if they are the best possible creatures, that is not the ground for his choosing them. And it implies that there is nothing in God's nature or character which would require him to act on the principle of choosing the best possible creatures to be the object of his creative powers.[12]

If God is gracious both in the best of all possible worlds (temporarily assuming with Adams that there is one) as well as in some lesser worlds, it is hard to see how his graciousness can make more of a difference in the value of one world rather man another.

There is a way of thinking of these things, however, that suggests that divine grace might actually make a difference to the value of a world. Perhaps in worlds with less perfect creatures God exercises *more* graciousness, or perhaps his graciousness is *more magnificent* for going so far beyond what is deserved. The former idea is suggested by a familiar question raised in Romans, "Should we continue in sin in order that grace may abound?" (Rom. 6:1b). Paul's answer, of course, is that eliciting additional grace is not a good reason to sin; but he does not deny the principles that added sin results in extra grace and that extra grace is a good thing. A related idea is that of *felix culpa*, as found in the *Exsultet: O felix culpa, quae talem ac tantum meruit habere Redemptorem*! ("Oh happy sin that merited so great a redeemer").[13] A way of understanding this thought is that God's gracious gift of redemption through the incarnation of his son makes such a contribution to the value of the world that its value exceeds that of a world in which no one sins. Indeed, in his discussion of the incarnation, Aquinas cites both of these passages in support of his contention that "there is no reason why human nature should not have been raised to something greater after sin. For God allows evils to happen in order to bring a greater good therefrom" (*S.T.* III, 3, *ad* 3). In other words, the addition of God's graciousness, especially in the form

of the incarnation, results in a greater good (a world of higher value) than a world with no sin and less grace.[14]

If human nature is "raised to something greater" by God's gracious provision of transformation and sanctification through the incarnation, then God's graciousness *could* make a world better and it *would* give him a reason to prefer some worlds to others. Adams might be right that "nothing in God's nature or character … would require him to…choos[e] the best possible creatures" but that is because it might compel him instead to create a world with creatures who could be *made* better. In other words, it might give him a reason to actualize a world containing corruptible creatures who need fixing rather than a world with creatures who are perfect in the first place.[14]

Is divine incarnation so great a good that any world that contains it is *infinitely* valuable? Would all worlds with a divine incarnation therefore be tied for best? These are difficult questions, and to attempt answers without a fuller account of what gives worlds their value, of how to value the incarnation and the changes it makes, and how to compare values if they are *infinite* is rash.[15] Fortunately, we do not need to answer these questions to see that Adams' attempt to show that a good God might not want to do what is best is incomplete. Perhaps, as Adams argues, God has some traits of character, not wanting to cause harm, or, possibly, being gracious, that are compatible with not wanting to do what is best. But this leaves it open that a perfectly good God has *other* traits of character that do make him want to do what is best. And it may be that the second of the traits Adams identifies, namely, graciousness, can make enough of a difference to the value of worlds actually to give God a reason to want to do what is best.

II. A RANGE OF CHOICES

Adams denies, in effect, that

(2) In *C* God knows that *A* is the best action, wants to do *A*, and is able to do *A*.

follows from

(1) In *C, A* is the best action for God to do,

In contrast, Richard Swinburne and Thomas Flint seem to accept not only this inference, but the principle,

(3) If in *C* God knows that *A* is the best action, wants to do *A*, and is able to do *A*, then God does *A* in *C*,

as well. They agree, as Swinburne puts it, that "God's perfect goodness … constrains him to act in certain ways,"[16] that "God's goodness thus limits his capacity for choice."[17]

Accordingly, Swinburne and Flint attempt to describe cases in which God is presented with a range of choices, so that he will count as free at least in those circumstances in which he is faced with such an array. Swinburne begins by endorsing the claim that "if there is a best action, [God] will do it," but he adds that "if there are alternative equal best actions, he will do one of them."[18] So the first case in which God's goodness leaves him room to make a free choice is the case in which there are equally good alternatives from which to choose.

The second case is that of an infinite range of choices of a certain sort. Swinburne introduces this case as follows,

> often the range of actions open to God is an infinite range of actions, each of which is inferior to some other action. Thus, for any world of conscious agents which God could create *ex nihilo*, there is plausibly a better one—for instance, one obtained by adding one more conscious agent (sufficiently distant from the others not to crowd them). And so among the actions of creating conscious agents *ex nihilo* there is no best.[19]

It is important to note, as Swinburne does, that just as when more than one alternative is tied for best, God's goodness constrains him to choose from the set of those tied for best, so, when there is an infinite range of possibilities, each one inferior to

some other, if it is better to choose one of those alternatives rather than none, then God's goodness constrains him to choose from that range. In Swinburne's example, if it is better to have a world with conscious agents created *ex nihilo* than not to, then God's goodness constrains him to pick from the infinite range of worlds like that. But the particular choice of alternative, both in the case of ties for best and in the case of infinite series with no best, is up to God. As Swinburne puts it, "Insofar as he acts within that framework, his perfect goodness does not dictate what he will do; and any acts within that framework we may call acts of will."[20]

Thomas Flint's position is structurally similar. He imagines God to face a "galaxy" of worlds open to him to actualize. Some of these galaxies are "oligarchic": there is a maximal level of goodness that the available worlds can have, and more man one world has it. Other galaxies are "anarchic": for any world in it, there is a better.[21] In the former case, God has a range of choices tied for best, and in the latter case, God has an infinite range to choose from. Flint concludes that "neither an anarchic nor an oligarchic galaxy endangers God's freedom."[22]

So both Swinburne and Flint think that God is free in at least certain situations, namely, when he faces a tie for best alternative or when there is an infinite series of increasingly better alternatives with no best.[23] A potential problem, looms, however. Some philosophers hold that a perfectly good being (or at least one who is either omnipotent or omniscient) cannot be in a situation in which there are infinitely many better and better alternatives. On the face of it, this is a startling claim. Why should whether a being is perfectly good limit the *structure* of what situations it can face?[24] Philip Quinn gives the following reason, which is intended to apply to *omnipotent* moral agents. He takes it to be "a fairly obvious truth" that

(4) Necessarily, for all w, w' and x, if w is an actualizable world and w' is an actualizable world and w is a morally better world than w', then if x is an omnipotent moral agent and x actualizes w', then x is such that there is some possible world in which there is a y such that y is a better moral agent in that world than he [that is, x] is in w'.[25]

Quinn's idea, although (4) does not exactly state this, is that if x were to actualize a world w, when there is a better world w available, then it is possible that someone actualize w and thereby be a morally better agent than x is. But if it is possible for someone to be morally better than x, then x is not morally *perfect*. This assumes that the value of the work redounds precisely to the moral status of the agent. This assumption seems to me far from obvious, but perhaps we can see that by considering another version of the objection.

In William Rowe's version, it is God's omniscience which added to moral perfection prevents him from being in a situation in which he faces an infinite series of increasingly better alternatives. Rowe claims

(5) If an omniscient being creates a world when there is a better world it could create, then it would be possible for there to be a being morally better than it.[26]

In support of this thesis, which he takes to be "plausible, if not self-evident," Rowe adds, "if an omniscient being creates a world when it could have created a better world, then that being has done something less good than it could do (create a better world). But any being who knowingly does something…less good than it could do falls short of being the best possible being."[27] Whatever plausibility this principle might have in the case of choices among a finite number of alternatives seems to me to disappear when the choice in question is from among an infinite number of choices where it is better to pick one rather than none. But Rowe has more to say in its defense: he claims that some cases devised by Daniel and Frances Howard-Snyder, intended to show that beings who choose differently among an infinite set of increasingly better alternatives can be morally equivalent, actually show the opposite. The Howard-Snyders first sup pose that worlds can be divided into what I shall call permissible and impermissible worlds.[28-30] Permissible worlds are those in which no individuals have lives not worth living and no evils are

unjustified by a compensating good. Impermissible worlds are those in which some individuals have lives that are not worth living, or some evils have no compensating good. They then suppose that the permissible worlds can be ordered according to value, and they propose three scenarios in which a deity chooses one of the permissible worlds. In the original case, their deity, Jove, employs a randomizing device which selects world 777. The Howard-Snyders men propose two alternative scenarios. In the first, a second deity, Juno, uses the same randomizing device and as a result chooses world 999. They claim that Jove and Juno are morally equivalent. Next they consider a third deity, Thor, who, eschewing the randomizer, nevertheless aims at creating a better world than Jove and so chooses world 888. The Howard-Snyders contend that Thor is not morally better than Jove, either. It is at this point that Rowe disagrees. He claims that Jove and Thor might have different *standards* in virtue of which Thor would count as morally superior. He writes, "Jove's standard of goodness in world creating is such that he is prepared to settle for *any* good [permissible] world even if there is a better one he can create. Thor, however, has a higher standard. He is not prepared to create any of the good worlds from W1 to W800 *provided* there is a better one he can create." Rowe concludes that his assessment of Thor undermines the attempt of the Howard-Snyders to discredit (5).

A modest revision of these stories shows, I think, that there is no difference between these deities, after all. As they develop their account, the Howard-Snyders assume that there is a minimal permissible world. (Their numbering begins with 1.) But why should we think that an infinite array of permissible worlds such that for every world there is a better must have a least valuable member? Perhaps those features that make a world permissible have no lower bound. Swinburne identifies among the things that contribute to the value of a world, in addition to the presence of conscious agents, "the kinds of knowledge and powers [God] gives to things and…the lengths of days he keeps them in being." We might add to this list the amount of pleasure these agents experience or the kind of compensation there is for the evils they endure. It is plausible to suppose that having conscious agents with knowledge and power, who live acceptably long lives, relatively free of pain and compensated in appropriate ways for the evils they endure contributes to the value of a world. And, of course, there will be no limit to how many such agents there could be, no limit to how long they could live, and no limit to how sufficiently they can be compensated for the evil they endure. That is why it seemed plausible to suppose that there could be an infinite series of ever more valuable permissible worlds. But it seems equally plausible that there might be no lowest acceptable level of knowledge and power, no shortest acceptable lifespan, no minimal acceptable amount of pleasure or compensation for evil for a world to be permissible. In other words, just as there might be no best of all possible worlds, there might also be no least acceptable world. So when God chooses a world, or when the deities in the Howard-Snyders example choose a world, it might not only be the case that for any world chosen there is a better; it might also be the case that for any world chosen there is an acceptable world that is not as good. In that case, it is hard to see how Thor in the example could be acting on a nobler principle or higher standard than Jove. Each picks a world to which infinitely many worlds are superior and which is itself superior to infinitely many other worlds. Thor does not have a principle according to which he rejects as unsuitable more worlds than Jove rejects. There can be no basis for Thor's rejection of worlds lower than 800, if there are infinitely many in that category; both make an arbitrary choice. These deities can create worlds of differing value without thereby differing themselves in goodness.

I have been arguing in support of the proposal of Swinburne and Flint that God might be presented with an infinite series of worlds from which to choose with no feature of any of those worlds compelling him, in virtue of his perfect goodness, to create *it*. They had suggested that, as well as the possibility that God might be presented with ties for best action, as part of an attempt to

provide room for God to act freely, unconstrained by his perfect nature. But it is time to return to the question of whether this proposal is an adequate defense of God's freedom. I think that it is not, for it amounts to saying that God is free only *when it does not matter what he does*. In any situation in which there is a best action open to God, Swinburne and Flint agree that his nature compels him to do it. They only find room for God's freedom in circumstances in which any choice he makes is on a par with any other, where he might as well choose blindly or randomly, and that is not a significant amount of freedom.

III. GOD'S FREEDOM

We began by noticing that it seems to follow from

(1) In *C, A* is the best action for God to do,

that

(2) In *C* God knows that *A* is the best action, wants to do *A*, and is able to do *A*.

Moreover,

(3) If in *C* God knows that *A* is the best action, wants to do *A*, and is able to do *A*, then God does *A* in *C*.

appears to be necessarily true. Then we asked how God could ever be free, if, whenever an action was his best alternative, a necessary condition of his performing it, namely, (2), obtains. Adams attempted, unsuccessfully I claimed, to deny the inference of (2) from (1). Swinburne and Flint accept the conclusion that God is not free whenever he has a best alternative, and they try to delineate what I claimed to be an unacceptably limited role for his freedom, namely, when what he chooses does not matter. We should, I think, look more closely at the assumption that if a necessary condition for God's performing an action obtains, then he does not perform that action freely. Thomas Flint claims, as we saw, that "an agent is truly free with respect to an action only if the situation in which he is placed is logically and causally compatible with both his performing and his not performing the action."[31] No doubt libertarians will agree that an agent is free with respect to performing an action only if there are no antecedent causally sufficient conditions for the agent's performing the action. But why should we, even if we are libertarians, extend this to antecedent *logically* sufficient conditions? After all, at least some libertarians are prepared to countenance the *prior truth* that an agent will (freely) perform an action, despite its being a logically sufficient condition of the agent's perforating the action. So why should we think that the truth of

(2) In *C* God knows that *A* is the best action, wants to do *A*, and is able to do *A*

is incompatible with God's doing *A* freely in *C*?

Here I think an appeal to compatibilist accounts of free will, of all things, is instructive. Compatibilists hold that an action can be free even though antecedent causal conditions for its performance exist. But canny compatibilists[32] insist that not just any antecedent causal conditions are so compatible—they have to be the right ones, arising in the right matter. Often the right ones are taken to be the agent's beliefs and desires. And the right manner is the customary way in which people come to have beliefs and desires, not through drugs or hypnosis or nefarious neurosurgeons manipulating their brains. The compatibilist then defends the claim that an action caused by an agent's beliefs and desires arising in the right way is nevertheless free by emphasizing that the beliefs and desires are the agent's *own*, that they are internal to the agent.

Those who reject the compatibilist account are often persuaded by arguments, like those of Peter van Inwagen,[33] that purport to show that, if determinism is true, an agent's beliefs and desires themselves have antecedent causes stretching back to before the agent even existed. The relevant causal conditions are thus not really internal to the agent.[34] The insight, to repeat, of the compatibilist is that the right antecedent conditions, internal to the agent, are compatible with the agent acting freely; on this interpretation, the compatibilist's

mistake is in taking the proffered conditions to be internal in this way.

Let us apply the compatibilist's insight to the case of God. Even if in some circumstances *C* God's knowing that *A* is the best action, his wanting to do *A*, and his being able to do *A* is a logically sufficient condition of his doing *A* in *C*, it is nevertheless in virtue of *his own nature* that he knows that *A* is the best action, wants to do *A*, and is able to do *A*.[35] There is no long chain stretching back to things separate from him that give him this constellation of knowledge, desire, and ability; it is due to his *own* knowledge and power and goodness. I see no reason not to say, accordingly, that God is free, even when he does what is best.[36]

NOTES

1. Augustine, *De libero arbitrio,* III, 3., translated by Thomas Williams in *On Free Choice of the Will* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1993), p. 75. Emphasis added.
2. Theodore Guleserian apparently thinks that doing what is best (optimal, in his term) is a *nonmoral* act, and he claims, in effect, but without extended argument, that traditional theism denies (3). See his "Can God Be Trusted?" *Philosophical Studies* 106 (2001): 293–303, esp. pp. 298–99.
3. Thomas P. Flint, "The Problem of Divine Freedom," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 20 (1983): 255–264, p. 255. Flint describes the view that God exists necessarily and has his perfections essentially as "Anselmian," and he connects that assumption with endorsement of the Ontological Argument. Flint also notes that libertarian freedom is an assumption of the Free Will Defense against evil. Flint thus develops the problem of divine freedom as a conflict arising from two positions many contemporary Christian philosophers accept Flint's own response focuses on the question of which *possible worlds* God is able to actualize.
4. Robert M. Adams, "Must God Create the Best?" in his *The Virtue of Faith and Other Essays in Philosophical Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), pp. 51–64. The essay originally appeared in *Philosophical Review* 81 (1972): 317–332. Adams does not himself endorse the claim that there is a best of all possible worlds.
5. Ibid., p. 52.
6. Ibid., p. 53.
7. Ibid., p. 54. Philip L. Quinn provides a penetrating discussion of some of Adams' claims in "God, Moral Perfection, and Possible Worlds," in Frederick Sontag and M. Darrol Bryant, eds., *God: The Contemporary Discussion* (New York: Rose of Sharon Press, 1982), pp. 197–215.
8. Ibid., p. 56. In a new endnote added to the reprinted version of his paper, Adams indicates that he now prefers to state his claim by reference to an imperfection in character rather than a defect, agreeing with a criticism by Philip Quinn that someone could have no defects while yet not being "superlatively good."
9. Ibid., p. 56. Grace for Adams thus resembles Anders Nygren's account of agapic love. Cf. Anders Nygren, *Agape and eros; a study of the Christian idea of love*, trans. A. G. Hebert (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1932–39).
10. Ibid., p.56.
11. Ibid., p. 56.
12. Ibid., pp. 56–57.
13. This hymn was formerly thought to derive from Augustine. It is now attributed to his mentor, Ambrose. See *The Penguin Book of Latin Verse*, Frederick Brittain, ed. (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1962), p. 94. It is traditionally sung on Easter Eve during the lighting of the Pascal candle.
14. Assuming that something like God's grace (and the resultant change in human nature) can contribute to the value of a world is to assume, what seems plausible, that it is not merely creaturely happiness, as in Adams' account, that contributes to the value of a world. Quinn (*op. cit.*) criticizes Adams for his exclusive interest in "felicity."
15. An interesting discussion of the problem of infinite utility is Jamie Dreier, "Boundless Good" (unpublished).

16. Richard Swinburne, *The Christian God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 134.
17. Ibid., p. l35.
18. Ibid.
19. Ibid.
20. Ibid.
21. Thomas Flint, "The Problem of Divine Freedom," p. 258. I am suppressing the details of Flint's meticulous and ingenious account of how worlds are collected into galaxies as well as his arguments about other types of galaxies.
22. Ibid. p. 259.
23. I have not presented Flint's account fully enough to show that this is indeed his view. Given what we have seen in the text, we are only entitled to attribute to him the claim that it is *possible* that God is free.
24. Perhaps a perfectly good being will never face a situation in which an alternative is to make reparations for a past moral wrong, but this is different from what I am calling the structure of a set of alternatives.
25. Philip L. Quinn, "God, Moral Perfection, and Possible Worlds," p. 213.
26. William L. Rowe, "Can God Be Free?" selection I. B.9. See also his "The Problem of Divine Perfection and Freedom," in Eleonore Stump, ed. *Reasoned Faith* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), pp. 223–33.
27. "Can God Be Free?".
28. Daniel and Frances Howard Snyder, "How an Unsurpassable Being Can Create a Surpassable World," *Faith and Philosophy* 11 (1994): 260–68. Rowe replied in "The Problem of No Best World," *Faith and Philosophy* 11 (1994): 269–71, as well as in "Can God Be Free?".
29. "Can God Be Free?".
30. *The Christian God*, p. 135.
31. "The Problem of Divine Freedom," p. 255.
32. I believe this term is due to Daniel Dennett, but I have not been able to find the source.
33. Peter van Inwagen, *An Essay on Free Will* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983).
34. I do not pretend to be summarizing van Inwagen's arguments here, which are considerably more involved and ingenious than we need to see now.
35. Thomas Talbott defends a similar view in "On the Divine Nature and the Nature of Divine Freedom," *Faith and Philosophy 5* (1988): 3–24. Talbott quotes the following instructive passage from C. S. Lewis:

    "Whatever human freedom means, Divine freedom cannot mean indeterminacy between alternatives and choice of one of them Perfect goodness can never debate about the end to be obtained, and perfect wisdom cannot debate about the means most suited to achieve it. The freedom of God consists in the fact that no cause other than Himself produces His acts and no external obstacle impedes them—that His own goodness is the root from which they all grow and His own omnipotence the air in which they all flower." *The Problem of Pain* (New York: Macmillan, 1962), p. 35.
36. I am grateful to Richard Feldman and John Bennett for helpful discussion of the issues of this paper and to William Rowe for allowing me to see an advance copy of "Can God Be Free?".

PART II



Traditional Arguments for the Existence of God

CAN THE EXISTENCE OF GOD be demonstrated or made probable by argument? The debate between those who believe that reason can demonstrate that God exists and those who do not has an ancient lineage, going back to Protagoras (ca. 450 BCE) and Plato (427–347 BCE). The Roman Catholic church has traditionally held that the existence of God is demonstrable by human reason. The strong statement of the First Vatican Council (1870) indicates that human reason is adequate to arrive at a state of knowledge:

> If anyone says that the one and true God, our creator and Lord, cannot be known with certainty with the natural light of human reason by means of the things that have been made: let him be anathema.

Many others, including theists of various denominations, among them Catholics, have denied that human reason is adequate to arrive at knowledge or demonstrate the existence of God.

Arguments for the existence of God divide into two main groups: a priori and a posteriori arguments. An *a priori argument* is one whose premises one can justifiably believe without having experiences of the world beyond what is needed to acquire the concepts involved in the premises. An a posteriori argument, on the other hand, is an argument with at least one premise that can be justifiably believed only on the basis of experience. In this work we consider one a priori argument for the existence of God and two a posteriori arguments. The a priori argument is the ontological argument. The a posteriori arguments are the cosmological argument and the teleological argument.

The question before us in this part of our work is, What do the arguments for the existence of God establish? Do any of them demonstrate beyond reasonable doubt the existence of a supreme being or deity? Do any of them make it probable (given the evidence at hand) that such a being exists?

II.A THE ONTOLOGICAL ARGUMENT FOR THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

THE ONTOLOGICAL ARGUMENT for the existence of God is the most intriguing of all the arguments for theism. It is one of the most remarkable arguments ever set forth. First devised by St. Anselm (1033–1109), Archbishop of Canterbury in the eleventh century, the argument has continued to puzzle and fascinate philosophers ever since. Let the testimony of the agnostic philosopher Bertrand Russell serve as a typical example here:

> I remember the precise moment, one day in 1894, as I was walking along Trinity Lane [at Cambridge University where Russell was a student], when I saw in a flash (or thought I saw) that the ontological argument is valid. I had gone out to buy a tin of tobacco; on my way back, I suddenly threw it up in the air, and exclaimed as I caught it: "Great Scott, the ontological argument is sound!"*

The argument is important not only because it claims to be an a priori proof for the existence of God but also because it is the primary locus of such philosophical problems as whether existence is a property and whether the notion of necessary existence is intelligible. Furthermore, it has special religious significance because it is the only one of the traditional arguments that clearly concludes to the necessary properties of God, that is, his omnipotence, omniscience, omnibenevolence, and other great-making properties.

Although there are many versions of the ontological argument and many interpretations of some of these, most philosophers agree on the essential form of Anselm's version in the second chapter of his *Proslogion*. Anselm believes that God's existence is absolutely certain. Yet he desires understanding to fulfill his faith. Thus he writes: "Therefore, Lord, you who grant understanding to faith, grant that, insofar as you know it is useful for me, I may understand that you exist as we believe you exist, and that you are what we believe you to be. Now we believe that you are something than which nothing greater can be thought. So can it be that no such nature exists, since 'The fool has said in his heart, "There is no God."'?

The argument that follows may be treated as a reductio ad absurdum argument. That is, it begins with a supposition (*S*: suppose that the greatest conceivable being exists in the mind alone) that is contradictory to what one desires to prove. One then goes about showing that (*S*) together with other certain or self-evident assumptions yields a contradiction, which in turn demonstrates that the contradictory of (*S*) must be true: A greatest possible being must exist in reality. You, the reader, can work out the details of the argument.

A monk named Gaunilo, a contemporary of Anselm's, sets forth the first objection to Anselm's argument. Accusing Anselm of pulling rabbits out of

**Autobiography of Bertrand Russell* (New York: Little, Brown & Co., 1967).

hats, he tells the story of a delectable lost island, one that is more excellent than all lands. Since it is better that such a perfect island exist in reality than simply in the mind alone, this Isle of the Blest must necessarily exist. Anselm's reply is that the analogy fails, for unlike the greatest possible being, the greatest possible island can be conceived as not existing. More recently, Alvin Plantinga has clarified Anselm's point. The idea is that some properties have intrinsic maximums and others do not. No matter how wonderful we make the Isle of the Blest, we can conceive of a more wonderful island. The greatness of islands is like the greatness of numbers in this respect. There is no greatest natural number, for no matter how large the number we choose, we can always conceive of one twice as large. On the other hand, the properties of God have intrinsic maximums. For example, perfect knowledge has an intrinsic maximum: For any proposition, an omniscient being knows whether it is true or false.

Our next reading is the critique by Immanuel Kant (1724–1804), who accused the proponent of the argument of defining God into existence. Kant claims that Anselm makes the mistake of treating "exists" as a first-order predicate like "blue" or "great." When we say that the castle is blue, we are adding a property (viz., blueness) to the idea of a castle, but when we say that the castle exists, we are not adding anything to the concept of a castle. We are saying only that the concept is exemplified or instantiated. In Anselm's argument "exists" is treated as a first-order predicate, which adds something to the concept of an entity and makes it *greater*. This, according to Kant, is the fatal flaw in the argument.

There are many considerations involved in the ontological argument that are not dealt with in our readings. For a clear discussion of the wider issues involved in this argument, see William Rowe's introductory work, *Philosophy of Religion* (Chapter 3, "The Ontological Argument").

II.A.1

The Ontological Argument

ST. ANSELM

St. Anselm (1033–1109), Abbot of Bec and later Archbishop of Canterbury, is the originator of one of the most intriguing arguments ever devised by the human mind, the ontological argument for the existence of a supremely perfect being. After the short selection from Anselm's Proslogion*, there*

From *Monologion and Proslogion, with the replies of Gaunilo and Anselm*, trans. with introduction and notes by Thomas Williams. (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 1996.) © 1996 by Thomas Williams. Used with permission.

follows a brief selection from Gaunilo's reply, In Behalf of the Fool, *and a counterresponse by Anselm.*

[ST. ANSELM'S PRESENTATION]

Therefore, Lord, you who grant understanding to faith, grant that, insofar as you know it is useful for me, I may understand that you exist as we believe you exist, and that you are what we believe you to be. Now we believe that you are something than which nothing greater can be thought. So can it be that no such nature exists, since "The fool has said in his heart, 'There is no God'" (Psalm 14:1; 53:1)? But when this same fool hears me say "something than which nothing greater can be thought," he surely understands what he hears; and what he understands exists in his understanding,[1] even if he does not understand that it exists [in reality]. For it is one thing for an object to exist in the understanding and quite another to understand that the object exists [in reality]. When a painter, for example, thinks out in advance what he is going to paint, he has it in his understanding, but he does not yet understand that it exists, since he has not yet painted it. But once he has painted it, he both has it in his understanding and understands that it exists because he has now painted it. So even the fool must admit that something than which nothing greater can be thought exists at least in his understanding, since he understands this when he hears it, and whatever is understood exists in the understanding. And surely that than which a greater cannot be thought cannot exist only in the understanding. For if it exists only in the understanding, it can be thought to exist in reality as well, which is greater. So if that than which a greater cannot be thought exists only in the understanding, then that than which a greater *cannot* be thought is that than which a greater *can* be thought. But that is clearly impossible. Therefore, there is no doubt that something than which a greater cannot be thought exists both in the understanding and in reality….

This [being] exists so truly that it cannot be thought not to exist. For it is possible to think that something exists that cannot be thought not to exist, and such a being is greater than one that can be thought not to exist. Therefore, if that than which a greater cannot be thought can be thought not to exist, then that than which a greater cannot be thought is *not* that than which a greater cannot be thought; and this is a contradiction. So that than which a greater cannot be thought exists so truly that it cannot be thought not to exist.

And this is you, O Lord our God. You exist so truly, O Lord my God, that you cannot be thought not to exist. And rightly so, for if some mind could think something better than you, a creature would rise above the Creator and sit in judgment upon him, which is completely absurd. Indeed, everything that exists, except for you alone, can be thought not to exist. So you alone among all things have existence most truly, and therefore most greatly. Whatever else exists has existence less truly, and therefore less greatly. So then why did "the fool say in his heart, 'There is no God,'" when it is so evident to the rational mind that you among all beings exist most greatly? Why indeed, except because he is stupid and a fool?…

But how has he said in his heart what he could not think? Or how could he not think what he said in his heart, since to say in one's heart is the same as to think? But if he really—or rather, *since* he really—thought this, because he said it in his heart, and did not say it in his heart, because he could not think it, there must be more than one way in which something is "said in one's heart" or "thought." In one sense of the word, to think a thing is to think the word that signifies that thing. But in another sense, it is to understand what exactly the thing is. God can be thought not to exist in the first sense, but not at all in the second sense. No one who understands what God is can think that God does not exist, although he may say these words in his heart with no signification at all, or with some peculiar signification. For God is that than which a greater cannot

be thought. Whoever understands this properly, understands that this being exists in such a way that he cannot, even in thought, fail to exist. So whoever understands that God exists in this way cannot think that he does not exist.

Thanks be to you, my good Lord, thanks be to you. For what I once believed through your grace, I now understand through your illumination, so that even if I did not want to *believe* that you exist, I could not fail to *understand* that you exist….

[GAUNILO'S CRITICISM]

"For example, there are those who say that somewhere in the ocean is an island, which, because of the difficulty—or rather, impossibility—of finding what does not exist, some call 'the Lost Island'. This island (so the story goes) is more plentifully endowed than even the Isles of the Blessed with an indescribable abundance of all sorts of riches and delights. And because it has neither owner nor inhabitant, it is everywhere superior in its abundant riches to all the other lands that human beings inhabit.

"Suppose someone tells me all this. The story is easily told and involves no difficulty, and so I understand it. But if this person went on to draw a conclusion, and say, 'You cannot any longer doubt that this island, more excellent than all others on earth, truly exists somewhere in reality. For you do not doubt that this island exists in your understanding, and since it is more excellent to exist not merely in the understanding, but also in reality, this island must also exist in reality. For if it did not, any land that exists in reality would be greater than it. And so this more excellent thing that you have understood would not in fact be more excellent.'–If, I say, he should try to convince me by, this argument that I should no longer doubt whether the island truly exists, either I would think he was joking, or I would not know whom I ought to think more foolish: myself, if I grant him his conclusion, or him, if he thinks he has established the existence of that island with any degree of certainty, without first showing that its excellence exists in my understanding as a thing that truly and undoubtedly exists and not in any way like something false or uncertain."…

[ST. ANSELM'S REJOINDER]

But, you say, this is just the same as if someone were to claim that it cannot be doubted that a certain island in the ocean, surpassing all other lands in its fertility (which, from the difficulty—or rather, impossibility—of finding what does not exist, is called "the Lost Island"), truly exists in reality, because someone can easily understand it when it is described to him in words. I say quite confidently that if anyone can find for me something existing either in reality or only in thought to which he can apply this inference in my argument, besides that than which a greater cannot be thought, I will find and give to him that Lost Island, never to be lost again. In fact, however, it has already become quite clear that that than which a greater cannot be thought cannot be thought not to exist, since its existence is a matter of such certain truth. For otherwise it would not exist at all.

Finally, if someone says that he thinks it does not exist, I say that when he thinks this, either he is thinking something than which a greater cannot be thought, or he is not. If he is not, then he is not thinking that it does not exist, since he is not thinking it at all. But if he is, he is surely thinking something that cannot be thought not to exist. For if it could be thought not to exist, it could be thought to have a beginning and an end, which is impossible. Therefore, someone who is thinking it, is thinking something that cannot be thought not to exist. And of course someone who is thinking this does not think that that very thing does not exist. Otherwise he would be thinking something that cannot be thought. Therefore, that than which a greater cannot be thought cannot be thought not to exist….

NOTE

1. The word here translated "understanding" is "*intellectus*." The text would perhaps read better if I translated it as "intellect," but this would obscure the fact that it is from the same root as the verb "*intelligere*," "to understand." Some of what Anselm says makes a bit more sense if this fact is constantly borne in mind.

II.A.2

A Critique of the Ontological Argument

IMMANUEL KANT

The German philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) in his remarkable work Critique of Pure Reason *(1781), from which our selection is taken, set forth a highly influential critique of the ontological argument. Essentially, the objection is that "existence is not a predicate," whereas the opposite is assumed to be true in the various forms of the ontological argument, that is, when you say that Mary is my mother, you are noting some property that describes or adds to who Mary is. But when you say, "Mary, my mother, exists," you are not telling us anything new about Mary; you are simply affirming that the concepts in question are exemplified. "Existence" is a second-order predicate or property, not to be treated as other first-order, normal predicates or properties are.*

THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF AN ONTOLOGICAL PROOF OF THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

It is evident from what has been said, that the conception of an absolutely necessary being is a mere idea, the objective reality of which is far from being established by the mere fact that it is a need of reason. On the contrary, this idea serves merely to indicate a certain unattainable perfection, and rather limits the operations than, by the presentation of new objects, extends the sphere of the understanding. But a strange anomaly meets us at the very threshold; for the inference from a given existence in general to an absolutely necessary existence, seems to be correct and unavoidable, while the conditions of the *understanding* refuse to aid us in forming any conception of such a being.

Philosophers have always talked of an absolutely necessary being, and have nevertheless declined to take the trouble of conceiving whether—and how—a being of this nature is even cogitable, not to mention that its existence is actually demonstrable. A verbal definition of the conception is certainly easy enough; it is something, the non-existence of which is impossible. But does this definition throw any light upon the conditions which render

From Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, translated by J. M. D. Meiklejohn (New York: Colonial Press, 1900). Translation revised by Louis Pojman.

it impossible to cogitate the non-existence of a thing—conditions which we wish to ascertain, that we may discover whether we think anything in the conception of such a being or not? For the mere fact that I throw away, by means of the word *Unconditioned*, all the conditions which the understanding habitually requires in order to regard anything as necessary, is very far from making clear whether by means of the conception of the unconditionally necessary I think of something, or really of nothing at all.

Nay, more, this chance-conception, now become so current, many have endeavored to explain by examples, which seemed to render any inquiries regarding its intelligibility quite needless. Every geometrical proposition—a triangle has three angles—it was said, is absolutely necessary; and thus people talked of an object which lay out of the sphere of our understanding as if it were perfectly plain what the conception of such a being meant.

All the examples adduced have been drawn, without exception, from *judgments*, and not from *things*. But the unconditioned necessity of a judgment does not form the absolute necessity of a thing. On the contrary, the absolute necessity of a judgment is only a conditioned necessity of a thing, or of the predicate in a judgment. The proposition above-mentioned, does not enounce that three angles necessarily exist, but, upon condition that a triangle exists, three angles must necessarily exist—in it. And thus this logical necessity has been the source of the greatest delusions. Having formed an *à priori* conception of a thing, the content of which was made to embrace existence, we believed ourselves safe in concluding that, because existence belongs necessarily to the object of the conception (that is, under the condition of my positing this thing as given), the existence of the thing is also posited necessarily, and that it is therefore absolutely necessary—merely because its existence has been cogitated in the conception.

If, in an identical judgment, I annihilate the predicate in thought, and retain the subject, a contradiction is the result; and hence I say, the former belongs necessarily to the latter. But if I suppress both subject and predicate in thought, no contradiction arises; for there is *nothing* at all, and therefore no means of forming a contradiction. To suppose the existence of a triangle and not that of its three angles, is self-contradictory; but to suppose the non-existence of both triangle and angles is perfectly admissible. And so is it with the conception of an absolutely necessary being. Annihilate its existence in thought, and you annihilate the thing itself with all its predicates; how then can there be any room for contradiction? Externally, there is nothing to give rise to a contradiction, for a thing cannot be necessary externally; nor internally, for, by the annihilation or suppression of the thing itself, its internal properties are also annihilated. God is omnipotent—that is a necessary judgment. His omnipotence cannot be denied, if the existence of a Deity is posited—the existence, that is, of an infinite being, the two conceptions being identical. But when you say, *God does not exist*, neither omnipotence nor any other predicate is affirmed; they must all disappear with the subject, and in this judgment there cannot exist the least self-contradiction.

You have thus seen, that when the predicate of a judgment is annihilated in thought along with the subject, no internal contradiction can arise, be the predicate what it may. There is no possibility of evading the conclusion—you find yourselves compelled to declare: There are certain subjects which cannot be annihilated in thought. But this is nothing more than saying: There exist subjects which are absolutely necessary—the very hypothesis which you are called upon to establish. For I find myself unable to form the slightest conception of a thing which, when annihilated in thought with all its predicates, leaves behind a contradiction; and contradiction is the only criterion of impossibility, in the sphere of pure *à priori* conceptions.

Against these general considerations, the justice of which no one can dispute, one argument is adduced, which is regarded as furnishing a satisfactory demonstration from the fact. It is affirmed, that there is one and only one conception, in which the non-being or annihilation of the object is self-contradictory, and this is the conception of an *ens realissimum*.* It possesses, you say, all reality, and you feel yourselves justified in admitting the

*Latin: "most real being."

possibility of such a thing. (This I am willing to grant for the present, although the existence of a conception which is not self-contradictory, is far from being sufficient to prove the possibility of an object.[1]) Now the notion of all reality embraces in it that of existence; the notion of existence lies, therefore, in the conception of this possible thing. If this thing is annihilated in thought, the internal possibility of the thing is also annihilated, which is self-contradictory.

I answer: It is absurd to introduce—under whatever term disguised—into the conception of a thing, which is to be cogitated solely in reference to its possibility, the conception of its existence. If this is admitted, you will have apparently gained the day, but in reality have enounced nothing but a mere tautology. I ask, is the proposition, *this or that thing* (which I am admitting to be possible) exists, an analytical or a synthetical proposition? If the former, there is no addition made to the subject of your thought by the affirmation of its existence; but then the conception in your minds is identical with the thing itself, or you have supposed the existence of a thing to be possible, and then inferred its existence from its internal possibility—which is but a miserable tautology. The word *reality* in the conception of the thing, and the word *existence* in the conception of the predicate, will not help you out of the difficulty. For, supposing you were to term all positing of a thing, reality, you have thereby posited the thing with all its predicates in the conception of the subject and assumed its actual existence, and this you merely repeat in the predicate. But if you confess, as every reasonable person must, that every existential proposition is synthetical, how can it be maintained that the predicate of existence cannot be denied without contradiction—a property which is the characteristic of analytical propositions, alone.

I should have a reasonable hope of putting an end forever to this sophistical mode of argumentation, by a strict definition of the conception of existence, did not my own experience teach me that the illusion arising from our confounding a logical with a real predicate (a predicate which aids in the determination of a thing) resists almost all the endeavors of explanation and illustration. A *logical predicate* may be what you please, even the subject may be predicated of itself; for logic pays no regard to the content of a judgment. But the determination of a conception is a predicate, which adds to and enlarges the conception. It must not, therefore, be contained in the conception.

Being is evidently not a real predicate, that is, a conception of something which is added to the conception of some other thing. It is merely the positing of a thing, or of certain determinations in it. Logically, it is merely the copula of a judgment. The proposition, *God is omnipotent*, contains two conceptions, which have a certain object or content; the word *is*, is no additional predicate—it merely indicates the relation of the predicate to the subject. Now, if I take the subject (God) with all its predicates (omnipotence being one), and say, *God is*, or *There is a God*, I add no new predicate to the conception of God, I merely posit or affirm the existence of the subject with all its predicates—I posit the *object* in relation to my *conception*. The content of both is the same; and there is no addition made to the conception, which expresses merely the possibility of the object, by my cogitating the object—in the expression, it *is*—as absolutely given or existing. Thus the real contains no more than the possible. A hundred real dollars contain no more than a hundred possible dollars. For, as the latter indicate the conception, and the former the object, on the supposition that the content of the former was greater than that of the latter, my conception would not be an expression of the whole object, and would consequently be an inadequate conception of it. But in reckoning my wealth there may be said to be more in a hundred real dollars, than in a hundred possible dollars—that is, in the mere conception of them. For the real object—the dollars—is not analytically contained in my conception, but forms a synthetical addition to my conception (which is merely a determination of my mental state), although this objective reality—this existence—apart from my conception, does not in the least degree increase the aforesaid hundred dollars.

It does not matter which predicates or how many of them we may think a thing possesses, I do not make the least addition to it when we further

declare that this thing exists. Otherwise, it would not be the exact same thing that exists, but something more than we had thought in the idea or concept; and hence, we could not say that the exact object of my thought exists. On the contrary, it exists with the same defect with which I have thought it, since otherwise what exists would be something different from what I thought. So when I think of a being as the highest reality, without any imperfection, the question still remains whether or not this being exists. For although, in my idea, nothing may be lacking in the possible real content of a thing in general, something is still lacking in its relation to my mental state; that is, I am ignorant of whether the object is also possible *à posteriori*. It is here we discover the core of our problem. If the question regarded an object of sense merely, it would be impossible for me to confuse the idea of a thing with its existence. For the concept of the object merely enables me to think of it according to universal conditions of experience; while the existence of the object permits me to think of it within the context of actual experience. However, in being connected with the content of experience as a whole, the concept of the object is not enlarged. All that has happened is that our thought has thereby acquired another possible perception. So it is not surprising that, if we attempt to think existence through the pure categories alone, we cannot specify a single mark distinguishing it from mere possibility.

Whatever be the content of our conception of an object, it is necessary to go beyond it, if we wish to predicate existence of an object. In the case of sensuous objects, this is attained by their connection according to empirical laws with some one of my perceptions; but when it comes to objects of pure thought, there is no means whatever of knowing of their existence, since it would have to be known in a completely *à priori* manner. But all our knowledge of existence (be it immediately by perception or by inferences connecting some object with a perception) belongs entirely to the sphere of experience—which is in perfect unity with itself—and although an existence out of this sphere cannot be absolutely declared to be impossible, it is a hypothesis the truth of which we have no means of discovering.

The idea of a supreme being is in many ways a very useful idea; but for the very reason that it is an idea, it is incapable of enlarging our knowledge with regard to the existence of things. It is not even sufficient to instruct us as to the possibility of a being which we do not know to exist. The analytical criterion of possibility, which consists in the absence of contradiction in propositions, cannot be denied it. But the connection of real properties in a thing is a synthesis of the possibility of which an *à priori* judgment cannot be formed, because these realities are not presented to us specifically; and even if this were to happen, a judgment would still be impossible, because the criterion of possibility of synthetical cognitions must be sought for in the world of experience, to which the object of an idea cannot belong. And thus the celebrated Leibniz has utterly failed in his attempt to establish upon *à priori* grounds the possibility of this sublime ideal being.

The celebrated ontological or Cartesian argument for the existence of a supreme being is therefore insufficient; and we may as well hope to increase our stock of knowledge by the aid of mere ideas, as the merchant to increase his wealth by adding a few zeros to his bank account.

NOTE

1. A conception is always possible, if it is not self-contradictory. This is the logical criterion of possibility, distinguishing the object of such a conception from *the nihil negativum*. But it may be, notwithstanding, an empty conception, unless the objective reality of this synthesis, by which it is generated, is demonstrated; and a proof of this kind must be based upon principles of possible experience, and not upon the principle of analysis or contradiction. This remark may be serviceable as a warning against concluding, from the possibility of a conception—which is logical, the possibility of a thing—which is real.

II.B THE COSMOLOGICAL ARGUMENT FOR THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

ASKING PEOPLE WHY THEY BELIEVE in God is likely to evoke something like the following response: "Well, things didn't just pop up out of nothing. Someone, a pretty powerful Someone, had to cause the universe to come into existence. You just can't have causes going back forever. God must have made the world. Nothing else makes sense."

All versions of the cosmological argument begin with the *a posteriori* assumptions that the universe exists and that something outside the universe is required to explain its existence. That is, it is *contingent*, depending on something outside of itself for its existence. That "something else" is logically prior to the birth of the universe. It constitutes the reason for the existence of the universe. Such a being is God.

One version of the cosmological argument is called the "first-cause argument." From the fact that some things are caused, we may reason to the existence of a first cause. The Dominican friar St. Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) gives a version of this argument in our first reading. His "second way" is based on the idea of causation:

> We find that among sensible things there is an ordering of efficient causes, and yet we do not find—nor is it possible to find—anything that is an efficient cause of its own self. For if something were an efficient cause of itself, then it would be prior to itself—which is impossible.
>
> But it is impossible to go on to infinity among efficient causes. For in every case of ordered efficient causes, the first is a cause of the intermediate and the intermediate is a cause of the last—and this regardless of whether the intermediate is constituted by many causes or by just one. But when a cause is removed, its effect is removed. Therefore, if there were no first among the efficient causes, then neither would there be a last or an intermediate. But if the efficient causes went on to infinity, there would not be a first efficient cause, and so there would not be a last effect or any intermediate efficient causes, either—which is obviously false. Therefore, one must posit some first efficient cause—which everyone calls God.

The general outline, focusing on the second argument, goes something like this:

1. There exist things that are caused.
2. Nothing can be the cause of itself.
3. There cannot be an infinite regress of causes.
4. Therefore, there exists an uncaused first cause.
5. If there is an uncaused first cause, then the uncaused first cause is God.
6. Therefore, God exists.

What can we say of this argument? Certainly the first premise is true—some things have causes. Indeed, we generally believe that every event has a cause that explains why the event happened. The second premise seems correct, for how

could something that didn't exist cause anything, let alone its own existence? Note that premise 2 and premise 4 do not contradict one another. There is nothing obviously incoherent about the idea that something or someone existed from eternity and so is uncaused, whereas there is something incoherent about the idea that something nonexistent caused itself to come into being.

One difficulty with the argument is premise 3: There cannot be an infinite regress of causes. Why can't there be such a regress? You might object that there is an infinite regress of numbers, so why can't there be an infinite regress of causes?

One response to this objection is that there is a significant difference between numbers and events and persons. Numbers are just abstract entities, whereas events and persons are concrete, temporal entities, the sorts of things that need to be brought into existence. Numbers exist in all possible worlds. They are eternal, but Napoleon, Mt. Everest, and you are not eternal but need a causal explanation. The child asks, "Mommy, who made me?" and the mother responds, "You came from my womb." The child persists, "Mommy, who made you and your womb?" The mother responds that she came from a fertilized egg in her mother's womb, but the child persists in the query until the mother is forced to admit that she doesn't know the answer or perhaps says, "God made the world and all that is in it." God may be one explanatory hypothesis, answering the question why the world came to be, but the question is, Are there other, equally good explanatory hypotheses? In other words, does the argument from first cause, *even if it is valid*, give us reason to think that *God* is the first cause?

In our second reading, the eighteenth-century philosopher Samuel Clarke sets forth a different version of the cosmological argument, the argument from contingency (Aquinas's third way). Clarke, like Aquinas before him, identifies the independent and necessary being with God. We are dependent, or contingent, beings. Reducing the argument to the bare bones, the argument from contingency is this:

1. Every being that exists is either contingent or necessary.
2. Not every being can be contingent.
3. Therefore, there exists a necessary being upon which the contingent beings depend.
4. A necessary being on which all contingent beings exist is what we mean by *God*.
5. Therefore, God exists.

A necessary being is self-existing, independent, and has the explanation of its existence in itself, whereas contingent beings do not have the reason for their existence in themselves but depend on other beings and, ultimately, depend on a necessary being.

In our third reading, William Rowe examines the cosmological argument, and especially versions like the argument from contingency based on the *principle of sufficient reason* (PSR)—the thesis that everything must have an explanation to account for it. He points out problems connected with this principle.

In our fourth reading, William Lane Craig and J. P. Moreland defend the *kalām* cosmological argument, an argument first set forth by Arab Islamic scholars, al-Kindi and al-Ghazali, in the Middle Ages.

In our final reading, Paul Draper analyzes the *kalām* argument and claims that, Craig's defense of the cosmological argument fails, both because it fails to establish that the universe had a beginning and because it rests on an equivocation of the phrase 'begins to exist.'

II.B.1

The Five Ways

THOMAS AQUINAS

The Dominican friar Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) is considered by many to be the greatest theologian in Western religion. The five ways of showing the existence of God given in this selection are versions of the cosmological argument. The first way concerns the fact that there is change (or motion) and argues that there must be an Unmoved Mover that originates all change but itself is not moved. The second way is from the idea of causation and argues that there must be a first, uncaused cause to explain the existence of all other causes. The third way is from the idea of contingency. It argues that because there are dependent beings (e.g., humans), there must be an independent or necessary being on whom the dependent beings rely for their subsistence. The fourth way is from excellence, and it argues that because there are degrees of excellence, there must be a perfect being from whence all excellences come. The final way is from the harmony of things. There is a harmony of nature, which calls for an explanation. The only sufficient explanation is that there is a divine designer who planned this harmony.

ARTICLE 3: DOES GOD EXIST?

It seems that God does not exist:

Objection 1: If one of a pair of contraries were infinite, it would totally destroy the other contrary. But by the name 'God' one means a certain infinite good. Therefore, if God existed, there would be nothing evil. But there is evil in the world. Therefore, God does not exist.

Objection 2: What can be accomplished with fewer principles is not done through more principles. But it seems that everything that happens in the world could have been accomplished through other principles, even if God did not exist; for things that are natural are traced back to nature as a principle, whereas things that are purposeful are traced back to human reason or will as a principle. Therefore, there is no need to claim that God exists.

But contrary to this: Exodus 1:14 says under the personage of God, "I am Who am."

I respond: There are five ways to prove that God exists.

Printed with the permission of the translator, Alfred J. Freddoso. This translation is being published by Saint Augustine's Press.

The *first* and clearest way is that taken from motion:

It is certain, and obvious to the senses, that in this world some things are moved.

But everything that is moved is moved by another. For nothing is moved except insofar as it is in potentiality with respect to that actuality toward which it is moved, whereas something effects motion insofar as it is in actuality in a relevant respect. After all, to effect motion is just to lead something from potentiality into actuality. But a thing cannot be led from potentiality into actuality except through some being that is in actuality in a relevant respect; for example, something that is hot in actuality—say, a fire—makes a piece of wood, which is hot in potentiality, to be hot in actuality, and it thereby moves and alters the piece of wood. But it is impossible for something to be simultaneously in potentiality and in actuality with respect to same thing; rather, it can be in potentiality and in actuality only with respect to different things. For what is hot in actuality cannot simultaneously be hot in potentiality; rather, it is cold in potentiality. Therefore, it is impossible that something should be both mover and moved in the same way and with respect to the same thing, or, in other words, that something should move itself. Therefore, everything that is moved must be moved by another.

If, then, that by which something is moved is itself moved, then it, too, must be moved by another, and that other by still another. But this does not go on to infinity. For if it did, then there would not be any first mover and, as a result, none of the others would effect motion, either. For secondary movers effect motion only because they are being moved by a first mover, just as a stick does not effect motion except because it is being moved by a hand. Therefore, one has to arrive at some first mover that is not being moved by anything. And this is what everyone takes to be God.

The *second* way is based on the notion of an efficient cause:

We find that among sensible things there is an ordering of efficient causes, and yet we do not find—nor is it possible to find—anything that is an efficient cause of its own self. For if something were an efficient cause of itself, then it would be prior to itself—which is impossible.

But it is impossible to go on to infinity among efficient causes. For in every case of ordered efficient causes, the first is a cause of the intermediate and the intermediate is a cause of the last—and this regardless of whether the intermediate is constituted by many causes or by just one. But when a cause is removed, its effect is removed. Therefore, if there were no first among the efficient causes, then neither would there be a last or an intermediate. But if the efficient causes went on to infinity, there would not be a first efficient cause, and so there would not be a last effect or any intermediate efficient causes, either—which is obviously false. Therefore, one must posit some first efficient cause—which everyone calls God.

The *third* way is taken from the possible and the necessary, and it goes like this:

Certain of the things we find in the world are able to exist and able not to exist; for some things are found to be generated and corrupted and, as a result, they are able to exist and able not to exist.

But it is impossible that everything should be like this; for that which is able not to exist is such that at some time it does not exist. Therefore, if everything is such that it is able not to exist, then at some time nothing existed in the world. But if this were true, then nothing would exist even now. For what does not exist begins to exist only through something that does exist; therefore, if there were no beings, then it was impossible that anything should have begun to exist, and so nothing would exist now—which is obviously false. Therefore, not all beings are able to exist [and able not to exist]; rather, it must be that there is something necessary in the world.

Now every necessary being either has a cause of its necessity from outside itself or it does not. But it is impossible to go on to infinity among necessary beings that have a cause of their necessity—in the same way, as was proved above, that it is impossible to go on to infinity among efficient causes. Therefore, one must posit something that is necessary *per se*, which does not have a cause of its necessity from outside itself but is instead a cause of necessity for the other [necessary] things. But this everyone calls God.

The *fourth* way is taken from the gradations that are found in the world:

In the world some things are found to be more and less good, more and less true, more and less noble, etc. But *more* and *less* are predicated of diverse things insofar as they approach in diverse ways that which is maximal in a given respect. For instance, the hotter something is, the closer it approaches that which is maximally hot. Therefore, there is something that is maximally true, maximally good, and maximally noble, and, as a result, is a maximal being; for according to the Philosopher in *Metaphysics* 2, things that are maximally true are maximally beings.

But, as is claimed in the same book, that which is maximal in a given genus is a cause of all the things that belong to that genus; for instance, fire, which is maximally hot, is a cause of all hot things. Therefore, there is something that is a cause for all beings of their *esse*, their goodness, and each of their perfections—and this we call God.

The *fifth* way is taken from the governance of things:

We see that some things lacking cognition, viz., natural bodies, act for the sake of an end. This is apparent from the fact that they always or very frequently act in the same way in order to bring about that which is best, and from this it is clear that it is not by chance, but by design, that they attain the end.

But things lacking cognition tend toward an end only if they are directed by something that has cognition and intelligence, in the way that an arrow is directed by an archer. Therefore, there is something intelligent by which all natural things are ordered to an end—and this we call God.

Reply to objection 1: As Augustine says in the *Enchiridion*, "Since God is maximally good, He would not allow any evil to exist in His works if He were not powerful enough and good enough to draw good even from evil." Therefore, it is part of God's infinite goodness that He should permit evils and elicit goods from them.

Reply to objection 2: Since it is by the direction of a higher agent that nature acts for the sake of a determinate end, those things that are done by nature must also be traced back to God as a first cause. Similarly, even things that are done by design must be traced back to a higher cause and not to human reason and will. For human reason and will are changeable and subject to failure, but, as was shown above, all things that can change and fail must be traced back to a first principle that is unmoved and necessary *per se*.

II.B.2

The Argument from Contingency

SAMUEL CLARKE

Samuel Clarke (1675–1729), an English philosopher and Anglican minister, one of the first to appreciate the work of Isaac Newton, here sets forth a version of the argument from contingency. It is based on the idea that if some beings are dependent, or contingent, there must of necessity be an independent being upon which all other beings are dependent.

Reprinted from *A Discourse Concerning Natural Religion* (1705).

There has existed from eternity some one unchangeable and independent being. For since something must needs have been from eternity; as hath been already proved, and is granted on all hands: either there has always existed one unchangeable and *independent* Being, from which all other beings that are or ever were in the universe, have received their original; or else there has been an infinite succession of changeable and *dependent* beings, produced one from another in an endless progression, without any original cause at all: which latter supposition is so very absurd, that tho' all atheism must in its account of most things (as shall be shown hereafter) terminate in it, yet I think very few atheists ever were so weak as openly and directly to defend it. For it is plainly impossible and contradictory to itself. I shall not argue against it from the supposed impossibility of infinite succession, *barely and absolutely considered in itself*; for a reason which shall be mentioned hereafter: but, if we consider such an infinite progression, as *one* entire endless *series of dependent* beings; 'tis plain this whole series of beings can have no cause *from without*, of its existence; because in it are supposed to be included *all things* that are or ever were in the universe: and 'tis plain it can have no reason *within itself*, of its existence; because no one being in this infinite succession is supposed to be self-existent or necessary (which is the only ground or reason of existence of any thing, that can be imagined *within the thing itself*, as will presently more fully appear), but every one *dependent* on the foregoing: and where *no part* is necessary, 'tis manifest *the whole* cannot be necessary; absolute necessity of existence, not being an outward, relative, and accidental determination; but an inward and essential property of the nature of the thing which so exists. An infinite succession therefore of merely *dependent beings*, without any original independent cause; is a *series* of beings, that has neither necessity nor cause, nor any reason *at all* of its existence, neither *within itself* nor *from without*: that is, 'tis an express contradiction and impossibility; 'tis a supposing *something to be caused*, (because it's granted in every one of its stages of succession, not to be necessary and from itself); and yet that in the whole it is caused *absolutely by nothing*: Which every man knows is a contradiction to be done *in time*; and because duration in this case makes no difference, 'tis equally a contradiction to suppose it done from eternity: And consequently there must *on the contrary*, of necessity have existed from eternity, *some one* immutable and *independent* Being: Which, what it is, remains in the next place to be inquired.

II.B.3

An Examination of the Cosmological Argument

WILLIAM ROWE

Brief biographical remarks about William Rowe appear before selection I.B.9. In the present selection, taken from the second edition of his Philosophy of Religion: An Introduction *(1993), Rowe begins by distinguishing between a priori and a posteriori arguments and setting the cosmological argument*

From Rowe, *Philosophy of Religion*, 2nd edition. © 1993 Wadsworth, a part of Cengage Learning, Inc.
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in historical perspective. Next, he divides the argument into two parts: that which seeks to prove the existence of a self-existent being and that which seeks to prove that this self-existent being is the God of theism. He introduces the principle of sufficient reason—"There must be an explanation (a) of the existence of any being and (b) of any positive fact whatever"—and shows its role in the cosmological argument. In the light of this principle, he examines the argument itself and four objections to it.

STATING THE ARGUMENT

Arguments for the existence of God are commonly divided into *a posteriori* arguments and *a priori* arguments. An *a posteriori* argument depends on a principle or premise that can be known only by means of our experience of the world. An *a priori* argument, on the other hand, purports to rest on principles all of which can be known independently of our experience of the world, by just reflecting on and understanding them. Of the three major arguments for the existence of God—the Cosmological, the Teleological, and the Ontological—only the last of these is entirely *a priori*. In the Cosmological Argument one starts from some simple fact about the world, such as that it contains things which are caused to exist by other things. In the Teleological Argument a somewhat more complicated fact about the world serves as a starting point, the fact that the world exhibits order and design. In the Ontological Argument, however, one begins simply with a concept of God….

Before we state the Cosmological Argument itself, we shall consider some rather general points about the argument. Historically, it can be traced to the writings of the Greek philosophers, Plato and Aristotle, but the major developments in the argument took place in the thirteenth and in the eighteenth centuries. In the thirteenth century Aquinas put forth five distinct arguments for the existence of God, and of these, the first three are versions of the Cosmological Argument.[1] In the first of these he started from the fact that there are things in the world undergoing change and reasoned to the conclusion that there must be some ultimate cause of change that is itself unchanging. In the second he started from the fact that there are things in the world that clearly are caused to exist by other things and reasoned to the conclusion that there must be some ultimate cause of existence whose own existence is itself uncaused. And in the third argument he started from the fact that there are things in the world which need not have existed at all, things which do exist but which we can easily imagine might not, and reasoned to the conclusion that there must be some being that had to be, that exists and could not have failed to exist. Now it might be objected that even if Aquinas' arguments do prove beyond doubt the existence of an unchanging changer, an uncaused cause, and a being that could not have failed to exist, the arguments fail to prove the existence of the theistic God. For the theistic God, as we saw, is supremely good, omnipotent, omniscient, and creator of but separate from and independent of the world. How do we know, for example, that the unchanging changer isn't evil or slightly ignorant? The answer to this objection is that the Cosmological Argument has two parts. In the first part the effort is to prove the existence of a special sort of being, for example, a being that could not have failed to exist, or a being that causes change in other things but is itself unchanging. In the second part of the argument the effort is to prove that the special sort of being whose existence has been established in the first part has, and must have, the features—perfect goodness, omnipotence, omniscience, and so on—which go together to make up the theistic idea of God. What this means, then, is that Aquinas' three arguments are different versions of only the first part of the Cosmological Argument. Indeed, in later sections of his *Summa Theological* Aquinas undertakes to show that the unchanging changer, the uncaused cause of existence, and the being which had to exist are one and the same being and that this single being has all of the attributes of the theistic God.

We noted above that a second major development in the Cosmological Argument took place in the eighteenth century, a development reflected in the writings of the German philosopher, Gottfried

Leibniz (1646–1716), and especially in the writings of the English theologian and philosopher, Samuel Clarke (1675–1729). In 1704 Clarke gave a series of lectures, later published under the title *A Demonstration of the Being and Attributes of God*. These lectures constitute, perhaps, the most complete, forceful, and cogent presentation of the Cosmological Argument we possess. The lectures were read by the major skeptical philosopher of the century, David Hume (1711–1776), and in his brilliant attack on the attempt to justify religion in the court of reason, his *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, Hume advanced several penetrating criticisms of Clarke's arguments, criticisms which have persuaded many philosophers in the modern period to reject the Cosmological Argument. In our study of the argument we shall concentrate our attention largely on its eighteenth-century form and try to assess its strengths and weaknesses in the light of the criticisms which Hume and others have advanced against it.

The first part of the eighteenth-century form of the Cosmological Argument seeks to establish the existence of a self-existent being. The second part of the argument attempts to prove that the self-existent being is the theistic God, that is, has the features which we have noted to be basic elements in the theistic idea of God. We shall consider mainly the first part of the argument, for it is against the first part that philosophers from Hume to Russell have advanced very important objections.

In stating the first part of the Cosmological Argument we shall make use of two important concepts, the concept of a *dependent being* and the concept of a *self-existent being*. By a *dependent being* we mean *a being whose existence is accounted for by the causal activity of other things*. Recalling Anselm's division into the three cases: "explained by another," "explained by nothing," and "explained by itself," it's clear that a dependent being is a being whose existence is explained by another. By a *self-existent being* we mean *a being whose existence is accounted for by its own nature*. This idea … is an essential element in the theistic concept of God. Again, in terms of Anselm's three cases, a self-existent being is a being whose existence is explained by itself. Armed with these two concepts, the concept of a dependent being and the concept of a self-existent being, we can now state the first part of the Cosmological Argument.

1. Every being (that exists or ever did exist) is either a dependent being or a self-existent being.
2. Not every being can be a dependent being.

Therefore,

3. There exists a self-existent being.

DEDUCTIVE VALIDITY

Before we look critically at each of the premises of this argument, we should note that this argument is, to use an expression from the logician's vocabulary, *deductively valid*. To find out whether an argument is deductively valid, we need only ask the question: If its premises were true, would its conclusion have to be true? If the answer is yes, the argument is deductively valid. If the answer is no, the argument is deductively invalid. Notice that the question of the validity of an argument is entirely different from the question of whether its premises are in fact true. The following argument is made up entirely of false statements, but it is deductively valid.

1. Babe Ruth is the President of the United States.
2. The President of the United States is from Indiana.

Therefore,

3. Babe Ruth is from Indiana.

The argument is deductively valid because even though its premises are false, if they were true its conclusion would have to be true. Even God, Aquinas would say, cannot bring it about that the premises of this argument are true and yet its conclusion is false, for God's power extends only to what is possible, and it is an absolute impossibility that Babe Ruth be the President,

the President be from Indiana, and yet Babe Ruth not be from Indiana.

The Cosmological Argument (that is, its first part) is a deductively valid argument. If its premises are or were true, its conclusion would have to be true. It's clear from our example about Babe Ruth, however, that the fact that an argument is deductively valid is insufficient to establish the truth of its conclusion. What else is required? Clearly that we know or have rational grounds for believing that the premises are true. If we know that the Cosmological Argument is deductively valid, and can establish that its premises are true, we shall thereby have proved that its conclusion is true. Are, then, the premises of the Cosmological Argument true? To this more difficult question we must now turn.

PSR AND THE FIRST PREMISE

At first glance the first premise might appear to be an obvious or even trivial truth. But it is neither obvious nor trivial. And if it appears to be obvious or trivial, we must be confusing the idea of a self-existent being with the idea of a being that is not a dependent being. Clearly, it is true that any being is either a dependent being (explained by other things) or it is not a dependent being (not explained by other things). But what our premise says is that any being is either a dependent being (explained by other things) or it is a self-existent being (explained by itself). Consider again Anselm's three cases.

a. explained by another

b. explained by nothing

c. explained by itself

What our first premise asserts is that each being that exists (or ever did exist) is either of sort *a* or of sort *c*. It denies that any being is of sort *b*. And it is this denial that makes the first premise both significant and controversial. The obvious truth we must not confuse it with is the truth that any being is either of sort *a* or not of sort *a*. While this is true it is neither very significant nor controversial.

Earlier we saw that Anselm accepted as a basic principle that whatever exists has an explanation of its existence. Since this basic principle denies that any thing of sort *b* exists or ever did exist, it's clear that Anselm would believe the first premise of our Cosmological Argument. The eighteenth-century proponents of the argument also were convinced of the truth of the basic principle we attributed to Anselm. And because they were convinced of its truth, they readily accepted the first premise of the Cosmological Argument. But by the eighteenth century, Anselm's basic principle had been more fully elaborated and had received a name, the *Principle of Sufficient Reason*. Since this principle (PSR, as we shall call it) plays such an important role in justifying the premises of the Cosmological Argument, it will help us to consider it for a moment before we continue our enquiry into the truth or falsity of the premises of the Cosmological Argument.

The Principle of Sufficient Reason, as it was expressed by both Leibniz and Samuel Clarke, is a very general principle and is best understood as having two parts. In its first part it is simply a restatement of Anselm's principle that there must be an explanation of the existence of any being whatever. Thus if we come upon a man in a room, PSR implies that there must be an explanation of the fact that that particular man exists. A moment's reflection, however, reveals that there are many facts about the man other than the mere fact that he exists. There is the fact that the man in question is in the room he's in, rather than somewhere else, the fact that he is in good health, and the fact that he is at the moment thinking of Paris, rather than, say, London. Now, the purpose of the second part of PSR is to require an explanation of these facts, as well. We may state PSR, therefore, as the principle that *there must be an explanation (a) of the existence of any being, and (b) of any positive fact whatever.* We are now in a position to study the role this very important principle plays in the Cosmological Argument.

Since the proponent of the Cosmological Argument accepts PSR in both its parts, it is clear that he will appeal to its first part, PSRa, as justification for the first premise of the Cosmological Argument. Of course, we can and should enquire

into the deeper question of whether the proponent of the argument is rationally justified in accepting PSR itself. But we shall put this question aside for the moment. What we need to see first is whether he is correct in thinking that *if* PSR is true then both of the premises of the Cosmological Argument are true. And what we have just seen is that if only the first part of PSR, that is, PSRa, is true, the first premise of the Cosmological Argument will be true. But what of the second premise of the argument? For what reasons does the proponent think that it must be true?

THE SECOND PREMISE

According to the second premise, not every being that exists can be a dependent being, that is, can have the explanation of its existence in some other being or beings. Presumably, the proponent of the argument thinks there is something fundamentally wrong with the idea that every being that exists is dependent, that each existing being was caused by some other being which in turn was caused by some other being, and so on. But just what does he think is wrong with it? To help us in understanding his thinking, let's simplify things by supposing that there exists only one thing now, A_1, a living thing perhaps, that was brought into existence by something else, A_2, which perished shortly after it brought A_1 into existence. Suppose further that A_2 was brought into existence in similar fashion some time ago by A_3, and A_3 by A_4, and so forth back into the past. Each of these beings is a *dependent* being, it owes its existence to the preceding thing in the series. Now if nothing else ever existed but these beings, then what the second premise says would not be true. For if every being that exists or ever did exist is an A and was produced by a preceding A, then every being that exists or ever did exist would be dependent and, accordingly, premise two of the Cosmological Argument would be false. If the proponent of the Cosmological Argument is correct there must, then, be something wrong with the idea that every being that exists or did exist is an A and that they form a causal series: A_1 caused by A_2, A_2 caused by A_3, A_3 caused by A_4, … A_n caused by A_{n+1}. How does the proponent of the Cosmological Argument propose to show us that there is something wrong with this view?

A popular but mistaken idea of how the proponent tries to show that something is wrong with the view, that every being might be dependent, is that he uses the following argument to reject it.

1. There must be a *first* being to start any causal series.
2. If every being were dependent there would be no *first* being to start the causal series.

Therefore,

3. Not every being can be a dependent being.

Although this argument is deductively valid, and its second premise is true, its first premise overlooks the distinct possibility that a causal series might be *infinite*, with no first member at all. Thus if we go back to our series of A beings, where each A is dependent, having been produced by the preceding A in the causal series, it's clear that if the series existed it would have no first member, for every A in the series there would be a preceding A which produced it, *ad infinitum*. The first premise of the argument just given assumes that a causal series must stop with a first member somewhere in the distant past. But there seems to be no good reason for making that assumption.

The eighteenth-century proponents of the Cosmological Argument recognized that the causal series of dependent beings could be infinite, without a first member to start the series. They rejected the idea that every being that is or ever was is dependent not because there would then be no first member to the series of dependent beings, but because there would then be no explanation for the fact that there are and have always been dependent beings. To see their reasoning let's return to our simplification of the supposition that the only things that exist or ever did exist are dependent beings. In our simplification of that supposition only one of the dependent beings exists at

a time, each one perishing as it produces the next in the series. Perhaps the first thing to note about this supposition is that there is no individual A in the causal series of dependent beings whose existence is unexplained—A_1 is explained by A_2, A_2 by A_3, and A_n by A_{n+1}. So the first part of PSR, PSRa, appears to be satisfied. There is no particular being whose existence lacks an explanation. What, then, is it that lacks an explanation, if every particular A in the causal series of dependent beings has an explanation? It is the *series itself* that lacks an explanation, or, as I've chosen to express it, *the fact that there are and have always been dependent beings*. For suppose we ask why it is that there are and have always been *A*s in existence. It won't do to say that *A*s have always been producing other *A*s—we can't explain why there have always been *A*s by saying there always have been *A*s. Nor, on the supposition that only *A*s have ever existed, can we explain the fact that there have always been *A*s by appealing to something other than an *A*—for no such thing would have existed. Thus the supposition that the only things that exist or ever existed are dependent things leaves us with a fact for which there can be no explanation; namely, the fact that there are and have always been dependent beings.

QUESTIONING THE JUSTIFICATION OF THE SECOND PREMISE

Critics of the Cosmological Argument have raised several important objections against the claim that if every being is dependent the series or collection of those beings would have no explanation. Our understanding of the Cosmological Argument, as well as of its strengths and weaknesses, will be deepened by a careful consideration of these criticisms.

The first criticism is that the proponent of the Cosmological Argument makes the mistake of treating the collection or series of dependent beings as though it were itself a dependent being, and, therefore, requires an explanation of its existence. But, so the objection goes, the collection of dependent beings is not itself a dependent being any more than a collection of stamps is itself a stamp.

A second criticism is that the proponent makes the mistake of inferring that because each member of the collection of dependent beings has a cause, the collection itself must have a cause. But, as Bertrand Russell noted, such reasoning is as fallacious as to infer that the human race (that is, the collection of human beings) must have a mother because each member of the collection (each human being) has a mother.

A third criticism is that the proponent of the argument fails to realize that for there to be an explanation of a collection of things is nothing more than for there to be an explanation of each of the things making up the collection. Since in the infinite collection (or series) of dependent beings, each being in the collection does have an explanation—by virtue of having been caused by some preceding member of the collection—the explanation of the collection, so the criticism goes, has already been given. As David Hume remarked, "Did I show you the particular causes of each individual in a collection of twenty particles of matter, I should think it very unreasonable, should you afterwards ask me, what was the cause of the whole twenty. This is sufficiently explained in explaining the cause of the parts."[2]

Finally, even if the proponent of the Cosmological Argument can satisfactorily answer these objections, he must face one last objection to his ingenious attempt to justify premise two of the Cosmological Argument. For someone may agree that if nothing exists but an infinite collection of dependent beings, the infinite collection will have no explanation of its existence, and still refuse to conclude from this that there is something wrong with the idea that every being is a dependent being. Why, he might ask, should we think that everything has to have an explanation? What's wrong with admitting that the fact that there are and have always been dependent beings is a *brute fact*, a fact having no explanation whatever? Why does everything have to have an explanation anyway?

We must now see what can be said in response to these several objections.

Responses to Criticism

It is certainly a mistake to think that a collection of stamps is itself a stamp, and very likely a mistake to think that the collection of dependent beings is itself a dependent being. But the mere fact that the proponent of the argument thinks that there must be an explanation not only for each member of the collection of dependent beings but for the collection itself is not sufficient grounds for concluding that he must view the collection as itself a dependent being. The collection of human beings, for example, is certainly not itself a human being. Admitting this, however, we might still seek an explanation of why there is a collection of human beings, of why there are such things as human beings at all. So the mere fact that an explanation is demanded for the collection of dependent beings is no proof that the person who demands the explanation must be supposing that the collection itself is just another dependent being.

The second criticism attributes to the proponent of the Cosmological Argument the following bit of reasoning.

1. Every member of the collection of dependent beings has a cause or explanation.

Therefore,

2. The collection of dependent beings has a cause or explanation.

As we noted in setting forth this criticism, arguments of this sort are often unreliable. It would be a mistake to conclude that a collection of objects is light in weight simply because each object in the collection is light in weight, for if there were many objects in the collection it might be quite heavy. On the other hand, if we know that each marble weighs more than one ounce, we could infer validly that the collection of marbles weighs more than an ounce. Fortunately, however, we don't need to decide whether the inference from 1 to 2 is valid or invalid. We need not decide this question because the proponent of the Cosmological Argument need not use this inference to establish that there must be an explanation of the collection of dependent beings. He need not use this inference because he has in PSR a principle from which it follows immediately that the collection of dependent beings has a cause or explanation. For according to PSR, every positive fact must have an explanation. If it is a fact that there exists a collection of dependent beings then, according to PSR, that fact too must have an explanation. So it is PSR that the proponent of the Cosmological Argument appeals to in concluding that there must be an explanation of the collection of dependent beings, and not some dubious inference from the premise that each member of the collection has an explanation. It seems, then, that neither of the first two criticisms is strong enough to do any serious damage to the reasoning used to support the second premise of the Cosmological Argument.

The third objection contends that to explain the existence of a collection of things is the same thing as to explain the existence of each of its members. If we consider a collection of dependent beings where each being in the collection is explained by the preceding member which caused it, it's clear that no member of the collection will lack an explanation of its existence. But, so the criticism goes, if we've explained the existence of every member of a collection, we've explained the existence of the collection—there's nothing left over to be explained. This forceful criticism, originally advanced by David Hume, has gained considerable support in the modern period. But the criticism rests on an assumption that the proponent of the Cosmological Argument would not accept. The assumption is that to explain the existence of a collection of things it is *sufficient* to explain the existence of every member in the collection. To see what is wrong with this assumption is to understand the basic issue in the reasoning by which the proponent of the Cosmological Argument seeks to establish that not every being can be a dependent being.

In order for there to be an explanation of the existence of the collection of dependent beings, it's clear that the eighteenth-century proponents would

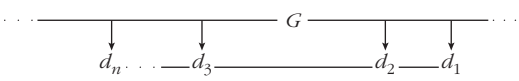
require that the following two conditions be satisfied:

C1. There is an explanation of the existence of each of the members of the collection of dependent beings.

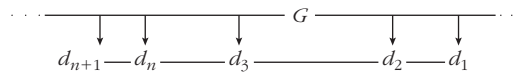
C2. There is an explanation of why there are any dependent beings.

According to the proponents of the Cosmological Argument, if every being that exists or ever did exist is a dependent being—that is, if the whole of reality consists of nothing more than a collection of dependent beings—C1 will be satisfied, but C2 will not be satisfied. And since C2 won't be satisfied, there will be no explanation of the collection of dependent beings. The third criticism, therefore, says in effect that if C1 is satisfied, C2 will be satisfied, and, since in a collection of dependent beings each member will have an explanation in whatever it was that produced it, C1 will be satisfied, So, therefore, C2 will be satisfied and the collection of dependent beings will have an explanation.

Although the issue is a complicated one, I think it is possible to see that the third criticism rests on a mistake: the mistake of thinking that if C1 is satisfied C2 must also be satisfied. The mistake is a natural one to make for it is easy to imagine circumstances in which if C1 is satisfied C2 also will be satisfied. Suppose, for example that the whole of reality includes not just a collection of dependent beings but also a self-existent being. Suppose further that instead of each dependent being having been produced by some other dependent being, every dependent being was produced by the self-existent being. Finally, let us consider both the possibility that the collection of dependent beings is finite in time and has a first member, and the possibility that the collection of dependent beings is infinite in past time, having no first member. Using *G* for the self-existent being, the first possibility may be diagramed as follows:



G, we shall say, has always existed and always will. We can think of d_1 as some presently existing dependent being, d_2, d_3, and so forth as dependent beings that existed at some time in the past, and d_n as the first dependent being to exist. The second possibility may be portrayed as follows:



On this diagram there is no first member of the collection of dependent beings. Each member of the infinite collection, however, is explained by reference to the self-existent being *G* which produced it. Now the interesting point about both these cases is that the explanation that has been provided for the members of the collection of dependent beings carries with it, at least in part, an answer to the question of why there are any dependent beings at all. In both cases we may explain why there are dependent beings by pointing out that there exists a self-existent being that has been engaged in producing them. So once we have learned that the existence of each member of the collection of dependent beings has its existence explained by the fact that *G* produced it, we have already learned why there are dependent beings.

Someone might object that we haven't really learned why there are dependent beings until we also learn *why G* has been producing them. But, of course, we could also say that we haven't really explained the existence of a particular dependent being, say d_3, until we also learn not just that *G* produced it but *why G* produced it. The point we need to grasp, however, is that once we admit that every dependent being's existence is explained by *G*, we must admit that the fact that there are dependent beings has also been explained. So it is not unnatural that someone should think that to explain the existence of the collection of dependent beings is nothing more than to explain the existence of its members. For, as we've seen, to explain the collection's existence is to explain each member's existence and to explain why there are any dependent beings at all. And in the examples we've considered, in doing

the one (explaining why each dependent being exists) we've already done the other (explained why there are any dependent beings at all). We must now see, however, that on the supposition that the whole of reality consists *only* of a collection of dependent beings, to give an explanation of each member's existence is not to provide an explanation of why there are dependent beings.

In the examples we've considered, we have gone outside of the collection of dependent beings in order to explain the members' existence. But if the only beings that exist or ever existed are dependent beings then each dependent being will be explained by some other dependent being, ad infinitum. This does not mean that there will be some particular dependent being whose existence is unaccounted for. Each dependent being has an explanation of its existence; namely, in the dependent being which preceded it and produced it. So C1 is satisfied: there is an explanation of the existence of each member of the collection of dependent beings. Turning to C2, however, we can see that it will not be satisfied. We cannot explain why there are (or have ever been) dependent beings by appealing to all the members of the infinite collection of dependent beings. For if the question to be answered is why there are (or have ever been) any dependent beings at all, we cannot answer that question by noting that there always have been dependent beings, each one accounting for the existence of some other dependent being. Thus on the supposition that every being is dependent, it seems there will be no explanation of why there are dependent beings. C2 will not be satisfied. Therefore, on the supposition that every being is dependent there will be no explanation of the existence of the collection of dependent beings.

THE TRUTH OF PSR

We come now to the final criticism of the reasoning supporting the second premise of the Cosmological Argument. According to the criticism, it is admitted that the supposition that every being is dependent implies that there will be a *brute fact* in the universe, a fact, that is, for which there can be no explanation whatever. For there will be no explanation of the fact that dependent beings exist and have always been in existence. It is this brute fact that the proponents of the argument were describing when they pointed out that if every being is dependent, the series or collection of dependent beings would lack an explanation of *its* existence. The final criticism asks what is wrong with admitting that the universe contains such a brute, unintelligible fact. In asking this question the critic challenges the fundamental principle, PSR, on which the Cosmological Argument rests. For, as we've seen, the first premise of the argument denies that there exists a being whose existence has no explanation. In support of this premise the proponent appeals to the first part of PSR. The second premise of the argument claims that not every being can be dependent. In support of this premise the proponent appeals to the second part of PSR, the part which states that there must be an explanation of any positive fact whatever.

The proponent reasons that if every being were a dependent being, then although the first part of PSR would be satisfied—every being would have an explanation—the second part would be violated; there would be no explanation for the positive fact that there are and have always been dependent beings. For first, since every being is supposed to be dependent, there would be nothing outside of the collection of dependent beings to explain the collection's existence. Second, the fact that each member of the collection has an explanation in some other dependent being is insufficient to explain why there are and have always been dependent beings. And, finally, there is nothing about the collection of dependent beings that would suggest that it is a self-existent collection. Consequently, if every being were dependent, the fact that there are and have always been dependent beings would have no explanation. But this violates the second part of PSR. So the second premise of the Cosmological Argument must be true: Not every being can be a dependent being. This conclusion, however, is no better than the principle, PSR, on which it rests. And it is the point of the final criticism to question the truth of PSR. Why, after all, should we accept the idea that every being and every positive fact must have an explanation? Why, in short, should we believe PSR? These are

important questions, and any final judgment of the Cosmological Argument depends on how they are answered.

Most of the theologians and philosophers who accept PSR have tried to defend it in either of two ways. Some have held that PSR is (or can be) known *intuitively* to be true. By this they mean that if we fully understand and reflect on what is said by PSR we can see that it must be true. Now, undoubtedly, there are statements which are known intuitively to be true. "Every triangle has exactly three angles" or "No physical object can be in two different places in space at one and the same time" are examples of statements whose truth we can apprehend just by understanding and reflecting on them. The difficulty with the claim that PSR is intuitively true, however, is that a number of very able philosophers fail to apprehend its truth, and some even claim that the principle is false. It is doubtful, therefore, that many of us, if any, know intuitively that PSR is true.

The second way philosophers and theologians who accept PSR have sought to defend it is by claiming that although it is not known to be true, it is, nevertheless, a presupposition of reason, a basic assumption that rational people make, whether or not they reflect sufficiently to become aware of the assumption. It's probably true that there are some assumptions we all make about our world, assumptions which are so basic that most of us are unaware of them. And, I suppose, it might be true that PSR is such an assumption. What bearing would this view of PSR have on the Cosmological Argument? Perhaps the main point to note is that even if PSR is a presupposition we all share, the premises of the Cosmological Argument could still be false. For PSR itself could still be false. The fact, if it is a fact, that all of us *presuppose* that every existing being and every positive fact has an explanation does not imply that no being exists, and no positive fact obtains, without an explanation. Nature is not bound to satisfy our presuppositions. As the American philosopher William James once remarked in another connection, "In the great boarding house of nature, the cakes and the butter and the syrup seldom come out so even and leave the plates so clear."

Our study of the first part of the Cosmological Argument has led us to the fundamental principle on which its premises rest, the Principle of Sufficient Reason. Since we do not seem to know that PSR is true, we cannot reasonably claim to know that the premises of the Cosmological Argument are true. They might be true. But unless we do know them to be true they cannot *establish* for us the conclusion that there exists a being that has the explanation of its existence within its own nature. If it were shown, however, that even though we do not *know* that PSR is true we all, nevertheless, *presuppose* PSR to be true, then, whether PSR is true or not, to be consistent we should accept the Cosmological Argument. For, as we've seen, its premises imply its conclusion and its premises do seem to follow from PSR. But no one has succeeded in *showing* that PSR is an assumption that most or all of us share. So our final conclusion must be that although the Cosmological Argument might be a *sound* argument (valid with true premises), it does not provide us with good rational grounds for believing that among these beings that exist there is one whose existence is accounted for by its own nature. Having come to this conclusion, we may safely put aside the second part of the argument. For even if it succeeded in showing that a self-existent being would have the other attributes of the theistic God, the Cosmological Argument would still not provide us with good rational grounds for belief in God, having failed in its first part to provide us with good rational grounds for believing that there is a self-existent being.

NOTES

1. See St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica, Ila.* 2, 3.
2. David Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, Part IX, ed. H. D. Aiken (New York: Hafner Publishing Company, 1948), pp. 59–60.

II.B.4

The *Kalām* Cosmological Argument

WILLIAM LANE CRAIG AND J. P. MORELAND

William Lane Craig (1949–) is a research professor of philosophy at Biola University in Los Angeles. He received his Ph.D. in philosophy from the University of Birmingham (England) and a Th.D. from the University of Munich (Germany). J. P. Moreland (1948–) is distinguished professor of philosophy at Biola University. He received his Ph.D. in philosophy from the University of Southern California. Professors Craig and Moreland are the authors of numerous works in philosophy of religion, including Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview *(2003), from which the following selection is taken. The* kalām *argument is a version of the cosmological argument developed by the Arab Islamic scholars al-Kindi and al-Ghazali in the Middle Ages. In this article Craig and Moreland develop two versions of the* kalām *argument, both aiming to prove that the universe must have a cause of its existence.*

The cosmological argument is a family of arguments that seek to demonstrate the existence of a Sufficient Reason or First Cause of the existence of the cosmos. The roll of the defenders of this argument reads like a *Who's Who* of western philosophy: Plato, Aristotle, ibn Sina, Al Ghazali, Maimonides, Anselm, Aquinas, Scotus, Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz and Locke, to name but some. The arguments can be grouped into three basic types: the *kalām* cosmological argument for a First Cause of the beginning of the universe, the Thomist cosmological argument for a sustaining a Ground of Being of the world, and the Leibnizian cosmological argument for a Sufficient Reason why something exists rather than nothing.

The *kalām* cosmological argument derives its name from the Arabic word designating medieval Islamic scholasticism, the intellectual movement largely responsible for developing the argument. It aims to show that the universe had a beginning at some moment in the finite past and, since something cannot come out of nothing, must therefore have a transcendent cause, which brought the universe into being. Classical proponents of the argument sought to demonstrate that the universe began to exist on the basis of philosophical arguments against the existence of an infinite, temporal regress of past events. Contemporary interest in the argument arises largely out of the startling empirical evidence of astrophysical cosmology for a beginning of space and time. Today the controlling paradigm of cosmology is the standard big bang model, according to which the space-time universe originated *ex nihilo* about fifteen billion years ago. Such an origin *ex nihilo* seems to many to cry out for a transcendent cause.

By contrast the Thomist cosmological argument, named for the medieval philosophical theologian Thomas Aquinas, seeks a cause that is first,

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not in the temporal sense, but in the sense of rank. Aquinas agreed that "if the world and motion have a first beginning, some cause must clearly be posited for this origin of the world and of motion" (*Summa contra gentiles* 1.13.30). But since he did not regard the *kalām* arguments for the past's finitude as demonstrative, he argued for God's existence on the more difficult assumption of the eternity of the world. On Aquinas's Aristotelian-inspired metaphysic, every existing finite thing is composed of essence and existence and is therefore radically contingent. A thing's essence is an individual nature which serves to define what that thing is. Now if an essence is to exist, there must be conjoined with that essence an act of being. This act of being involves a continual bestowal of being, or the thing would be annihilated. Essence is in potentiality to the act of being, and therefore without the bestowal of being the essence would not exist. For the same reason no substance can actualize itself; for in order to bestow being on itself it would have to be already actual. A pure potentiality cannot actualize itself but requires some external cause. Now although Aquinas argued that there cannot be an infinite regress of causes of being (because in such a series all the causes would be merely instrumental and so no being would be produced, just as no motion would be produced in a watch without a spring even if it had an infinite number of gears) and that therefore there must exist a First Uncaused Cause of being, his actual view was that there can be no intermediate causes of being at all, that any finite substance is sustained in existence immediately by the Ground of Being. This must be a being that is not composed of essence and existence and, hence, requires no sustaining cause. We cannot say that this being's essence includes existence as one of its properties, for existence is not a property, but an act, the instantiating of an essence. Therefore, we must conclude that this being's essence just *is* existence. In a sense, this being has no essence; rather, it is the pure act of being, unconstrained by any essence. It is, as Thomas says, *ipsum esse subsistens*, the act of being itself subsisting. Thomas identifies this being with the God whose name was revealed to Moses as "I am" (Ex 3:14).

The German polymath Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, for whom the third form of the argument is named, sought to develop a version of the cosmological argument from contingency without the Aristotelian metaphysical underpinnings of the Thomist argument. In his essay "The Principles of Nature and of Grace, Based on Reason," Leibniz wrote, "The first question which should rightly be asked is this: why is there something rather than nothing?" Leibniz meant this question to be truly universal, not merely to apply to finite things. On the basis of his principle of sufficient reason, as stated in his treatise *The Monadology*, that "no fact can be real or existent, no statement true, unless there be a sufficient reason why it is so and not otherwise," Leibniz held that his question must have an answer. It will not do to say that the universe (or even God) just exists as a brute fact, a simple fact that cannot be explained. There must be an explanation why it exists. He went on to argue that the sufficient reason cannot be found in any individual thing in the universe, nor in the collection of such things which comprise the universe, nor in earlier states of the universe, even if these regress infinitely. Therefore, there must exist an ultramundane being that is metaphysically necessary in its existence, that is to say, its nonexistence is impossible. It is the sufficient reason for its own existence as well as for the existence of every contingent thing.

In evaluating these arguments, let us consider them in reverse order. A simple statement of a Leibnizian cosmological argument runs as follows:

1. Every existing thing has an explanation of its existence, either in the necessity of its own nature or in an external cause.
2. If the universe has an explanation of its existence, that explanation is God.
3. The universe is an existing thing.
4. Therefore the explanation of the existence of the universe is God.

Is this a good argument? One of the principal objections to Leibniz's own formulation of the argument is that the principle of sufficient reason

as stated in The *Monadology* seems evidently false. There cannot be an explanation of why there are any contingent states of affairs at all, for if such an explanation is contingent, then it too must have a further explanation, whereas if it is necessary, then the states of affairs explained by it must also be necessary. Some theists have responded to this objection by agreeing that one must ultimately come to some explanatory stopping point that is simply a brute fact, a being whose existence is unexplained. For example, Richard Swinburne claims that in answering the question "Why is there something rather than nothing?" we must finally come to the brute existence of some contingent being. This being will not serve to explain its own existence (and, hence, Leibniz's question goes unanswered), but it will explain the existence of everything else. Swinburne argues that God is the best explanation of why everything other than the brute Ultimate exists because as a unique and infinite being God is simpler than the variegated and finite universe.

But the above formulation of the Leibnizian argument avoids the objection without retreating to the dubious position that God is a contingent being. Premise (1) merely requires any existing *thing* to have an explanation of its existence, either in the necessity of its own nature or in some external cause. This premise is compatible with there being brute *facts* about the world. What it precludes is that there could exist things—substances exemplifying properties—that just exist inexplicably. This principle seems quite plausible, at least more so than its contradictory, which is all that is required for a successful argument. On this analysis, there are two kinds of being: necessary beings, which exist of their own nature and so have no external cause of their existence, and contingent beings, whose existence is accounted for by causal factors outside themselves.

Premise (2) is, in effect, the contrapositive of the typical atheist response to Leibniz that on the atheistic worldview the universe simply exists as a brute contingent thing. Atheists typically assert that, there being no God, it is false that everything has an explanation of its existence, for the universe, in this case, just exists inexplicably. In so saying, the atheist implicitly recognizes that if the universe has an explanation, then God exists as its explanatory ground. Since, as premise (3) states, the universe is obviously an existing thing (especially evident in its very early stages when its density was so extreme), it follows that God exists.

It is open to the atheist to retort that while the universe has an explanation of its existence, that explanation lies not in an external ground but in the necessity of its own nature. In other words, (2) is false; the universe is a metaphysically necessary being. This was the suggestion of David Hume, who demanded, "Why may not the material universe be the necessarily existent being?" Indeed, "How can anything, that exists from eternity, have a cause, since that relation implies a priority in time and a beginning of existence?" (*Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, Part 9).

This is an extremely bold suggestion on the part of the atheist. We have, we think we can safely say, a strong intuition of the universe's contingency. A possible world in which no concrete objects exist certainly seems conceivable. We generally trust our modal intuitions on other matters; if we are to do otherwise with respect to the universe's contingency, then atheists need to provide some reason for such skepticism other than their desire to avoid theism. But they have yet to do so.

Still, it would be desirable to have some stronger argument for the universe's contingency than our modal intuitions alone. Could the Thomist cosmological argument help us here? If successful, it would show that the universe is a contingent being causally dependent on a necessary being for its continued existence. The difficulty with appeal to the Thomist argument, however, is that it is very difficult to show that things are, in fact, contingent in the special sense required by the argument. Certainly things are naturally contingent in that their continued existence is dependent on a myriad of factors including particle masses and fundamental forces, temperature, pressure, entropy level and so forth, but this natural contingency does not suffice to establish things' metaphysical contingency in the sense that being must continually be added to their

essences lest they be spontaneously annihilated. Indeed, if Thomas's argument does ultimately lead to an absolutely simple being whose essence is existence, then one might well be led to deny that beings are metaphysically composed of essence and existence if the idea of such an absolutely simple being proves to be unintelligible….

But what about the *kalām* cosmological argument? An essential property of a metaphysically necessary and ultimate being is that it be eternal, that is to say, without beginning or end. If the universe is not eternal, then it could not be, as Hume suggested, a metaphysically necessary being. But it is precisely the aim of the *kalām* cosmological argument to show that the universe is not eternal but had a beginning. It would follow that the universe must therefore be contingent in its existence. Not only so, the *kalām* argument shows the universe to be contingent in a very special way: it came into existence out of nothing. The atheist who would answer Leibniz by holding that the existence of the universe is a brute fact, an exception to the principle of sufficient reason, is thus thrust into the very awkward position of maintaining not merely that the universe exists eternally without explanation, but rather that for no reason at all it magically popped into being out of nothing, a position which might make theism look like a welcome alternative. Thus the *kalām* argument not only constitutes an independent argument for a transcendent Creator but also serves as a valuable supplement to the Leibnizian argument.

The *kalām* cosmological argument may be formulated as follows:

1. Whatever begins to exist has a cause.
2. The universe began to exist.
3. Therefore, the universe has a cause.

Conceptual analysis of what it means to be a cause of the universe then aims to establish some of the theologically significant properties of this being.

Premise (1) seems obviously true—at the least, more so than its negation. It is rooted in the metaphysical intuition that something cannot come into being from nothing. Moreover, this premise is constantly confirmed in our experience. Nevertheless, a number of atheists, in order to avoid the argument's conclusion, have denied the first premise. Sometimes it is said that quantum physics furnishes an exception to premise (1), since on the subatomic level events are said to be uncaused (according to the so-called Copenhagen interpretation). In the same way, certain theories of cosmic origins are interpreted as showing that the whole universe could have sprung into being out of the subatomic vacuum. Thus the universe is said to be the proverbial free lunch.

This objection, however, is based on misunderstandings. In the first place, not all scientists agree that subatomic events are uncaused. A great many physicists today are quite dissatisfied with the Copenhagen interpretation of subatomic physics and are exploring deterministic theories like that of David Bohm. Thus subatomic physics is not a proven exception to premise (1). Second, even on the traditional, indeterministic interpretation, particles do not come into being out of nothing. They arise as spontaneous fluctuations of the energy contained in the subatomic vacuum, which constitutes an indeterministic cause of their origination. Third, the same point can be made about theories of the origin of the universe out of a primordial vacuum. Popular magazine articles touting such theories as getting "something from nothing" simply do not understand that the vacuum is not nothing but rather a sea of fluctuating energy endowed with a rich structure and subject to physical laws. Thus there is no basis for the claim that quantum physics proves that things can begin to exist without a cause, much less that the universe could have sprung into being uncaused from literally nothing.

Other critics have said that premise (1) is true only for things *in* the universe, but it is not true *of* the universe itself. But the argument's defender may reply that this objection misconstrues the nature of the premise. Premise (1) does not state merely a physical law like the law of gravity or the laws of thermodynamics, which are valid for things within the universe. Premise (1) is not a physical principle. Rather, premise (1) is a metaphysical principle: being cannot come from nonbeing; something

cannot come into existence uncaused from nothing. The principle therefore applies to all of reality, and it is thus metaphysically absurd that the universe should pop into being uncaused out of nothing. This response seems quite reasonable: for on the atheistic view, there was not even the *potentiality* of the universe's existence prior to the big bang, since nothing is prior to the big bang. But then how could the universe become actual if there was not even the potentiality of its existence? It makes much more sense to say that the potentiality of the universe lay in the power of God to create it.

Recently some critics of the *kalām* cosmological argument have denied that in beginning to exist the universe *became actual* or *came into being*. They thereby focus attention on the theory of time underlying the *kalām* argument (see chap. 18). On a static or so-called B-theory of time (according to which all moments of time are equally existent) the universe does not in fact come into being or become actual at the big bang; it just exists tenselessly as a four-dimensional space-time block that is finitely extended in the *earlier than* direction. If time is tenseless, then the critics are right that the universe never really comes into being, and therefore the quest for a cause of its coming into being is misconceived. Although Leibniz's question, "Why is there (tenselessly) something rather than noting?" should still rightly be asked, there would be no reason to look for a cause of the universe's beginning to exist, since on tenseless theories of time the universe did not truly begin to exist by virtue of its having a first event, any more than a meter stick begins to exist by virtue of its having a first centimeter. In affirming that things which begin to exist need a cause, the proponent of the *kalām* cosmological argument assumes the following understanding of that notion, where x ranges over any entity and t ranges over times, whether instants or moments of nonzero finite duration:

A. x begins to exist at t if and only if x comes into being at t.

B. x comes into being at t if and only if (i) x exists at t, and the actual world includes no state of affairs in which x exists timelessly, (ii) t is either the first time at which x exists or is separated from any $t' < t$ at which x existed by an interval during which x does not exist, and (iii) x's existing at t is a tensed fact.

The key clause in (B) is (iii). By presupposing a dynamic or so-called A-theory of time, according to which temporal becoming is real, the proponent of the *kalām* cosmological argument justifiably assumes that the universe's existing at a first moment of time represents the moment at which the universe came into being. Thus the real issue separating the proponent of the *kalām* cosmological argument and critics of the first premise is the objectivity of tense and temporal becoming.

Premise (2), *The universe began to exist*, has been supported by both deductive philosophical arguments and inductive scientific arguments. The first of four arguments for this premise that we will consider is the argument based on *the impossibility of the existence of an actual infinite*. It may be formulated as follows:

1. An actual infinite cannot exist.
2. An infinite temporal regress of physical events is an actual infinite.
3. Therefore an infinite temporal regress of physical events cannot exist.

In order to assess this argument, it will be helpful to define some terms. By an actual infinite, the argument's defender means any collection having at a time t a number of definite and discrete members that is greater than any natural number $\{0, 1, 2, 3, \ldots\}$. This notion is to be contrasted with a potential infinite, which is any collection having at any time t a number of definite and discrete members that is equal to some natural number but which over time increases endlessly toward infinity as a limit. By *exist* proponents of the argument mean "have extra-mental existence," or "be instantiated in the real world." By a "physical event," they mean any change occurring within the space-time universe. Since any change takes time, there are no instantaneous events. Neither could there be an infinitely slow event, since such an "event" would in reality be a changeless state.

Therefore, any event will have a finite, nonzero duration. In order that all the events comprising the temporal regress of past events be of equal duration, one arbitrarily stipulates some event as our standard and, taking as our point of departure the present standard event, we consider any series of such standard events ordered according to the relation *earlier than*. The question is whether this series of events is comprised of an actually infinite number of events or not. If not, then since the universe is not distinct from the series of past physical events, the universe must have had a beginning, in the sense of a first standard event. It is therefore not relevant whether the temporal series had a beginning *point* (a first temporal instant). The question is whether there was in the past an event occupying a nonzero, finite temporal interval that was absolutely first, that is, not preceded by any equal interval.

Premise (1) asserts, then, that an actual infinite cannot exist in the real, spatiotemporal world. It is usually alleged that this sort of argument has been invalidated by Georg Cantor's work on the actual infinite and by subsequent developments in set theory. But this allegation misconstrues the nature of both Cantor's system and modern set theory, for the argument does not in fact contradict a single tenet of either. The reason is this: Cantor's system and set theory are simply a universe of discourse, a mathematical system based on certain adopted axioms and conventions. The argument's defender may hold that while the actual infinite may be a fruitful and consistent concept within the postulated universe of discourse, it cannot be transposed into the spatiotemporal world, for this would involve counterintuitive absurdities. This can be shown by concrete examples that illustrate the various absurdities that would result if an actual infinite were to be instantiated in the real world.

Take, for example, Hilbert's Hotel, a product of the mind of the great German mathematician David Hilbert. As a warm-up, let us first imagine a hotel with a finite number of rooms. Suppose, furthermore, that all the rooms are full. When a new guest arrives asking for a room, the proprietor apologizes, "Sorry, all the rooms are full," and that is the end of the story. But now let us imagine a hotel with an infinite number of rooms and suppose once more that *all the rooms are full.* There is not a single vacant room throughout the entire infinite hotel. Now suppose a new guest shows up, asking for a room. "But of course!" says the proprietor, and he immediately shifts the person in room #1 into room #2, the person in room #2 into room #3, the person in room #3 into room #4 and so on, out to infinity. As a result of these room changes, room #1 now becomes vacant, and the new guest gratefully checks in. But remember, before he arrived, all the rooms were full! Equally curious, according to the mathematicians, there are now no more persons in the hotel than there were before: the number is just infinite. But how can this be? The proprietor just added the new guest's name to the register and gave him his keys—how can there not be one more person in the hotel than before?

But the situation becomes even stranger. For suppose an infinity of new guests show up at the desk, asking for a room. "Of course, of course!" says the proprietor, and he proceeds to shift the person in room #1 into room #2, the person in room #2 into room #4, the person in room #3 into room #6 and so on out to infinity, always putting each former occupant into the room number twice his own. Because any natural number multiplied by two always equals an even number, all the guests wind up in even-numbered rooms. As a result, all the odd-numbered rooms become vacant, and the infinity of new guests is easily accommodated. And yet, before they came, all the rooms were full! And again, strangely enough, the number of guests in the hotel is the same after the infinity of new guests check in as before, even though there were as many new guests as old guests. In fact, the proprietor could repeat this process *infinitely many times*, and yet there would never be one single person more in the hotel than before.

But Hilbert's Hotel is even stranger than the German mathematician made it out to be. For suppose some of the guests start to check out. Suppose the guest in room #1 departs. Is there not now one fewer person in the hotel? Not according to the mathematicians! Suppose the guests in rooms #1, 3, 5, … check out. In this case an infinite number

of people have left the hotel, but according to the mathematicians, there are no fewer people in the hotel! In fact, we could have every other guest check out of the hotel and repeat this process infinitely many times, and yet there would never be any fewer people in the hotel. Now suppose the proprietor doesn't like having a half-empty hotel (it looks bad for business). No matter! By shifting occupants as before, but in reverse order, he transforms his half-vacant hotel into one that is jammed to the gills. You might think that by these maneuvers the proprietor could always keep this strange hotel fully occupied. But you would be wrong. For suppose that the persons in rooms #4, 5, 6, … checked out. At a single stroke the hotel would be virtually emptied, the guest register would be reduced to three names, and the infinite would be converted to finitude. And yet it would remain true that the same number of guests checked out this time as when the guests in rooms #1, 3, 5, … checked out! Can anyone believe that such a hotel could exist in reality?

Hilbert's Hotel certainly seems absurd. Since nothing hangs on the illustration's involving a hotel, the argument, if successful, would show in general that it is impossible for an actually infinite number of things to exist in spatiotemporal reality. Students sometimes react to such illustrations as Hilbert's Hotel by saying that we really do not understand the nature of infinity and, hence, these absurdities result. But this attitude is simply mistaken. Infinite set theory is a highly developed and well-understood branch of mathematics, and these absurdities can be seen to result precisely because we *do* understand the notion of a collection with an actually infinite number of members.

Sometimes it is said that we can find counterexamples to the claim that an actually infinite number of things cannot exist, so that premise (1) must be false. For instance, is not every finite distance capable of being divided into 1/2, 1/4, 1/8, …, on to infinity? Does that not prove that there are in any finite distance an actually infinite number of parts? The defender of the argument may reply that this objection confuses a potential infinite with an actual infinite. He will point out that while you can continue to divide any distance for as long as you want, such a series is merely potentially infinite, in that infinity serves as a limit that you endlessly approach but never reach. If you assume that any distance is *already* composed out of an actually infinite number of parts, then you are begging the question. You are assuming what the objector is supposed to prove, namely that there is a clear counterexample to the claim that an actually infinite number of things cannot exist.

Again, it is worth reiterating that nothing in the argument need be construed as an attempt to undermine the theoretical system bequeathed by Cantor to modern mathematics. Indeed, some of the most eager enthusiasts of the system of transfinite mathematics are only too ready to agree that these theories have no relation to the real world. Thus Hilbert, who exuberantly extolled Cantor's greatness, nevertheless held that the Cantorian paradise exists only in the ideal world invented by the mathematician and is nowhere to be found in reality. The case against the existence of the actual infinite need say nothing about the use of the idea of the infinite in conceptual mathematical systems.

The second premise states that *an infinite temporal regress of events is an actual infinite*. The second premise asserts that if the series or sequence of changes in time is infinite, then these events considered collectively constitute an actual infinite. The point seems obvious enough, for if there has been a sequence composed of an infinite number of events stretching back into the past, then an actually infinite number of events have occurred. If the series of past events were an actual infinite, then all the absurdities attending the real existence of an actual infinite would apply to it.

In summary: if an actual infinite cannot exist in the real, spatiotemporal world and an infinite temporal regress of events is such an actual infinite, we can conclude that an infinite temporal regress of events cannot exist, that is to say, the temporal series of past physical events had a beginning. And this implies the second premise of the original syllogism of the *kalām* cosmological argument.

The second argument against the possibility of an infinite past that we will consider is the

argument based on *the impossibility of forming an actual infinite by successive addition*. It may be formulated as follows:

1. The temporal series of physical events is a collection formed by successive addition.
2. A collection formed by successive addition cannot be an actual infinite.
3. Therefore, the temporal series of physical events cannot be an actual infinite.

Here one does not assume that an actual infinite cannot exist. Even if an actual infinite can exist, it is argued that the temporal series of events cannot be such, since an actual infinite cannot be formed by successive addition, as the temporal series of events is.

Premise (1) presupposes once again an A-theory of time. On such a theory the collection of all past events prior to any given event is not a collection whose members all tenselessly coexist. Rather, it is a collection that is instantiated sequentially or successively in time, one event coming to pass on the heels of another. Since temporal becoming is an objective feature of the physical world, the series of past events is not a tenselessly existing continuum, all of whose members are equally real. Rather, the members of the series come to be and pass away one after another.

Premise (2) asserts that a collection formed by successive addition cannot be an actual infinite. Sometimes this is described as the impossibility of traversing the infinite. In order for us to have "arrived" at today, temporal existence has, so to speak, traversed an infinite number of prior events. But before the present event could arrive, the event immediately prior to it would have to arrive, and before that event could arrive, the event immediately prior to it would have to arrive, and so on ad infinitum. No event could ever arrive, since before it could elapse there will always be one more event that had to have happened first. Thus, if the series of past events were beginningless, the present event could not have arrived, which is absurd.

This argument brings to mind Betrand Russell's account of Tristram Shandy, who, in the novel by Sterne, writes his autobiography so slowly that it takes him a whole year to record the events of a single day. Were he mortal, he would never finish, asserts Russell, but if he were immortal, then the entire book could be completed, since to each day there would correspond a year, and both are infinite. Russell's assertion is untenable on an A-theory of time, however, since the future is in reality a potential infinite only. Though he write forever, Tristram Shandy would only get farther and farther behind, so that instead of finishing his autobiography, he will progressively approach a state in which he would be *infinitely* far behind. But he would never reach such a state because the years and hence the days of his life would always be finite in number though indefinitely increasing.

But let us turn the story about: Suppose Tristram Shandy has been writing from eternity past at the rate of one day per year. Should not Tristram Shandy now be infinitely far behind? For if he has lived for an infinite number of years, Tristram Shandy has recorded an equally infinite number of past days. Given the thoroughness of his autobiography, these days are all consecutive days. At any point in the past or present, therefore, Tristram Shandy has recorded a beginningless, infinite series of consecutive days. But now the question inevitably arises: *Which* days are these? Where in the temporal series of events are the days recorded by Tristram Shandy at any given point? The answer can only be that *they are days infinitely distant from the present*. For there is no day on which Tristram Shandy is writing that is finitely distant from the last recorded day.

If Tristram Shandy has been writing for one year's time, then the most recent day he could have recorded is one year ago. But if he has been writing two years, then that same day could not have been recorded by him. For since his intention is to record *consecutive* days of his life, the most recent day he could have recorded is the day immediately after a day at least two years ago. This is because it takes a year to record a day, so that to record two days he must have two years. Similarly, if he has been writing three years, then the most recent day recorded could be no more recent than

three years ago plus two days. In fact, the recession into the past of the most recent recordable day can be plotted according to the formula: (present date $-n$ years of writing) + $(n - 1)$ days. In other words, the longer he has written the further behind he has fallen. But what happens if Tristram Shandy has, *ex hypothesi*, been writing for an infinite number of years? The first day of his autobiography recedes to infinity, that is to say, to a day infinitely distant from the present. Nowhere in the past at a finite distance from the present can we find a recorded day, for by now Tristram Shandy is infinitely far behind. The beginningless, infinite series of days which he has recorded are days which lie at an infinite temporal distance from the present. What therefore follows from the Tristram Shandy story is that an infinite series of past events is absurd, for there is no way to traverse the distance from an infinitely distant event to the present, or, more technically, for an event that was once present to recede to an infinite temporal distance.

But now a deeper absurdity bursts into view. For if the series of past events is an actual infinite, then we may ask, why did Tristram Shandy not finish his autobiography yesterday or the day before, since by then an infinite series of moments had already elapsed? Given that in infinite time he would finish the book, then at any point in the infinite past he should already have finished. No matter how far along the series of past events one regresses, Tristram Shandy would have already completed his autobiography. Therefore, at no point in the infinite series of past events could he be finishing the book. We could never look over Tristram Shandy's shoulder to see if he were now writing the last page. For at any point an actually infinite sequence of events would have transpired and the book would have already been completed. Thus at no time in eternity will we find Tristram Shandy writing, which is absurd, since we supposed him to be writing from eternity. And at no point will he finish the book, which is equally absurd, because for the book to be completed, he must at some point have finished. What the Tristram Shandy story really tells us is that an actually infinite temporal regress is absurd.

Sometimes critics indict this argument as a sleight-of-hand trick like Zeno's paradoxes of motion. Zeno argued that before Achilles could cross the stadium, he would have to cross halfway; but before he could cross halfway, he would have to cross a quarter of the way; but before he could cross a quarter of the way, he would have to cross an eighth of the way, and so on to infinity. It is evident that Achilles could not even move! Therefore, Zeno concluded, motion is impossible. Now even though Zeno's argument is very difficult to refute, nobody really believes that motion is impossible. Even if Achilles must pass through an infinite number of halfway points in order to cross the stadium, somehow he manages to do so! The argument against the impossibility of traversing an infinite past, some critics allege, must commit the same fallacy as Zeno's paradox.

But such an objection fails to reckon with two crucial disanalogies of an infinite past to Zeno's paradoxes: whereas in Zeno's thought experiments the intervals traversed are *potential* and *unequal,* in the case of an infinite past the intervals are *actual* and *equal.* The claim that Achilles must pass through an infinite number of halfway points in order to cross the stadium is question-begging, for it already assumes that the whole interval is a composition of an infinite number of points, whereas Zeno's opponents, like Aristotle, take the line as a whole to be conceptually prior to any divisions which we might make in it. Moreover, Zeno's intervals, being unequal, sum to a merely finite distance, whereas the intervals in an infinite past sum to an infinite distance. Thus his thought experiments are crucially disanalogous to the task of traversing an infinite number of equal, actual intervals to arrive at our present location.

It is frequently objected that this sort of argument illicitly presupposes an infinitely distant starting point in the past and then pronounces it impossible to travel from that point to today. But if the past is infinite, then there would be no starting point whatever, not even an infinitely distant one. Nevertheless, from any given point in the past, there is only a finite distance to the present, which is easily "traversed." But in fact no

proponent of the *kalām* argument of whom we are aware has assumed that there was an infinitely distant starting point in the past. (Even the Tristram Shandy paradox does not assert that there was an infinitely distant first day, but merely that there were days infinitely distant in the past.) The fact that there is *no beginning* at all, not even an infinitely distant one, seems only to make the problem worse, not better. To say that the infinite past could have been formed by successive addition is like saying that someone has just succeeded in writing down all the negative numbers, ending at −1. And, we may ask, how is the claim that from any given moment in the past there is only a finite distance to the present even relevant to the issue? The defender of the *kalām* argument could agree to this happily. For the issue is how the *whole* series can be formed, not a finite portion of it. Does the objector think that because every *finite* segment of the series can be formed by successive addition that the whole *infinite* series can be so formed? That is as logically fallacious as saying because every part of an elephant is light in weight, the whole elephant is light in weight. The claim is therefore irrelevant.

In summary: If a collection formed by successive addition cannot be an actual infinite, then since the temporal series of events is a collection formed by successive addition, it follows that the temporal series of past physical events is not beginningless.

The third argument for the universe's beginning advanced by contemporary proponents of the *kalām* cosmological argument is an inductive argument based on the expansion of the universe. In 1917, Albert Einstein made a cosmological application of his newly discovered gravitational theory, the general theory of relativity (GTR). In so doing he assumed that the universe exists in a steady state, with a constant mean mass density and a constant curvature of space. To his chagrin, however, he found that GTR would not permit such a model of the universe unless he introduced into his gravitational field equations a certain "fudge factor" in order to counterbalance the gravitational effect of matter and so ensure a static universe. Unfortunately, Einstein's static universe was balanced on a razor's edge, and the least perturbation would cause the universe either to implode or to expand. By taking this feature of Einstein's model seriously, the Russian mathematician Alexander Friedman and the Belgian astronomer Georges Lemaître were able to formulate independently in the 1920s solutions to the field equations which predicted an expanding universe.

In 1929 the astronomer Edwin Hubble showed that the red-shift in the optical spectra of light from distant galaxies was a common feature of all measured galaxies and was proportional to their distance from us. This red-shift was taken to be a Doppler effect indicative of the recessional motion of the light source in the line of sight. Incredibly, what Hubble had discovered was the isotropic expansion of the universe predicted by Friedman and Lemaître on the basis of Einstein's GTR.

According to the Friedman-Lemaître model, as time proceeds, the distances separating galactic masses become greater. It is important to understand that as a GTR-based theory, the model does not describe the expansion of the material content of the universe into a preexisting, empty space, but rather the expansion of space itself. The ideal particles of the cosmological fluid constituted by the galactic masses are conceived to be at rest with respect to space but to recede progressively from one another as space itself expands or stretches, just as buttons glued to the surface of a balloon would recede from one another as the balloon inflates. As the universe expands, it becomes less and less dense. This has the astonishing implication that as one reverses the expansion and extrapolates back in time, the universe becomes progressively denser until one arrives at a state of "infinite density"[1] at some point in the finite past. This state represents a singularity at which space-time curvature, along with temperature, pressure and density, becomes infinite. It therefore constitutes an edge or boundary to space-time itself. The term "big bang" is thus potentially misleading, since the expansion cannot be visualized from the outside (there being no "outside," just as there is no "before" with respect to the big bang).

The standard big bang model, as the Friedman-Lemaître model came to be called, thus describes a universe that is not eternal in the past but that came into being a finite time ago. Moreover—and this

deserves underscoring—the origin it posits is an absolute origin *ex nihilo*. For not only all matter and energy, but space and time themselves come into being at the initial cosmological singularity. There can be no natural, physical cause of the big bang event, since, in Quentin Smith's words, "it belongs analytically to the concept of the cosmological singularity that it is not the effect of prior physical events. The definition of a singularity… entails that it is *impossible to extend the spacetime manifold beyond the singularity*…. This rules out the idea that the singularity is an effect of some prior natural process."[2] Sir Arthur Eddington, contemplating the beginning of the universe, opined that the expansion of the universe was so preposterous and incredible that "I feel almost an indignation that anyone should believe in it—except myself."[3] He finally felt forced to conclude, "The beginning seems to present insuperable difficulties unless we agree to look on it as frankly supernatural."[4]

Sometimes objectors appeal to scenarios other than the standard model of the expanding universe in an attempt to avert the absolute beginning predicted by the standard model. But while such theories are possible, it has been the overwhelming verdict of the scientific community that none of them is more probable than the big bang theory. The devil is in the details, and once you get down to specifics you find that there is no mathematically consistent model that has been so successful in its predictions or as corroborated by the evidence as the traditional big bang theory. For example, some theories, like the oscillating universe (which expands and recontracts forever) or the chaotic inflationary universe (which continually spawns new universes), do have a potentially infinite future but turn out to have only a finite past. Vacuum fluctuation universe theories (which postulate an eternal vacuum out of which our universe is born) cannot explain why, if the vacuum was eternal, we do not observe an infinitely old universe. The quantum gravity universe theory propounded by the famous physicist Stephen Hawking, if interpreted realistically, still involves an absolute origin of the universe even if the universe does not begin in a so-called singularity, as it does in the standard big bang theory. The recent speculative cyclic ekpyrotic scenario championed by Paul Steinhardt not only leaves unresolved the difficulties facing the old oscillating universe but has also been shown to require a singular beginning in the past. In sum, according to Hawking, "Almost everyone now believes that the universe, and *time itself*, had a beginning at the Big Bang."[5]

The fourth argument for the finitude of the past is also an inductive argument, this time on the basis of the thermodynamic properties of the universe. According to the second law of thermodynamics, processes taking place in a closed system always tend toward a state of equilibrium. Now our interest in the law concerns what happens when it is applied to the universe as a whole. The universe is, on a naturalistic view, a gigantic closed system, since it is everything there is and there is nothing outside it. This seems to imply that, given enough time, the universe and all its processes will run down, and the entire universe will come to equilibrium. This is known as the heat death of the universe. Once the universe reaches this state, no further change is possible. The universe is dead.

There are two possible types of heat death for the universe. If the universe will eventually recontract, it will die a "hot" death. As it contracts, the stars gain energy, causing them to burn more rapidly so that they finally explode or evaporate. As everything in the universe grows closer together, the black holes begin to gobble up everything around them, and eventually begin themselves to coalesce. In time, all the black holes finally coalesce into one large black hole that is coextensive with the universe, from which the universe will never reemerge.

On the other hand if, as is more likely, the universe will expand forever, then its death will be cold, as the galaxies turn their gas into stars, and the stars burn out. At 10^{30} years the universe will consist of 90% dead stars, 9% supermassive black holes formed by the collapse of galaxies, and 1% atomic matter, mainly hydrogen. Elementary particle physics suggests that thereafter protons will decay into electrons and positrons so that space will be filled with a rarefied gas so thin that

the distance between an electron and a positron will be about the size of the present galaxy. Eventually all black holes will completely evaporate and all the matter in the ever-expanding universe will be reduced to a thin gas of elementary particles and radiation. Equilibrium will prevail throughout, and the entire universe will be in its final state, from which no change will occur.

Now the question that needs to be asked is this: if given enough time the universe will reach heat death, then why is it not in a state of heat death now, if it has existed forever, from eternity? If the universe did not begin to exist, then it should now be in a state of equilibrium. Like a ticking clock, it should by now have run down. Since it has not yet run down, this implies, in the words of one baffled scientist, "In some way the universe must have been *wound up*."[6]

Some people have tried to escape this conclusion by adopting an oscillating model of the universe which never reaches a final state of equilibrium. But even apart from the physical and observational problems plaguing such a model, the thermodynamic properties of this model imply the very beginning of the universe that its proponents sought to avoid. Because entropy increases from cycle to cycle in such a model, it has the effect of generating larger and longer oscillations with each successive cycle. Thus, as one traces the oscillations back in time, they become progressively smaller until one reaches a first and smallest oscillation. Hence, the oscillating model has an infinite future, but only a finite past. In fact, it is estimated on the basis of current entropy levels that the universe cannot have gone through more than 100 previous oscillations.

Even if this difficulty were avoided, a universe oscillating from eternity past would require an infinitely precise tuning of initial conditions in order to last through an infinite number of successive bounces. A universe rebounding from a single, infinitely long contraction is, if entropy increases during the contracting phase, thermodynamically untenable and incompatible with the initial low-entropy condition of our expanding phase. Postulating an entropy decrease during the contracting phase in order to escape this problem would require us to postulate inexplicably special low-entropy conditions at the time of the bounce in the life of an infinitely evolving universe. Such a low-entropy condition at the beginning of the expansion is more plausibly accounted for by the presence of a singularity or some sort of quantum creation event.

So whether one adopts a recontracting model, an ever-expanding model or an oscillating model, thermodynamics suggests that the universe had a beginning. The universe appears to have been created a finite time ago, and its energy was somehow simply put in at the creation as an initial condition.

On the basis of these four arguments for the finitude of the past, the proponent of the *kalām* argument seems to have good grounds for affirming the second premise of the *kalām* cosmological argument: that the universe began to exist. It therefore follows that the universe has a cause. Conceptual analysis enables us to recover a number of striking properties that must be possessed by such an ultramundane being. For as the cause of space and time, this entity must transcend space and time and therefore exist atemporally and nonspatially, at least without the universe. This transcendent cause must therefore be changeless and immaterial, since timelessness entails changelessness, and changelessness implies immateriality. Such a cause must be beginningless and uncaused, at least in the sense of lacking any antecedent causal conditions. Ockham's razor will shave away further causes, since we should not multiply causes beyond necessity. This entity must be unimaginably powerful, since it created the universe without any material cause.

Finally, and most remarkably, such a transcendent cause is plausibly taken to be personal. Three reasons can be given for this conclusion. First, there are two types of causal explanation: scientific explanations in terms of laws and initial conditions and personal explanations in terms of agents and their volitions. A first state of the universe *cannot* have a scientific explanation, since there is nothing before it, and therefore it can be accounted for only in terms of a personal explanation. Second, the personhood of the cause of the universe is implied by its timelessness and immateriality, since the only entities we know of that can possess such properties are either minds or abstract objects, and abstract

objects do not stand in causal relations. Therefore, the transcendent cause of the origin of the universe must be of the order of mind. Third, this same conclusion is also implied by the fact that we have in this case the origin of a temporal effect from a timeless cause. If the cause of the origin of the universe were an impersonal set of necessary and sufficient conditions, it would be impossible for the cause to exist without its effect. For if the necessary and sufficient conditions of the effect are timelessly given, then their effect must be given as well. The only way for the cause to be timeless and changeless but for its effect to originate anew a finite time ago is for the cause to be a personal agent who freely chooses to bring about an effect without antecedent determining conditions. Thus we are brought, not merely to a transcendent cause of the universe, but to its Personal Creator. He is, as Leibniz maintained, the Sufficient Reason why anything exists rather than nothing.

NOTES

1. This should not be taken to mean that the density of the universe takes on a value of H_0 but rather that the density of the universe is expressed by a ratio of mass to volume in which the volume is zero; since division by zero is impermissible, the density is said to be infinite in this sense.
2. Quentin Smith, "The Uncaused Beginning of the Universe," in *Theism, Atheism and Big Bang Cosmology*, by William Lane Craig and Quentin Smith (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993), p. 120.
3. Arthur Eddington, *The Expanding Universe* (New York: Macmillan, 1933), p. 124.
4. Ibid., p. 178.
5. Stephen Hawking and Roger Penrose, *The Nature of Space and Time*, The Isaac Newton Institute Series of Lectures (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996), p. 20.
6. Richard Schlegel, "Time and Thermodynamics," in *The Voices of Time*, ed. J. T. Fraser (London: Penguin, 1948), p. 511.

II.B.5

A Critique of the *Kalām* Cosmological Argument

PAUL DRAPER

Paul Draper is professor of philosophy at Purdue University and the author of several important essays in the philosophy of religion. In this article he analyzes William Lane Craig's philosophical defense of the kalam cosmological argument. Draper contends that Craig's defense fails, both because it fails to establish that the universe had a beginning and because it rests on an equivocation of the phrase 'begins to exist.'

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Epistemology begins in doubt, ethics in conflict, and metaphysics in wonder.

In a recent book,[1] William Lane Craig offers a philosophical and scientific defense of a very old and very wonderful argument: the *kalām* cosmological argument. Unlike other cosmological arguments, the *kalām* argument bases its conclusion that the universe has a cause of its existence on the premise that the universe began to exist a finite time ago. Craig calls it the "*kalām*" cosmological argument because "*kalām*" is the name of a theological movement within Islam that used reason, including this argument, to defend the Muslim faith against philosophical objections. After being fully developed by Arab thinkers like al-Kindi and al-Ghazali, the argument eventually made its way to the West, where it was rejected by St. Thomas Aquinas and defended by St. Bonaventure.[2] My focus in this paper will be on Craig's philosophical defense of the argument. I will try to show that this defense fails, both because it fails to establish that the universe had a beginning and because it commits the fallacy of equivocation.

Compare the following two cosmological arguments, each of which concludes that the universe has a cause of its existence:

1. Every contingent thing (including things that are infinitely old) has a cause of its existence.
2. The universe is contingent.
3. Therefore, the universe has a cause of its existence.

1. Everything that begins to exist has a cause of its existence.
2. The universe began to exist.
3. Therefore, the universe has a cause of its existence.

The first of these arguments is sometimes called the argument from contingency. It was suggested by Aristotle, clearly formulated by Arabic philosophers like ibn Sina, and later championed in the West by St. Thomas Aquinas. I find it completely unpersuasive. For although the second premise is clearly true (so long as "contingent" means "logically contingent"), I do not find the first premise appealing at all. If something is infinitely old, then it has always existed, and it's hard to see why something that has always existed requires a cause of its existence, even if it is logically possible that it not have existed. (Indeed, it's not even clear that something that has always existed *could* have a cause of its existence.)

The second of these arguments is the *kalām* cosmological argument. This argument avoids the weakness of the argument from contingency by denying that the universe is infinitely old and maintaining that the universe needs a cause, not because it is contingent, but rather because it had a beginning. In other words, it replaces the weak premise that every contingent thing needs a cause of its existence with the compelling premise that everything that begins to exist needs a cause of its existence. Of course, a price must be paid for strengthening the first premise: the second premise—that the universe began to exist—is not by a long shot as unquestionably true as the claim that the universe is contingent.

Craig, however, provides a spirited and plausible defense of this premise. He offers four arguments in support of it, two of which are philosophical (armchair cosmology at its best) and two of which are scientific (but still interesting). Both philosophical arguments depend on a distinction between a potential infinite and an actual infinite. A potential infinite is a series or collection that can increase forever without limit but is always finite (e.g., the set of events that have occurred since the birth of my daughter or the set of completed years after 1000 BCE). An actual infinite is a set of distinct things (real or not) whose number is actually infinite (e.g., the set of natural numbers). The first philosophical argument claims that there can't be an infinite regress of events, because actual infinites cannot exist in reality. According to the second argument, an infinite regress of events is impossible because, even if actual infinites could exist in reality, they could not be formed by successive addition.

The first scientific argument is based on the evidence for the Big Bang theory, which seems to many scientists to support the view that the universe had a

beginning. The second scientific argument appeals to the Second Law of Thermodynamics. According to this law, the amount of energy available to do mechanical work always decreases in a closed system. Thus, since the universe as a whole is a closed system with a finite amount of such energy, an infinitely old universe is incompatible with the fact that we have not yet run out of such energy—the universe has not yet reached its "equilibrium end state." Since I'm no scientist, I will focus my attention on Craig's philosophical arguments, beginning with the second one.

As Craig himself points out, his second philosophical argument is very similar to the argument that Immanuel Kant uses to support the thesis of his first antinomy:

> If we assume that the world has no beginning in time, then up to every given moment an eternity has elapsed and there has passed away in the world an infinite series of successive states of things. Now the infinity of a series consists in the fact that it can never be completed through successive synthesis. It thus follows that it is impossible for an infinite world-series to have passed away, and that a beginning of the world is therefore a necessary condition of the world's existence.[3]

Craig formulates the argument as follows:

(i) The temporal series of events is a collection formed by successive addition.

(ii) A collection formed by successive addition cannot be an actual infinite.

(iii) Thus, the temporal series of events cannot be an actual infinite. (from i and ii)

(iv) Therefore, the temporal regress of events is finite. (from iii)[4]

This argument is closely related to Zeno's paradoxes, which depend on the claim that one cannot complete an infinite series of tasks one at a time since that would imply an infinitieth member of the series. As it stands, the argument is unconvincing. For while it is true that one cannot start with a finite collection and then by adding one new member at a time turn it into an infinite collection (no matter how much time one has available), nothing of the sort is required in order for the past to be infinite. For if the temporal regress of events is infinite, then the universe has never had a finite number of past events. Rather, it has always been the case that the collection of past events is infinite. Thus, if the temporal regress of events is infinite, then the temporal series of events is not an infinite collection formed by successively adding to a finite collection. Rather, it is a collection formed by successively adding to an infinite collection. And surely it is not impossible to form an infinite collection by successively adding to an already infinite collection.

One might object that, if the temporal regress of events is infinite, then there must be some event E separated from the birth of my daughter by an infinite number of intermediate events, in which case the collection containing E and all those intermediate events would have to be an actually infinite collection formed by successively adding to a finite collection of events, namely the collection containing E as its only member. This objection fails because it is simply not true that, if the temporal regress of events is infinite, then there must be two events separated by an infinite number of intermediate events. For consider the set of natural numbers. It is actually infinite, yet every member of it is such that there is a finite number of members between it and its first member.[5]

Craig's first philosophical argument is, I believe, much more promising than his second. It bases its conclusion that the temporal regress of physical events must be finite—there must have been a first physical event—on the premises that an actual infinite cannot exist in reality and an infinite temporal regress of events is an actual infinite.[6] From this and the further claim that a first physical event could not have been preceded by an eternal absolutely quiescent physical universe, the conclusion is drawn that the physical universe had a beginning. The first stage of this argument can be formulated as follows:

a. No set of real things is actually infinite.

b. If there was no first event, then the set of all real events occurring prior to the birth of my daughter is actually infinite.

c. Therefore, there was a first event.

Craig defends premise (a) of this argument by pointing out that the assumption that a set of real things is actually infinite has paradoxical implications.[7] For example, it implies that we could have a library consisting of infinitely many black books (each might be assigned an even number). We could then add infinitely many red books (each might be assigned an odd number) and yet not increase the number of books in the library by a single volume. Indeed, we could add infinitely many different colors of books with infinitely many books of each color (the red books could be assigned rational numbers between 0 and 1, the black books rational numbers between 1 and 2, and so on) and not increase our collection by a single volume.

These paradoxes arise because the following three statements constitute an inconsistent triad:

S1. A set has more members than any of its proper subsets.

S2. If the members of two sets can be placed in one-to-one correspondence, then neither set has more members than the other.

S3. There are actually infinite sets.

For example, since the set of even numbers has one-to-one correspondence with the set of natural numbers and even with the set of rational numbers, S2 implies that one could add infinitely many red books or infinitely many books of each of infinitely many different colors to the library without increasing the size of that library's collection. (One need only make sure that the additions are *denumerably* infinite.) But of course S1 implies that any such addition would increase the size of the collection since the set of even numbers is a proper subset both of the set of natural numbers and of the set of rational numbers. Thus, two intuitively appealing principles together imply a contradiction on the assumption that there can be an actually infinite collection of books. One way to avoid this contradiction is to reject the assumption that there can be an actually infinite collection of books. So the underlying argument in defense of the claim that no collection of real things is actually infinite is simply that, since S1 and S2 are both true of collections of real things, it follows that S3 is not true of such collections—no collections of real things are actually infinite.

Craig claims that Georg Cantor's theory of transfinite numbers is consistent because it rejects the first member of the triad. But this member is not rejected because it can be proven false about actually infinite sets, nor is the second member accepted because it can be proven that if a one-to-one correspondence between the elements of two actually infinite sets can be established then the sets are equivalent. Rather, equivalent sets are simply defined as sets having one-to-one correspondence. Thus, while Cantor's theory is a consistent mathematical system, there is, according to Craig, no reason to think that it has any interesting ontological implications. In particular, it does not provide any reason to think that S1 is false about actually infinite sets and hence provides no justification for thinking that actual infinites can exist in reality.[8]

Notice that, if Craig is right that past events are real but future events are not, then his argument for a first event does not commit him to the position that there is a last event. For consider the following parallel argument for the conclusion that there will be a last event:

(a) No set of real things is actually infinite.

(b) If there will be no last event, then the set of all real events occurring after the birth of my daughter is actually infinite.

(c) Therefore, there will be a last event.

Since future events are not real, the second premise of this argument is false. If there is no last event, then the set of all real events occurring after the birth of my daughter is merely potentially infinite—not actually infinite. This collection can increase in size indefinitely, but it will always be finite. Past events, on the other hand, are all real. So if there is no first past event, then the set of all real past events is actually infinite, not potentially infinite. Craig concludes that, although there may be no last event, there must be a first event, and hence, since matter cannot exist without events occurring, it follows that the universe has not always existed—it began to exist.

Although this fascinating argument for the second premise of the *kalām* argument may be sound, Craig has not given us adequate reason to believe it is. The problem concerns the inconsistent triad mentioned above. What Craig needs to do is to show that, when it comes to collections of real things, we should reject the third member of the triad instead of S1 or S2. But he has not shown this. S1 and S2 are certainly true for finite collections. But it's far from clear that they are true for all collections. Allow me to explain why.

Consider S1, which says that a set has more members than any of its proper subsets. If "more" means "a greater number," then the claim that S1 is true for actually infinite sets requires us to make sense of claiming that actually infinite sets have a *number* of members. But an actually infinite set doesn't have a natural number of members or a rational number of members or a real number of members, so one such set can't have a greater natural or rational or real number of members than another. Of course, an actually infinite set does have a transfinite number of members. But transfinite numbers are what Cantor defines them to be. And given his definition, it simply isn't true that actually infinite sets have a greater transfinite number of members than all of their proper subsets. We could say that an actually infinite set has a greater "infinite number" of members than all of its proper subsets, but Craig gives us no theory of infinite numbers that would justify that claim.

Of course, Craig might claim that no such theory is necessary, that we don't even need to make use of the word *number* here; for it's just obvious that, in some sense of the word *more*, any set that has every member that another set has and some members it doesn't have has more members than the other set. I agree this is obvious, but in the case of infinite sets, this is obvious only because "more" can just mean "has every member the other set has and some members it doesn't have." If, however, we grant Craig that S1 is true on these grounds, then why accept S2? Why not claim instead that actually infinite collections of real objects are possible, but the fact that two of them have one-to-one correspondence is not a good reason to believe that neither has "more" members than the other? Why, for example, is it more reasonable to believe that actually infinite libraries are impossible than to believe that, although they are possible, one such library can have "more" books than a second despite the fact that the books in the first can be placed in one-to-one correspondence with the books in the second? Craig provides no good answer to these questions. Obviously he cannot all of a sudden appeal to Cantor's theory to justify accepting S2. For that would commit him to rejecting S1. And since, when infinite sets are compared, the word *more* cannot mean what it does when finite sets are compared, the fact that S2 is true for finite sets is not by itself a good reason to believe that it is true for all sets.

So Craig fails to show that S1 and S2 are both true of all collections of real objects, and hence he fails to show that actually infinite collections of real objects are impossible. Therefore, his first philosophical argument, like his second, fails to establish that an infinite regress of events is impossible and so fails to establish that the universe began to exist. This leaves us with Craig's scientific arguments. Since I lack the expertise to evaluate these arguments, let's assume, for the sake of argument, that they succeed and hence that the universe did begin to exist. Must we then conclude that the *kalām* argument succeeds? This would be a profound result. Granted, this argument doesn't get all the way to God's existence. But accepting its conclusion does require rejecting naturalism—since nothing can be a cause of its own existence, a cause outside the natural world would be required.

As wonderful as this conclusion is, I do not believe that Craig's defense of the *kalām* argument justifies accepting it, even assuming that his scientific arguments are sound. This is because Craig commits the fallacy of equivocation. The verb "to begin" has a narrow or strict sense and a broad or loose sense. In the narrow sense, "to begin" means "to begin within time." When used in this way, "x begins to exist" implies that there was a time at which x did not exist and then a later time at which x exists. But "to begin" can also mean "to begin either within or with time." When used in this way, "x begins to exist" does not imply that there was a time at which x did not exist, because the past may itself be finite in which case something that begins to exist at the first moment in time is such that there never was a time at which it

did not exist—it begins with time rather than within time. Now consider the two premises of the *kalām* argument in the fight of this distinction.

The second premise is that the universe began to exist. All of Craig's arguments in favor of this premise, including his scientific ones, would be unsound if one interpreted "began to exist" in the second premise as meaning "began to exist within time." For nothing in these arguments counts against a relational view of time. And on a relational view of time, a first temporal event is simultaneous with a first moment in time. This would mean that, if the temporal series of past events is finite, then the universe began to exist with time. Indeed, if anything, the arguments in favor of the second premise support a beginning with time. For if an infinite regress of events is an actual infinite and for that reason impossible, then it would seem that an infinite past would be an actual infinite and for that reason impossible. Moreover, one of Craig's scientific arguments appeals to an interpretation of the Big Bang Theory according to which time did not exist "before" the big bang. So the most that Craig has established is that the universe began to exist either within or with time.

The first premise is that anything that begins to exist has a cause of its existence. What does "begins to exist" mean here? Craig defends this premise by claiming that it is an "empirical generalisation enjoying the strongest support experience affords."[9] But experience only supports the claim that anything that begins to exist within time has a cause of its existence. For we have no experience whatsoever of things beginning to exist with time.[10] Such things would require timeless causes. And even if it is conceptually possible for a temporal event to have a timeless cause, we certainly have no experience of this. Of course, Craig also claims that premise (1) is intuitively obvious—that it needs no defense at all. But it is far from obvious that a universe that begins to exist with time needs a cause of its existence. Like an infinitely old universe, a universe that begins to exist with time has always existed—for any time t, the universe existed at t. And once again, it's far from obvious that something that has always existed requires a cause for its existence. It's not even clear that such a thing *could* have a cause of its existence.

So in order to be justified in believing both of the premises of the argument—justified, that is, solely on the basis of Craig's defense of those premises—we would need to equivocate on the meaning of "begins to exist." We would need to use this term in the narrow sense in the first premise and in the broad sense in the second premise. But then the conclusion of the argument would not follow from its premises. Thus, Craig commits the fallacy of equivocation.[11]

Do my objections to Craig's defense of the *kalām* argument prove that it is doomed? I don't think so. The argument remains promising. Perhaps, for example, it could be shown that an absolute theory of time is correct, and that such a theory, together with scientific or new philosophical evidence against an infinitely old universe, implies a beginning of the universe within time. Or perhaps it could be shown that the universe began to exist with time and that even something that begins to exist with time requires a cause of its existence. So my conclusion is not that the *kalām* argument should be dismissed. It is just that it has not yet been adequately defended. I still *wonder* whether the argument is a good one.

NOTES

1. William Lane Craig, *The Kalām Cosmological Argument* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers), 1979.
2. For a brief but interesting history of the argument, see Craig, Part I.
3. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason,* trans. Norman Kemp Smith (London: Macmillan & Co., 1929), p. 396. Quoted by Craig on p. 189.
4. Craig, p. 103.
5. Cf. Quentin Smith, "*Infinity and the Past,*" in *Theism, Atheism, and Big Bang Cosmology*, ed. William Lane Craig and Quentin Smith (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), pp. 78–83; Antony Flew, "The Case for God Challenged," in *Does God Exist?: The Great Debate*, ed. J. P. Moreland and Kai Nielsen (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers,

1990), p. 164; and Keith Parsons, "Is There a Case for Christian Theism?" in *Does God Exist?: The Great Debate*, p. 187.

6. Craig, p. 69.
7. Craig, pp. 82–87.
8. Craig, pp. 94–95.
9. Craig, p. 145. Craig also suggests here that premise (1) could be defended by appealing to an a priori category of causality. Such Kantian maneuvering does not seem very promising in this context. For in order to reconcile it with the realism presupposed by the *kalām* argument, one would need to claim that the causal principle must, as a necessary precondition of thought, hold without exception in the noumenal world!
10. Cf. Quentin Smith, "The Uncaused Beginning of the Universe," in *Theism, Atheism, and Big Bang Cosmology*, p. 123.
11. In "The Caused Beginning of the Universe" (in *Theism, Atheism, and Big Bang Cosmology*) Craig denies that his inference is equivocal on the grounds that "our conviction of the truth of the causal principle is not based upon an inductive survey of existents in space-time, but rather upon the metaphysical intuition that something cannot come out of nothing" (p. 147). Of course, he did appeal to such a survey in his book, but Craig claims that this was just "a last-ditch defence of the principle designed to appeal to the hard-headed empiricist who resists the metaphysical intuition that properly grounds our conviction of the principle" (p. 147, note 13). This response to the charge of equivocation is not at all convincing. For metaphysical intuitions about contingent matters are notoriously unreliable—that's why so many contemporary philosophers are, quite justifiably, "hard-headed empiricists." Further, at the risk of committing the genetic fallacy, it is worth pointing out that it is probably our experience of things beginning to exist within time that causes some of us to have the metaphysical intuition that something cannot come out of nothing.

II.C THE TELEOLOGICAL ARGUMENT FOR THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

THE TELEOLOGICAL ARGUMENT for the existence of God begins with the premise that the world exhibits intelligent purpose, order, or other marks of design, and it proceeds to the conclusion that there must be or probably is a divine intelligence, a supreme designer, to account for the observed or perceived intelligent purpose or order. Although core ideas of the argument can be found in Plato, in the Bible (Rom. 1), and in Cicero, the most well-known treatment of it is found in William Paley's *Natural Theology* (1802). In his opening chapter, included here as our first selection, he offers his famous "watch" argument, which begins as follows:

> In crossing a heath, suppose I pitched my foot against a stone, and were asked how the stone came to be there, I might possibly answer, that for anything I knew to the contrary, it had lain there for ever; nor would it, perhaps, be very easy to show the absurdity of this answer. But suppose I found a watch upon the ground, and it should be inquired how the watch happened to be in that place, I should hardly think of the answer which I had before given—that, for anything I knew, the watch might have always been there. Yet why should not this answer serve for the watch as well as for the stone? Why is it not as admissible in the second case, as in the first?

Paley argues that just as we infer the existence of an intelligent designer to account for the purpose-revealing watch, we must analogously infer the existence of an intelligent grand designer to account for the purpose-revealing world.

"Every indication of contrivance, every manifestation of design, which existed in the watch, exists in the works of nature; with the difference, on the side of nature, of being greater and more, and that in a degree which exceeds all computation." The skeleton of the argument looks like this:

1. Human artifacts are products of intelligent design (purpose).
2. The works of nature resemble these human artifacts, particularly in having parts that are functionally organized.
3. Therefore, the works of nature are (probably) products of intelligent design (purpose).
4. But these works are vastly more complex and far greater in number than human artifacts.
5. Therefore, there probably is a powerful and vastly intelligent designer who designed the works of nature.

Ironically, Paley's argument was attacked even before Paley had set it down, for David Hume (1711–1776) had long before written his famous *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* (published posthumously in 1779), the classic critique of the teleological argument. Paley seems to have been unaware of it. A selection from the Dialogues is included as our second reading. In it, the natural theologian, Cleanthes, debates the orthodox believer, Demea, and the skeptic or critic, Philo, who does most of the serious arguing.

Hume, through Philo, attacks the argument from several different angles. He argues first of all that the universe—which might itself be viewed as one of Paley's "works of nature"—is not sufficiently like the productions of human design to support the argument. Philo puts it as follows:

> But can you think, Cleanthes, that your usual phlegm and philosophy have been preserved in so wide a step as you have taken, when you compare to the universe, houses, ships, furniture, machines and from their similarity in some circumstances infer a similarity in their causes? … But can a conclusion, with any propriety, be transferred from the parts to the whole? Does not the great disproportion bar all comparison and inferences? From observing the growth of a hair, can we learn anything concerning the generation of a man?

We cannot argue from the parts to the whole. You, the reader, will want to test this judgment with some possible counterexamples.

Philo's second objection is that the analogy from artifact to divine designer fails because you have no other universe with which to compare this one. We would need to make such a comparison in order to decide if it were the kind of universe that was designed or simply the kind that developed on its own. As C. S. Peirce put it, "Universes are not as plentiful as blackberries." Because there is only one of them, we have no standard of comparison by which to judge it.

Paley's answer to this would be that if we could find one clear instance of purposefulness in nature (e.g., the eye), it would be sufficient to enable us to conclude that there is probably an intelligent designer. Hume makes several other points against the design argument, which you will want to examine on you own.

A modern objection to the argument, one that was anticipated by Hume, is that based on Darwinian evolution, which has cast doubt upon the notion of teleological explanation altogether. In his *Origin of Species* (1859) Darwin claimed that the process of development from simpler organisms to more complex ones took place gradually over millions of years through an apparently nonpurposeful process of trial and error, of natural selection, and of survival of the fittest. As Julian Huxley put it, the evolutionary process

> results immediately and automatically from the basic property of living matter—that of self-copying, but with occasional errors. Self-copying leads to multiplication and competition; the errors in self-copying are what we call mutations, and mutations will inevitably confer different degrees of biological advantage or disadvantage on their possessors. The consequence will be differential reproduction down the generations—in other words, natural selection.*

As important as Darwin's contribution is in offering us an alternative model of biological development, it doesn't altogether destroy the argument from design. The theist has at least two ways of reviving the argument. First, she can argue that the process of natural selection is the *way* in which a divine designer might work out his purpose for the world, and the inference to the existence of a designer can then still be construed as an inference to the best explanation. Alternatively, she can turn her attention away from biological structures and look for marks of design elsewhere in the universe—as, for example, in the apparent "fine tuning" of the natural laws and physical constants. She might then argue that, regardless of whether a design inference is warranted as an explanation for biological purpose, such an inference is, at any rate, warranted as an explanation for these other features of the universe.

The former strategy is pursued by Richard Swinburne in the third reading in this section: "The Argument from Design," excerpted from the first edition of his *The Existence of God* (2004). The latter strategy is explained by Robin Collins in the fourth and final reading in this section, "A Scientific Argument for the Existence of God."

Swinburne, a modern Cleanthes, rejects all deductive forms of arguments for the existence of God, and in their place he sets a series of inductive arguments: versions of the cosmological argument, the teleological argument, the argument from religious experience, and others. Although none of these alone proves the existence of God or shows it to be more probable than not, each adds to the probability of God's existence. Together they constitute a cumulative case for theism. There is something crying for an explanation: Why does this grand

Evolution as Process (New York: Harper & Row, 1953), 4.

universe exist? Together the arguments for God's existence provide a plausible explanation of the existence of the universe, of why we are here, of why there is anything at all and not just nothing.

Swinburne's arguments are set in terms of confirmation theory. He distinguishes arguments that are "P-inductive" (in which the premises make the conclusion probable) from those that are "C-inductive" (in which the premises confirm the probability of the conclusion or make it more probable than it otherwise would be—although without showing the conclusion to be more probable than not). The cosmological and teleological arguments are, according to Swinburne, good C-inductive arguments. Because there is no counterargument to theism (note that Swinburne believes he can successfully meet the argument from evil; see Part IV) and because religious experience offers considerable evidential force in favor of theism, the cumulative effect is to significantly increase the probability of theism.

Robin Collins likewise defends the conclusion that theism is more probable on a certain kind of evidence than atheism. In Collins's essay, the evidence in focus is the fact that the laws of nature and fundamental physical constants appear to have been "fine-tuned" so as to make it possible for living organisms to arise. To take just a few examples, Collins notes that if gravity had been stronger or weaker by one part in 10^{40}, or if the neutron were not about 1.001 times the mass of the proton, or if the electromagnetic force had been slightly stronger or weaker, life would have been impossible. In short, the likelihood of the laws and fundamental constants being so well coordinated as to allow for the possibility of life is staggeringly low; thus, Collins argues, the fact that the laws and constants *are* so well coordinated constitutes evidence that their values are not the result of chance but rather are due to the creative activity of an intelligent designer.

II.C.1

The Watch and the Watchmaker

WILLIAM PALEY

William Paley (1743–1805), Archdeacon of Carlisle, was a leading evangelical apologist. His most important work is Natural Theology, or Evidences of the Existence and Attributes of the Deity Collected from the Appearances of Nature *(1802), the first chapter of which is reprinted here. Paley argues that just as we infer the existence of an intelligent designer to explain the presence of*

From William Paley, *Natural Theology, or Evidences of the Existence and Attributes of the Deity Collected from the Appearances of Nature* (1802).

a subtle and complex artifact like a watch, so too we must infer the existence of an intelligent Grand Designer to explain the existence of the works of nature, which are far more subtle, complex, and cleverly contrived than any human artifact.

STATEMENT OF THE ARGUMENT

In crossing a heath, suppose I pitched my foot against a stone, and were asked how the stone came to be there, I might possibly answer, that, for anything I knew to the contrary, it had lain there for ever; nor would it, perhaps, be very easy to show the absurdity of this answer. But suppose I found a watch upon the ground, and it should be inquired how the watch happened to be in that place, I should hardly think of the answer which I had given—that, for anything I knew, the watch might have always been there. Yet why should not this answer serve for the watch as well as for the stone? Why is it not as admissible in the second case as in the first? For this reason, and for no other; viz., that, when we come to inspect the watch, we perceive (what we could not discover in the stone) that its several parts are framed and put together for a purpose, e.g. that they are so formed and adjusted as to produce motion, and that motion so regulated as to point out the hour of the day; that, if the different parts had been differently shaped from what they are, if a different size from what they are, or placed after any other manner, or in any other order than that in which they are placed, either no motion at all would have been carried on in the machine, or none which would have answered the use that is now served by it. To reckon up a few of the plainest of these parts, and of their offices, all tending to one result:—We see a cylindrical box containing a coiled elastic spring, which, by its endeavor to relax itself, turns round the box. We next observe a flexible chain (artificially wrought for the sake of flexure) communicating the action of the spring from the box to the fusee. We then find a series of wheels, the teeth of which catch in, and apply to, each other, conducting the motion from the fusee to the balance, and from the balance to the pointer, and, at the same time, by the size and shape of those wheels, so regulating that motion as to terminate in causing an index, by an equable and measured progression, to pass over a given space in a given time. We take notice that the wheels are made of brass, in order to keep them from rust; the springs of steel, no other metal being so elastic; that over the face of the watch there is placed a glass, a material employed in no other part of the work, but in the room of which, if there had been any other than a transparent substance, the hour could not be seen without opening the case. This mechanism being observed, (it requires indeed an examination of the instrument, and perhaps some previous knowledge of the subject, to perceive and understand it; but being once, as we have said, observed and understood,) the inference, we think, is inevitable, that the watch must have had a maker; that there must have existed, at some time, and at some place or other, an artificer or artificers who formed it for the purpose which we find it actually to answer; who comprehended its construction, and designed its use.

I. Nor would it, I apprehend, weaken the conclusion, that we had never seen a watch made; that we had never known an artist capable of making one; that we were altogether incapable of executing such a piece of workmanship ourselves, or of understanding in what manner it was performed; all this being no more than what is true of some exquisite remains of ancient art, of some lost and to the generality of mankind, of the more curious productions of modern manufacture. Does one man in a million know how oval frames are turned? Ignorance of this kind exalts our opinion of the unseen and unknown artist's skill, if he be unseen and unknown, but raises no doubt in our minds of the existence and agency of such an artist, at some former time, and in some place or other. Nor can I perceive that it varies at all the inference, whether the question arise concerning a human agent, or concerning an agent of a different species, or an agent possessing, in some respect, a different nature.

II. Neither, secondly, would it invalidate our conclusion, that the watch sometimes went wrong, or that it seldom went exactly right. The purpose of the machinery, the design, and the designer, might be evident, and, in the case supposed, would be evident, in whatever way we accounted for the irregularity of the movement, or whether we could account for it or not. It is not necessary that a machine be perfect, in order to show with what design it was made; still less necessary, where the only question is, whether it were made with any design at all.

III. Nor, thirdly, would it bring any uncertainty into the argument, if there were a few parts of the watch, concerning which we could not discover, or had not yet discovered, in what manner they conduced to the general effect; or even some parts, concerning which we could not ascertain whether they conduced to that effect in any manner whatever. For, as to the first branch of the case, if by the loss, or disorder, or decay of the parts in question, the movement of the watch were found in fact to be stopped, or disturbed, or retarded, no doubt would remain in our minds as to the utility or intention of these parts, although we should be unable to investigate the manner according to which, or the connection by which, the ultimate effect depended upon their action or assistance; and the more complex is the machine, the more likely is this obscurity to arise. Then, as to the second thing supposed, namely, that there were parts which might be spared without prejudice to the movement of the watch, and that he had proved this by experiment, these superfluous parts, even if we were completely assured that they were such, would not vacate the reasoning which we had instituted concerning other parts. The indication of contrivance remained, with respect to them, nearly as it was before.

IV. Nor, fourthly, would any man in his senses think the existence of the watch, with its various machinery, accounted for, by being told that it was one out of possible combinations of material forms; that whatever he had found in the place where he found the watch, must have contained some internal configuration or other; and that this configuration might be the structure now exhibited, viz., of the works of a watch, as well as a different structure.

V. Nor, fifthly, would it yield his inquiry more satisfaction, to be answered, that there existed in things a principle of order, which had disposed the parts of the watch into their present form and situation. He never knew a watch made by the principle of order; nor can he even form to himself an idea of what is meant by a principle of order, distinct from the intelligence of the watchmaker.

VI. Sixthly, he would be surprised to hear that the mechanism of the watch was no proof of contrivance, only a motive to induce the mind to think so.

VII. And not less surprised to be informed, that the watch in his hand was nothing more than the result of the laws of *metallic* nature. It is a perversion of language to assign any law as the efficient, operative cause of anything. A law presupposes an agent; for it is only the mode according to which an agent proceeds; it implies a power; for it is the order according to which that power acts. Without this agent, without this power, which are both distinct from itself, the *law* does nothing, is nothing. The expression, "the law of metallic nature," may sound strange and harsh to a philosophic ear; but it seems quite as justifiable as some others which are more familiar to him such as "the law of vegetable nature," "the law of animal nature," or, indeed, as "the law of nature" in general, when assigned as the cause of phenomena in exclusion of agency and power, or when it is substituted into the place of these.

VIII. Neither, lastly, would our observer be driven out of his conclusion, or from his confidence in its truth, by being told that he knew nothing at all about the matter. He knows enough for his argument: he knows the utility of the end: he knows the subserviency and adaptation of the means to the end. These points being known, his ignorance of other points, his doubts concerning other points, affect not the certainty of his reasoning. The consciousness of knowing little need not beget a distrust of that which he does know….

APPLICATION OF THE ARGUMENT

Every indication of contrivance, every manifestation of design, which existed in the watch, exists in the works of nature; with the difference, on the side of nature, of being greater and more, and that in a degree which exceeds all computation. I mean that the contrivances of nature surpass the contrivances of art, in the complexity, subtilty, and curiosity of the mechanism; and still more, if possible, do they go beyond them in number and variety; yet in a multitude of cases, are not less evidently mechanical, not less evidently contrivances, not less evidently accommodated to their end, or suited to their office, than are the most perfect productions of human ingenuity.

II.C.2

A Critique of the Design Argument

DAVID HUME

The Scottish empiricist and skeptic David Hume (1711–1776) is one of the most important philosophers who ever lived. Among his most important works are A Treatise on Human Nature, An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding, and Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion *(published posthumously in 1779), from which the present selection is taken. The* Dialogues *contain the classic critique of the argument from design. Our reading is from Parts 2 and 5 of this dialogue. Cleanthes, who opens our selection, is a natural theologian, the Paley of his time, who opposes both the orthodox believer, Demea, and the skeptic, Philo. It is Philo who puts forth the major criticisms against the argument from design.*

Cleanthes: Look round the world: Contemplate the whole and every part of it: You will find it to be nothing but one great machine, subdivided into an infinite number of lesser machines, which again admit of subdivisions to a degree beyond what human senses and faculties can trace and explain. All these various machines, and even their most minute parts, are adjusted to each other with an accuracy which ravishes into admiration all men who have ever contemplated them. The curious adapting of means to ends, throughout all nature, resembles exactly, though it much exceeds, the productions of human contrivance; of human design, thought, wisdom, and intelligence. Since therefore the effects resemble each other, we are led to infer, by all the rules of analogy, that the causes also resemble, and that the Author of Nature is somewhat similar to the mind of man, though possessed of much larger faculties, proportioned to the grandeur of the work which he has executed. By this argument *a posteriori*, and by this argument alone, do we prove at once the

From David Hume, *Dialogue Concerning National Religion* (1779) London: Longman Green, 1878.

existence of a Deity and his similarity to human mind and intelligence.

Demea: I shall be so free, *Cleanthes,* said *Demea,* as to tell you that from the beginning I could not approve of your conclusion concerning the similarity of the Deity to men; still less can I approve of the mediums by which you endeavor to establish it. What! No demonstration of the Being of God! No abstract arguments! No proofs *a priori!* Are these which have hitherto been so much insisted on by philosophers all fallacy, all sophism? Can we reach no farther in this subject than experience and probability? I will say not that this is betraying the cause of a Deity; but surely, by this affected candor, you give advantages to atheists which they never could obtain by the mere dint of argument and reasoning.

Philo: What I chiefly scruple in this subject, said *Philo,* is not so much that all religious arguments are by *Cleanthes* reduced to experience, as that they appear not to be even the most certain and irrefragable of that inferior kind. That a stone will fall, that fire will burn, that the earth has solidity, we have observed a thousand and a thousand times; and when any new instance of this nature is presented, we draw without hesitation the accustomed inference. The exact similarity of the cases gives us a perfect assurance of a similar event, and a stronger evidence is never desired nor sought after. But wherever you depart, in the least, from the similarity of the cases, you diminish proportionably the evidence; and may at last bring it to a very weak *analogy,* which is confessedly liable to error and uncertainty. After having experienced the circulation of the blood in human creatures, we make no doubt that it takes place in *Titius* and *Maevius;* but from its circulation in frogs and fishes it is only a presumption, though a strong one, from analogy that it takes place in men and other animals. The analogical reasoning is much weaker when we infer the circulation of the sap in vegetables from our experience that the blood circulates in animals; and those who hastily followed that imperfect analogy are found, by more accurate experiments, to have been mistaken.

If we see a house, *Cleanthes,* we conclude, with the greatest certainty, that it had an architect or builder because this is precisely that species of effect which we have experienced to proceed from that species of cause. But surely you will not affirm that the universe bears such a resemblance to a house that we can with the same certainty infer a similar cause, or that the analogy is here entire and perfect. The dissimilitude is so striking that the utmost you can here pretend to is a guess, a conjecture, a presumption concerning a similar cause; and how that pretension will be received in the world, I leave you to consider.

Cleanthes: It would surely be very ill received, replied *Cleanthes;* and I should be deservedly blamed and detested did I allow that the proofs of a Deity amounted to no more than a guess or conjecture. But is the whole adjustment of means to ends in a house and in the universe so slight a resemblance? The economy of final causes? The order, proportion, and arrangement of every part? Steps of a stair are plainly contrived that human legs may use them in mounting; and this inference is certain and infallible. Human legs are also contrived for walking and mounting; and this inference, I allow, is not altogether so certain because of the dissimilarity which you remark; but does it, therefore, deserve the name only of presumption or conjecture?

Demea: Good God! cried *Demea,* interrupting him, where are we? Zealous defenders of religion allow that the proofs of a Deity fall short of perfect evidence! And you, *Philo,* on whose assistance I depended in proving the adorable mysteriousness of the Divine Nature, do you assent to all these extravagant opinions of *Cleanthes?* For what other name can I give them? or, why spare my censure when such principles are advanced, supported by such an authority, before so young a man as *Pamphilus?*

Philo: You seem not to apprehend, replied *Philo,* that I argue with *Cleanthes* in his own way, and, by showing him the dangerous consequences of his tenets, hope at last to reduce him to our opinion. But what sticks most with you, I observe, is the representation which *Cleanthes* has made of the argument *a posteriori;* and, finding that that argument is likely to escape your hold and vanish

into air, you think it so disguised that you can scarcely believe it to be set in its true light. Now, however much I may dissent, in other respects, from the dangerous principle of *Cleanthes,* I must allow that he has fairly represented that argument, and I shall endeavor so to state the matter to you that you will entertain no further scruples with regard to it.

Were a man to abstract from everything which he knows or has seen, he would be altogether incapable, merely from his own ideas, to determine what kind of scene the universe must be, or to give the preference to one state or situation of things above another. For as nothing which he clearly conceives could be esteemed impossible or implying a contradiction, every chimera of his fancy would be upon an equal footing; nor could he assign any just reason why he adheres to one idea or system, and rejects the others which are equally possible.

Again, after he opens his eyes and contemplates the world as it really is, it would be impossible for him at first to assign the cause of any one event, much less of the whole of things, or of the universe. He might set his fancy a rambling, and she might bring him in an infinite variety of reports and representations. These would all be possible; but, being all equally possible, he would never of himself give a satisfactory account for his preferring one of them to the rest. Experience alone can point out to him the true cause of any phenomenon.

Now, according to this method of reasoning, *Demea,* it follows (and is, indeed, tacitly allowed by *Cleanthes* himself) that order, arrangement, or the adjustment of final causes, is not of itself any proof of design, but only so far as it has been experienced to proceed from that principle. For aught we can know *a priori,* matter may contain the source or spring of order originally within itself, as well as mind does; and there is no more difficulty in conceiving that the several elements, from an internal unknown cause, may fall into the most exquisite arrangement, than to conceive that their ideas, in the great universal mind, from a like internal unknown cause, fall into that arrangement. The equal possibility of both these suppositions is allowed. But, by experience, we find, according to *Cleanthes,* that there is a difference between them. Throw several pieces of steel together, without shape or form; they will never arrange themselves so as to compose a watch. Stone and mortar and wood, without an architect, never erect a house. But the ideas in a human mind, we see, by an unknown, inexplicable economy, arrange themselves so as to form the plan of a watch or house. Experience, therefore, proves that there is an original principle of order in mind, not in matter. From similar effects we infer similar causes. The adjustment of means to ends is alike in the universe, as in a machine of human contrivance. The causes, therefore, must be resembling.

I was from the beginning scandalized, I must own, with this resemblance which is asserted between the Deity and human creatures, and must conceive it to imply such a degradation of the Supreme Being as no sound theist could endure. With your assistance, therefore, *Demea,* I shall endeavor to defend what you justly call the adorable mysteriousness of the Divine Nature, and shall refute this reasoning of *Cleanthes,* provided he allows that I have made a fair representation of it.

When *Cleanthes* had assented, *Philo,* after a short pause, proceeded in the following manner.

That all inferences, *Cleanthes,* concerning fact are founded on experience, and that all experimental reasonings are founded on the supposition that similar causes prove similar effects, and similar effects similar causes, I shall not at present much dispute with you. But observe, I entreat you, with what extreme caution all just reasoners proceed in the transferring of experiments to similar cases. Unless the cases be exactly similar, they repose no perfect confidence in applying their past observation to any particular phenomenon. Every alteration of circumstances occasions a doubt concerning the event; and it requires new experiments to prove certainly that the new circumstances are of no moment or importance. A change in bulk, situation, arrangement, age, disposition of the air, or surrounding bodies; any of these particulars may be attended with the most unexpected consequences. And unless the objects be quite familiar

to us, it is the highest temerity to expect with assurance, after any of these changes, an event similar to that which before fell under our observation. The slow and deliberate steps of philosophers here, if anywhere, are distinguished from the precipitate march of the vulgar, who, hurried on by the smallest similitude, are incapable of all discernment or consideration.

But can you think, *Cleanthes,* that your usual phlegm and philosophy have been preserved in so wide a step as you have taken when you compared to the universe houses, ships, furniture, machines; and, from their similarity in some circumstances, inferred a similarity in their causes? Thought, design, intelligence, such as we discover in men and other animals, is no more than one of the springs and principles of the universe, as well as heat or cold, attraction or repulsion, and a hundred others which fall under daily observation. It is an active cause by which some particular parts of nature, we find, produce alterations on other parts. But can a conclusion, with any propriety, be transferred from parts to the whole? Does not the great disproportion bar all comparison and inference? From observing the growth of a hair, can we learn anything concerning the generation of a man? Would the manner of a leaf's blowing, even though perfectly known, afford us any instruction concerning the vegetation of a tree?

But allowing that we were to take the *operations* of one part of nature upon another for the foundation of our judgment concerning the *origin* of the whole (which never can be admitted), yet why select so minute, so weak, so bounded a principle as the reason and design of animals is found to be upon this planet? What peculiar privilege has this little agitation of the brain which we call "thought," that we must thus make it the model of the whole universe? Our partiality in our own favor does indeed present it on all occasions, but sound philosophy ought carefully to guard against so natural an illusion.

So far from admitting, continued *Philo,* that the operations of a part can afford us any just conclusion concerning the origin of the whole, I will not allow any one part to form a rule for another part if the latter be very remote from the former, is there any reasonable ground to conclude that the inhabitants of other planets possess thought, intelligence, reason, or anything similar to these faculties in men? When nature has so extremely diversified her manner of operation in this small globe, can we imagine that she incessantly copies herself throughout so immense a universe? And if thought, as we may well suppose, be confined merely to this narrow corner, and has even there so limited a sphere of action, with what propriety can we assign it for the original cause of all things? The narrow view of a peasant who makes his domestic economy the rule for the government of kingdoms is in comparison a pardonable sophism.

But were we ever so much assured that a thought and reason resembling the human were to be found throughout the whole universe, and were its activity elsewhere vastly greater and more commanding than it appears in this globe; yet I cannot see why the operations of a world constituted, arranged, adjusted, can with any propriety be extended to a world which is in its embryo state, and is advancing towards that constitution and arrangement. By observation we know somewhat of the economy, action, and nourishment of a finished animal; but we must transfer with great caution that observation to the growth of a fetus in the womb, and still more to the formation of an animalcule in the loins of its male parent. Nature, we find, even from our limited experience, possesses an infinite number of springs and principles which incessantly discover themselves on every change of her position and situation. And what new and unknown principles would actuate her in so new and unknown a situation as that of the formation of a universe, we cannot, without the utmost temerity, pretend to determine.

A very small part of this great system, during a very short time, is very imperfectly discovered to us; and do we thence pronounce decisively concerning the origin of the whole?

Admirable conclusion! Stone, wood, brick, iron, brass, have not, at this time, in this minute globe of earth, an order or arrangement without human art and contrivance; therefore, the universe

could not originally attain its order and arrangement without something similar to human art. But is a part of nature a rule for another part very wide of the former? Is it a rule for the whole? Is a very small part a rule for the universe? Is nature in one situation a certain rule for nature in another situation vastly different from the former?

And can you blame me, *Cleanthes,* if I here imitate the prudent reserve of *Simonides,* who, according to the noted story, being asked by *Hiero, What God was?* desired a day to think of it, and then two days more; and after that manner continually prolonged the term, without ever bringing in his definition or description? Could you even blame me if I had answered, at first, *that I did not know,* and was sensible that this subject lay vastly beyond the reach of my faculties? You might cry out skeptic and raillier, as much as you pleased; but, having found in so many other subjects much more familiar the imperfections and even contradictions of human reason, I never should expect any success from its feeble conjectures in a subject so sublime and so remote from the sphere of our observation. When two species of objects have always been observed to be conjoined together, I can infer, by custom, the existence of one wherever I see the existence of the other; and this I call an argument from experience. But how this argument can have place where the objects, as in the present case, are single, individual, without parallel or specific resemblance, may be difficult to explain. And will any man tell me with a serious countenance that an orderly universe must arise from some thought and art like the human because we have experience of it? To ascertain this reasoning it were requisite that we had experience of the origin of worlds; and it is not sufficient, surely, that we have seen ships and cities arise from human art and contrivance….

Philo: But to show you still more inconveniences, continued *Philo,* in your anthropomorphism, please to take a new survey of your principles. *Like effects prove like causes.* This is the experimental argument; and this, you say too, is the sole theological argument. Now it is certain that the liker the effects are which are seen and the liker the causes which are inferred, the stronger is the argument. Every departure on either side diminishes the probability and renders the experiment less conclusive. You cannot doubt of the principle; neither ought you to reject its consequences.

All the new discoveries in astronomy which prove the immense grandeur and magnificence of the works of nature are so many additional arguments for a Deity, according to the true system of theism; but, according to your hypothesis of experimental theism, they become so many objections, by removing the effect still farther from all resemblance to the effects of human art and contrivance. For if *Lucretius,* even following the old system of the world, could exclaim:

> Who is strong enough to rule the sum,
> who to hold in hand and control the
> mighty bridle of the unfathomable deep?
> who to turn about all the heavens at one
> time, and warm the fruitful worlds with
> ethereal fires, or to be present in all places
> and at all times.[1]

If Tully[2] esteemed this reasoning so natural as to put it into the mouth of his Epicurean:

> What power of mental vision enabled your
> master Plato to descry the vast and
> elaborate architectural process which, as he
> makes out, the deity adopted in building
> the structure of the universe? What
> method of engineering was employed?
> What tools and levers and derricks? What
> agents carried out so vast an
> understanding? And how were air, fire,
> water, and earth enabled to obey and
> execute the will of the architect?

If this argument, I say, had any force in former ages, how much greater must it have at present when the bounds of nature are so infinitely enlarged and such a magnificent scene is opened to us? It is still more unreasonable to form our idea of so unlimited a cause from our experience of the narrow productions of human design and invention.

The discoveries by microscopes, as they open a new universe in miniature, are still objections,

according to you; arguments, according to me. The farther we push our researches of this kind, we are still led to infer the universal cause of all to be vastly different from mankind, or from any object of human experience and observation.

And what say you to the discoveries in anatomy, chemistry, botany?…

Cleanthes: These surely are no objections, replied *Cleanthes;* they only discover new instances of art and contrivance. It is still the image of mind reflected on us from innumerable objects. Philo: Add a mind like the human, said Philo. I know of no other, replied *Cleanthes*. *Philo:* And the liker, the better, insisted Philo. To be sure, said *Cleanthes.*

Philo: Now, *Cleanthes,* said *Philo,* with an air of alacrity and triumph, mark the consequences. First, by this method of reasoning you renounce all claim to infinity in any of the attributes of the Deity. For, as the cause ought only to be proportioned to the effect, and the effect, so far as it falls under our cognizance, is not infinite: What pretensions have we, upon your suppositions, to ascribe that attribute to the Divine Being? You will still insist that, by removing him so much from all similarity to human creatures, we give in to the most arbitrary hypothesis, and at the same time weaken all proofs of his existence.

Secondly, you have no reason, on your theory, for ascribing perfection to the Deity, even in his finite capacity; or for supposing him free from every error, mistake, or incoherence, in his undertakings. There are many inexplicable difficulties in the works of Nature which, if we allow a perfect author to be proved *a priori*, are easily solved, and become only seeming difficulties from the narrow capacity of man, who cannot trace infinite relations. But according to your method of reasoning, these difficulties become all real; and, perhaps, will be insisted on as new instances of likeness to human art and contrivance. At least, you must acknowledge that it is impossible for us to tell, from our limited views, whether this system contains any great faults or deserves any considerable praise if compared to other possible and even real systems. Could a peasant, if the *Aeneid* were read to him, pronounce that poem to be absolutely faultless, or even assign to it its proper rank among the productions of human wit, he who had never seen any other production?

But were this world ever so perfect a production, it must still remain uncertain whether all the excellences of the work can justly be ascribed to the workman. If we survey a ship, what an exalted idea must we form of the ingenuity of the carpenter who framed so complicated, useful, and beautiful a machine? And what surprise must we feel when we find him a stupid mechanic who imitated others, and copied an art which, through a long succession of ages, after multiplied trials, mistakes, corrections, deliberations, and controversies, had been gradually improving? Many worlds might have been botched and bungled, throughout an eternity, ere this system was struck out; much labor lost; many fruitless trials made; and a slow but continued improvement carried on during infinite ages in the art of world-making. In such subjects, who can determine where the truth, nay, who can conjecture where the probability lies, amidst a great number of hypotheses which may be proposed, and a still greater which may be imagined?

And what shadow of an argument, continued Philo, can you produce from your hypothesis to prove the unity of the Deity? A great number of men join in building a house or ship, in rearing a city, in framing a commonwealth; why may not several deities combine in contriving and framing a world? This is only so much greater similarity to human affairs. By sharing the work among several, we may so much further limit the attributes of each, and get rid of that extensive power and knowledge which must be supposed in one deity, and which, according to you, can only serve to weaken the proof of his existence. And if such foolish, such vicious creatures as man can yet often unite in framing and executing one plan, how much more those deities or demons, whom we may suppose several degrees more perfect?

To multiply causes without necessity is indeed contrary to true philosophy, but this principle applies not to the present case. Were one deity antecedently proved by your theory who were possessed of every attribute requisite to the production of the universe,

it would be needless, I own (though not absurd), to suppose any other deity existent. But while it is still a question whether all these attributes are united in one subject or dispersed among several independent beings; by what phenomena in nature can we pretend to decide the controversy? Where we see a body raised in a scale, we are sure that there is in the opposite scale, however concealed from sight, some counterpoising weight equal to it; but it is still allowed to doubt whether that weight be an aggregate of several distinct bodies or one uniform united mass. And if the weight requisite very much exceeds anything which we have ever seen conjoined in any single body, the former supposition becomes still more probable and natural. An intelligent being of such vast power and capacity as is necessary to produce the universe, or, to speak in the language of ancient philosophy, so prodigious an animal, exceeds all analogy and even comprehension.

But further, *Cleanthes,* men are mortal, and renew their species by generation; and this is common to all living creatures. The two great sexes of male and female, says *Milton,* animate the world. Why must this circumstance, so universal, so essential, be excluded from those numerous and limited deities? Behold, then, the theogony of ancient times brought back upon us.

And why not become a perfect anthropomorphite? Why not assert the deity or deities to be corporeal, and to have eyes, a nose, mouth, ears, etc.? *Epicurus* maintained that no man had ever seen reason but in a human figure; therefore, the gods must have a human figure. And this argument, which is deservedly so much ridiculed by *Cicero*, becomes, according to you, solid and philosophical.

In a word, *Cleanthes,* a man who follows your hypothesis is able, perhaps, to assert or conjecture that the universe sometime arose from something like design: But beyond that position he cannot ascertain one single circumstance, and is left afterwards to fix every point of his theology by the utmost license of fancy and hypothesis. This world, for aught he knows, is very faulty and imperfect, compared to a superior standard; and was only the first rude essay of some infant deity who afterwards abandoned it, ashamed of his lame performance: It is the work only of some dependent, inferior deity, and is the object of derision to his superiors: It is the production of old age and dotage in some superannuated deity; and ever since his death has run on at adventures, from the first impulse and active force which it received from him.... You justly give signs of horror, *Demea,* at these strange suppositions; but these, and a thousand more of the same kind, are *Cleanthes'* suppositions, not mine. From the moment the attributes of the Deity are supposed finite, all these have place. And I cannot, for my part, think that so wild and unsettled a system of theology is, in any respect, preferable to none at all.

Cleanthes: These suppositions I absolutely disown, cried *Cleanthes:* They strike me, however, with no horror, especially when proposed in that rambling way in which they drop from you. On the contrary, they give me pleasure when I see that, by the utmost indulgence of your imagination, you never get rid of the hypothesis of design in the universe, but are obliged at every turn to have recourse to it. To this concession I adhere steadily; and this I regard as a sufficient foundation for religion.

NOTES

1. *On the Nature of Things*, II, 1096–1099 (trans. by W. D. Rouse).
2. Tully was a common name for the Roman lawyer and philosopher, Marcus Tullius Cicero, 106–43 BC. The excerpt is from *The Nature of the Gods*, i, viii, 19 (trans. By H. Rackham).

II.C.3

The Argument from Design

RICHARD SWINBURNE

Richard Swinburne (1934–) was, until his retirement, the Nolloth Professor of the Philosophy of the Christian Religion at Oxford University. He has written extensively in philosophy of religion, and his body of work includes several pieces on the traditional arguments for the existence of God. The following selection is from The Existence of God *(1979) in which he rejects all deductive forms of arguments for the existence of God but sets in their place a series of inductive arguments. In this selection, he presents an inductive version of the argument from design. His strategy is to show that several of the arguments, although only minimally suggestive when taken in isolation, together make a cumulative case for the truth of theism.*

A few notes are crucial to an understanding of Swinburne's essay. First, he contrasts the "Hempelian account" of scientific explanation with the "powers-and-liabilities account" of scientific explanation. According to the Hempelian account—named after Carl Hempel—to provide a scientific explanation of an event is (roughly) to show that the occurrence of the event is logically implied by the occurrence of particular circumstances that obtained prior to the event together with facts about the laws of nature. On the other hand, the powers-and-liabilities account says that providing a scientific explanation for an event is a matter of showing that the event's cause had powers to bring about the event that it was liable to exercise under the given circumstances. Second, Hempel thinks that scientific explanations are not the only available explanations for events in the world. There are also what he calls "personal" explanations. Third, Swinburne places a great deal of weight on the notion of simplicity. Other things being equal, if a theory A *is simpler than a theory* B*, theory* A *is to be preferred. Finally, Swinburne uses Bayes's theorem to sustain his argument: Let* h *be a theory or hypothesis, let* e *be the evidential phenomena, and let* k *be our background knowledge.* P*(*h/e&k*) represents the probability of* h *being true given the available evidence and our background knowledge. You do not need to understand the intricacies of Bayes's theorem in order to follow Swinburne's reasoning.*

I understand by an argument from design one which argues from some general pattern of order in the universe or provision for the needs of conscious beings to a God responsible for these phenomena. An argument from a general pattern of order I shall call a teleological argument. In the definition of "teleological argument" I emphasize the words "general pattern"; I shall not count an argument to the existence of God from some particular pattern of order manifested on a unique occasion as a teleological argument.

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TWO FORMS OF TELEOLOGICAL ARGUMENT

I begin with the distinction between spatial order and temporal order, between what I shall call regularities of co-presence and regularities of succession. An example of a regularity of co-presence would be a town with all its roads at right angles to each other, or a section of books in a library arranged in alphabetical order of authors. Regularities of succession are simple patterns of behaviour of objects, such as their behaviour in accordance with the laws of nature—for example, Newton's laws.

Many of the striking examples of order in the universe evince an order which is due both to a regularity of co-presence and to a regularity of succession. A working car consists of many parts so adjusted to each other that it follows the instructions of the driver delivered by his pulling and pushing a few levers and buttons and turning a wheel, to take passengers whither he wishes. Its order arises because its parts are so arranged at some instant (regularity of co-presence) that, the laws of nature being as they are (regularity of succession) it brings about the result neatly and efficiently. The order of living animals and plants likewise results from regularities of both types.

Men who marvel at the order of the universe may marvel at either or both of the regularities of co-presence and of succession. The thinkers of the eighteenth century to whom the argument from design appealed so strongly were struck almost exclusively by the regularities of co-presence. They marveled at the order in animals and plants; but since they largely took for granted the regularities of succession, what struck them about the animals and plants, as to a lesser extent about machines made by men, was the subtle and coherent arrangement of their millions of parts. Paley's *Natural Theology* dwells mainly on details of comparative anatomy, on eyes and ears and muscles and bones arranged with minute precision so as to operate with high efficiency, and in the *Dialogues* Hume's Cleanthes produces the same kind of examples: "Consider, anatomize the eye, survey its structure and contrivance, and tell me from your own feeling, if the idea of a contriver does not immediately flow in upon you with a force like that of sensation."

The eighteenth-century argument from spatial order seems to go as follows. Animals and plants have the power to reproduce their kind, and so, given the past existence of animals and plants, their present existence is to be expected. But what is vastly surprising is the existence of animals and plants at all. By natural processes they can only come into being through generation. But we know that the world has not been going on for ever, and so the great puzzle is the existence of the first animals and plants in 4004 BC or whenever exactly it was that animals and plants began to exist. Since they could not have come about by natural scientific processes, and since they are very similar to the machines, which certain rational agents, viz. men, make, it is very probable that they were made by a rational agent—only clearly one much more powerful and knowledgeable than men.

In the *Dialogues*, through the mouth of Philo, Hume made some classical objections to the argument in this form, some of which have some force against all forms of the argument; I shall deal with most of these as we come to appropriate places in this chapter. Despite Hume's objections, the argument is, I think, a very plausible one—given its premisses. But one of its premisses was shown by Darwin and his successors to be clearly false. Complex animals and plants can be produced through generation by less complex animals and plants—species are not eternally distinct; and simple animals and plants can be produced by natural processes from inorganic matter. This discovery led to the virtual disappearance of the argument from design from popular apologetic—mistakenly, I think, since it can easily be reconstructed in a form which does not rely on the premisses shown to be false by Darwin. This can be done even for the argument from spatial order.

We can reconstruct the argument from spatial order as follows. We see around us animals and plants, intricate examples of spatial order in the ways which Paley set out, similar to machines of

the kind which men make. We know that these animals and plants have evolved by natural processes from inorganic matter. But clearly this evolution can only have taken place, given certain special natural laws. These are first, the chemical laws stating how under certain circumstances inorganic molecules combine to make organic ones, and organic ones combine to make organisms. And secondly, there are the biological laws of evolution stating how organisms have very many offspring, some of which vary in one or more characteristics from their parents, and how some of these characteristics are passed on to most offspring, from which it follows that, given shortage of food and other environmental needs, there will be competition for survival, in which the fittest will survive. Among organisms very well fitted for survival will be organisms of such complex and subtle construction as to allow easy adaptation to a changing environment. These organisms will evince great spatial order. So the laws of nature are such as, under certain circumstances, to give rise to striking examples of spatial order similar to the machines which men make. Nature, that is, is a machine-making machine. In the twentieth century men make not only machines, but machine-making machines. They may therefore naturally infer from nature which produces animals and plants, to a creator of nature similar to men who make machine-making machines.

This reconstructed argument is now immune to having some crucial premisses shown false by some biologist of the 1980s. The facts to which its premisses appeal are too evident for that—whatever the details, natural laws are clearly such as to produce complex organisms from inorganic matter under certain circumstances. But although this is so, I do not find the argument a very strong one, and this is because of the evident paucity of organisms throughout the universe. The circumstances under which nature behaves as a machine-making machine are rare. For that reason nature does not evince very strongly the character of a machine-making machine and hence the analogies between the products of natural processes on the one hand and machines on the other are not too strong. Perhaps they give a small degree of probability to the hypothesis that a rational agent was responsible for the laws of evolution in some ways similar to the rational agents who make machines, but the probability is no more than that.

I pass on to consider a form of teleological argument which seems to me a much stronger one—the teleological argument from the temporal order of the world. The temporal order of the universe is, to the man who bothers to give it a moment's thought, an overwhelmingly striking fact about it. Regularities of succession are all-pervasive. For simple laws govern almost all successions of events. In books of physics, chemistry, and biology we can learn how almost everything in the world behaves. The laws of their behavior can be set out by relatively simple formulae which men can understand and by means of which they can successfully predict the future. The orderliness of the universe to which I draw attention here is its conformity to formula, to simple, formulable, scientific laws. The orderliness of the universe in this respect is a very striking fact about it. The universe might so naturally have been chaotic, but it is not—it is very orderly.

That the world has this very peculiar characteristic may be challenged in various ways. It may be said of the order which we seem to see in the universe that we impose the order on the world, that it is not there independently of our imposition. Put another way all that this temporal order amounts to, it might be said, is a coincidence between how things have been so far in the world and the patterns which men can recognize and describe, a coincidence which is itself susceptible of an explanation in terms of natural selection. In fact, however, the temporal order of the world is something deeper than that. The premiss of a good teleological argument is not that so far (within his life or within human history) things have conformed to a pattern which man can recognize and describe. The premiss is rather that things have and will continue to conform to such a pattern however initial conditions vary, however men interfere in the world. If induction is justified, we are justified in supposing that things will continue to behave as they have behaved

in the kinds of respect which scientists and ordinary people recognize and describe. I assume that we are justified in believing that the laws of gravity and chemical cohesion will continue to hold tomorrow—that stones will fall, and desks hold together tomorrow as well as today—however initial conditions vary, however men interfere in the world. It may of course be doubted whether philosophers have given a very satisfactory account of what makes such beliefs justified (hence "the problem of induction"); but I assume the commonsense view that they are justified. So the teleologist's premiss is not just that there has been in nature so far an order which men can recognize and describe; but there has been and will continue to be in nature an order, recognizable and describable by men certainly, but one which exists independently of men. If men are correct in their belief that the order which they see in the world is an order which will hold in the future as in the past, it is clearly not an imposed or invented order. It is there in nature. For man cannot make nature conform subsequently to an order which he has invented. Only if the order is there in nature is nature's future conformity to be expected.

An objector may now urge that although the order of the universe is an objective matter, nevertheless, unless the universe were an orderly place, men would not be around to comment on the fact. (If there were no natural laws, there would be no regularly functioning organisms, and so no men.) Hence there is nothing surprising in the fact that men find order—they could not possibly find anything else. This conclusion is clearly a little too strong. There would need to be quite a bit of order in and around our bodies if men are to exist and think, but there could be chaos outside the earth, so long as the earth was largely unaffected by that chaos. There is a great deal more order in the world than is necessary for the existence of humans. So men could still be around to comment on the fact even if the world were a much less orderly place than it is. But quite apart from this minor consideration, the argument still fails totally for a reason which can best be brought out by an analogy. Suppose that a madman kidnaps a victim and shuts him in a room with a card-shuffling machine. The machine shuffles ten packs of cards simultaneously and then draws a card from each pack and exhibits simultaneously the ten cards. The kidnapper tells the victim that he will shortly set the machine to work and it will exhibit its first draw, but that unless the draw consists of an ace of hearts from each pack, the machine will simultaneously set off an explosion which will kill the victim, in consequence of which he will not see which cards the machine drew. The machine is then set to work, and to the amazement and relief of the victim the machine exhibits an ace of hearts drawn from each pack. The victim thinks that this extraordinary fact needs an explanation in terms of the machine having been rigged in some way. But the kidnapper, who now reappears, casts doubt on this suggestion. "It is hardly surprising," he says, "that the machine draws only aces of hearts. You could not possibly see anything else. For you would not be here to see anything at all, if any other cards had been drawn." But of course the victim is right and the kidnapper is wrong. There is indeed something extraordinary in need of explanation in ten aces of hearts being drawn. The fact that this peculiar order is a necessary condition of the draw being perceived at all makes what is perceived no less extraordinary and in need of explanation. The teleologist's starting-point is not that we perceive order rather than disorder, but that order rather than disorder is there. Maybe only if order is there can we know what is there, but that makes what is there no less extraordinary and in need of explanation.

So the universe is characterized by vast, all-pervasive temporal order, the conformity of nature to formula, recorded in the scientific laws formulated by men. Now this phenomenon, like the very existence of the world, is clearly something "too big" to be explained by science. If there is an explanation of the world's order it cannot be a scientific one, and this follows from the nature of scientific explanation. For, in scientific explanation we explain particular phenomena as brought about by prior phenomena in accord with scientific laws; or we explain the operation of scientific laws in terms of more general scientific laws (and perhaps also

particular phenomena). Thus we explain the operation of Kepler's laws in terms of the operation of Newton's laws (given the masses, initial velocities, and distances apart of the sun and planets); and we explain the operation of Newton's laws in terms of the operation of Einstein's field equations for space relatively empty of matter. Science thus explains particular phenomena and low-level laws in terms partly of high-level laws. But from the very nature of science it cannot explain the highest-level laws of all; for they are that by which it explains all other phenomena.

At this point we need to rephrase our premisses in terms of the powers-and-liabilities account of science, which we have seen reason for preferring to the Hempelian account. On this account what the all-pervasive temporal order amounts to is the fact that throughout space and time there are physical objects of various kinds, every such object having the powers and liabilities which are described in laws of nature—e.g. the power of attracting each other physical object in the universe with a force of $\gamma mm^1/r^2$ dynes (where γ is the gravitational constant), the liability always to exercise this power, and the liability to be attracted by each other body in the universe with a force of $\gamma mm^1/r^2$ dynes and so on. From the fact that it has such general powers it follows that an object will have certain more specific powers, given the land of object that it is. For example, given that it has a mass of 1 gram, it will follow that it has the power of attracting each other body in the universe with a force of $\gamma m^1/r^2$ dynes. This picture allows us to draw attention to one feature of the orderliness of the universe which the other picture makes it easy to ignore. Unlike the feature to which I have drawn attention so far, it is not one of which men have always known; it is one which the atomic theory of chemistry strongly suggested, and the discovery of fundamental particles confirmed. It is this. The physical objects scattered throughout space and time are, or are composed of, particles of a few limited kinds, which we call fundamental particles. Whether the protons and electrons which we suppose to be the fundamental particles are in fact fundamental, or whether they are composed of yet more fundamental particles (e.g. quarks) which are capable of independent existence is not altogether clear—but what does seem clear is that if there are yet more fundamental particles, they too come in a few specific kinds. Nature only has building-blocks of a few lands. Each particle of a given kind has a few defining properties which determine its behaviour and which are specific to that kind. Thus all electrons have a mass of $1/2MeV/c^2$, a charge of -1, a spin of 1/2, etc. All positrons have other properties the same as electrons, but a charge of $+1$. All protons have a mass of 938 MeV/c^2, a charge of $+1$, and a spin of 1/2. And so on. There are innumerably many particles which belong to each of a few kinds, and no particles with characteristics intermediate between those of two kinds. The properties of fundamental kinds, that is, which give specific form to the general powers which all objects have, belong to a small class; and the powers and liabilities of large-scale objects are determined by those of their fundamental components. Particles have constant characteristics over time; they only change their characteristics, or are destroyed or converted into other particles by reason of their own liabilities (e.g. to decay) or the action of other particles acting in virtue of their powers.

Put in these terms then, the orderliness of nature is a matter of the vast uniformity in the powers and liabilities of bodies throughout endless time and space, and also in the paucity of kinds of components of bodies. Over centuries long, long ago and over distances distant in millions of light years from ourselves the same universal orderliness reigns. There are, as we have seen, explanations of only two kinds for phenomena—scientific explanation and personal explanation. Yet, although a scientific explanation can be provided of why the more specific powers and liabilities of bodies hold (e.g. why an electron exerts just the attractive force which it does) in terms of more general powers and liabilities possessed by all bodies (put in Hempelian terms—why a particular natural law holds in terms of more general natural laws), science cannot explain why all bodies do possess the same very general powers and liabilities. It is with this fact that scientific explanation stops. So either the

orderliness of nature is where all explanation stops, or we must postulate an agent of great power and knowledge who brings about through his continuous action that bodies have the same very general powers and liabilities (that the most general natural laws operate); and, once again, the simplest such agent to postulate is one of infinite power, knowledge, and freedom, i.e. God. An additional consideration here is that it is clearly vastly simpler to suppose that the existence and the order of the world have the same cause, and the considerations which lead us to postulate a being of infinite power, knowledge, and freedom as the cause of the former reinforce the considerations which lead us to postulate such a cause for the latter.

In the *Dialogues* Hume made the objection—why should we not postulate many gods to give order to the universe, not merely one? "A great number of men join in building a house or a ship, in rearing a city, in framing a commonwealth, why may not several deities combine in framing a world?" Hume again is aware of the obvious counter-objection to his suggestion. "To multiply causes without necessity is … contrary to true philosophy." He claims, however, that the counter-objection does not apply here, because (in my terminology) although the supposition that there is one god is a simpler supposition than the supposition that there are many, in postulating many persons to be responsible for the order of the universe we are postulating persons more like to men in power and knowledge—that is we are putting forward a hypothesis which fits in better with our background knowledge of what there is in the world. That may be. But Hume's hypothesis is very complicated—we want to ask about it such questions as why are there just 333 deities (or whatever the number is), why do they have powers of just the strength which they do have, and what moves them to cooperate as closely as obviously they do; questions of a kind which obtrude far less with the far simpler and so less arbitrary theistic hypothesis. Even if Hume were right in supposing that the prior probability of his hypothesis were as great as that of theism (because the fit with background knowledge of the former cancels out the simplicity of the latter) (and I do not myself think that he is right), the hypothesis of theism nevertheless has greater explanatory power than the Humean hypothesis and is for that reason more probable. For theism leads us to expect that we will find throughout nature one pattern of order. But if there were more than one deity responsible for the order of the universe, we would expect to see characteristic marks of the handiwork of different deities in different parts of the universe, just as we see different kinds of workmanship in the different houses of a city. We would expect to find an inverse square of law of gravitation obeyed in one part of the universe, and in another part a law which was just short of being an inverse square law—without the difference being explicable in terms of a more general law. It is enough to draw this absurd conclusion to see how wrong the Humean objection is.

So I shall take as the alternatives—the first, that the temporal order of the world is where explanation stops, and the second, that the temporal order of the world is due to the agency of God; and I shall ignore the less probable possibilities that the order is to be explained as due to the agency of an agent or agents of finite power. The proponent of the teleological argument claims that the order of nature shows an orderer—God.

THE FORCE OF THE SECOND FORM OF TELEOLOGICAL ARGUMENT

The teleological argument, whether from temporal or spatial order, is, I believe, a codification by philosophers of a reaction to the world deeply embedded in the human consciousness. Men see the comprehensibility of the world as evidence of a comprehending creator. The prophet Jeremiah lived in an age in which the existence of a creator-god of some sort was taken for granted. What was at stake was the extent of his goodness, knowledge, and power. Jeremiah argued from the

order of the world that he was a powerful and reliable god, that god was God. He argued to the power of the creator from the extent of the creation—"The host of heaven cannot be numbered, neither the sand of the sea measured"; and he argued that its regular behaviour showed the reliability of the creator, and he spoke of the "covenant of the day and night" whereby they follow each other regularly, and "the ordinances of heaven and earth,"[1] and he used their existence as an argument for the trust-worthiness of the God of Jacob. The argument from temporal order has been with us ever since.

You get the argument from temporal order also in Aquinas's fifth way, which runs as follows:

> The fifth way is based on the guidedness of nature. An orderedness of actions to an end is observed in all bodies obeying natural laws, even when they lack awareness. For their behaviour hardly ever varies, and will practically always turn out well; which shows that they truly tend to a goal, and do not merely hit it by accident. Nothing however that lacks awareness tends to a goal, except under the direction of someone with awareness and with understanding; the arrow, for example requires an archer. Everything in nature, therefore is directed to its goal by someone with understanding and this we call "God."[2]

Aquinas argues that the regular behaviour of each inanimate thing shows that some animate being is directing it (making it move to achieve some purpose, attain some goal); and from that he comes—rather quickly—to the conclusion that one "being with understanding" is responsible for the behaviour of all inanimate things.

It seems to me fairly clear that no argument from temporal order—whether Aquinas's fifth way or any other argument can be a good deductive argument. For although the premiss is undoubtedly correct—a vast pervasive order characterizes the world—the step from premiss to conclusion is not a valid deductive one. Although the existence of order may be good evidence of a designer, it is surely compatible with the non-existence of one—it is hardly a logically necessary truth that all order is brought about by a person. And although, as I have urged, the supposition that one person is responsible for the orderliness of the world is much simpler and so more probable than the supposition that many persons are, nevertheless, the latter supposition seems logically compatible with the data—so we must turn to the more substantial issue of whether the argument from the temporal order of the world to God is a good inductive argument. We had reached the conclusion that either the vast uniformity in the powers and liabilities of bodies was where explanation stopped, or that God brings this about by his continuous action, through an intention constant over time.

Let us represent by e this conformity of the world to order, and let h be the hypothesis of theism. It is not possible to treat a teleological argument in complete isolation from the cosmological argument. We cannot ask how probable the premiss of the teleological argument makes theism, independently of the premiss of the cosmological argument, for the premiss of the teleological argument entails in part the premiss of the cosmological argument. That there is order of the kind described entails at least that there is a physical universe. So let k be now, not mere tautological evidence, but the existence of a complex physical universe (the premiss of the version of the cosmological argument to which I devoted most attention). Let us ask how much more probable does the orderliness of such a universe make the existence of God than does the mere existence of the universe.

With these fillings, we ask whether $P(h/e\&k) > P(h/k)$ and by how much. As we have seen $P(h/e\&k)$ will exceed $P(h/k)$ if and only if $P(e/h\&k) > P(e/\sim h\&k)$. Put in words with our current fillings for h, e, and k, the existence of order in the world confirms the existence of God if and only if the existence of this order in the world is more probable if there is a God than if there is not. We saw in Chapter 6 that where h is the hypothesis that there is a God $P(e/h\&k)$ may exceed $P(e/\sim h\&k)$, either because e cannot be explained in any other way and is very unlikely to occur uncaused or

because God has character such that he is more likely to bring about *e* than alternative states. With respect to the cosmological argument, I suggested that its case rested solely on the first consideration. Here I shall suggest that again the first consideration is dominant, but that the second has considerable significance also.

Let us start with the first consideration, *e* is the vast uniformity in the powers and liabilities possessed by material objects—$P(e/\sim h\&k)$ is the probability that there should be that amount of uniformity in a God-less world, that this uniform distribution of the powers of things should be where explanation terminates, that they be further inexplicable. That there should be material bodies is strange enough; but that they should all have such similar powers which they inevitably exercise, seems passing strange. It is strange enough that physical objects should have powers at all—why should they not just be, without being able to make a difference to the world? But that they should all, throughout infinite time and space, have some general powers identical to those of all other objects (and they all be made of components of very few fundamental kinds, each component of a given kind being identical in all characteristics with each other such component) and yet there be no cause of this at all seems incredible. The universe is complex as we urged, in the last chapter, in that there are so many bodies of different shapes, etc., and now we find an underlying orderliness in the identity of powers and paucity of kinds of components of bodies. Yet this orderliness, if there is no explanation of it in terms of the action of God, is the orderliness of coincidence—the fact that one body has certain powers does not explain the fact that a second body has—not the simplicity of a common underlying explanation. The basic complexity remains in the vast number of different bodies in which the orderliness of identical powers and components is embodied. It is a complexity too striking to occur unexplained. It cries out for explanation in terms of some single common source with the power to produce it. Just as we would seek to explain all the coins of the realm having an identical pattern in terms of their origin from a common mould, or all of many pictures' having a common style in terms of their being painted by the same painter, so too should we seek to explain all physical objects' having the same powers in terms of their deriving them from a common source. On these grounds alone $P(e/h\&k) \gg P(e/k)$, and so $P(b/e\&k) \gg P(h/k)$.[3]

I think, however, that we can go further by bringing in considerations from God's character—we saw in Chapter 6 that God will bring about a state of affairs if it is over all a good thing that he should, he will not bring about a state of affairs if it is over all a bad thing that he should, and that he will only bring about a state of affairs if it is in some way a good thing that he should. Put in terms of reasons—he will always act on overriding reasons and cannot act except for a reason. Now there are two reasons why human beings produce order. One is aesthetic—beauty comes in the patterns of things, such as dances and songs. Some sort of order is a necessary condition of phenomena having beauty; complete chaos is just ugly—although of course not any order is beautiful. The second reason why a human being produces order is that when there is order he or other rational agents can perceive that order and utilize it to achieve ends. If we see that there is a certain pattern of order in phenomena we can then justifiably predict that that order will continue, and that enables us to make predictions about the future on which we can rely. A librarian puts books in an alphabetical order of authors in order that he and users of the library who come to know that the order is there may subsequently be able to find any book in the library very quickly (because, given knowledge of the order, we can predict whereabouts in the library any given book will be).

God has similar reasons for producing an orderly, as opposed to a chaotic universe. In so far as some sort of order is a necessary condition of beauty, and it is a good thing—as it surely is—that the world be beautiful rather than ugly, God has reason for creating an orderly universe. Secondly, I shall argue in Chapter 10 that it is good that God should make finite creatures with the opportunity to grow in knowledge and power. Now if creatures are going consciously to extend

their control of the world, they will need to know how to do so. There will need to be some procedures which they can find out, such that if they follow those procedures, certain events will occur. This entails the existence of temporal order. There can only be such procedures if the world is orderly, and, I should add, there can only be such procedures ascertainable by men if the order of the world is such as to be discernible by men. To take a simple example, if hitting things leads to them breaking or penetrating other things, and heating things leads to them melting, men can discover these regularities and utilize them to make artefacts such as houses, tables, and chairs. They can heat iron ore to melt it to make nails, hammers, and axes, and use the latter to break wood into the right shapes to hammer together with nails to make the artefacts. Or, if light and other electro-magnetic radiation behave in predictable ways comprehensible by men, men can discover those ways and build telescopes and radio and television receivers and transmitters. A world must evince the temporal order exhibited by laws of nature if men are to be able to extrapolate from how things have behaved in the past, to how they will behave in the future, which extrapolation is necessary if men are to have the knowledge of how things will behave in the future, which they must have in order to be able to extend their control over the world. (There would not need to be complete determinism—agents themselves could be exempt from the full rigors of determinism, and there might be violations of natural laws from time to time. But basically the world has to be governed by laws of nature if agents are consciously to extend their control of the world.) If I am right in supposing that God has reason to create finite creatures with the opportunity to grow in knowledge and power, then he has reason to create temporal order. So I suggest that God has at least these two reasons for producing an orderly world. Maybe God has reasons for not making creatures with the opportunity to grow in knowledge and power, and so the second reason for his creating an orderly universe does not apply. But with one possible, and, I shall show, irrelevant qualification, the first surely does. God may choose whether or not to make a physical universe, but if he does, he has reason for making a beautiful and so an orderly one. God has reason, if he does make a physical universe, not to make a chaotic or botched-up one. The only reason of which I can think why God should make the universe in some respects ugly would be to give to creatures the opportunity to discover the aesthetic merits of different states of affairs and through cooperative effort to make the world beautiful for themselves. But then the other argument shows that if they are to be able to exercise such an opportunity the world will need to be orderly in some respects. (There will have to be predictable regularities which creatures may utilize in order to produce beautiful states of affairs.) So, either way, the world will need to be orderly. It rather looks as if God has overriding reason to make an orderly universe if he makes a universe at all. However, as I emphasized, human inquiry into divine reasons is a highly speculative matter. But it is nevertheless one in which men are justified in reaching tentative conclusions. For God is postulated to be an agent like ourselves in having knowledge, power, and freedom, although to an infinitely greater degree than we have. The existence of the analogy legitimizes us in reaching conclusions about his purposes, conclusions which must allow for the quantitative difference, as I have tried to do.

So I suggest that the order of the world is evidence of the existence of God both because its occurrence would be very improbable *a priori* and also because, in virtue of his postulated character, he has very good, apparently overriding, reason for making an orderly universe, if he makes a universe at all. It looks as if $P(e/h\&k)$ equals 1. For both reasons $P(e/h\&k) \gg P(e/\sim h\&k)$ and so $P(b/e\&k) \gg P(h/k)$. I conclude that the teleological argument from temporal order is a good C-inductive argument to the existence of God.[†]

Let us look at the argument from a slightly different angle. It is basically an argument by

[†]Earlier in the book Swinburne distinguishes a P-inductive argument from a C-inductive argument. A P-inductive argument is one in which the premises make the conclusion probable. A C-inductive argument is one in which the premises *add to the probability of the conclusion (i.e., makes it more probable than it would otherwise be).*

analogy, an analogy between the order in the natural world (the temporal order codified in laws of nature) and the patterns of order which men often produce (the ordered books on library shelves, or the temporal order in the movements of a dancer or the notes of a song). It argues from similarity between phenomena of two kinds B and $B^\star$ to similarity between their causes A and $A^\star$. In view of the similarities between the two kinds of order B and $B^\star$, the theist postulates a cause ($A^\star$) in some respects similar to A (men); yet in view of the dissimilarities the theist must postulate a cause in other respects different. All arguments by analogy do and must proceed in this way. They cannot postulate a cause in all respects similar. They postulate a cause who is such that one would expect him to produce phenomena similar to B in the respects in which $B^\star$ are similar to B and different from B in the respects in which $B^\star$ are different from B.

All argument from analogy works like this. Thus various properties of light and sound were known in the nineteenth century, among them that both light and sound are reflected, refracted, diffracted, and show interference phenomena. In the case of sound these were known to be due to disturbance of the medium, air, in which it is transmitted. What could one conclude by analogy about the cause of the reflection, etc., of light? One could conclude that the propagation of light was, like the propagation of sound, the propagation of a wavelike disturbance in a medium. But one could not conclude that it was the propagation of a disturbance in the same medium—air, since light passed through space empty of air. Scientists had to postulate a separate medium—aether, the disturbance of which was responsible for the reflection, etc., of light. And not merely does all argument by analogy proceed like this, but all inductive inference can be represented as argument by analogy. For all inductive inference depends on the assumption that in certain respects things continue the same and in other respects they differ. Thus that crude inference from a number of observed swans all having been white to the next swan's being white is an argument by analogy. For it claims that the next swan will be like the observed swans in one respect—color, while being unlike them in other respects.

In our case the similarities between the temporal order which men produce and the temporal order in nature codified in scientific laws mean postulating as cause of the latter a person who acts intentionally. The dissimilarities between the kinds of order include the world-wide extent of the order in nature in comparison with the very narrow range of order which men produce. This means postulating as cause of the former a person of enormous power and knowledge. Now, as we saw in Chapter 2, a person has a body if there is a region of the world under his direct control and if he controls other regions of the world only by controlling the former and by its movements having predictable effects on the outside world. Likewise he learns about the world only by the world having effects on this region. If these conditions are satisfied, the person has a body, and the stated region is that body. But if a person brings about directly the connections between things, including the predictable connections between the bodies of other persons and the world, there is no region of the world, goings-on in which bring about those connections. The person must bring about those connections as a basic action. His control of the world must be immediate, not mediated by a body. So the dissimilarities between the two kinds of order necessarily lead to the postulation of a non-embodied person (rather than an embodied person) as cause of the temporal order in nature.

These considerations should suffice to rebut that persistent criticism of the argument from design which we have heard ever since Hume that, taken seriously, the argument ought to be postulating an embodied god, a giant of a man. "Why not," wrote Hume, "become a perfect anthro-pomorphite? Why not assert the deity or deities to be corporeal, and, to have eyes, a nose, mouth, ears, etc.?" The answer is the simple one that dissimilarities between effects lead the rational man to postulate dissimilarities between causes, and that this procedure is basic to inductive inference.

It is true that the greater the dissimilarities between effects, the weaker is the argument to

the existence of a similar cause; and it has been a traditional criticism of the argument from design represented as an argument by analogy that the analogy is weak. The dissimilarities between the natural world and the effects which men produce are indeed striking; but the similarities between these are also, I have been suggesting, striking—in both there is the conformity of phenomena to a simple pattern of order detectable by men. But although the dissimilarities are perhaps sufficiently great to make the argument not a good P-inductive argument, this chapter suggests that it remains a good C-inductive argument. The existence of order in the universe increases significantly the probability that there is a God, even if it does not by itself render it probable.

THE ARGUMENT FROM BEAUTY

We saw that God has reason, apparently overriding reason, for making, not merely any orderly world (which we have been considering so far) but a beautiful world—at any rate to the extent to which it lies outside the control of creatures. (And he has reason too, I would suggest, even in whatever respects the world does lie within the control of creatures, to give them experience of beauty to develop, and perhaps also some ugliness to annihilate.) So God has reason to make a basically beautiful world, although also reason to leave some of the beauty or ugliness of the world within the power of creatures to determine; but he would seem to have overriding reason not to make a basically ugly world beyond the powers of creatures to improve. Hence, if there is a God there is more reason to expect a basically beautiful world than a basically ugly one—by the principles of Chapter 6. *A priori*, however, there is no particular reason for expecting a basically beautiful rather than a basically ugly world. In consequence, if the world is beautiful, that fact would be evidence for God's existence. For, in this case, if we let k be "there is an orderly physical universe," e be "there is a beautiful universe," and h be "there is a God," $P(e/h\&k)$ will be greater than $P(e/k)$; and so by our previous principles the argument from e to h will be another good C-inductive argument.

Few, however, would deny that our universe (apart from its animal and human inhabitants, and aspects subject to their immediate control) has that beauty. Poets and painters and ordinary men down the centuries have long admired the beauty of the orderly procession of the heavenly bodies, the scattering of the galaxies through the heavens (in some ways random, in some ways orderly), and the rocks, sea, and wind interacting on earth, "The spacious firmament on high, and all the blue aethereal sky," the water lapping against "the old eternal rocks," and the plants of the jungle and of temperate climates, contrasting with the desert and the Arctic wastes. Who in his senses would deny that here is beauty in abundance? If we confine ourselves to the argument from the beauty of the inanimate and plant worlds, the argument surely works.

NOTES

1. Jer. 33: 20f. and 25f.
2. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae,* 1 a, 2.3, trans. T. McDermott, OP (London, 1964).
3. "$\gg$" means "is much greater than," "$\ll$" means "is much less than."

II.C.4

A Scientific Argument for the Existence of God

ROBIN COLLINS

Robin Collins (1961–) is professor of philosophy at Messiah College, and he has written several articles on the argument from design. The article included here presents a simplified version of an argument that he has developed in much more technical detail elsewhere. He begins by noting that life would have been impossible had certain laws of nature and fundamental physical constants (such as the gravitational constant) been even slightly different. He then argues that since this apparent "fine-tuning" of the laws and constants is significantly more probable on the assumption that the universe was designed to be hospitable for life than on the assumption that it was not designed at all, such apparent fine-tuning counts as evidence in favor of the existence of a designer.

I. INTRODUCTION

The Evidence of Fine-Tuning

Suppose we went on a mission to Mars, and found a domed structure in which everything was set up just right for life to exist. The temperature, for example, was set around 70° F and the humidity was at 50 percent; moreover, there was an oxygen recycling system, an energy gathering system, and a whole system for the production of food. Put simply, the domed structure appeared to be a fully functioning biosphere. What conclusion would we draw from finding this structure? Would we draw the conclusion that it just happened to form by chance? Certainly not. Instead, we would unanimously conclude that it was designed by some intelligent being. Why would we draw this conclusion? Because an intelligent designer appears to be the only plausible explanation for the existence of the structure. That is, the only alternative explanation we can think of—that the structure was formed by some natural process—seems extremely unlikely. Of course, it is *possible* that, for example, through some volcanic eruption various metals and other compounds could have formed, and then separated out in just the right way to produce the "biosphere," but such a scenario strikes us as extraordinarily unlikely, thus making this alternative explanation unbelievable.

The universe is analogous to such a "biosphere," according to recent findings in physics. Almost everything about the basic structure of the universe—for example, the fundamental laws and parameters of physics and the initial distribution of matter and energy—is balanced on a razor's edge for life to occur. As the eminent Princeton physicist Freeman Dyson notes, "There are many … lucky accidents in physics. Without such accidents, water could not exist as liquid, chains of carbon atoms could not form complex organic molecules, and

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hydrogen atoms could not form breakable bridges between molecules"[1]—in short, life as we know it would be impossible.

Scientists call this extraordinary balancing of the parameters of physics and the initial conditions of the universe the "fine-tuning of the cosmos." It has been extensively discussed by philosophers, theologians, and scientists, especially since the early 1970s, with hundreds of articles and dozens of books written on the topic. Today, it is widely regarded as offering by far the most persuasive current argument for the existence of God. For example, theoretical physicist and popular science writer Paul Davies—whose early writings were not particularly sympathetic to theism—claims that with regard to basic structure of the universe, "the impression of design is overwhelming."[2] Similarly, in response to the life-permitting fine-tuning of the nuclear resonances responsible for the oxygen and carbon synthesis in stars, the famous astrophysicist Sir Fred Hoyle declares that

> I do not believe that any scientists who examined the evidence would fail to draw the inference that the laws of nuclear physics have been deliberately designed with regard to the consequences they produce inside stars. If this is so, then my apparently random quirks have become part of a deep-laid scheme. If not then we are back again at a monstrous sequence of accidents.[3]

A few examples of this fine-tuning are listed below:

1. If the initial explosion of the big bang had differed in strength by as little as one part in 10^{60}, the universe would have either quickly collapsed back on itself, or expanded too rapidly for stars to form. In either case, life would be impossible. (As John Jefferson Davis points out, an accuracy of one part in 10^{60}can be compared to firing a bullet at a one-inch target on the other side of the observable universe, twenty billion light years away, and hitting the target.)[4]
2. Calculations indicate that if the strong nuclear force, the force that binds protons and neutrons together in an atom, had been stronger or weaker by as little as five percent, life would be impossible.[5]
3. Calculations by Brandon Carter show that if gravity had been stronger or weaker by one part in 10^{40}, then life-sustaining stars like the sun could not exist. This would most likely make life impossible.[6]
4. If the neutron were not about 1.001 times the mass of the proton, all protons would have decayed into neutrons or all neutrons would have decayed into protons, and thus life would not be possible.[7]
5. If the electromagnetic force were slightly stronger or weaker, life would be impossible, for a variety of different reasons.[8]

Imaginatively, one could think of each instance of fine-tuning as a radio dial: unless all the dials are set exactly right, life would be impossible. Or, one could think of the initial conditions of the universe and the fundamental parameters of physics as a dart board that fills the whole galaxy, and the conditions necessary for life to exist as a small one-foot-wide target: unless the dart hits the target, life would be impossible. The fact that the dials are perfectly set, or that the dart has hit the target, strongly suggests that someone set the dials or aimed the dart, for it seems enormously improbable that such a coincidence could have happened by chance.

Although individual calculations of fine-tuning are only approximate and could be in error, the fact that the universe is fine-tuned for life is almost beyond question because of the large number of independent instances of apparent fine-tuning. As philosopher John Leslie has pointed out, "Clues heaped upon clues can constitute weighty evidence despite doubts about each element in the pile."[9] What is controversial, however, is the degree to which the fine-tuning provides evidence for the existence of God. As impressive as the argument from fine-tuning seems to be, atheists have raised several significant objections to it. Consequently, those who are aware of these objections, or have thought of them on their own, often will find the argument unconvincing. This is not only true of atheists, but

also many theists. I have known, for instance, both a committed Christian Hollywood filmmaker and a committed Christian biochemist who remained unconvinced because of certain atheist objections to the argument. This is unfortunate, particularly since the fine-tuning argument is probably the most powerful current argument for the existence of God. My goal in this chapter, therefore, is to make the fine-tuning argument as strong as possible. This will involve developing the argument in as objective and rigorous a way as I can, and then answering the major atheist objections to it. Before launching into this, however, I will need to make a preliminary distinction.

A Preliminary Distinction

To develop the fine-tuning argument rigorously, it is useful to distinguish between what I shall call the *atheistic single-universe hypothesis* and the *atheistic many-universes hypothesis*. According to the atheistic single-universe hypothesis, there is only one universe, and it is ultimately an inexplicable, "brute" fact that the universe exists and is fine-tuned. Many atheists, however, advocate another hypothesis, one which attempts to explain how the seemingly improbable fine-tuning of the universe could be the result of chance. We will call this hypothesis the *atheistic many-worlds hypothesis,* or *the atheistic many-universes hypothesis*. According to this hypothesis, there exists what could be imaginatively thought of as a "universe generator" that produces a very large or infinite number of universes, with each universe having a randomly selected set of initial conditions and values for the parameters of physics. Because this generator produces so many universes, just by chance it will eventually produce one that is fine-tuned for intelligent life to occur.

Plan of the Chapter

Below, we will use this distinction between the atheistic single-universe hypothesis and the atheistic many-universes hypothesis to present two separate arguments for theism based on the fine-tuning: one which argues that the fine-tuning provides strong reasons to prefer theism over the atheistic single-universe hypothesis and one which argues that we should prefer theism over the atheistic many-universes hypothesis. We will develop the argument against the atheistic single-universe hypothesis in section II below, referring to it as the core argument. Then we will answer objections to this *core* argument in section III, and finally develop the argument for preferring theism to the atheistic many-universes hypothesis in section IV. An appendix is also included that further elaborates and justifies one of the key premises of the core argument presented in section II.

II. CORE ARGUMENT RIGOROUSLY FORMULATED

General Principle of Reasoning Used

The Principle Explained We will formulate the fine-tuning argument against the atheistic single-universe hypothesis in terms of what I will call the *prime principle of confirmation*. The prime principle of confirmation is a general principle of reasoning which tells us when some observation counts as evidence in favor of one hypothesis over another. *Simply put, the principle says that whenever we are considering two competing hypotheses, an observation counts as evidence in favor of the hypothesis under which the observation has the highest probability (or is the least improbable).* (Or, put slightly differently, the principle says that whenever we are considering two competing hypotheses, H_1 and H_2, an observation, O, counts as evidence in favor of H_1 over H_2 if O is more probable under H_1 than it is under H_2.) Moreover, the degree to which the evidence counts in favor of one hypothesis over another is proportional to the degree to which the observation is more probable under the one hypothesis than the other.[10] For example, the fine-tuning is much, much more probable under theism than under the atheistic single-universe hypothesis, so it counts as strong evidence for theism over this atheistic hypothesis. In the next major subsection, we will

present a more formal and elaborated rendition of the fine-tuning argument in terms of the prime principle. First, however, let's look at a couple of illustrations of the principle and then present some support for it.

Additional Illustrations of the Principle For our first illustration, suppose that I went hiking in the mountains, and found underneath a certain cliff a group of rocks arranged in a formation that clearly formed the pattern "Welcome to the mountains, Robin Collins." One hypothesis is that, by chance, the rocks just happened to be arranged in that pattern—ultimately, perhaps, because of certain initial conditions of the universe. Suppose the only viable alternative hypothesis is that my brother, who was in the mountains before me, arranged the rocks in this way. Most of us would immediately take the arrangements of rocks to be strong evidence in favor of the "brother" hypothesis over the "chance" hypothesis. Why? Because it strikes us as extremely *improbable* that the rocks would be arranged that way by chance, but *not improbable* at all that my brother would place them in that configuration. Thus, by the prime principle of confirmation we would conclude that the arrangement of rocks strongly supports the "brother" hypothesis over the chance hypothesis.

Or consider another case, that of finding the defendant's fingerprints on the murder weapon. Normally, we would take such a finding as strong evidence that the defendant was guilty. Why? Because we judge that it would be *unlikely* for these fingerprints to be on the murder weapon if the defendant was innocent, but *not unlikely* if the defendant was guilty. That is, we would go through the same sort of reasoning as in the above case.

Support for the Principle Several things can be said in favor of the prime principle of confirmation. First, many philosophers think that this principle can be derived from what is known as the *probability calculus,* the set of mathematical rules that are typically assumed to govern probability. Second, there does not appear to be any case of recognizably good reasoning that violates this principle. Finally, the principle appears to have a wide range of applicability, undergirding much of our reasoning in science and everyday life, as the examples above illustrate. Indeed, some have even claimed that a slightly more general version of this principle undergirds all scientific reasoning. Because of all these reasons in favor of the principle, we can be very confident in it.

Further Development of Argument

To further develop the core version of the fine-tuning argument, we will summarize the argument by explicitly listing its two premises and its conclusion:

- *Premise 1*. The existence of the fine-tuning is not improbable under theism.
- *Premise 2*. The existence of the fine-tuning is very improbable under the atheistic single-universe hypothesis.
- *Conclusion*: From premises (1) and (2) and the prime principle of confirmation, it follows that the fine-tuning data provide strong evidence to favor the design hypothesis over the atheistic single-universe hypothesis.

At this point, we should pause to note two features of this argument. First, the argument does not say that the fine-tuning evidence proves that the universe was designed, or even that it is likely that the universe was designed. In order to justify these sorts of claims, we would have to look at the full range of evidence both for and against the design hypothesis, something we are not doing in this chapter. Rather, the argument merely concludes that the fine-tuning strongly *supports* theism *over* the atheistic single-universe hypothesis.

In this way, the evidence of the fine-tuning argument is much like fingerprints found on the gun: although they can provide strong evidence that the defendant committed the murder, one could not conclude merely from them alone that the defendant is guilty; one would also have to look at all the other evidence offered. Perhaps, for instance, ten reliable witnesses claimed to see the

defendant at a party at the time of the shooting. In this case, the fingerprints would still count as significant evidence of guilt, but this evidence would be counterbalanced by the testimony of the witnesses. Similarly the evidence of fine-tuning strongly supports theism over the atheistic single-universe hypothesis, though it does not itself show that, everything considered, theism is the most plausible explanation of the world. Nonetheless, as I argue in the conclusion of this chapter, the evidence of fine-tuning provides a much stronger and more objective argument for theism (over the atheistic single-universe hypothesis) than the strongest atheistic argument does against theism.

The second feature of the argument we should note is that, given the truth of *the prime principle of confirmation*, the conclusion of the argument follows from the premises. Specifically, if the premises of the argument are true, then we are guaranteed that the conclusion is true: that is, the argument is what philosophers call *valid*. Thus, insofar as we can show that the premises of the argument are true, we will have shown that the conclusion is true. Our next task, therefore, is to attempt to show that the premises are true, or at least that we have strong reasons to believe them.

Support for the Premises

Support for Premise (1) Premise (1) is easy to support and fairly uncontroversial. One major argument in support of it can be simply stated as follows: *since God is an all good being, and it is good for intelligent, conscious beings to exist, it is not surprising or improbable that God would create a world that could support intelligent life*. Thus, the fine-tuning is not improbable under theism, as premise (1) asserts.

Support for Premise (2) Upon looking at the data, many people find it very obvious that the fine-tuning is highly improbable under the atheistic single-universe hypothesis. And it is easy to see why when we think of the fine-tuning in terms of the analogies offered earlier. In the dart board analogy, for example, the initial conditions of the universe and the fundamental parameters of physics are thought of as a dart board that fills the whole galaxy, and the conditions necessary for life to exist as a small one-foot-wide target. Accordingly, from this analogy it seems obvious that it would be highly improbable for the fine-tuning to occur under the atheistic single-universe hypothesis—that is, for the dart to hit the target by chance.

Typically, advocates of the fine-tuning argument are satisfied with resting the justification of premise (2), or something like it, on this sort of analogy. Many atheists and theists, however, question the legitimacy of this sort of analogy, and thus find the argument unconvincing. For these people, the appendix to this chapter offers a rigorous and objective justification of premise (2) using standard principles of probabilistic reasoning. Among other things, in the process of rigorously justifying premise (2), we effectively answer the common objection to the fine-tuning argument that because the universe is a unique, unrepeatable event, we cannot meaningfully assign a probability to its being fine-tuned.

III. SOME OBJECTIONS TO CORE VERSION

As powerful as the core version of the fine-tuning argument is, several major objections have been raised to it by both atheists and theists. In this section, we will consider these objections in turn.

Objection 1: More Fundamental Law Objection

One criticism of the fine-tuning argument is that, as far as we know, there could be a more fundamental law under which the parameters of physics *must* have the values they do. Thus, given such a law, it is not improbable that the known parameters of physics fall within the life-permitting range.

Besides being entirely speculative, the problem with postulating such a law is that it simply moves the improbability of the fine-tuning up one level, to that of the postulated physical law itself. Under this hypothesis, what is improbable is that of all the conceivable fundamental physical laws there could

be, the universe just happens to have the one that constrains the parameters of physics in a life-permitting way. Thus, trying to explain the fine-tuning by postulating this sort of fundamental law is like trying to explain why the pattern of rocks below a cliff spell "Welcome to the mountains, Robin Collins" by postulating that an earthquake occurred and that all the rocks on the cliff face were arranged in just the right configuration to fall into the pattern in question. Clearly this explanation merely transfers the improbability up one level, since now it seems enormously improbable that of all the possible configurations the rocks could be in on the cliff face, they are in the one which results in the pattern "Welcome to the mountains, Robin Collins."

A similar sort of response can be given to the claim that the fine-tuning is not improbable because it might be *logically necessary* for the parameters of physics to have life-permitting values. That is, according to this claim, the parameters of physics must have life-permitting values in the same way 2 + 2 must equal 4, or the interior angles of a triangle must add up to 180 degrees in Euclidian geometry. Like the "more fundamental law" proposal above, however, this postulate simply transfers the improbability up one level: of all the laws and parameters of physics that conceivably could have been logically necessary, it seems highly improbable that it would be those that are life-permitting.[11]

Objection 2: Other Forms of Life Objection

Another objection people commonly raise to the fine-tuning argument is that as far as we know, other forms of life could exist even if the parameters of physics were different. So, it is claimed, the fine-tuning argument ends up presupposing that all forms of intelligent life must be like us. The answer to this objection is that most cases of fine-tuning do not make this presupposition. Consider, for instance, the case of the fine-tuning of the strong nuclear force. If it were slightly smaller, no atoms could exist other than hydrogen. Contrary to what one might see on *Star Trek*, an intelligent life-form cannot be composed merely of hydrogen gas: there is simply not enough stable complexity. So, in general the fine-tuning argument merely presupposes that intelligent life requires some degree of stable, reproducible organized complexity. This is certainly a very reasonable assumption.

Objection 3: Anthropic Principle Objection

According to the weak version of the so-called *anthropic principle,* if the laws of nature were not fine-tuned, we would not be here to comment on the fact. Some have argued, therefore, that the fine-tuning is not really *improbable or surprising* at all under atheism, but simply follows from the fact that we exist. The response to this objection is to simply restate the argument in terms of our existence: our existence as embodied, intelligent beings is extremely unlikely under the atheistic single-universe hypothesis (since our existence requires fine-tuning), but not improbable under theism. Then, we simply apply the prime principle of confirmation to draw the conclusion that *our existence* strongly confirms theism over the atheistic single-universe hypothesis.

To further illustrate this response, consider the following "firing squad" analogy. As John Leslie points out, if fifty sharpshooters all miss me, the response "if they had not missed me I wouldn't be here to consider the fact" is not adequate. Instead, I would naturally conclude that there was some reason why they all missed, such as that they never really intended to kill me. Why would I conclude this? Because my continued existence would be very improbable under the hypothesis that they missed me by chance, but not improbable under the hypothesis that there was some reason why they missed me. Thus, by the prime principle of confirmation, my continued existence strongly confirms the latter hypothesis.[12]

Objection 4: The "Who Designed God?" Objection

Perhaps the most common objection that atheists raise to the argument from design, of which the

fine-tuning argument is one instance, is that postulating the existence of God does not solve the problem of design, but merely transfers it up one level. Atheist George Smith, for example, claims that

> If the universe is wonderfully designed, surely God is even more wonderfully designed. He must, therefore, have had a designer even more wonderful than He is. If *God* did not require a designer, then there is no reason why such a relatively less wonderful thing as the universe needed one.[13]

Or, as philosopher J. J. C. Smart states the objection:

> If we postulate God in addition to the created universe we increase the complexity of our hypothesis. We have all the complexity of the universe itself, and we have in addition the at least equal complexity of God. (The designer of an artifact must be at least as complex as the designed artifact)…. *If the theist can show the atheist that postulating God actually reduces the complexity of one's total world view, then the atheist should be a theist.*[14]

The first response to the above atheist objection is to point out that the atheist claim that the designer of an artifact must be as complex as the artifact designed is certainly not obvious. But I do believe that their claim has some intuitive plausibility: for example, in the world we experience, organized complexity seems only to be produced by systems that already possess it, such as the human brain/mind, a factory, or an organism's biological parent.

The second, and better, response is to point out that, at most, the atheist objection only works against a version of the design argument that claims that all organized complexity needs an explanation, and that God is the best explanation of the organized complexity found in the world. The version of the argument I presented against the atheistic single-universe hypothesis, however, only required that the fine-tuning be more probable under theism than under the atheistic single-universe hypothesis. But this requirement is still met even if God exhibits tremendous internal complexity, far exceeding that of the universe. Thus, even if we were to grant the atheist assumption that the designer of an artifact must be as complex as the artifact, the fine-tuning would still give us strong reasons to prefer theism over the atheistic single-universe hypothesis.

To illustrate, consider the example of the "biosphere" on Mars presented at the beginning of this paper. As mentioned above, the existence of the biosphere would be much more probable under the .hypothesis that intelligent life once visited Mars than under the chance hypothesis. Thus, by the prime principle of confirmation, the existence of such a "biosphere" would constitute strong evidence that intelligent, extraterrestrial life had once been on Mars, even though this alien life would most likely have to be much more complex than the "biosphere" itself.

The final response theists can give to this objection is to show that a supermind such as God would *not* require a high degree of unexplained organized complexity to create the universe. Although I have presented this response elsewhere, presenting it here is beyond the scope of this chapter.

IV. THE ATHEISTIC MANY-UNIVERSES HYPOTHESIS

The Atheistic Many-Universes Hypothesis Explained

In response to the theistic explanation of fine-tuning of the cosmos, many atheists have offered an alternative explanation, what I will call the atheistic many-universes hypothesis. (In the literature it is more commonly referred to as the *many-worlds hypothesis,* though I believe this name is somewhat misleading.) According to this hypothesis, there are a very large—perhaps infinite—number of universes, with the fundamental parameters of physics varying from universe to universe.[15] Of course, in the vast majority of these universes the parameters of physics would not have life-permitting values.

Nonetheless, in a small proportion of universes they would, and consequently it is no longer improbable that universes such as ours exist that are fine-tuned for life to occur.

Advocates of this hypothesis offer various types of models for where these universes came from. We will present what are probably the two most popular and plausible, the so-called *vacuum fluctuation* models and the *oscillating big bang* models. According to the vacuum fluctuation models, our universe, along with these other universes, were generated by quantum fluctuations in a preexisting superspace.[16] Imaginatively, one can think of this preexisting superspace as an infinitely extending ocean full of soap, and each universe generated out of this superspace as a soap bubble which spontaneously forms on the ocean.

The other model, the oscillating big bang model, is a version of the big bang theory. According to the big bang theory, the universe came into existence in an "explosion" (that is, a "bang") somewhere between ten and fifteen billion years ago. According to the *oscillating* big bang theory, our universe will eventually collapse back in on itself (what is called the "big crunch") and then from that "big crunch" will arise another "big bang," forming a new universe, which will in turn itself collapse, and so on. According to those who use this model to attempt to explain the fine-tuning, during every cycle, the parameters of physics and the initial conditions of the universe are reset at random. Since this process of collapse, explosion, collapse, and explosion has been going on for all eternity, eventually a fine-tuned universe will occur, indeed infinitely many of them.

In the next section, we will list several reasons for rejecting the atheistic many-universes hypothesis.

Reasons for Rejecting the Atheistic Many-Universes Hypothesis

First Reason The first reason for rejecting the atheistic many-universes hypothesis, and preferring the theistic hypothesis, is the following general rule: *everything else being equal, we should prefer hypotheses for which we have independent evidence or that are natural extrapolations from what we already know.* Let's first illustrate and support this principle, and then apply it to the case of the fine-tuning.

Most of us take the existence of dinosaur bones to count as very strong evidence that dinosaurs existed in the past. But suppose a dinosaur skeptic claimed that she could explain the bones by postulating a "dinosaur-bone-producing-field" that simply materialized the bones out of thin air. Moreover, suppose further that, to avoid objections such as that there are no known physical laws that would allow for such a mechanism, the dinosaur skeptic simply postulated that we have not yet discovered these laws or detected these fields. Surely, none of us would let this skeptical hypothesis deter us from inferring the existence of dinosaurs. Why? Because although no one has directly observed dinosaurs, we do have experience of other animals leaving behind fossilized remains, and thus the dinosaur explanation is a *natural extrapolation* from our common experience. In contrast, to explain the dinosaur bones, the dinosaur skeptic has invented a set of physical laws, and a set of mechanisms that are *not* a natural extrapolation from anything we know or experience.

In the case of the fine-tuning, we already know that minds often produce fine-tuned devices, such as Swiss watches. Postulating God—a supermind—as the explanation of the fine-tuning, therefore, is a natural extrapolation from what we already observe minds to do. In contrast, it is difficult to see how the atheistic many-universes hypothesis could be considered a natural extrapolation from what we observe. Moreover, unlike the atheistic many-universes hypothesis, we have some experiential evidence for the existence of God, namely religious experience. Thus, by the above principle, we should prefer the theistic explanation of the fine-tuning over the atheistic many-universes explanation, everything else being equal.

Second Reason

A second reason for rejecting the atheistic many-universes hypothesis is that the "many-universes generator" seems like it would need to be designed.

For instance, in all current worked-out proposals for what this "universe generator" could be—such as the oscillating big bang and the vacuum fluctuation models explained above—the "generator" itself is governed by a complex set of physical laws that allow it to produce the universes. It stands to reason, therefore, that if these laws were slightly different the generator probably would not be able to produce any universes that could sustain life. After all, even my bread machine has to be made just right in order to work properly, and it only produces loaves of bread, not universes! Or consider a device as simple as a mousetrap: it requires that all the parts, such as the spring and hammer, be arranged just right in order to function. It is doubtful, therefore, whether the atheistic many-universe theory can entirely eliminate the problem of design the atheist faces; rather, at least to some extent, it seems simply to move the problem of design up one level.[17]

Third Reason A third reason for rejecting the atheistic many-universes hypothesis is that the universe generator must not only select the parameters of physics at random, but must actually randomly create or select the very laws of physics themselves. This makes this hypothesis seem even more farfetched since it is difficult to see what possible physical mechanism could select or create laws.

The reason the "many-universes generator" must randomly select the laws of physics is that, just as the right values for the parameters of physics are needed for life to occur, the right set of laws is also needed. If, for instance, certain laws of physics were missing, life would be impossible. For example, without the law of inertia, which guarantees that particles do not shoot off at high speeds, life would probably not be possible.[18] Another example is the law of gravity: if masses did not attract each other, there would be no planets or stars, and once again it seems that life would be impossible. Yet another example is the *Pauli Exclusion Principle*, the principle of quantum mechanics that says that no two fermions—such as electrons or protons—can share the same quantum state. As prominent Princeton physicist Freeman Dyson points out,[19] without this principle all electrons would collapse into the nucleus and thus atoms would be impossible.

Fourth Reason The fourth reason for rejecting the atheistic many-universes hypothesis is that it cannot explain other features of the universe that seem to exhibit apparent design, whereas theism can. For example, many physicists, such as Albert Einstein, have observed that the basic laws of physics exhibit an extraordinary degree of beauty, elegance, harmony, and ingenuity. Nobel prize-winning physicist Steven Weinberg, for instance, devotes a whole chapter of his book *Dreams of a Final Theory*[20] explaining how the criteria of beauty and elegance are commonly used to guide physicists in formulating the right laws. Indeed, one of the most prominent theoretical physicists of this century, Paul Dirac, went so far as to claim that "it is more important to have beauty in one's equations than to have them fit experiment."[21]

Now such beauty, elegance, and ingenuity make sense if the universe was designed by God. Under the atheistic many-universes hypothesis, however, there is no reason to expect the fundamental laws to be elegant or beautiful. As theoretical physicist Paul Davies writes, "If nature is so 'clever' as to exploit mechanisms that amaze us with their ingenuity, is that not persuasive evidence for the existence of intelligent design behind the universe? If the world's finest minds can unravel only with difficulty the deeper workings of nature, how could it be supposed that those workings are merely a mindless accident, a product of blind chance?"[22]

Final Reason This brings us to the final reason for rejecting the atheistic many-universes hypothesis, which may be the most difficult to grasp: namely, neither the atheistic many-universes hypothesis (nor the atheistic single-universe hypothesis) can at present adequately account for the improbable initial arrangement of matter in the universe required by the second law of thermodynamics. To see this, note that according to the second law of thermodynamics, the entropy of the

universe is constantly increasing. The standard way of understanding this entropy increase is to say that the universe is going from a state of order to disorder. We observe this entropy increase all the time around us: things, such as a child's bedroom, that start out highly organized tend to "decay" and become disorganized unless something or someone intervenes to stop it.

Now, for purposes of illustration, we could think of the universe as a scrabble-board that initially starts out in a highly ordered state in which all the letters are arranged to form words, but which keeps getting randomly shaken. Slowly, the board, like the universe, moves from a state of order to disorder. The problem for the atheist is to explain how the universe could have started out in a highly ordered state, since it is extraordinarily improbable for such states to occur by chance.[23] If, for example, one were to dump a bunch of letters at random on a scrabble-board, it would be very unlikely for most of them to form into words. At best, we would expect groups of letters to form into words in a few places on the board.

Now our question is, Could the atheistic many-universes hypothesis explain the high degree of initial order of our universe by claiming that given enough universes, eventually one will arise that is ordered and in which intelligent life occurs, and so it is no surprise that we find ourselves in an ordered universe? The problem with this explanation is that it is overwhelmingly more likely for local patches of order to form in one or two places than for the whole universe to be ordered, just as it is overwhelmingly more likely for a few letters on the scrabble-board randomly to form words than for all the letters throughout the board randomly to form words. Thus, the overwhelming majority of universes in which intelligent life occurs will be ones in which the intelligent life will be surrounded by a small patch of order necessary for its existence, but in which the rest of the universe is disordered. Consequently, even under the atheistic many-universes hypothesis, it would still be enormously improbable for intelligent beings to find themselves in a universe such as ours which is highly ordered throughout.[24]

Conclusion

Even though the above criticisms do not definitively refute the atheistic many-universes hypothesis, they do show that it has some severe disadvantages relative to theism. This means that if atheists adopt the atheistic many-universes hypothesis to defend their position, then atheism has become much less plausible than it used to be. Modifying a turn of phrase coined by philosopher Fred Dretske: these are inflationary times, and the cost of atheism has just gone up.

V. OVERALL CONCLUSION

In the above sections I showed there are good, objective reasons for claiming that the fine-tuning provides strong evidence for theism. I first presented an argument for thinking that the fine-tuning provides strong evidence for preferring theism over the atheistic single-universe hypothesis, and then presented a variety of different reasons for rejecting the atheistic many-universes hypothesis as an explanation of the fine-tuning. In order to help one appreciate the strength of the arguments presented, I would like to end by comparing the strength of the *core* version of the argument from the fine-tuning to what is widely regarded as the strongest atheist argument against theism, the argument from evil.[25]

Typically, the atheist argument against God based on evil takes a similar form to the core version of the fine-tuning argument. Essentially, the atheist argues that the existence of the kinds of evil we find in the world is very improbable under theism, but not improbable under atheism. Thus, by the prime principle of confirmation, they conclude that the existence of evil provides strong reasons for preferring atheism over theism.

What makes this argument weak in comparison to the core version of the fine-tuning argument is that, unlike in the case of the fine-tuning, the atheist does not have a significant objective basis for claiming that the existence of the kinds of evil we find in the world is highly improbable under theism. In fact, their judgment that it is improbable

seems largely to rest on a mistake in reasoning. To see this, note that in order to show that it is improbable, atheists would have to show that it is *unlikely* that the types of evils we find in the world are necessary for any morally good, greater purpose, since if they are, then it is clearly not at all unlikely that an all good, all powerful being would create a world in which those evils are allowed to occur. But how could atheists show this without first surveying all possible morally good purposes such a being might have, something they have clearly not done? *Consequently, it seems, at most the atheist could argue that since no one has come up with any adequate purpose yet, it is unlikely that there is such a purpose*. This argument, however, is very weak, as I will now show.

The first problem with this atheist argument is that it assumes that the various explanations people have offered for why an all good God would create evil—such as the free will theodicy—ultimately fail. But even if we grant that these theodicies fail, the argument is still very weak. To see why, consider an analogy. Suppose someone tells me that there is a rattlesnake in my garden, and I examine a portion of the garden and do not find the snake. I would only be justified in concluding that there was probably no snake in the garden if either: i) I had searched at least half the garden; or ii) I had good reason to believe that if the snake were in the garden, it would likely be in the portion of the garden that I examined. If, for instance, I were randomly to pick some small segment of the garden to search and did not find the snake, I would be unjustified in concluding from my search that there was probably no snake in the garden. Similarly, if I were blindfolded and did not have any idea of how large the garden was (e.g., whether it was ten square feet or several square miles), I would be unjustified in concluding that it was unlikely that there was a rattlesnake in the garden, even if I had searched for hours with my rattlesnake-detecting dogs. Why? Because I would not have any idea of what percentage of the garden I had searched.

As with the garden example, we have no idea of how large the realm is of possible greater purposes for evil that an all good, omnipotent being could have. Hence we do not know what proportion of this realm we have actually searched. Indeed, considering the finitude of our own minds, we have good reason to believe that we have so far only searched a small proportion, and we do not have significant reason to believe that all the purposes God might have for allowing evil would be in the proportion we searched. Thus, we have little objective basis for saying that the existence of the types of evil we find in the world is highly improbable under theism.

From the above discussion, therefore, it is clear that the relevant probability estimates in the case of the fine-tuning are much more secure than those estimates in the probabilistic version of the atheist's argument from evil, since unlike the latter, we can provide a fairly rigorous, objective basis for them based on actual calculations of the relative range of life-permitting values for the parameters of physics. (See the appendix to this chapter for a rigorous derivation of the probability of the fine-tuning under the atheistic single-universe hypothesis.) *Thus, I conclude, the core argument for preferring theism over the probabilistic version of the atheistic single-universe hypothesis is much stronger than the atheist argument from evil.*[26]

APPENDIX

In this appendix, I offer a rigorous support for premise (2) of the main argument: that is, the claim that the fine-tuning is very improbable under the atheistic single-universe hypothesis. Support for premise (2) will involve three major subsections. The first subsection will be devoted to explicating the fine-tuning of gravity since we will often use this to illustrate our arguments. Then, in our second subsection, we will show how the improbability of the fine-tuning under the atheistic single-universe hypothesis can be derived from a commonly used, objective principle of probabilistic reasoning called the *principle of indifference*. Finally, in our third subsection, we will explicate what it could mean to say that the

fine-tuning is improbable given that the universe is a unique, unrepeatable event as assumed by the atheistic single-universe hypothesis. The appendix will in effect answer the common atheist objection that theists can neither *justify* the claim that the fine-tuning is improbable under the atheistic single-universe hypothesis, nor can they provide an account of what it could possibly *mean* to say that the fine-tuning is improbable.

i. The Example of Gravity

The force of gravity is determined by Newton's law $F = Gm_1m_2/r^2$. Here G is what is known as the *gravitational constant*, and is basically a number that determines the force of gravity in any given circumstance. For instance, the gravitational attraction between the moon and the earth is given by first multiplying the mass of the moon (m_1) times the mass of the earth (m_2), and then dividing by the distance between them squared (r^2). Finally, one multiplies this result by the number G to obtain the total force. Clearly the force is directly proportional to G: for example, if G were to double, the force between the moon and the earth would double.

In the previous section, we reported that some calculations indicate that the force of gravity must be fine-tuned to one part in 10^{40} in order for life to occur. What does such fine-tuning mean? To understand it, imagine a radio dial, going from 0 to $2G_0$, where G_0 represents the current value of the gravitational constant. Moreover, imagine the dial being broken up into 10^{40}—that is, ten thousand, billion, billion, billion, billion—evenly spaced tick marks. To claim that the strength of gravity must be fine-tuned to one part in 10^{40} is simply to claim that, in order for life to exist, the constant of gravity cannot vary by even one tick mark along the dial from its current value of G_0.

ii. The Principle of Indifference

In the following subsections, we will use the *principle of indifference* to justify the assertion that the fine-tuning is highly improbable under the atheistic single-universe hypothesis.

a. The Principle Stated Applied to cases in which there is a finite number of alternatives, the principle of indifference can be formulated as the claim that we should assign the same probability to what are called *equipossible alternatives*, where two or more alternatives are said to be equipossible if we have no reason to prefer one of the alternatives over any of the others. (In another version of the principle, alternatives that are relevantly symmetrical are considered equipossible and hence the ones that should be assigned equal probability.) For instance, in the case of a standard two-sided coin, we have no more reason to think that the coin will land on heads than that it will land on tails, and so we assign them each an equal probability. Since the total probability must add up to one, this means that the coin has a 0.5 chance of landing on heads and a 0.5 chance of landing on tails. Similarly, in the case of a standard six-sided die, we have no more reason to think that it will land on one number, say a 6, than any of the other numbers, such as a 4. Thus, the principle of indifference tells us to assign each possible way of landing an equal probability—namely ⅙.

The above explication of the principle applies only when there are a finite number of alternatives, for example six sides on a die. In the case of the fine-tuning, however, the alternatives are not finite but form a continuous magnitude. The value of G, for instance, conceivably could have been any number between 0 and infinity. Now, continuous magnitudes are usually thought of in terms of ranges, areas, or volumes depending on whether or not we are considering one, two, three, or more dimensions. For example, the amount of water in an 8 oz. glass could fall anywhere within the *range* 0 oz. to 8 oz., such as 6.012345645 oz. Or, the exact position that a dart hits a dart board can fall anywhere within the *area* of the dart board. With some qualifications to be discussed below, the principle of indifference becomes in the continuous case the principle that *when we have no reason to prefer any one value of a parameter over another, we should, assign equal probabilities to equal ranges, areas, or volumes*. So, for instance, suppose one aimlessly throws a dart at a dart board. Assuming the dart hits

the board, what is the probability it will hit within the bull's eye? Since the dart is thrown aimlessly, we have no more reason to believe it will hit one part of the dart board than any other part. The principle of indifference, therefore, tells us that the probability of its hitting the bull's eye is the same as the probability of hitting any other part of the dart board of equal area. This means that the probability of its hitting the bull's eye is simply the ratio of the area of the bull's eye to the rest of the dart board. So, for instance, if the bull's eye forms only 5 percent of the total area of the board, then the probability of its hitting the bull's eye will be 5 percent.

b. Application to Fine-Tuning In the case of the fine-tuning, we have no more reason to think that the parameters of physics will fall within the life-permitting range than within any other range, given the atheistic single-universe hypothesis. Thus according to the principle of indifference, equal ranges of these parameters should be assigned equal probabilities. As in the case of the dart board mentioned in the last section, this means that the probability of the parameters of physics falling within the life-permitting range under the atheistic single-universe hypothesis is simply the ratio of the range of life-permitting values (the "area of the bull's eye") to the total *relevant* range of possible values (the "relevant area of the dart board").

Now physicists can make rough estimates of the range of *life-permitting* values for the parameters of physics, as discussed above in the case of gravity, for instance. But what is the "total *relevant* range of possible values"? At first one might think that this range is infinite, since the values of the parameters could conceivably be anything. This, however, is not correct, for although the possible range of values could be infinite, for most of these values we have no way of estimating whether they are life-permitting or not. We do not truly know, for example, what would happen if gravity were 10^{60} times stronger than its current value: as far as we know, a new form of matter might come into existence that could sustain life. Thus, as far as we know, there could be other life-permitting ranges far removed from the actual values that the parameters have. Consequently, all we can say is that the life-permitting range is very, very small *relative* to the limited range of values for which we can make estimates, a range that we will here-after refer to as the "*illuminated*" range.

Fortunately, however, this limitation does not affect the overall argument. The reason is that, based on the principle of indifference, we can still say that it is very improbable for the values for the parameters of physics to have fallen in the life-permitting range *instead* of some other part of the "illuminated" range.[27] And this *improbability* is all that is actually needed for our main argument to work. To see this, consider an analogy. Suppose a dart landed on the bull's eye at the center of a huge dart board. Further, suppose that this bull's eye is surrounded by a very large empty, bull's-eye-free, area. Even if there were many other bull's eyes on the dart board, we would still take the fact that the dart landed on the bull's eye instead of some other part of the large empty area surrounding the bull's eye as strong evidence that it was aimed. Why? Because we would reason that *given that the dart landed in the empty area*, it was very improbable for it to land in the bull's eye by chance but not improbable if it were aimed. Thus, by the prime principle of confirmation, we could conclude that the dart landing on the bull's eye strongly confirms the hypothesis that it was aimed over the chance hypothesis.

c. The Principle Qualified Those who are familiar with the principle of indifference, and mathematics, will recognize that one important qualification needs to be made to the above account of how to apply the principle of indifference. (Those who are not mathematically adept might want to skip this and perhaps the next paragraph.) To understand the qualification, note that the ratio of ranges used in calculating the probability is dependent on how one parameterizes, or writes, the physical laws. For example, suppose for the sake of illustration that the range of life-permitting values for the gravitational constant is 0 to G_0, and

the "illuminated" range of possible values for G is 0 to $2G_0$. Then, the ratio of life-permitting values to the range of "illuminated" possible values for the gravitational constant will be ½. Suppose, however, that one writes the law of gravity in the mathematically equivalent form of $F = \sqrt{Um_1m_2}/r^2$ instead of $F = Gm_1m_2/r^2$, where $U = G^2$. (In this way of writing Newton's law, U becomes the new gravitational constant.) This means that $U_0 = {G_0}^2$, where U_0, *like* G_0, represents the actual value of U in our universe. Then, the range of life-permitting values would be 0 to U_0, and the "illuminated" range of possible values would be 0 to $4U_0$ on the U scale (which is equivalent to 0 to $2G_0$ on the G scale). Hence, calculating the ratio of life-permitting values using the U scale instead of the G scale yields a ratio of ¼ instead of ½ Indeed, for almost any ratio one chooses—such as one in which the life-permitting range is about the same size as the "illuminated" range—there exist mathematically equivalent forms of Newton's law that will yield that ratio. So, why choose the standard way of writing Newton's law to calculate the ratio instead of one in which the fine-tuning is not improbable at all?

The answer to this question is to require that the proportion used in calculating the probability be between *real* physical ranges, areas, or volumes, not merely mathematical representations of them. That is, the proportion given by the scale used in one's representation must directly correspond to the proportions actually existing in physical reality. As an illustration, consider how we might calculate the probability that a meteorite will fall in New York state instead of somewhere else in the northern, contiguous United States. One way of doing this is to take a standard map of the northern, contiguous United States, measure the area covered by New York on the map (say 2 square inches) and divide it by the total area of the map (say 30 square inches). If we were to do this, we would get approximately the right answer because the proportions on a standard map directly correspond to the actual proportions of land areas in the United States.[28] On the other hand, suppose we had a map made by some lover of the east coast in which, because of the scale used, the east coast took up half the map. If we used the proportions of areas as represented by this map we would get the wrong answer since the scale used would not correspond to real proportions of land areas. Applied to the fine-tuning, this means that our calculations of these proportions must be done using parameters that directly correspond to physical quantities in order to yield valid probabilities. In the case of gravity, for instance, the gravitational constant G directly corresponds to the force between two unit masses a unit distance apart, whereas U does not. (Instead, U corresponds to the square of the force.) Thus, G is the correct parameter to use in calculating the probability.[29]

d. Support for Principle Finally, although the principle of indifference has been criticized on various grounds, several powerful reasons can be offered for its soundness if it is restricted in the ways explained in the last subsection. First, it has an extraordinarily wide range of applicability. As Roy Weatherford notes in his book, *Philosophical Foundations of Probability Theory*, "an astonishing number of extremely complex problems in probability theory have been solved, and usefully so, by calculations based entirely on the assumption of equiprobable alternatives [that is, the principle of indifference]."[30] Second, at least for the discrete case, the principle can be given a significant theoretical grounding in information theory, being derivable from Shannon's important and well-known measure of *information*, or *negative* entropy.[31] Finally, in certain everyday cases the principle of indifference seems the only justification we have for assigning probability. To illustrate, suppose that in the last ten minutes a factory produced the first fifty-sided die ever produced. Further suppose that every side of the die is (macroscopically) perfectly symmetrical with every other side, except for there being different numbers printed on each side. (The die we are imagining is like a fair six-sided die except that it has fifty sides instead of six.) Now, we all immediately know that upon being rolled the probability of the die coming up on any given side is one in fifty. Yet, we do not know this

directly from experience with fifty-sided dice, since by hypothesis no one has yet rolled such dice to determine the relative frequency with which they come up on each side. Rather, it seems our only justification for assigning this probability is the principle of indifference: that is, given that every side of the die is relevantly macroscopically symmetrical with every other side, we have no reason to believe that the die will land on one side over any other side, and thus we assign them all an equal probability of one in fifty.[32]

iii. The Meaning of Probability

In the last section we used the principle of indifference to rigorously justify the claim that the fine-tuning is highly improbable under the atheistic single-universe hypothesis. We did not explain, however, what it could *mean* to say that it is improbable, especially given that the universe is a unique, unrepeatable event. To address this issue, we shall now show how the probability invoked in the fine-tuning argument can be straightforwardly understood either as what could be called *classical probability* or as what is known as *epistemic probability*.

Classical Probability The *classical conception of probability* defines probability in terms of the ratio of number of "favorable cases" to the total number of equipossible cases.[33] Thus, for instance, to say the probability of a die coming up "4" is one out of six is simply to say that the number of ways a die could come up "4" is one-sixth the number of equipossible ways it could come up. Extending this definition to the continuous case, classical probability can be defined in terms of the relevant ratio of ranges, areas, or volumes over which the principle of indifference applies. Thus, under this extended definition, to say that the probability of the parameters of physics falling into the life-permitting value is very improbable simply *means* that the ratio of life-permitting values to the range of possible values is very, very small. Finally, notice that this definition of probability implies the principle of indifference, and thus we can be certain that the principle of indifference holds for classical probability.

Epistemic Probability *Epistemic probability* is a widely recognized type of probability that applies to claims, statements, and hypotheses—that is, what philosophers call propositions.[34] (A proposition is any claim, assertion, statement, or hypothesis about the world.) Roughly, the epistemic probability of a proposition can be thought of as the degree of credence—that is, degree of confidence or belief—we rationally should have in the proposition. Put differently, epistemic probability is a measure of our rational degree of belief under a condition of ignorance concerning whether a proposition is true or false. For example, when one says that the special theory of relativity is probably true, one is making a statement of epistemic probability. After all, the theory is actually either true or false. But, we do not know for sure whether it is true or false, so we say it is probably true to indicate that we should put more confidence in its being true than in its being false. It is also commonly argued that the probability of a coin toss is best understood as a case of epistemic probability. Since the side the coin will land on is determined by the laws of physics, it is argued that our assignment of probability is simply a measure of our rational expectations concerning which side the coin will land on.

Besides epistemic probability sumpliciter, philosophers also speak of what is known as the *conditional* epistemic probability of one proposition on another. The conditional epistemic probability of a proposition R on another proposition S—written as $P(R/S)$—can be defined as the degree to which the proposition S *of itself* should rationally lead us to expect that R is true. For example, there is a high conditional probability that it will rain today on the hypothesis that the weatherman has predicted a 100 percent chance of rain, whereas there is a low conditional probability that it will rain today on the hypothesis that the weatherman has predicted only a 2 percent chance of rain. That is, the hypothesis that the weatherman has predicted a 100 percent chance of rain today should strongly lead us to expect that it will rain, whereas the

hypothesis that the weatherman has predicted a 2 percent chance should lead us to expect that it will not rain. Under the epistemic conception of probability, therefore, the statement that *the fine-tuning of the Cosmos is very improbable under the atheistic single-universe hypothesis* makes perfect sense: it is to be understood as making a statement about the degree to which the atheistic single-universe hypothesis would or should, of *itself*, rationally lead us to expect the cosmic fine-tuning.[35]

Conclusion

The above discussion shows that we have at least two ways of understanding improbability invoked in our main argument: as classical probability or epistemic probability. This undercuts the common atheist objection that it is meaningless to speak of the probability of the fine-tuning under the atheistic single-universe hypothesis since under this hypothesis the universe is not a repeatable event.

NOTES

1. Freeman Dyson, *Disturbing the Universe* (New York: Harper and Row, 1979), 251.
2. Paul Davies, *The Cosmic Blueprint: New Discoveries in Nature's Creative Ability to Order the Universe* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1988), 203.
3. Fred Hoyle, in *Religion and the Scientists* (1959); quoted in *The Anthropic Cosmological Principle*, ed. John Barrow and Frank Tipler (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 22.
4. See Paul Davies, *The Accidental Universe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 90–91. John Jefferson Davis, "The Design Argument, Cosmic 'Fine-tuning,' and the Anthropic Principle," *The International Journal of Philosophy of Religion* 22 (1987): 140.
5. John Leslie, *Universes* (New York: Routledge, 1989), 4, 35; *Anthropic Cosmological Principle*, 322.
6. Paul Davies, *Superforce: The Search for a Grand Unified Theory of Nature* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1984), 242.
7. Leslie, *Universes*, 39–40.
8. John Leslie, "How to Draw Conclusion from a Fine-Tuned Cosmos," in *Physics, Philosophy and Theology: A Common Quest for Understanding*, ed. Robert Russell et al. (Vatican City State: Vatican Observatory Press, 1988), 299.
9. Leslie, "How to Draw Conclusions," 300.
10. For those familiar with the probability calculus, a precise statement of the degree to which evidence counts in favor of one hypothesis over another can be given in terms of the odds form of Bayes's Theorem: that is, $P(H_1/E)/P(H_2/E) = [P(H_1/P(H_2)] \times [P(E/H_1)/(E/H_2)]$. The general version of the principle stated here, however, does not require the applicability or truth of Bayes's Theorem.
11. Those with some training in probability theory will want to note that the kind of probability invoked here is what philosophers call *epistemic probability*, which is a measure of the rational degree of belief we should have in a proposition (see appendix, subsection iii). Since our rational degree of belief in a necessary truth can be less than 1, we can sensibly speak of it being improbable for a given law of nature to exist necessarily. For example, we can speak of an unproven mathematical hypothesis—such as Goldbach's conjecture that every even number greater than 6 is the sum of two odd primes—as being probably true or probably false given our current evidence, even though all mathematical hypotheses are either necessarily true or necessarily false.
12. Leslie, "How to Draw Conclusion," 304.
13. George Smith, "The Case Against God," reprinted in *An Anthology of Atheism and Rationalism*, ed. Gordon Stein (Buffalo: Prometheus Press, 1980), 56.
14. J. J. C. Smart, "Laws of Nature and Cosmic Coincidence," *The Philosophical Quarterly* 35 (July 1985): 275–76, italics added.
15. I define a "universe" as any region of space-time that is disconnected from other regions in such a way that the parameters of physics in that region could differ significantly from the other regions.
16. Quentin Smith, "World Ensemble Explanations," *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 67 (1986): 82.

17. Moreover, the advocate of the atheistic many-universes hypothesis could not avoid this problem by hypothesizing that the many universes always existed as "brute fact" without being produced by a universe generator. This would simply add to the problem: it would not only leave unexplained the fine-tuning or our own universe, but would leave unexplained the existence of these other universes.
18. Leslie, *Universes*, 59.
19. Dyson, *Disturbing the Universe*, 251.
20. Chapter 6, "Beautiful Theories."
21. Paul Dirac, "The Evolution of the Physicist's Picture of Nature," *Scientific American* (May 1963): 47.
22. Davies, *Superforce*, 235–36.
23. This connection between order and probability, and the second law of thermodynamics in general, is given a precise formulation in a branch of fundamental physics called *statistical mechanics*, according to which a state of high order represents a very improbable state, and a state of disorder represents a highly probable state.
24. See Lawrence Sklar, *Physics and Chance: Philosophical Issues in the Foundation of Statistical Mechanics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), chapter 8, for a review of the nontheistic explanations for the ordered arrangement of the universe and the severe difficulties they face.
25. A more thorough discussion of the atheist argument from evil is presented in Daniel Howard-Snyder's chapter (pp. 76–115), and a discussion of other atheistic arguments is given in John O'Leary-Hawthorn's chapter (pp. 116–34).
26. This work was made possible in part by a Discovery Institute grant for the fiscal year 1997–1998.
27. In the language of probability theory, this sort of probability is known as a conditional probability. In the case of *G*, calculations indicate that this conditional probability of the fine-tuning would be less than 10^{-40} since the life-permitting range is less than 10^{-40} of the range 0 to $2G_0$, the latter range being certainly smaller than the total "illuminated" range for *G*.
28. I say "approximately right" because in this case the principle of indifference only applies to strips of land that are the same distance from the equator. The reason for this is that only strips of land equidistant from the equator are truly symmetrical with regard to the motion of the earth. Since the northern, contiguous United States are all about the same distance from the equator, equal land areas should be assigned approximately equal probabilities.
29. This solution will not always work since, as the well-known Bertrand Paradoxes illustrate (e.g., see Roy Weatherford, *Foundations of Probability Theory* [Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982], 56), sometimes there are two equally good and conflicting parameters that directly correspond to a physical quantity and to which the principle of indifference applies. In these cases, at best we can say that the probability is somewhere between that given by the two conflicting parameters. This problem, however, typically does not seem to arise for most cases of fine-tuning. Also, it should be noted that the principle of indifference applies best to *classical* or *epistemic* probability, not other kinds of probability such as *relative frequency*. (See subsection iii below.)
30. Weatherford, *Probability Theory*, 35.
31. Sklar, *Physics and Chance*, 191; Bas van Fraassen, *Laws and Symmetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 345.
32. Of course, one could claim that our experience with items such as coins and dice teaches us that whenever two alternatives are macroscopically symmetrical, we should assign them an equal probability, unless we have a particular reason not to. All this claim implies, however, is that we have experiential justification for the principle of indifference, and thus it does not take away from our main point that in certain practical situations we must rely on the principle of indifference to justify our assignment of probability.
33. See Weatherford, *Probability Theory*, ch. 2.
34. For an in-depth discussion of epistemic probability, see Richard Swinburne, *An Introduction to Confirmation Theory* (London: Methuen, 1973); Ian Hacking, *The Emergence of Probability: A Philosophical Study of Early Ideas About Probability, Induction and Statistical Inference* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975); and Alvin Plantinga, *Warrant and Proper Function* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), chapters 8 and 9.

35. It should be noted here that this rational degree of expectation should not be confused with the degree to which one should expect the parameters of physics to fall within the life-permitting range if one believed the atheistic single-universe hypothesis. For even those who believe in this atheistic hypothesis should expect the parameters of physics to be life-permitting since this follows from the fact that we are alive. Rather, the conditional epistemic probability in this case is the degree to which the atheistic single-universe hypothesis *of itself* should lead us to expect parameters of physics to be life-permitting. This means that in assessing the conditional epistemic probability in this and other similar cases, one must exclude contributions to our expectations arising from other information we have, such as that we are alive. In the case at hand, one way of doing this is by means of the following sort of thought experiment. Imagine a disembodied being with mental capacities and a knowledge of physics comparable to that of the most intelligent physicists alive today, except that the being does not know whether the parameters of physics are within the life-permitting range. Further, suppose that this disembodied being believed in the atheistic single-universe hypothesis. Then, the degree that being should rationally expect the parameters of physics to be life-permitting will be equal to our conditional epistemic probability, since its expectation is solely a result of its belief in the atheistic single-universe hypothesis, not other factors such as its awareness of its own existence.

PART III



Religious Experience

There was not a mere consciousness of something there, but fused in the central happiness of it, a startling awareness of some ineffable good. Not vague either; not like the emotional effect of some poem, or scene, or blossom, or music, but the sure knowledge of the close presence of a sort of mighty person, and after it went, the memory persisted as the one perception of reality. Everything else might be a dream, but not that.

(AN ANONYMOUS MYSTIC CITED BY WILLIAM JAMES IN *VARIETIES OF RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE*, 1902.)

THE HEART OF RELIGION is and always has been experiential. Encounters with the supernatural, a transcendent dimension, the Wholly Other are at the base of every great religion. Abraham hears a Voice calling him to leave his family in Haran and venture out into a broad unknown, thus becoming the father of Israel. Abraham's grandson Jacob wrestles all night with an angel and is transformed, gaining the name "Israel," "prince of God." While tending his father-in-law's flock, Moses has a vision of "I am that I am" (Yahweh) in the burning bush and is ordered to deliver Israel out of slavery into a land flowing with milk and honey. Isaiah has a vision of the Lord "high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple" of heaven. In the New Testament, John, James, and Peter behold Jesus gloriously transformed on the Mount of Transfiguration and are themselves transformed by the experience. After the death of Jesus, Saul is traveling to Damascus to persecute Christians, when he is met by a blazing light and hears a Voice, asking him why he is persecuting the Lord. Changing his name to Paul, he becomes the leader of the Christian missionary movement. The Hindu experiences the Atman (soul) as the Brahman (God), "That art Thou," or beholds the glories of Krishna. The Advaitian Hindu merges with the One, as a drop of water merges with the vast ocean. The Buddhist merges with Nirvana or beholds a vision of the Buddha. Allah reveals his holy word, the Koran, to Mohammed. Joan of Arc hears voices calling on her to save her people, and

Joseph Smith has a vision of the Angel Moroni, calling him to do a new work for God.

What shall we make of religious experience? Is it a source of information, or justified belief, about God? Does it, in other words, have *evidential value*? Or is it somehow to be dismissed, perhaps as a mere trick of the brain?

One concern that people sometimes raise about the idea that religious experience has evidential value is that religious experience is typically private. If your friend says that she hears a pleasant tune, and you listen and say, "Yes, I hear it now too," there is no problem; but if you listen carefully and don't hear it, you (and your friend) might well wonder whether your friend is just imagining the sounds she thinks she hears. But the matter doesn't have to end there. You could try to bring in others to see if they hear the sound. You could also bring in scientific instruments—an audiometer, perhaps. But we can't really do the same with religious experience. You might have the sense of God forgiving you or of an angel speaking to you while your friend, in the same room with you, neither hears, nor sees, nor feels anything unusual. You might be praying and suddenly feel transported by grace and sense the unity of all reality while your friend sitting next to you simply wonders at the strange expression on your face and asks if something is wrong. Unlike in the case of perceptual experience, you can't seek verification of your experience by bringing in other people or instruments to "settle the matter."

Yet, as noted above, various kinds of religious experiences have been reported by numerous people, from dairymaids like Joan of Arc to mystics like Teresa of Avila and St. John of the Cross. Even in modern times religious experiences are not uncommon; and they often seem to play a role in religious conversion and in the maintenance or strengthening of religious belief. The phenomenon cannot simply be dismissed without serious analysis.

We begin our study in this part with four selections of religious experience from four different traditions, the Jewish, the Christian, the Hindu, and the Buddhist. It is important to note that, although the sorts of religious experiences reported in these selections are hardly isolated instances, religious experiences fall on a continuum of vividness and intensity, and experiences of a less vivid and intense sort than the "mystical" experiences reported here seem to be far more common. Many religious believers will report having had experiences like feeling overwhelmed by the love or forgiveness of God or feeling at one with nature or the cosmos. Experiences like these are much more ordinary, and it is as important to consider their evidential value as it is to consider the evidential value of mystical experiences like visions of Jesus or the experience of total loss of one's individuality.

Our second selection is an excerpt from William James's classic study *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902). In this selection, James describes mystical experience, which he considers to be the deepest kind of religious experience. It is something that transcends our ordinary, sensory experience and that cannot be described in terms of our normal concepts and language. It is "ineffable experience." The subject realizes that the experience "defies expression, that no adequate report of its content can be given in words," James writes. "It follows from this that its quality must be directly experienced; it cannot be imparted or transferred to others." And yet it contains a "noetic quality," a content. It purports to convey truth about the nature of reality, namely, that there is a unity of all things and that that

unity is spiritual, not material. It is antinaturalistic, pantheistic, and optimistic. Further, mystical states are *transient*—that is, they cannot be sustained for long—and they are *passive*— that is, the mystic is acted upon by divine deliverance. We may prepare ourselves for the experience, but it is not something that we do; it is something that happens to us.

James is cautious about what can be deduced from mystical experience. Although he thinks that mystical states ought to be taken seriously by the individuals to whom they come, he denies that the rest of us are under any obligation to "accept their revelations uncritically." Nevertheless, he thinks that the mystical experiences of others can still have value for us by opening us up to the idea of alternative modes of experience and alternative ways of acquiring information about spiritual reality.

In our third selection, provocatively entitled "Perceiving God," William P. Alston defends the idea that religious experience might reasonably be construed as a form of *perception*. His basic idea is that, because of the ways in which religious experience is analogous to sensory experience, religious experience ought to be taken seriously as a source of justified belief about God. On his view, many of the reasons why people deny that religious experience is a source of evidence about spiritual reality would count equally as reasons to deny that sensory experience is a source of evidence about the external world. But, of course, few of us are willing to deny that sensory experience is a source of evidence. Thus, we should likewise be willing to grant that religious experience has evidential value.

One natural objection against Alston's thesis is that there is some reason to think that many, if not all, religious experiences admit of fully naturalistic explanations. Our fourth and fifth readings in this section explore this concern. In the fourth selection, psychiatrists Eugene d'Aquili and Andrew Newberg provide reason to think that the phenomenon of religious and mystical experience has a neuropsychological basis. As they put it, "the essential elements of religion are hardwired in the brain." Nevertheless, they stop short of saying that this undercuts the rationality of believing that religious experience puts us in touch with some genuine spiritual reality. After all, they note, experience of the physical world can similarly be "reduced to neural blips and fluxes of brain chemistry." On the other hand, Jeff Jordan does argue that the availability of naturalistic explanations for religious experiences would undercut the evidential value of those experiences. However, he says, there is no reason at present to think that all religious experiences admit of a fully naturalistic explanation. (Attentive readers will note that some of the material in Part VII of this volume is also relevant to this issue.)

In the final selection in this part, we turn our attention to a somewhat different problem connected with the phenomenon of religious experience. Although it is true that religious experience is in some sense rather common, religious experience of the vivid and interesting sort reported in the first selection is undeniably rare. This fact, together with the (apparent) fact that our other evidence for the existence of God is inconclusive has led many philosophers—religious and nonreligious alike—to wonder whether the "hiddenness" of God is consistent with the idea that God loves us or is otherwise concerned for our well-being. For religious believers, divine hiddenness is a source of pain and doubt; for agnostics and atheists it is often one of the central reasons for unbelief. Many philosophers have responded to the problem by trying to find ways in which divine hiddenness is good for human beings. In our

sixth reading, however, Michael Rea argues that perhaps divine hiddenness is justified even independently of whatever goods it might bring us.

III.1

Selections of Mystical Experiences

AN OLD TESTAMENT SELECTION: THE CALL OF ISAIAH

In the year of King Uzziah's death I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the skirt of his robe filled the temple. About him were attendant seraphim, and each had six wings; one pair covered his face and one pair his feet, and one pair was spread inflight. They were calling ceaselessly to one another,

> *Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of Hosts:*
> *the whole earth is full of his glory.*

And, as each one called, the threshold shook to its foundations, while the house was filled with smoke. Then I cried,

> *Woe is me! I am lost,*
> *for I am. a man of unclean lips*
> *and I dwell among a people of unclean lips;*
> *yet with these eyes I have seen the King, the*
> *LORD of Hosts.*

Then one of the seraphim flew to me carrying in his hand a glowing coal which he had taken from the altar with a pair of tongs. He touched my mouth with it and said,

> *See, this has touched your lips;*
> *your iniquity is removed,*
> *and your sin is wiped away.*

Then I heard the Lord saying, Whom shall I send? Who will go for me? And I answered, Here am I; send me. He said, Go and tell this people:

> *You may listen and listen, but you will not understand.*
> *You may look and look again, but you will never know.*
> *This people's wits are dulled,*
> *their ears are deafened and their eyes blinded, so that they cannot see with their eyes nor listen with their ears nor understand with their wits, so that they may turn and be healed.*

ISAIAH, Chapter 6, New English Bible

THE CHRISTIAN MYSTIC, ST. TERESA OF ÁVILA

One day when I was at prayer… I saw Christ at my side—or, to put it better, I was conscious of Him, for I saw nothing with the eyes of the body or the eyes of the soul (the imagination). He seemed quite close to me and I saw that it was He. As I thought, He was speaking to me. Being completely ignorant that such visions were possible, I was very much afraid at first, and could do nothing but weep, though as soon as He spoke His first word of assurance to me, I regained my usual calm, and became cheerful and free from fear. All the time Jesus Christ seemed to be at my side, but as this was not an imaginary vision I could not see in what form. But I most clearly felt that He was all the time on my right, and was a witness of everything that I was doing… if I say that I do not see Him with the eyes of the body or the eyes of the soul, because this is no imaginary vision, how then can I know and affirm that he

is beside me with greater certainty than if I saw Him? If one says that one is like a person in the dark who cannot see someone though he is beside him, or that one is like somebody who is blind, it is not right. There is some similarity here, but not much, because a person in the dark can perceive with the other senses, or hear his neighbor speak or move, or can touch him. Here this is not so, nor is there any feeling of darkness. On the contrary, He appears to the soul by a knowledge brighter than the sun. I do not mean that any sun is seen, or any brightness, but there is a light which, though unseen, illuminates the understanding.

J. M. Cohen, trans., *The Life of St. Teresa of Ávila,* London: Penguin, 1957

A HINDU EXAMPLE

The Ego has disappeared. I have realized my identity with Brahman and so all my desires have melted away. I have arisen above my ignorance and my knowledge of this seeming universe. What is this joy I feel? Who shall measure it? I know nothing but joy, limitless, unbounded! The treasure I have found there cannot be described in words. The mind cannot conceive of it. My mind fell like a hailstone into that vast expanse of Brahman's ocean. Touching one drop of it, I melted away and became one with Brahman. Where is this universe? Who took it away? Has it merged into something else? A while ago, I beheld it—now it exists no longer. Is there anything apart or distinct from Brahman? Now, finally and clearly, I know that I am the Atman [the soul identified with Brahman], whose nature is eternal joy. I see nothing, I hear nothing, I know nothing that is separate from me.

Swami Prabhavandanda, trans., *Shankara's Crest-Jewel of Discrimination*, New York: Mentor Books, 1970

A BUDDHIST MEDITATION

Of one who has entered the first trance the voice has ceased; of one who has entered the second trance reasoning and reflection have ceased; of one who has entered the third trance joy has ceased; of one who has entered the fourth trance the inspiration and expiration have ceased; of one who has entered the realm of the infinity of space the perception of form has ceased; of one who has entered the realm of the infinity of consciousness the perception of the realm of the infinity of space has ceased; of one who has entered the realm of nothingness the perception of the realm of the infinity of consciousness has ceased.

HENRY WARREN, ed., SAMYUTTA-NIKAYA, in *Buddhism in Translation*, New York: Atheneum, 1973

III.2

Mysticism

WILLIAM JAMES

William James (1842–1910), American philosopher and psychologist, was one of the most influential thinkers of his time. He taught at Harvard University and is considered, along with C. S. Peirce, one of the fathers of pragmatism. The Varieties of Religious Experience *(1902) is his classic study of*

From William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (Longman, Green & Co.: New York, 1902). Some footnotes deleted.

religious experience. In this selection James describes mystical experience, which he considers to be the deepest kind of religious experience it is something that transcends our ordinary, sensory experience and that cannot be described in terms of our normal concepts and language.

Over and over again in these lectures I have raised points and left them open and unfinished until we should have come to the subject of Mysticism. Some of you, I fear, may have smiled as you noted my reiterated postponements. But now the hour has come when mysticism must be faced in good earnest, and those broken threads wound up together. One may say truly, I think, that personal religious experience has its root and centre in mystical states of consciousness; so for us, who in these lectures are treating personal experience as the exclusive subject of our study, such states of consciousness ought to form the vital chapter from which the other chapters get their light. Whether my treatment of mystical states will shed more light or darkness, I do not know, for my own constitution shuts me out from their enjoyment almost entirely, and I can speak of them only at second hand. But though forced to look upon the subject so externally, I will be as objective and receptive as I can; and I think I shall at least succeed in convincing you of the reality of the states in question, and of the paramount importance of their function.

First of all, then, I ask, What does the expression "mystical states of consciousness" mean? How do we part off mystical states from other states?

The words "mysticism" and "mystical" are often used as terms of mere reproach, to throw at any opinion which we regard as vague and vast and sentimental, and without a base in either facts or logic. For some writers a "mystic" is any person who believes in thought-transference, or spirit-return. Employed in this way the word has little value: there are too many less ambiguous synonyms. So, to keep it useful by restricting it, I will do what I did in the case of the word "religion," and simply propose to you four marks which, when an experience has them, may justify us in calling it mystical for the purpose of the present lectures. In this way we shall save verbal disputation, and the recriminations that generally go therewith.

1. Ineffability The handiest of the marks by which I classify a state of mind as mystical is negative. The subject of it immediately says that it defies expression, that no adequate report of its contents can be given in words. It follows from this that its quality must be directly experienced; it cannot be imparted or transferred to others. In this peculiarity mystical states are more like states of feeling than like states of intellect. No one can make clear to another who has never had a certain feeling, in what the quality or worth of it consists. One must have musical ears to know the value of a symphony; one must have been in love one's self to understand a lover's state of mind. Lacking the heart or ear, we cannot interpret the musician or the lover justly, and are even likely to consider him weak-minded or absurd. The mystic finds that most of us accord to his experiences an equally incompetent treatment.

2. Noetic quality Although so similar to states of feeling, mystical states seem to those who experience them to be also states of knowledge. They are states of insight into depths of truth unplumbed by the discursive intellect. They are illuminations, revelations, full of significance and importance, all inarticulate though they remain; and as a rule they carry with them a curious sense of authority for aftertime.

These two characters will entitle any state to be called mystical, in the sense in which I use the word. Two other qualities are less sharply marked, but are usually found. These are:—

3. Transiency Mystical states cannot be sustained for long. Except in rare instances, half an hour, or at most an hour or two, seems to be the limit beyond which they fade into the light of common day. Often, when faded, their quality can but imperfectly be reproduced in memory; but when they recur it is recognized; and from one recurrence to another it is susceptible of continuous development in what is felt as inner richness and importance.

4. Passivity Although the oncoming of mystical states may be facilitated by preliminary voluntary operations, as by fixing the attention, or going through certain bodily performances, or in other ways which manuals of mysticism prescribe; yet when the characteristic sort of consciousness once has set in, the mystic feels as if his own will were in abeyance, and indeed sometimes as if he were grasped and held by a superior power. This latter peculiarity connects mystical states with certain definite phenomena of secondary or alternative personality, such as prophetic speech, automatic writing, or the mediumistic trance. When these latter conditions are well pronounced, however, there may be no recollection whatever of the phenomenon, and it may have no significance for the subject's usual inner life, to which, as it were, it makes a mere interruption. Mystical states, strictly so-called, are never merely interruptive. Some memory of their content always remains, and a profound sense of their importance. They modify the inner life of the subject between the times of their recurrence. Sharp divisions in this region are, however, difficult to make, and we find all sorts of gradations and mixtures.

These four characteristics are sufficient to mark out a group of states of consciousness peculiar enough to deserve a special name and to call for careful study. Let it then be called the mystical group.

Our next step should be to gain acquaintance with some typical examples. Professional mystics at the height of their development have often elaborately organized experiences and a philosophy based thereupon. But you remember what I said in my first lecture: phenomena are best understood when placed within their series, studied in their germ and in their over-ripe decay, and compared with their exaggerated and degenerated kindred. The range of mystical experience is very wide, much too wide for us to cover in the time at our disposal. Yet the method of serial study is so essential for interpretation that if we really wish to reach conclusions we must use it. I will begin, therefore, with phenomena which claim no special religious significance, and end with those of which the religious pretensions are extreme.

The simplest rudiment of mystical experience would seem to be that deepened sense of the significance of a maxim or formula which occasionally sweeps over one. "I've heard that said all my life," we exclaim, "but I never realized its full meaning until now." "When a fellow-monk," said Luther, "one day repeated the words of the Creed: I believe in the forgiveness of sins,' I saw the Scripture in an entirely new light; and straightway I felt as if I were born anew. It was as if I had found the door of paradise thrown wide open." This sense of deeper significance is not confined to rational propositions. Single words, and conjunctions of words, effects of light on land and sea, odors and musical sounds, all bring it when the mind is tuned aright. Most of us can remember the strangely moving power of passages in certain poems read when we were young, irrational doorways as they were through which the mystery of fact, the wildness and the pang of life, stole into our hearts and thrilled them. The words have now perhaps become mere polished surfaces for us; but lyric poetry and music are alive and significant only in proportion as they fetch these vague vistas of a life continuous with our own, beckoning and inviting, yet ever eluding our pursuit. We are alive or dead to the eternal inner message of the arts according as we have kept or lost this mystical susceptibility….

.....

[An] incommunicableness of the transport is the keynote of all mysticism. Mystical truth exists for the individual who has the transport, but for no one else. In this, as I have said, it resembles the knowledge given to us in sensations more than that given by conceptual thought. Thought, with its remoteness and abstractness, has often enough in the history of philosophy been contrasted unfavorably with sensation. It is a commonplace of metaphysics that God's knowledge cannot be discursive but must be intuitive, that is, must be constructed more after the pattern of what in ourselves is called immediate feeling, than after that of proposition and judgment. But *our* immediate feelings have no content but what the five senses supply; and we have seen and shall see again that mystics may emphatically deny that the senses play any part in the

very highest type of knowledge which their transports yield.

In the Christian church there have always been mystics. Although many of them have been viewed with suspicion, some have gained favor in the eyes of the authorities. The experiences of these have been treated as precedents, and a codified system of mystical theology has been based upon them, in which everything legitimate finds its place. The basis of the system is "orison" or meditation, the methodical elevation of the soul towards God. Through the practice of orison the higher levels of mystical experience may be attained. It is odd that Protestantism, especially evangelical Protestantism, should seemingly have abandoned everything methodical in this line. Apart from what prayer may lead to, Protestant mystical experience appears to have been almost exclusively sporadic. It has been left to our mind-curers to reintroduce methodical meditation into our religious life.

The first thing to be aimed at in orison is the mind's detachment from outer sensations for these interfere with its concentration upon ideal things. Such manuals as Saint Ignatius's *Spiritual Exercises* recommend the disciple to expel sensation by a graduated series of efforts to imagine holy scenes. The acme of this kind of discipline would be a semi-hallucinatory mono-ideism—an imaginary figure of Christ, for example, coming fully to occupy the mind. Sensorial images of this sort, whether literal or symbolic, play an enormous part in mysticism. But in certain cases imagery may fall away entirely, and in the very highest raptures it tends to do so. The state of consciousness becomes then insusceptible of any verbal description. Mystical teachers are unanimous as to this. Saint John of the Cross, for instance, one of the best of them, thus describes the condition called the "union of love," which, he says, is reached by "dark contemplation." In this the Deity compensates the soul, but in such a hidden way that the soul—

> finds no terms, no means, no comparison whereby to render the sublimity of the wisdom and the delicacy of the spiritual feeling with which she is filled…We receive this mystical knowledge of God clothed in none of the kinds of images, in none of the sensible representations, which our mind makes use of in other circumstances. Accordingly in this knowledge, since the senses and the imagination are not employed, we get neither form nor impression, nor can we give any account or furnish any likeness, although the mysterious and sweet-tasting wisdom comes home so clearly to the inmost parts of our soul. Fancy a man seeing a certain kind of thing for the first time in his life. He can understand it, use and enjoy it, but he cannot apply a name to it, nor communicate any idea of it, even though all the while it be a mere thing of sense. How much greater will be his powerlessness when it goes beyond the senses! This is the peculiarity of the divine language. The more infused, intimate, spiritual, and supersensible it is, the more does it exceed the senses, both inner and outer, and impose silence upon them.
>
> …The soul then feels as if placed in a vast and profound solitude, to which no created thing has access, in an immense and boundless desert, desert the more delicious the more solitary it is. There, in this abyss of wisdom, the soul grows by what it drinks in from the wellsprings of the comprehension of love,… and recognizes, however sublime and learned may be the terms we employ, how utterly vile, insignificant, and improper they are, when we seek to discourse of divine things by their means.

I cannot pretend to detail to you the sundry stages of the Christian mystical life. Our time would not suffice, for one thing; and moreover, I confess that the subdivisions and names which we find in the Catholic books seem to me to represent nothing objectively distinct. So many men, so many minds; I imagine that these experiences can be as infinitely varied as are the idiosyncrasies of individuals.

The cognitive aspects of them, their value in the way of revelation, is what we are directly concerned with, and it is easy to show by citation how strong an impression they leave of being revelations of new depths of truth. Saint Teresa is the expert of experts in describing such conditions, so I will turn immediately to what she says of one of the highest of them, the "orison of union."

> In the orison of union (says Saint Teresa) the soul is fully awake as regards God, but wholly asleep as regards things of this world and in respect of herself. During the short time the union lasts, she is as it were deprived of every feeling, and even if she would, she could not think of any single thing. Thus she needs to employ no artifice in order to arrest the use of her understanding: it remains so stricken with inactivity that she neither knows what she loves, nor in what manner she loves, nor what she wills. In short, she is utterly dead to the things of the world and lives solely in God.... I do not even know whether in this state she has enough life left to breathe. It seems to me she has not; or at least that if she does breathe, she is unaware of it. Her intellect would fain understand something of what is going on within her, but it has so little force now that it can act in no way whatsoever. So a person who falls into a deep faint appears as if dead...
>
> Thus does God, when he raises a soul to union with himself, suspend the natural action of all her faculties. She neither sees, hears, nor understands, so long as she is united with God. But this time is always short, and it seems even shorter than it is. God establishes himself in the interior of this soul in such a way, that when she returns to herself, it is wholly impossible for her to doubt that she has been in God, and God in her. This truth remains so strongly impressed on her that, even though many years should pass without the condition returning, she can neither forget the favor she received, nor doubt of its reality. If you, nevertheless, ask how it is possible that the soul can see and understand that she has been in God, since during the union she has neither sight nor understanding, I reply that she does not see it then, but that she sees it clearly later, after she has returned to herself, not by any vision, but by a certitude which abides with her and which God alone can give her. I knew a person who was ignorant of the truth that God's mode of being in everything must be either by presence, by power, or by essence, but who, after having received the grace of which I am speaking, believed this truth in the most unshakable manner. So much so that, having consulted a half-learned man who was as ignorant on this point as she had been before she was enlightened, when he replied that God is in us only by "grace," she disbelieved his reply, so sure she was of the true answer; and when she came to ask wiser doctors, they confirmed her in her belief, which much consoled her...
>
> But how, you will repeat, can one have such certainty in respect to what one does not see? This question, I am powerless to answer. These are secrets of God's omnipotence which it does not appertain to me to penetrate. All that I know is that I tell the truth; and I shall never believe that any soul who does not possess this certainty has ever been really united to God.

The kinds of truth communicable in mystical ways, whether these be sensible or supersensible, are various. Some of them relate to this world—visions of the future, the reading of hearts, the sudden understanding of texts, the knowledge of distant events, for example; but the most important revelations are theological or metaphysical.

> Saint Ignatius confessed one day to Father Laynez that a single hour of meditation at Manresa had taught him more truths about heavenly things than all the teachings of all the doctors put together could have taught him.... One day in orison, on the steps of the choir of the Dominican church, he saw in a distinct manner the plan of divine wisdom in the creation of the world. On another occasion, during a procession, his spirit was ravished in God, and it was given him to contemplate, in a form and images fitted to the weak understanding of a dweller on the earth, the deep mystery of the holy Trinity. This last vision flooded his heart with such sweetness, that the mere memory of it in after times made him shed abundant tears.

Similarly with Saint Teresa.

> One day, being in orison (she writes), it was granted me to perceive in one instant how all things are seen and contained in God. I did not perceive them in their proper form, and nevertheless the view I had of them was of a sovereign clearness, and has remained vividly impressed upon my soul. It is one of the most signal of all the graces which the Lord has granted me.... The view was so subtle and delicate that the understanding cannot grasp it.

She goes on to tell how it was as if the Deity were an enormous and sovereignly limpid diamond, in which all our actions were contained in such a way their full sinfulness appeared evident as never before. On another day, she relates, while she was reciting the Athanasian Creed—

> Our Lord made me comprehend in what way it is that one God can be in three persons. He made me see it so clearly that I remained as extremely surprised as I was comforted,... and now, when I think of the holy Trinity, or hear It spoken of, I understand how the three adorable Persons form only one God and I experience an unspeakable happiness.

On still another occasion it was given to Saint Teresa to see and understand in what wise the Mother of God had been assumed into her place in Heaven.

The deliciousness of some of these states seems to be beyond anything known in ordinary consciousness. It evidently involves organic sensibilities, for it is spoken of as something too extreme to be borne, and as verging on bodily pain. But it is too subtle and piercing a delight for ordinary words to denote. God's touches, the wounds of his spear, references to ebriety and to nuptial union have to figure in the phraseology by which it is shadowed forth. Intellect and senses both swoon away in these highest states of ecstasy. "If our understanding comprehends," says Saint Teresa, "it is in a mode which remains unknown to it, and it can understand nothing of what it comprehends. For my own part, I do not believe that it does comprehend, because, as I said, it does not understand itself to do so. I confess that it is all a mystery in which I am lost." In the condition called *raptus* or ravishment by theologians, breathing and circulation are so depressed that it is a question among the doctors whether the soul be or be not temporarily dissevered from the body. One must read Saint Teresa's descriptions and the very exact distinctions which she makes, to persuade one's self that one is dealing, not with imaginary experiences, but with phenomena which, however rare, follow perfectly definite psychological types.

To the medical mind these ecstasies signify nothing but suggested and imitated hypnoid states, on an intellectual basis of superstition, and a corporeal one of degeneration and hysteria. Undoubtedly these pathological conditions have existed in many and possibly in all the cases, but that fact tells us nothing about the value for knowledge of the consciousness which they induce. To pass a spiritual judgment upon these states, we must not content ourselves with superficial medical talk, but inquire into their fruits for life.

Their fruits appear to have been various. Stupefaction, for one thing, seems not to have been

altogether absent as a result. You may remember the helplessness in the kitchen and schoolroom of poor Margaret Mary Alacoque. Many other ecstatics would have perished but for the care taken of them by admiring followers. The "other-worldliness" encouraged by the mystical consciousness makes this over-abstraction from practical life peculiarly liable to befall mystics in whom the character is naturally passive and the intellect feeble; but in natively strong minds and characters we find quite opposite results. The great Spanish mystics, who carried the habit of ecstasy as far as it has often carried, appear for the most part to have shown indomitable spirit and energy, and all the more so for the trances in which they indulged.

Saint Ignatius was a mystic, but his mysticism made him assuredly one of the most powerfully practical human engines that ever lived. Saint John of the Cross, writing of the intuitions and "touches" by which God reaches the substance of the soul, tells us that—

> They enrich it marvelously. A single one of them may be sufficient to abolish at a stroke certain imperfections of which the soul during its whole life had vainly tried to rid itself, and to leave it adorned with virtues and loaded with supernatural gifts. A single one of these intoxicating consolations may reward it for all the labors undergone in its life—even were they numberless. Invested with an invincible courage, filled with an impassioned desire to suffer for its God, the soul then is seized with a strange torment—that of not being allowed to suffer enough.

Saint Teresa is as emphatic, and much more detailed. You may perhaps remember a passage I quoted from her in my first lecture. There are many similar pages in her autobiography. Where in literature is a more evidently veracious account of the formation of a new centre of spiritual energy, than is given in her description of the effects of certain ecstasies which in departing leave the soul upon a higher level of emotional excitement?

> Often, infirm and wrought upon with dreadful pains before the ecstasy, the soul emerges from it full of health and admirably disposed for action… as if God had willed that the body itself, already obedient to the soul's desires, should share in the soul's happiness… The soul after such a favor is animated with a degree of courage so great that if at that moment its body should be torn to pieces for the cause of God, it would feel nothing but the liveliest comfort. Then it is that promises and heroic resolutions spring up in profusion in us, soaring desires, horror of the world, and the clear perception of our proper nothingness… .What empire is comparable to that of a soul who, from this sublime summit to which God has raised her, sees all the things of earth beneath her feet, and is captivated by no one of them? How ashamed she is of her former attachments! How amazed at her blindness! What lively pity she feels for those whom she recognizes still shrouded in the darkness!… She groans at having ever been sensitive to points of honor, at the illusion that made her ever see as honor what the world calls by that name. Now she sees in this name nothing more than an immense lie of which the world remains a victim. She discovers, in the new light from above, that in genuine honor there is nothing spurious, that to be faithful to this honor is to give our respect to what deserves to be respected really, and to consider as nothing, or as less than nothing, whatsoever perishes and is not agreeable to God. …She laughs when she sees grave persons, persons of orison, caring for points of honor for which she now feels profoundest contempt. It is suitable to the dignity of their rank to act thus, they pretend, and it makes them more useful to others. But she knows that in despising the dignity of their rank for the pure love of God they would do

> more good in a single day than they would effect in ten years by preserving it…She laughs at herself that there should ever have been a time in her life when she made any case of money, when she ever desired it…Oh! if human beings might only agree together to regard it as so much useless mud, what harmony would then reign in the world! With what friendship we would all treat each other if our interest in honor and in money could but disappear from earth! For my own part, I feel as if it would be a remedy for all our ills.

Mystical conditions may, therefore, render the soul more energetic in the lines which their inspiration favors. But this could be reckoned an advantage only in case the inspiration were a true one. If the inspiration were erroneous, the energy would be all the more mistaken and misbegotten. So we stand once more before the problem of truth which confronted us at the end of the lectures on saintliness. You will remember that we turned to mysticism precisely to get some light on truth. Do mystical states establish the truth of those theological affections in which the saintly life has its root?

In spite of their repudiation of articulate self-description, mystical states in general assert a pretty distinct theoretic drift. It is possible to give the outcome of the majority of them in terms that point in definite philosophical directions. One of these directions is optimism, and the other is monism. We pass into mystical states from out of ordinary consciousness as from a less into a more, as from a smallness into a vastness, and at the same time as from an unrest to a rest. We feel them as reconciling, unifying states. They appeal to the yes-function more than to the no-function in us. In them the unlimited absorbs the limits and peacefully closes the account. Their very denial of every adjective you may propose as applicable to the ultimate truth—He, the Self, the Atman, is to be described by "No! no!": only, say the Upanishads—though it seems on the surface to be a no-function, is a denial made on behalf of a deeper yes. Whoso calls the Absolute anything in particular, or says that it is this, seems implicitly to shut it off from being *that*—it is as if he lessened it. So we deny the "this," negating the negation which it seems to us to imply, in the interests of the higher affirmative attitude by which we are possessed. The fountain-head of Christian mysticism is Dionysius the Are-opagite. He describes the absolute truth by negatives exclusively.

> The cause of all things is neither soul nor intellect; nor has it imagination, opinion, or reason, or intelligence; nor is it reason or intelligence; nor is it spoken or thought. It is neither number, nor order, nor magnitude, nor littleness, nor equality, nor inequality, nor similarity, nor dissimilarity. It neither stands, nor moves, nor rests…. It is neither essence, nor eternity, nor time. Even intellectual contact does not belong to it. It is neither science nor truth. It is not even royalty or wisdom; not one; not unity; not divinity or goodness; nor even spirit as we know it (etc., *ad libitum*).

But these qualifications are denied by Dionysius, not because the truth falls short of them, but because it so infinitely excels them. It is above them. It is super-lucent, *super*-splendent, *super*-essential, *super*-sublime, *super* everything that can be named. Like Hegel in his logic, mystics journey towards the positive pole of truth only by the "Methode der Absoluten Negativität."

Thus comes the paradoxical expressions that so abound in mystical writings. As when Eckhart tells of the still desert of the Godhead, "where never was seen difference, neither Father, Son, nor Holy Ghost, where there is no one at home, yet where the spark of the soul is more at peace than in itself." As when Boehme writes of the Primal Love, that "it may fitly be compared to Nothing, for it is deeper than any Thing, and is as nothing with respect to all things, forasmuch as it is not comprehensible by any of them. And because it is nothing respectively, it is therefore free from all things, and is that only good, which a man cannot express or utter what it is, there being nothing to which it may be

compared, to express it by." Or as when Angelus Silesius sings:—

> *[God is pure Nothing. Neither Now*
> *nor Here affects Him.*
> *But the more you grasp him,*
> *the more He disappears"] (Ed. trans.)*

To this dialectical use, by the intellect, of negation as a mode of passage towards a higher kind of affirmation, there is correlated the subtlest of moral counterparts in the sphere of the personal will. Since denial of the finite self and its wants, since asceticism of some sort, is found in religious experience to be the only doorway to the larger and more blessed life, this moral mystery intertwines and combines with the intellectual mystery in all mystical writings.

> Love (continues Boehme) [is Nothing, for] when thou art gone forth wholly from the Creature and from that which is visible, and art become Nothing to all that is Nature and Creature, then thou art in that eternal One, which is God himself, and then thou shalt feel within thee the highest virtue of Love….The treasure of treasures for the soul is where she goeth out of the Somewhat into that Nothing out of which all things may be made. The soul here saith, *I have nothing*, for I am utterly stripped and naked; *I can do nothing*, for I have no manner of power, but am as water poured out; *I am nothing*, for all that I am is no more than an image of Being, and only God is to me I AM; and so, sitting down in my own Nothingness, I give glory to the eternal Being, and *will nothing* of myself, that so God may will all in me, being unto me my God and all things.

In Paul's language, I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me. Only when I become as nothing can God enter in and no difference between his life and mine remain outstanding.

This overcoming of all the usual barriers between the individual and the Absolute is the great mystic achievement. In mystic states we both become one with the Absolute and we become aware of our oneness. This is the everlasting and triumphant mystical tradition, hardly altered by differences of clime or creed. In Hinduism, in Neoplatonism, in Sufism, in Christian mysticism, in Whitmanism, we find the same recurring note, so that there is about mystical utterances an eternal unanimity which ought to make a critic stop and think, and which brings it about that the mystical classics have, as has been said, neither birthday nor native land. Perpetually telling of the unity of man with God, their speech antedates languages, and they do not grow old.

"That are Thou!" says the Upanishads, and the Vedantists add: "Not a part, nor a mode of That, but identically That, that absolute Spirit of the World." "As pure water poured into pure water remains the same, thus, O Gautama, is the Self of a thinker who knows. Water in water, fire in fire, ether in ether, no one can distinguish them: likewise a man whose mind has entered into the self." "Everyman," says the Sufi Gulshan-Raz, "whose heart is no longer shaken by any doubts, knows with certainty that there is no being save only One…In his divine majesty the me, and we, the thou, are not found, for in the One there can be no distinction. Every being who is annulled and entirely separated from himself, hears resound outside of him this voice and this echo: *I am God*: he has an eternal way of existing, and is no longer subject to death." In the vision of God, says Plotinus, "what sees is not our reason, but something prior and superior to our reason— He who thus sees does not properly see, does not distinguish or imagine two things. He changes, he ceases to be himself, preserves nothing of himself. Absorbed in God, he makes but one with him, like a Centre of a circle coinciding with another centre." "Here," writes Suso, "the spirit dies, and yet is all alive in the marvels of the Godhead… and is lost in the stillness of the glorious dazzling obscurity and of the naked simple unity. It is in this modeless *where* that the highest bliss is to be found." ["I am as great as God,"] sings Angelus Silesius again, ["He is as small as I. He cannot be above me, nor I under Him."] (Ed. trans.)

In mystical literature such self-contradictory phrases as "dazzling obscurity," "whispering silence," "teeming desert," are continually met with. They prove that not conceptual speech, but music rather, is the element through which we are best spoken to by mystical truth. Many mystical scriptures are indeed little more than musical compositions.

> He who would hear the voice of Nada, "the Soundless Sound," and comprehend it, he has to learn the nature of Dhâranâ… When to him-self his form appears unreal, as do on waking all the forms he sees in dreams; when he has ceased to hear the many, he may discern the ONE—the inner sound which kills the outer. … For then the soul will hear, and will remember. And then to the inner ear will speak THE VOICE OF THE SILENCE….And now thy *Self* is lost in SELF, *thyself* unto THYSELF, merged in that SELF from which thou first didst radiate…Behold! thou hast become the Light, thou hast become the Sound, thou art thy Master and thy God. Thou art THYSELF the object of thy search: the VOICE unbroken, that resounds throughout eternities, exempt from change, from sin exempt, the seven sounds in one, the VOICE OF THE SILENCE. *Om tat Sat.*

These words, if they do not awaken laughter as you receive them, probably stir chords within you which music and language touch in common. Music gives us ontological messages which non-musical criticism is unable to contradict, though it may laugh at our foolishness in minding them. There is a verge of the mind which these things haunt; and whispers there-from mingle with the operations of our understanding, even as the waters of the infinite ocean send their waves to break among the pebbles that he upon our shores.

> *Here begins the sea that ends not till the world's end. Where we stand,*
> *Could we know the next high sea-mark set beyond these waves that gleam,*
> *We should know what never man hath known, nor eye of man hath scanned.*
>
> …
>
> *Ah, but here man's heart leaps, yearning towards the gloom with venturous glee,*
> *From the shore that hath no shore beyond it, set in all the sea.*

That doctrine, for example, that eternity is timeless, that our "immortality," if we live in the eternal, is not so much future as already now and here, which we find so often expressed today in certain philosophical circles, finds its support in a "hear, hear!" or an "amen," which floats up from that mysteriously deeper level. We recognize the passwords to the mystical region as we hear them, but we cannot use them ourselves; it alone has the keeping of "the password primeval."

I have now sketched with extreme brevity and insufficiency, but as fairly as I am able in the time allowed, the general traits of the mystic range of consciousness. *It is on the whole pantheistic and optimistic, or at least the opposite of pessimistic. It is anti-naturalistic, and harmonizes best with twice-bornness and so-called other-worldly states of mind.*

My next task is to inquire whether we can invoke it as authoritative. Does it furnish any *warrant for the truth* of the twice-bornness and supernaturality and pantheism which it favors? I must give my answer to this question as concisely as I can.

In brief my answer is this—and I will divide it into three parts:—

1. Mystical states, when well developed, usually are, and have the right to be, absolutely authoritative over the individuals to whom they come.
2. No authority emanates from them which should make it a duty for those who stand outside of them to accept their revelations uncritically.
3. They break down the authority of the non-mystical or rationalistic consciousness, based upon the understanding and the senses alone.

> They show it to be only one kind of consciousness. They open out the possibility of other orders of truth, in which, so far as anything in us vitally responds to them, we may freely continue to have faith.

I will take up these points one by one.

1. As a matter of psychological fact, mystical states of a well-pronounced and emphatic sort are usually authoritative over those who have them. They have been "there," and know. It is vain for rationalism to grumble about this. If the mystical truth that comes to a man proves to be a force that he can live by, what mandate have we of the majority to order him to live in another way? We can throw him into a prison or a madhouse, but we cannot change his mind—we commonly attach it only the more stubbornly to its beliefs. It mocks our utmost efforts, as a matter of fact, and in point of logic it absolutely escapes our jurisdiction. Our own more "rational" beliefs are based on evidence exactly similar in nature to that which mystics quote for theirs. Our senses, namely, have assured us of certain states of fact; but mystical experiences are as direct perceptions of fact for those who have them as any sensations ever were for us. The records show that even though the five senses be in abeyance in them, they are absolutely sensational in their epistemological quality, if I may be pardoned the barbarous expression—that is, they are face to face presentations of what seems immediately to exist.

The mystic is, in short, *invulnerable*, and must be left, whether we relish it or not, in undisturbed enjoyment of his creed. Faith, says Tolstoy, is that by which men live. And faith-state and mystic state are practically convertible terms.

2. But I now proceed to add that mystics have no right to claim that we ought to accept the deliverance of their peculiar experiences, if we are ourselves outsiders and feel no private call thereto. The utmost they can ever ask of us in this life is to admit that they establish a presumption. They form a consensus and have an unequivocal outcome; and it would be odd, mystics might say, if such a unanimous type of experience should prove to be altogether wrong. At bottom, however, this would only be an appeal to numbers, like the appeal of rationalism the other way; and the appeal to numbers has no logical force. If we acknowledge it, it is for "suggestive," not for logical reasons: we follow the majority because to do so suits our life.

But even this presumption from the unanimity of mystics is far from being strong. In characterizing mystic states as pantheistic, optimistic, etc., I am afraid I over-simplified the truth. I did so for expository reasons, and to keep the closer to the classic mystical tradition. The classic religious mysticism, it now must be confessed, is only a "privileged case." It is an *extract*, kept true to type by the selection of the fittest specimens and their preservation in "schools." It is carved out from a much larger mass; and if we take the larger mass as seriously as religious mysticism has historically taken itself, we find that the supposed unanimity largely disappears. To begin with, even religious mysticism itself, the kind that accumulates traditions and makes schools, is much less unanimous than I have allowed. It has been both ascetic and antinomianly self-indulgent within the Christian church. It is dualistic in Sankhya, and monistic in Vedanta philosophy. I called it pantheistic; but the great Spanish mystics are anything but pantheists. They are with few exceptions non-metaphysical minds, for whom "the category of personality" is absolute. The "union" of man with God is for them much more like an occasional miracle than like an original identity. How different again, apart from the happiness common to all, is the mysticism of Walt Whitman, Edward Carpenter, Richard Jefferies, and other naturalistic pantheists, from the more distinctively Christian sort. The fact is that the mystical feeling of enlargement, union, and emancipation has no specific intellectual content whatever of its own. It is capable of forming matrimonial alliances with material furnished by the most diverse philosophies and theologies, provided only they can find a place in their framework for its peculiar emotional mood. We have no right, therefore, to invoke its prestige as distinctively in favor of any special belief, such as that in absolute idealism, or in the absolute monistic identity, or in

the absolute goodness, of the world. It is only relatively in favor of all these things—it passes out of common human consciousness in the direction in which they lie.

So much for religious mysticism proper. But more remains to be told, for religious mysticism is only one half of mysticism. The other half has no accumulated traditions except those which the textbooks on insanity supply. Open any one of these and you will find abundant cases in which "mystical ideas" are cited as characteristic symptoms of enfeebled or deluded states of mind. In delusional insanity, paranoia, as they sometimes call it, we may have a *diabolical* mysticism, a sort of religious mysticism turned upside down. The same sense of ineffable importance in the smallest events, the same texts and words coming with new meanings, the same voices and visions and leadings and missions, the same controlling by extraneous powers; only this time the emotion is pessimistic: instead of consolations we have desolations; the meanings are dreadful; and the powers are enemies to life. It is evident from the point of view of their psychological mechanism, the classic mysticism and these lower mysticisms spring from the same mental level, from that great subliminal or transmarginal region of which science is beginning to admit the existence, but of which so little is really known. That region contains every kind of matter: "seraph and snake" abide there side by side. To come from thence is no infallible credential. What comes must be sifted and tested, and run the gauntlet of confrontation with the total context of experience, just like what comes from the outer world of sense. Its value must be ascertained by empirical methods, so long as we are not mystics ourselves.

Once more, then, I repeat that non-mystics are under no obligation to acknowledge in mystical states a superior authority conferred on them by their intrinsic nature.

3. Yet, I repeat once more, the existence of mystical states absolutely overthrows the pretension of non-mystical states to be the sole and ultimate dictators of what we may believe. As a rule, mystical states merely add a supersensuous meaning to the ordinary outward data of consciousness. They are excitements like the emotions of love or ambition, gifts to our spirit by means of which facts already objectively before us fall into a new expressiveness and make a new connection with our active life. They do not contradict these facts as such, or deny anything that our senses have immediately seized. It is the rationalistic critic rather who plays the part of denier in the controversy, and his denials have no strength, for there never can be a state of facts to which new meaning may not truthfully be added, provided the mind ascend to a more enveloping point of view. It must always remain an open question whether mystical states may not possibly be such superior points of view, windows through which the mind looks out upon a more extensive and inclusive world. The difference of the views seen from the different mystical windows need not prevent us from entertaining this supposition. The wider world would in that case prove to have a mixed constitution like that of this world, that is all. It would have its celestial and its infernal regions, its tempting and its saving moments, its valid experiences and its counterfeit ones, just as our world has them; but it would be a wider world all the same. We should have to use its experiences by selecting and. subordinating and substituting just as is our custom in this ordinary naturalistic world; we should be liable to error just as we are now; yet the counting in of that wider world of meanings, and the serious dealing with it, might, in spite of all the perplexity, be indispensable stages in our approach to the final fullness of the truth.

In this shape, I think, we have to leave the subject. Mystical states indeed wield no authority due simply to their being mystical states. But the higher ones among them point in directions to which the religious sentiments even of non-mystical men incline. They tell of the supremacy of the ideal, of vastness, of union, of safety, and of rest. They offer us *hypotheses*, hypotheses which we may voluntarily ignore, but which as thinkers we cannot possibly upset. The supernaturalism and optimism to which they would persuade us may, interpreted in one way or another, be after all the truest of insights into the meaning of this life.

"Oh, the little more, and how much it is; and the little less, and what worlds away!" It may be that possibility and permission of this sort are all that our religious consciousness requires to live on. In my last lecture I shall have to try to persuade you that this is the case. Meanwhile, however, I am sure that for many of my readers this diet is too slender. If supernaturalism and inner union with the divine are true, you think, then not so much permission, as compulsion to believe, ought to be found. Philosophy has always professed to prove religious truth by coercive argument; and the construction of philosophies of this kind has always been one favorite function of the religious life, if we use this term in the large historic sense. But religious philosophy is an enormous subject, and in my next lecture I can only give that brief glance at it which my limits will allow.

CONCLUSIONS ON RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE

Let us agree, then, that Religion, occupying her-self with personal destinies and keeping thus in contact with the only absolute realities which we know, must necessarily play an eternal part in human history. The next thing to decide is what she reveals about those destinies, or whether indeed she reveals anything distinct enough to be considered a general message to mankind. We have done as you see, with our preliminaries, and our final summing up can now begin…

Both thought and feeling are determinants of conduct, and the same conduct may be determined either by feeling or by thought. When we survey the whole field of religion, we find a great variety in the thoughts that have prevailed there; but the feelings on the one hand and the conduct on the other are almost always the same, for Stoic, Christian, and Buddhist saints are practically indistinguishable in their lives. The theories which Religion generates, being thus variable, are secondary; and if you wish to grasp her essence, you must look to the feelings and the conduct as being the more constant elements. It is between these two elements that the short circuit exists on which she carries on her principal business, while the ideas and symbols and other institutions form loop-lines which may be perfections and improvements, and may even some day all be united into one harmonious system, but which are not to be regarded as organs with an indispensable function, necessary at all times for religious life to go on. This seems to me the first conclusion which we are entitled to draw from the phenomena we have passed in review.

The next step is to characterize the feelings. To what psychological order do they belong?

The resultant outcome of them is in any case what Kant calls "sthenic" affection, an excitement of the cheerful, expansive, "dynamogenic" order which, like any tonic, freshens our vital powers. In almost every lecture, but especially in the lectures on Conversion and on Saintliness, we have seen how this emotion overcomes temperamental melancholy and imparts endurance to the Subject, or a zest, or a meaning, or an enchantment and glory to the common objects of life. The name of "faith state," by which Professor Leuba designates it, is a good one. It is a biological as well as a psychological condition, and Tolstoy is absolutely accurate in classing faith among the forces *by which men live*. The total absence of it, anhedonia, means collapse.

The faith-state may hold a very minimum of intellectual content. We saw examples of this in those sudden raptures of the divine presence, or in such mystical seizures as Dr. Bucke described. It may be a mere vague enthusiasm, half spiritual, half vital, a courage, and a feeling that great and wondrous things are in the air.

When, however, a positive intellectual content is associated with a faith-state, it gets invincibly stamped in upon belief, and this explains the passionate loyalty of religious persons everywhere to the minutest details of their so widely differing creeds. Taking creeds and faith-state together, as forming "religions," and treating these as purely subjective phenomena, without regard to the question of their "truth," we are obliged, on account of their extraordinary influence upon action and endurance, to class them amongst the most important biological functions of mankind. Their stimulant

and anaesthetic effect is so great that Professor Leuba, in a recent article, goes so far as to say that so long as men can use their God, they care very little who he is, or even whether he is at all. "The truth of the matter can be put," says Leuba, "in this way: *God is not known, he is not understood; he is used*—sometimes as meat-purveyor, sometimes as moral support, sometimes as friend, sometimes as an object of love. If he proves himself useful, the religious consciousness asks for no more than that. Does God really exist? How does he exist? What is he? are so many irrelevant questions. Not God, but life, more life, a larger, richer, more satisfying life is, in the last analysis, the end of religion. The love of life, at any and every level of development, is the religious impulse."

At this purely subjective rating, therefore, Religion must be considered vindicated in a certain way from the attacks of her critics. It would seem that she cannot be a mere anachronism and survival, but must exert a permanent function, whether she be with or without intellectual content, and whether, if she have any, it be true or false.

We must next pass beyond the point of view of merely subjective utility, and make inquiry into the intellectual content itself.

First, is there, under all the discrepancies of the creeds, a common nucleus to which they bear their testimony unanimously?

And second, ought we to consider the testimony true?

I will take up the first question first, and answer it immediately in the affirmative. The warring gods and formulas of the various religions do indeed cancel each other, but there is a certain uniform deliverance in which religions all appear to meet. It consists of two parts:—

1. An uneasiness; and
2. Its solution.

1. The uneasiness, reduced to its simplest terms, is a sense that there is *something wrong about us* as we naturally stand.
2. The solution is a sense that *we are saved from the wrongness* by making proper connection with the higher powers.

In those more developed minds, which alone we are studying, the wrongness takes a moral character, and the salvation takes a mystical tinge. I think we shall keep well within the limits of what is common to all such minds if we formulate the essence of their religious experience in terms like these:—

The individual, so far as he suffers from his wrongness and criticizes it, is to that extent consciously beyond it, and in at least possible touch with something higher, if anything higher exist. Along with the wrong part there is thus a better part of him, even though it may be but a most helpless germ. With which part he should identify his real being is by no means obvious at this stage; but when stage 2 (the stage of solution or salvation) arrives, the man identifies his real being with the germinal higher part of himself; and does so in the following way. *He becomes conscious that this higher part is conterminous and continuous with a more of the same quality, which is operative in the universe outside of him, and which he can keep in working touch with, and in a fashion get on board of and save himself when all his lower being has gone to pieces in the wreck.*

It seems to me that all the phenomena are accurately describable in these very simple general terms. They allow for the divided self and the struggle; they involve the change of personal centre and the surrender of the lower self; they express the appearance of exteriority of the helping power and yet account for our sense of union with it; and they fully justify our feelings of security and joy. There is probably no autobiographic document, among all those which I have quoted, to which the description will not well apply. One need only add such specific details as will adapt it to various theologies and various personal temperaments, and one will then have the various experiences reconstructed in their individual forms.

So far, however, as this analysis goes, the experiences are only psychological phenomena. They possess, it is true, enormous biological worth. Spiritual strength really increases in the subject when he has them, a new life opens for him, and they seem to him a place of conflux where the forces of two universes meet; and yet this may be nothing but his

subjective way of feeling things, a mood of his own fancy, in spite of the effects produced. I now turn to my second question: What is the objective "truth" of their content?

The part of the content concerning which the question of truth most pertinently arises is that "MORE of the same quality" with which our own higher self appears in the experience to come into harmonious working relation. Is such a "more" merely our own notion, or does it really exist? If so, in what shape does it exist? Does it act, as well as exist? And in what form should we conceive of that "union" with it of which religious geniuses are so convinced?

It is in answering these questions that the various theologies perform their theoretic work, and that their divergencies most come to light. They all agree that the "more" really exists; though some of them hold it to exist in the shape of a personal god or gods, while others are satisfied to conceive it as a stream of ideal tendency embedded in the eternal structure of the world. They all agree, moreover, that it acts as well as exists, and that something really is effected for the better when you throw your life into its hands. It is when they treat of the experience of "union" with it that their speculative differences appear most clearly. Over this point pantheism and theism, nature and second birth, works and grace and karma, immortality and reincarnation, rationalism and mysticism, carry on inveterate disputes.

At the end of my lecture on Philosophy I held out the notion that an impartial science of religions might sift out from the midst of their discrepancies a common body of doctrine which she might also formulate in terms to which physical science need not object. This, I said, she might adopt as her own reconciling hypothesis, and recommend it for general belief. I also said that in my last lecture I should have to try my own hand at framing such an hypothesis.

The time has now come for this attempt. Who says "hypothesis" renounces the ambition to be coercive in his arguments. The most I can do is, accordingly, to offer something that may fit the facts so easily that your scientific logic will find no plausible pretext for vetoing your impulse to welcome it as true.

The "more," as we called it, and the meaning of our "union" with it, form the nucleus of our inquiry. Into what definite description can these words be translated, and for what definite facts do they stand? It would never do for us to place ourselves offhand at the position of a particular theology, the Christian theology, for example, and proceed immediately to define the "more" as Jehovah, and the "union" as his imputation to us of the righteousness of Christ. That would be unfair to other religions, and from our present standpoint at least, would be an over-belief.

We must begin by using less particularized terms; and, since one of the duties of the science of religions is to keep religion in connection with the rest of science, we shall do well to seek first of all a way of describing the "more," which psychologists may also recognize as real. The *subconscious self* is nowadays a well-accredited psychological entity; and I believe that in it we have exactly the mediating term required. Apart from all religious considerations, there is actually and literally more life in our total soul than we are at any time aware of. The exploration of the transmarginal field has hardly yet been seriously undertaken, but what Mr. Myers said in 1892 in his essay on the Subliminal Consciousness is as true as when it was first written: "Each of us is in reality an abiding psychical entity far more extensive than he knows—an individuality which can never express itself completely through any corporeal manifestation. The Self manifests through the organism; but there is always some part of the Self unmanifested; and always, as it seems, some power of organic expression in abeyance or reserve." Much of the content of this larger background against which our conscious being stands out in relief is insignificant. Imperfect memories, silly jingles, inhibitive timidities, "dissolutive" phenomena of various sorts, as Myers calls them, enter into it for a large part. But in it many of the performances of genius seem also to have their origin; and in our study of conversion, of mystical experiences, and of prayer, we have seen how striking a part invasions from this region play in the religious life.

Let me then propose, as an hypothesis, that whatever it may be on its *further* side, the "more" with which in religious experience we feel ourselves connected is on its *hither* side the subconscious continuation of our conscious life. Starting thus with a recognized psychological fact as our basis, we seem to preserve a contact with "science" which the ordinary theologian lacks. At the same time the theologian's contention that the religious man is moved by an external power is vindicated, for it is one of the peculiarities of invasions from the subconscious region to take on objective appearances, and to suggest to the Subject an external control. In the religious life the control is felt as "higher"; but since on our hypothesis it is primarily the higher faculties of our own hidden mind which are controlling, the sense of union with the power beyond us is a sense of something, not merely apparently, but literally true.

This doorway into the subject seems to me the best one for a science of religions, for it mediates between a number of different points of view. Yet it is only a doorway, and difficulties present themselves as soon as we step through it, and ask how far our transmarginal consciousness carries us if we follow it on its remoter side. Here the over-beliefs begin: here mysticism and the conversion-rapture and Vedantism and transcendental idealism bring in their monistic interpretations and tell us that the finite self rejoins the absolute self, for it was always one with God and identical with the soul of the world. Here the prophets of all the different religions come with their visions, voices, raptures, and other openings, supposed by each to authenticate his own peculiar faith.

Those of us who are not personally favored with such specific revelations must stand outside of them altogether and, for the present at least, decide that, since they corroborate incompatible theological doctrines, they neutralize one another and leave no fixed result. If we follow any one of them, or if we follow philosophical theory and embrace monistic pantheism on non-mystical grounds, we do so in the exercise of our individual freedom, and build out our religion in the way most congruous with our personal susceptibilities. Among these susceptibilities intellectual ones play a decisive part. Although the religious question is primarily a question of life, of living or not living in the higher union which opens itself to us as a gift, yet the spiritual excitement in which the gift appears a real one will often fail to be aroused in an individual until certain particular intellectual beliefs or ideas which, as we say, come home to him, are touched. These ideas will thus be essential to that individual's religion;—which is as much as to say that over-beliefs in various directions are absolutely indispensable, and that we should treat them with tenderness and tolerance so long as they are not intolerant themselves. As I have elsewhere written, the most interesting and valuable things about a man are usually his over-beliefs.

Disregarding the over-beliefs, and confining ourselves to what is common and generic, we have in *the fact that the conscious person is continuous with a wider self through which saving experiences come,* a positive content of religious experience which, it seems to me, *is literally and objectively true as far as it goes.* If I now proceed to state my own hypothesis about the farther limits of this extension of our personality, I shall be offering my own over-belief—though I know it will appear a sorry under-belief to some of you—for which I can only bespeak the same indulgence which in a converse case I should accord to yours.

The further limits of our being plunge, it seems to me, into an altogether other dimension of existence from the sensible and merely "understandable" world. Name it the mystical region, or the supernatural region, whichever you choose. So far as our ideal impulses originate in this region (and most of them do originate in it, for we find them possessing us in a way for which we cannot articulately account), we belong to it in a more intimate sense than that in which we belong to the visible world, for we belong in the most intimate sense wherever our ideals belong. Yet the unseen region in question is not merely ideal, for it produces effects in this world. When we commune with it, work is actually done upon our finite personality, for we are turned into new men, and consequences in the way of conduct follow in the natural world upon our regenerative change. But that which produces effects within another reality must be termed a reality itself,

so I feel as if we had no philosophic excuse for calling the unseen or mystical world unreal.

God is the natural appellation, for us Christians at least, for the supreme reality, so I will call this higher part of the universe by the name of God. We and God have business with each other; and in opening ourselves to his influence our deepest destiny is fulfilled. The universe, at those parts of it which our personal being constitutes, takes a turn genuinely for the worse or for the better in proportion as each one of us fulfills or evades God's demands. As far as this goes I probably have you with me, for I only translate into schematic language what I may call the instinctive belief of mankind: God is real since he produces real effects.

The real effects in question, so far as I have as yet admitted them, are exerted on the personal centres of energy of the various subjects, but the spontaneous faith of most of the subjects is that they embrace a wider sphere than this. Most religious men believe (or "know," if they be mystical) that not only they themselves, but the whole universe of beings to whom the God is present, are secure in his parental hands. There is a sense, a dimension, they are sure, in which we are *all* saved, in spite of the gates of hell and all adverse terrestrial appearances. God's existence is the guarantee of an ideal order that shall be permanently preserved. This world may indeed, as science assures us, some day burn up or freeze; but if it is part of his order, the old ideals are sure to be brought elsewhere to fruition, so that where God is, tragedy is only provisional and partial, and shipwreck and dissolution are not the absolutely final things. Only when this further step of faith concerning God is taken, and remote objective consequences are predicted, does religion, as it seems to me, get wholly free from the first immediate subjective experience, and bring a *real hypothesis* into play. A good hypothesis in science must have other properties than those of the phenomenon it is immediately invoked to explain, otherwise it is not prolific enough. God, meaning only what enters into the religious man's experience of union, falls short of being an hypothesis of this more useful order. He needs to enter into wider cosmic relations in order to justify the subject's absolute confidence and peace.

That the God with whom, starting from the hither side of our own extra-marginal self, we come at its remoter margin into commerce should be the absolute world-ruler, is of course a very considerable over-belief. Over-belief as it is, though, it is an article of almost every one's religion. Most of us pretend in some way to prop it up upon our philosophy, but the philosophy itself is really propped upon this faith. What is this but to say that Religion, in her fullest exercise of function, is not a mere illumination of facts already elsewhere given, not a mere passion, like love, which views things in a rosier light. It is indeed that, as we have seen abundantly. But it is something more, namely, a postulator of new *facts* as well. The world interpreted religiously is not the materialistic world over again, with an altered expression; it must have, over and above the altered expression, a *natural constitution* different at some point from that which a materialistic world would have. It must be such that different events can be expected in it, different conduct must be required.

This thoroughly "pragmatic" view of religion has usually been taken as a matter of course by common men. They have interpolated divine miracles into the field of nature, they have built a heaven out beyond the grave. It is only transcendentalist metaphysicians who think that, without adding any concrete details to Nature, or subtracting any, but by simply calling it the expression of absolute spirit, you make it more divine just as it stands. I believe the pragmatic way of taking religion to be the deeper way. It gives it body as well as soul, it makes it claim, as everything real must claim, some characteristic realm of fact as its very own. What the more characteristically divine facts are, apart from the actual inflow of energy in the faith-state and the prayer-state, I know not. But the over-belief on which I am ready to make my personal venture is that they exist. The whole drift of my education goes to persuade me that the world of our present consciousness is only one out of many worlds of consciousness that exist, and that those other worlds must contain experiences which have a meaning for our life also; and that although in the main their experiences and those of this world keep discrete, yet the two become continuous at certain points, and higher energies

filter in. By being faithful in my poor measure to this over-belief, I seem to myself to keep more sane and true. I can, of course, put myself into the sectarian scientist's attitude, and imagine vividly that the world of sensations and of scientific laws and objects may be all. But whenever I do this, I hear that inward monitor of which W. K. Clifford once wrote, whispering the word "bosh!" Humbug is humbug, even though it bear the scientific name, and the total expression of human experience, as I view it objectively, invincibly urges me beyond the narrow "scientific" bounds. Assuredly, the real world is of a different temperament more intricately built than physical science allows. So my objective and my subjective conscience both hold me to the over-belief which I express. Who knows whether the faithfulness of individuals here below to their own poor over-beliefs may not actually help God in turn to be more effectively faithful to his own greater tasks? …

III.3

Perceiving God

WILLIAM P. ALSTON

William P. Alston (1921–2009) was a professor of philosophy at Syracuse University and one of the leading figures in the fields of epistemology and philosophy of religion throughout the past fifty years. In this selection, he argues that religious experience plays a role with respect to beliefs about God that is analogous to the role played by sense perception with respect to beliefs about the external world. On his view, religious experience may be thought of as perception *of God, and it is a source of justified belief about God.*

I want to explore and defend the idea that the experience, or, as I shall say, the *perception*, of God plays an epistemic role with respect to beliefs about God importantly analogous to that played by sense perception with respect to beliefs about the physical world. The nature of that latter role is, of course, a matter of controversy, and I have no time here to go into those controversies. It is admitted, however, on (almost) all hands that sense perception provides us with knowledge (justified belief) about current states of affairs in the immediate environment of the perceiver and that knowledge of this sort is somehow required for any further knowledge of the physical world. The possibility I wish to explore is that what a person takes to be an experience of God can provide him/her with knowledge (justified beliefs) about what God is doing, or how God is "situated," vis-á-vis that subject at that moment. Thus, by experiencing the presence and activity of God, *S* can come to know (justifiably believe) that God is sustaining her in being, filling her with His love, strengthening her, or communicating a certain message to her. Let's call beliefs as to how God is currently related to the subject *M-beliefs* ("M" for manifestation); these are the "perceptual beliefs" of the theological sphere. I shall suppose that here too the "perceptual" knowledge one acquires from experience is crucial for whatever else we can learn about God, though I won't have time to explore and defend

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that part of the position; I will have my hands full defending the claim that M-beliefs are justified. I will just make two quick points about the role of M-beliefs in the larger scheme. First, just as with our knowledge of the physical world, the recognition of a crucial role for perceptual knowledge is compatible with a wide variety of views as to just how it figures in the total system and as to what else is involved. Second, an important difference between the two spheres is that in the theological sphere perceptual beliefs as to what God has "said" (communicated, revealed) to one or another person play a major role.

I have been speaking alternatively of perceptual *knowledge* and of the *justification* of perceptual beliefs. In this paper I shall concentrate on justification, leaving to one side whatever else is involved in knowledge. It will be my contention that (putative) experience of God is a source of justification for M-beliefs, somewhat in the way that sense experience is a source of justification for perceptual beliefs. Again, it is quite controversial what this latter way is. I shall be thinking of it in terms of a direct-realist construal of sense perception, according to which I can be justified in supposing that my dog is wagging his tail just because something is visually presenting itself to me as (looks like) my dog wagging his tail; that is, it looks to me in such a way that I am thereby justified in thereby supposing it to be my dog wagging his tail. Analogously I think of the "experience of God" as a matter of something's presenting itself to one's experience as God (doing so and so); so that here too the subject is justified in believing that God is present to her, or is doing so and so vis-a-vis her, just because that is the way in which the object is presented to her experience. (For the purposes of this paper let's focus on those cases in which this presentation is not via any *sensory* qualities or *sensorily* perceivable objects. The experience involved will be nonsensory in character.) It is because I think of the experience of God as having basically the same structure as the sense perception of physical objects that I feel entitled to speak of "perceiving God." But though I construe the matter in direct-realist terms, most of what I have to say here will be relevant to a defense of the more general claim that the experiential justification of M-beliefs is importantly parallel to the experiential justification of perceptual beliefs about the physical environment, on any halfway plausible construal of the latter, at least on any halfway plausible realist construal.

I shall develop the position by way of responding to a number of objections. This procedure reflects my conviction that the very considerable incidence of putative perceptions of God creates a certain initial presumption that these experiences are what they seem to be and that something can thereby be learned about God.

Objection I. What reason do we have for supposing that anyone ever does really perceive God? In order for *S* to perceive God it would have to be the case that (1) God exists, and (2) God is related to *S* or to his experience in such a way as to be perceivable by him. Only after we have seen reason to accept all that will we take seriously any claim to perceive God.

Answer. It all depends on what you will take as a reason. What you have in mind, presumably, are reasons drawn from some source other than perceptions of God, e.g., metaphysical arguments for the existence and nature of God. But why do you think you are justified in that restriction? We don't proceed in this way with respect to sense perception. Although in determining whether a particular alleged perception was genuine we don't make use of the results of *that* perception, we do utilize what has been observed in many other cases. And what alternative is there? The conditions of veridical sense perception have to do with states of affairs and causal interactions in the physical world, matters to which we have no cognitive access that is not based on sense perception. In like fashion, if there is a divine reality why suppose that the conditions of veridically perceiving it could be ascertained without relying on perceptions of *it*? In requiring external validation in this case but not the other you are arbitrarily imposing a double standard.

Objection II. There are many contradictions in the body of M-beliefs. In particular, persons report communications from God that contradict other reported communications. How, then, can one claim that all M-beliefs are justified?

Answer. What is (should be) claimed is only *prima facie* justification. When a person believes

that God is experientially present to him, that belief is justified *unless* the subject has sufficient reasons to suppose it to be false or to suppose that the experience is not, in these circumstances, sufficiently indicative of the truth of the belief. This is, of course, precisely the status of individual perceptual beliefs about the physical environment. When, seeming to see a lake, I believe there to be a lake in front of me, my belief is thereby justified unless I have sufficient reason to suppose it false or to suppose that, in these circumstances, the experience is not sufficiently indicative of the truth of the belief.

Objection III. It is rational to form beliefs about the physical environment on the basis of the way that environment appears to us in sense experience (call this practice of belief formation SP) because that is a generally reliable mode of belief formation. And it is reliable just because, in normal conditions, sense experience varies concomitantly with variations in what we take ourselves to be perceiving. But we have no reason to suppose any such regular covariation for putative perception of God. And hence we lack reason for regarding as rational the parallel practice of forming M-beliefs on the basis of what is taken to be a perception of God (call that practice RE).

Answer. This is another use of a double standard. How do we know that normal sense experience varies concomitantly with perceived objects? We don't know this a priori. Rather, we have strong empirical evidence for it. That is, by relying on sense perception for our data we have piled up evidence for the reliability of SP. Let's call the kind of circularity exhibited here *epistemic circularity*. It is involved whenever the premises in an argument for the reliability or rationality of a belief-forming practice have themselves been acquired by that practice.[2] If we allow epistemically circular arguments, the reliability of RE can be supported in the same way. Among the things people have claimed to learn from RE is that God will enable people to experience His presence and activity from time to time in a veridical way. By relying on what one learns from the practice of RE, one can show that RE is a reliable belief-forming practice. On the other hand, if epistemically circular arguments are not countenanced, there can be no significant basis for a reliability claim in either case.

Objection IV. A claim to perceive *X*, and so to form reliable perceptual beliefs about *X* on the basis of this, presupposes that the experience involved is best explained by the activity of *X*, *inter alia*. But it seems that we can give adequate explanations of putative experiences of God in purely naturalistic terms, without bringing God into the explanation at all. Whereas we can't give adequate explanations of normal sense experience without bringing the experienced external objects into the explanation. Hence RE, but not SP, is discredited by these considerations.

Answer. I do not believe that much of a case can be made for the adequacy of any naturalistic explanation of experiences of God. But for present purposes I want to concentrate on the way in which this objection once more depends on a double standard. You will have no case at all for your claim unless you, question-beggingly, restrict yourself to sources of evidence that exclude RE. For from RE and systems built up on its output we learn that God is involved in the explanation of every fact whatever. But you would not proceed in that way with SP. If it is a question of determining the best explanation of sense experience you will, of course, make use of what you think you have learned from SP. Again, you have arbitrarily applied different standards to the two practices.

Here is another point. Suppose that one could give a purely psychological or physiological explanation of the experiences in question. That is quite compatible with God's figuring among their causes and, hence, coming into an ideally complete explanation. After all, it is presumably possible to give an adequate causal explanation of sense experience in terms of what goes on within the skull, but that is quite compatible with the external perceived objects' figuring further back along the causal chain.

Objection V. You have been accusing me of *arbitrarily* employing a double standard. But I maintain that RE differs from SP in ways that make different standards appropriate. SP is a pervasive and inescapable feature of our lives. Sense experience is insistent, omnipresent, vivid, and richly detailed.

We use it as a source of information during all our waking hours. RE, by contrast, is not universally shared; and even for its devotees its practice is relatively infrequent. Moreover, its deliverances are, by comparison, meager, obscure, and uncertain. Thus when an output of RE does pop up, it is naturally greeted with more skepticism, and one properly demands more for its validation than in the case of so regular and central part of our lives as SP.

Answer. I don't want to deny either the existence or the importance of these differences. I want to deny only that they have the alleged bearing on the epistemic situation. Why should we suppose that a cognitive access enjoyed only by a part of the population is less likely to be reliable than one that is universally distributed? Why should we suppose that a source that yields less detailed and less fully understood beliefs is more suspect than a richer source? A priori it would seem just as likely that some aspects of reality are accessible only to persons that satisfy certain conditions not satisfied by all human beings as that some aspects are equally accessible to all. A priori it would seem just as likely that some aspects of reality are humanly graspable only in a fragmentary and opaque manner as that some aspects are graspable in a more nearly complete and pellucid fashion. Why view the one sort of cognitive claim with more suspicion than the other? I will agree that the spotty distribution of RE calls for explanation, as does the various cognitively unsatisfactory features of its output. But, for that matter, so does the universal distribution and cognitive richness of SP. And in both cases explanations are forthcoming, though in both cases the outputs of the practices are utilized in order to achieve those explanations. As for RE, the limited distribution may be explained by the fact that many persons are not prepared to meet the moral and other "way of life" conditions that God has set for awareness of Himself. And the cognitively unsatisfactory features of the doxastic output are explained by the fact that God infinitely exceeds our cognitive powers.

Objection VI. When someone claims to see a spruce tree in a certain spot, the claim is checkable. Other people can take a look, photographs can be taken, the subject's condition can be diagnosed, and so on. But there are no comparable checks and tests available in RE. And how can we take seriously a claim to have perceived an objective state of affairs if there is, in principle, no intersubjective way of determining whether that claim is correct?

Answer. The answer to this objection is implicit in a point made earlier, viz., that putative experience of God yields only prima facie justification, justification (unqualifiedly) provided there are no sufficient overriding considerations. This notion has a significant application only where there is what we may call an *overrider system*, i.e., ways of determining whether the facts are such as to indicate a belief from the range in question to be false and ways of determining whether conditions are such that the basis of the belief is sufficiently indicative of its truth. SP does contain such a system. What about RE? Here we must confront a salient difference between the two spheres. If we consider the way in which a body of beliefs has been developed on the basis of SP we find pretty much the same system across all cultures. But our encounters with God have spawned a number of different religious communities with beliefs and practices of worship which are quite different, though with some considerable overlap. These differences carry with them differences in overrider systems. But it remains true that if we consider any particular religious community which exhibits a significant commonality in doctrine and worship it will feature a more or less definite overrider system. For concreteness let's think of what I will call the *mainline Christian community*. (From this point onward I will use the term "RE" for the practice of forming M-beliefs as it goes on in this community.) In that community a body of doctrine has developed concerning the nature of God, His purposes, and His interactions with mankind, including His appearances to us. If an M-belief contradicts this system that is a reason for deeming it false. Moreover there is a long and varied history of experiential encounters with God, embodied in written accounts as well as oral transmission. This provides bases for regarding particular experiences as more or less likely to be veridical, given the conditions, psychological or otherwise, in which they occurred, the character of the subject, and the effects in the life of the subject. Thus a socially established religious doxastic practice like RE will contain a rich system of overriders that

provides resources for checking the acceptability of any particular M-belief.

But perhaps your point is rather that there are no *external* checks on a particular report, none that do not rely on other claims of the same sort. Let's agree that this is the case. But why suppose that to be any black mark against RE? Here is the double standard again. After all, particular claims within SP cannot be checked without relying on what we have learned from SP. Suppose I claim to see a fir tree in a certain spot. To check on this one would have to rely on other persons' perceptual reports as to what is at that spot, our general empirical knowledge of the likelihood of a fir tree in that locality, and so on. Apart from what we take ourselves to have learned from SP, we would have nothing to go on. One can hardly determine whether my report was accurate by intuiting self-evident truths or by consulting divine revelation. But if SP counts as having a system of checks even though this system involves relying on some outputs of the practice in order to put others to the test, why should RE be deemed to have no such system when its procedures exhibit the same structure? Once more you are, arbitrarily, setting quite different requirements for different practices.

Perhaps your point was that RE's system of checks is unlike SP's. In particular, the following difference can be discerned. Suppose I report seeing a morel at a certain spot in the forest. Now suppose that a number of qualified observers take a good look at that spot at that time and report that no morel is to be seen. In that case my report would have been decisively disconfirmed. But nothing like that is possible in RE. We can't lay down any conditions (of a sort the satisfaction of which we can determine) under which a properly qualified person will experience the presence of God if God is "there" to be experienced. Hence a particular report cannot be decisively disconfirmed by the experience of others.

But what epistemic relevance does this difference have? Why should we suppose that RE is rendered dubious for lacking check ability of this sort? Let's consider what makes this kind of intersubjective test possible for SP. Clearly it is that we have discovered fairly firm regularities in the behavior of physical things, including human sense perception. Since there are stable regularities in the ways in which physical objects disclose themselves to our perception, we can be assured that if *X* exists at a certain time and place and if *S* satisfies appropriate conditions then *S* is sure to perceive *X*. But no such tight regularities are discoverable in God's appearances to our experience. We can say something about the way in which such matters as the distribution of attention and the moral and spiritual state of the subject are conducive to such appearances; but these most emphatically do not add up to the sort of lawlike connections we get with SP. Now what about this difference? Is it to the epistemic discredit of RE that it does not enable us to discover such regularities? Well, that all depends on what it would be reasonable to expect if RE does put us into effective cognitive contact with God. Given what we have learned about God and our relations to Him (from RE, supplemented by whatever other sources there be), should we expect to be able to discover such realities if God really exists? Clearly not. There are several important points here, but the most important is that it is contrary to God's plans for us to give us that much control, cognitive and practical. Hence it is quite understandable, if God exists and is as RE leads us to suppose, that we should not be able to ascertain the kinds of regularities that would make possible the kinds of intersubjective tests exhibited by SP. Hence, the epistemic status of RE is in no way diminished by its lack of such tests. Once more RE is subjected to an inappropriate standard. This time, however, it is not a double standard, but rather an inappropriate single standard. RE is being graded down for lacking positive features of other practices, where these features cannot reasonably be supposed to be generally necessary conditions of epistemic excellence, even for experiential practices. Thus my critic is exhibiting what we might term *epistemic chauvinism*, judging alien forms of life according to whether they conform to the home situation, a procedure as much to be deplored in the epistemic as in the political sphere.

Objection VII. How can it be rational to take RE as a sorce of justification when there are incompatible rivals that can lay claim to that status on exactly the same grounds? M-beliefs of different religious communities conflict to a considerable extent, particularly those concerning alleged divine

messages, and the bodies of doctrine they support conflict even more. We get incompatible accounts of God's plans for us and requirements on us, of the conditions of salvation, and so on. This being the case, how can we pick out just one of these communal practices as yielding justified belief?

Answer. I take this to be by far the most serious difficulty with my position. I have chosen to concentrate on what I take to be less serious problems, partly because their consideration brings out better the main lineaments of the position, and partly because any serious treatment of this last problem would spill beyond the confines of this paper.[2] Here I shall have to content myself with making one basic point. We are not faced with the necessity of choosing only one such practice as yielding prima facie justified M-beliefs. The fact that there are incompatibilities between systems of religious beliefs, in M-beliefs and elsewhere, shows that not all M-beliefs can be true, but not that they cannot all be prima facie justified. After all, incompatible beliefs *within* a system can all be prima facie justified; that's the point of the prima facie qualification. When we are faced with a situation like that, the hope is that the overrider system and other winnowing devices will weed out the inconsistencies. To be sure, inter-system winnowing devices are hazier and more meager than those which are available within a system; but consistency, consonance with other well-entrenched beliefs and doxastic practices, and general reasonability and plausibility give us something to go on. Moreover, it may be that some religious ways of life fulfill their own promises more fully than others. Of course, there is never any guarantee that a unique way of resolving incompatibilities will present itself, even with a system. But where there are established practices of forming beliefs on the basis of experience, I believe the rational course is to regard each such belief as thereby prima facie justified, hoping that future developments, perhaps unforeseeable at present, will resolve fundamental incompatibilities.

In conclusion I will make explicit the general epistemological orientation I have been presupposing in my defense of RE. I take our human situation to be such that we engage in a plurality of basic doxastic practices, each of which involves a distinctive sort of input to belief-forming "mechanisms," a distinctive range of belief contents (a "subject matter" and ways of conceiving it), and a set of functions that determine belief contents as a function of input features. Each practice is socially established: socially shared, inculcated, reinforced, and propagated. In addition to experiential practices, with which we have been concerned in this paper, there are, e.g., inferential practices, the input of which consists of beliefs, and the practice of forming memory beliefs. A doxastic practice is not restricted to the formation of first-level beliefs; it will also typically involve criteria and procedures of criticism of the beliefs thus formed; here we will find the "overrider systems" of which we were speaking earlier. In general, we learn these practices and engage in them long before we arrive at the stage of explicitly formulating their principles and subjecting them to critical reflection. Theory is deeply rooted in practice.

Nor, having arrived at the age of reason, can we turn our back on all that and take a fresh start, in the Cartesian spirit, choosing our epistemic procedures and criteria anew, on a purely "rational" basis.

Apart from reliance on doxastic tendencies with which we find ourselves, we literally have nothing to go on. Indeed, what Descartes did, as Thomas Reid trenchantly pointed out, was arbitrarily to pick one doxastic practice he found himself engaged in—accepting propositions that seem self-evident—and set that as a judge over all the others, with what results we are all too familiar. This is not to say that we must acquiesce in our pre-reflective doxastic tendencies in every respect. We can tidy things up, modify our established practices so as to make each more internally consistent and more consistent with the others. But, on the whole and for the most part, we have no choice but to continue to form beliefs in accordance with these practices and to take these ways of forming beliefs as paradigmatically conferring epistemic justification. And this is the way that epistemology has in fact gone, except for some arbitrary partiality. Of course it would be satisfying to economize our basic commitments by taking one or a few of these practices as basic and using them to validate the others; but we have made little progress in this enterprise over the centuries. It is not self-evident that sense perception is reliable, nor can we establish its reliability if we restrict

ourselves to premises drawn from introspection; we cannot show that deductive reasoning is valid without using deductive reasoning to do so; and so on. We are endowed with strong tendencies to engage in a number of distinct doxastic practices, none of which can be warranted on the basis of others. It is clearly the better part of wisdom to recognize beliefs that emerge from these practices to be rational and justified, at least once they are properly sifted and refined.

In this paper I have undertaken to extend this account to doxastic practices that are not universally practiced. Except for that matter of distribution and the other peripheral matters mentioned in Objection V and except for being faced with actually existing rivals, a religious experiential doxastic practice like RE seems to me to be on all fours with SP and other universal practices. It too involves a distinctive range of inputs, a range of belief contents, and functions that map features of the former onto contents of the latter. It is socially established within a certain community. It involves higher-level procedures of correction and modification of its first-level beliefs. Though it *may* be acquired in a deliberate and self-conscious fashion, it is more typically acquired in a practical, prereflective form. Though it is obviously evitable in a way SP, e.g., is not, for many of its practitioners it is just about as firmly entrenched.

These similarities lead me to the conclusion that if, as it seems we must concede, a belief is prima facie justified by virtue of emerging from one of the universal basic practices, we should also concede the same status to the products of RE. I have sought to show that various plausible-sounding objections to this position depend on the use of a double standard or reflect arbitrary epistemic chauvinism. They involve subjecting RE to inappropriate standards. Once we appreciate these points, we can see the strength of the case for RE as one more epistemically autonomous practice of belief formation and source of justification.

NOTES

1. See my "Epistemic Circularity," Philosophy and Phenomenological Research, XLVII, 1 (September 1986): 1–30.
2. For an extended treatment of this issue, see my "Religious Experience and Religious Diversity," forthcoming in Christian Scholars' Review.

III.4

The Neuropsychological Basis of Religions, or Why God Won't Go Away

EUGENE G. D'AQUILI AND ANDREW B. NEWBERG

Eugene G. d'Aquili (1940–1998) and Andrew B. Newberg are research psychiatrists who have done important empirical work on the neuroscience of religious experience. In the present article, they discuss

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the neuropsychological basis of religion and religious concepts, and they also explore the implications suggested by a neuropsychological analysis of religious experience.

1. RELIGION AS A PROBLEM

In the eighteenth century, religion was sometimes described as *cette espèce d'ignorance profonde*. It was believed toward the end of the eighteenth century that religion as a form of profound ignorance would simply vanish with general education, along with its God or gods and its superstitious trappings. In this scenario the development of the higher criticism with respect to the Judeo-Christian scriptures and the triumph of the scientific method in general put the final two nails in the coffin of religion. There remained only the actual burial, which was scheduled for the near future. It has been more than 200 years since the scheduled date for the burial of religion, but the event has not yet occurred. Indeed the coffin has been opened and its occupant seems to have escaped. What can possibly have gone wrong? Universal education has been in place for well over 100 years in the West, and neither religion nor its God seems to want to go away.

Although the mainstream Western religions have suffered somewhat, religion has reappeared everywhere under new guises. Bizarre cults of all sorts have sprung up all over the world, and a sort of New Age mysticism seems to be capturing the hearts and minds of many well-educated persons. Furthermore, the old mainstream religions are undergoing a resurgence in many places. The refusal of religion to die even though eighteenth- and nineteenth-century intellectuals considered it rank superstition has become an embarrassment. Obviously religious phenomena, if not religions themselves, must arise out of pretty tenacious material. This paper will attempt to analyze why religions and their gods won't go away. But first we must attempt to discover whether there is any generality to the concept of religion, as opposed to individually existing religions, in order to see if there are universal core elements in these religions that specifically won't go away.

Defining religion is a notoriously difficult task. Indeed there are many who maintain that the concept has no single referent. This is easy to understand, because the term *religion* often encompasses such disparate elements as Eastern monism, Western dualism, divine immanence, divine transcendence, attempts at controlling nature and the environment, achieving and maintaining a plethora of interior states, emphasis on moral behavior, and so forth. It is difficult to see much in common between the religions of various primitive societies and, for example, the exalted spiritual awareness of Theravada Buddhism. Likewise, it is often very difficult to see much similarity between certain practitioners of the same religion. Thus, a behavioral analysis, and to a certain extent a cognitive one, would see very little in common between the Catholicism of a rural South American Indian and that of a Meister Eckhart or of an Anselm of Canterbury. In view of such differences can we even hope to arrive at anything like a unitary concept of religion?

Until the late eighteenth century there was practically no attempt at defining religion per se. Consequently religions, particularly in the West, were defined by their cognitive content or dogmatic formulations. It is only in the works of Friedrich Schleiermacher in the late eighteenth century that an attempt was made to define religion, as such, by switching the emphasis from a cognitive or doctrinal emphasis to a more visceral or intuitive one. Schleiermacher defined religion as a "feeling of *absolute* dependence." Since his day, all attempts at a general definition of religion have relied heavily on emphasizing the intuitive, emotional, or visceral. A major step forward in the attempt at formulating a general definition of religion was the rise of anthropological and sociological theory. These approaches asserted that religion is always embedded in a cultural matrix and that religious beliefs, customs, and rituals must be understood in a radical relationship to the cultures in which they arise. Durkheim in his *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* maintained that "a society has all that is necessary to arouse the sensation of the divine in

minds, merely by the power it has over them" (1926, 207). Thus, in the Durkheimian analysis, religion is nothing more than a transform of society. On the other hand, psychologists from Freud to Skinner have seen in religion a projection either of various intrapsychic dynamics or of hopes and expectations based on previous experience.

Since the turn of this century, however, scholars have begun to devote themselves to the phenomenology of religion on its own terms. They believed that there were phenomena that needed to be explained which eluded both sociological and psychological determinism. An example of such an approach has been the analysis of religion in terms of an awareness of the *sacred* and the *holy*. Rudolf Otto, in *The Idea of the Holy* ([1917] 1970), defined the essence of religious awareness as "awe." This he understood as a mixture of fear and fascination before the divine. Otto saw the essential religious experience as a *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*. Otto betrayed his Western origins, however, by understanding this as a sensed "wholly other" of the divine being. Such an approach began to get at a dominant form of Western mysticism but was not so applicable to Eastern religions or to primitive ones.

The most recent and subtle reworking of Otto's concept of the sacred as the central core of all religious experience has been done by Mircea Eliade (1959). For Eliade the sacred is no longer to be found almost exclusively in Otto's god-encounter type of experience. Rather, every culture exemplifies the existential sense of the sacred in its rituals and symbols, especially primitive and Asian cultures. In fairness it must be stated that Eliade's position, though intriguing and subtle, is hard to verify in actual cases across cultures. Many anthropologists, linguists, and psychologists question whether the concept of the sacred is identifiable as such in an analysis of the language, experience, and thought of most primitive societies. Such scholars assert that religious experience is not sui generis but is rather an amalgam of diverse cultural phenomena and experiences.

This cursory review of the history of Western attempts to understand religion leaves us in a somewhat confused state. The account of Winston King at least draws out some important characteristics of religion which keep recurring. After first making the point that *salvation* is but another name for religion in general, he asks,

> Are there distinguishing characteristics of religious salvation? The first is that religious salvation tends to concentrate on the needs that a culture defines as most fundamental, neglecting needs that a culture defines as less important. Religious means of salvation, often indirect and extra-human, seek to use supersensible forces and powers either in addition to or in place of ordinary tangible means. The second distinguishing characteristic is that religious salvations tend to aim at total, absolute, and sometimes transcendent fulfillment of human needs. As defined by the cultural context, this fulfillment ranges all the way from the fullness of physical satisfactions to the eternal ecstasy of union with the Absolute. (King 1978, 288)

In this paper we are proposing that there are two classes of neuropsychological mechanisms that underlie the development of religious experiences and behaviors. These two classes of mechanisms represent two lines of neurological development involving the evolution of structures that comprise what we have called in other works the "causal operator" on the one hand and the "holistic operator" on the other. What we mean by *operators* are networks of nerve tissue in the brain that perform specific functions—in the first case allowing us to perceive causality and in the second allowing us to perceive wholeness in the midst of diversity. In considering these two brain operators we are led to the heart of what King is talking about, that is, the use of supersensible forces and powers to control the environment in such a way as to attain those needs which the culture defines as fundamental. Furthermore, these operators allow for the movement toward the fulfillment of human needs in a total, absolute, or transcendent fashion often involving holistic unusual states or experiences.

2. RELIGION AS CONTROL OF THE ENVIRONMENT

For several years now we have proposed the existence of a number of neural operators in the brain which are responsible for various higher cortical functions and have also proposed the probable neuroanatomical substrate for these operators. The cognitive operators we are referring to handle abstraction of generals from particulars, the perception of abstract causality in external reality, the perception of spatial or temporal sequences in external reality, and the ordering of elements of reality into causal chains giving rise to explanatory models of the external world, whether scientific or mythical. Briefly, the inferior parietal lobule on the dominant hemisphere of the brain, the anterior convexity of the frontal lobes primarily on the dominant side, and their reciprocal neural interconnections have been fairly definitively shown to account for causal sequencing of elements of reality abstracted from sense perceptions. The operation of cross-modal transfer, which is specific to the function of the inferior parietal lobule, is particularly implicated in causal sequencing. For convenience we refer to the anterior convexity of the frontal lobe, the inferior parietal lobule, and their reciprocal interconnections as the *causal operator*. Thus the causal operator performs its functions on any given strip of reality in the same way that a mathematical operator functions. It organizes that strip of reality into what is subjectively perceived as causal sequences back to the initial terminus of that strip. In view of the apparently universal human trait, under ordinary circumstances, of positing causes for any given strip of reality, we postulate that if the initial terminus is not given by sense data, the causal operator automatically generates an initial terminus.

Western science differs only accidentally from the more usual form of human cognition. Science refuses to postulate an initial terminus or first cause for any strip of reality unless it is observed or can be immediately inferred from observation. Under more usual conditions the causal operator generates the initial terminus or first cause of any strip of reality. The initial terminus is a mental construct drawn from elements encoded in memory and characterized by the nature of the operator itself. That is, the construct causes, or in some sense has the power to generate, the strip of reality. We are proposing that gods, powers, spirits, or in general what we have come to call personalized power sources, or any other causative construct, is automatically generated by the causal operator. Note that in speaking of Western science we have not have been speaking of Western scientists. The restrictions imposed on human thought in Western science are of a social and contractual nature. The brain of the scientist, however, functions no differently from that of anyone else. Although scientists may reject the idea of gods, spirits, demons, or any other type of personalized power source, they nevertheless experience them in dreams and fantasy life. The causal operator simply operates spontaneously on reality, positing an initial causal terminus when none is given. When the strip of reality to be analyzed is the totality of the universe, then the initial terminus or first cause that is automatically produced by the causal operator is Aristotle's First Mover Unmoved.

If this analysis is correct, then human beings have no choice but to construct myths consisting of personalized power sources to explain their world. The myths may be social in nature, or they may be individual in terms of dreams, daydreams, or other fantasies of the individual person. Nevertheless, as long as human beings are aware of the contingency of their existence in the face of what often appears to be a capricious universe, they must construct myths to orient themselves within that universe. Thus, the brain constructs gods, spirits, demons, or other personalized power sources with whom individuals can deal contractually in order to gain control over a capricious environment. Once unknown or mysterious causes of strips of reality are perceived as persons or personalized forces, people can deal with them as they would deal with powerful persons. For example, people can offer gifts in return for the spirits' beneficence. Thus, the concept of sacrifice as the *do ut des*

of ancient Roman religion is the most primitive contractual obligation entered into by man with power sources or gods. All this is inherent in the obligatory functioning of the neural structures we have just considered. Since it is unlikely that humankind will ever know the first cause of every strip of reality observed, it is highly probable that people will always generate gods, powers, demons, or other entities as first causes to explain what they observe. Indeed, people cannot do otherwise.

The development of higher cortical functions may be regarded as a blessing insofar as these functions allow humans to solve abstract problems, an adaptive mechanism in any environment. They can also be regarded as a curse. Because humans can think abstractly and causally, they can transcend their immediate perceptual field. From experience, they can postulate probable events under given circumstances. Most of all, these functions make humans acutely aware of their own mortality and of the contingency of their existence in an unpredictable world. This is the basis of the existential anxiety that all humans bear within them. It is to relieve this curse of cognition, this existential anxiety, that humans first seek mastery over their environment by attempting to organize it mythically and by attempting to control it through the intervention of personalized power constructs. We propose that the control aspect of religion is a self-maintenance system par excellence. Religion allows for a sense of control over the environment which preserves the necessary positive psychological outlook to allow individuals and social groups to perform the actual manipulations in the external world which, in fact, do lead to some measure of control and ultimately to survival. This control aspect of religion, in which the brain generates gods, spirits, and powers and manipulates them by sacrifice, prayer, and other contractual situations, is probably the most primitive form of religion. It is the predominant form in primitive societies and during the early historic period. Early Roman religion is a particularly pertinent example in that it was a state religion which concerned itself almost exclusively with the manipulation of deities for the purposes of the state. Although this manipulative and contractual aspect of religion predominates in primitive societies and in the early historic phases of the higher cultures, it is nevertheless present, to some extent at least, even in the most developed and advanced religions. This is certainly true of contemporary popular religious practice. We propose that the attempt to control the environment by means of the positing of, and control of, personal power sources is sufficient in and of itself to constitute religion.

We should note that the causal operator also may impose a spurious causality relating inanimate objects directly to each other, but not through the mediation of personalized power sources. This process we have chosen to call *magic*, and not *religion*. Thus, when a direct causal connection is seen between sticking a pin in a doll and a victim's having a heart attack, we would call this magic. Religion, understood as we are presenting it, requires the mediation of personalized power constructs. Thus, the *ex opere operantis* theory of sacramental efficacy of classic Protestantism would be seen as a religious model, whereas the *ex opere operato* theory of classic Roman Catholic sacramental theology would be seen as a magical model within an overall religious system.

3. RELIGION AS SELF-TRANSCENDENCE

There is a second neural mechanism which produces phenomena that are quite distinct from the control aspect of religion but that are nevertheless seen as intrinsically religious when they occur. In fact, in most of the worlds high religions, the class of phenomena arising from this second neural mechanism is usually seen as expressing the summit or the ultimate in each religious tradition. However, it is extremely rare for this class of phenomena to occur independently of some aspect of religion generated by the control mechanisms alluded to in section 2. What we are talking about here is what is often referred to as *mystical phenomena*, or altered states of consciousness generating a sense of some interaction with another, mysterious world which in some way is perceived as ultimate or transcendent.

Since the early 1960s there have been many attempts on the part of philosophers of religion and others to define mystical experiences and to categorize them. As with religion in general, so with mysticism in particular, there seems to be no way to arrive at a general definition of mysticism that encompasses all of its manifestations. Gimello, however, points out some cogent characteristics of mysticism which seem to get at core manifestations:

> A mystical experience is a state of mind, achieved commonly through some sort of self-cultivation, of which the following are usually or often the salient, but not necessarily the only, features:
>
> A feeling of oneness or unity, variously defined.
>
> A strong confidence in the "reality" or "objectivity" of the experience, i.e. a conviction that it is somehow revelatory of "the truth."
>
> A sense of the final inapplicability to the experience of conventional language, i.e. a sense that the experience is ineffable.
>
> A cessation of normal intellectual operations (e.g. deduction, discrimination, ratiocination, speculation, etc.) or the substitution for them of some "higher" or qualitatively different mode of intellect (e.g. intuition).
>
> A sense of the coincidence of opposites, of various kinds (paradoxically).
>
> An extraordinarily strong affective tone, again of various kinds (e.g. sublime joy, utter serenity, great fear, incomparable pleasure, etc.—often an unusual combination of such as these). (Gimello 1978, 178)

If we take this as a tentative definition of *mystical experience*, the problem is that it is not clear which elements, if any, are invariant across cultures. We are beginning to feel that a neuropsychological analysis of mysticism and altered phases of consciousness in general can begin to bring some order out of the confusion if we attempt to set up a typology of mystical experiences based on the underlying brain functions that seem to generate such experiences.

Although we do not have sufficient space to consider the details of neurophysiology, we will briefly review some basic aspects. The human autonomic nervous system is divided into two subsystems: the sympathetic and parasympathetic systems. The sympathetic system is concerned with short-term energy-expending reactions to unforeseen environmental circumstances. It is the system regulating *fight or flight*. The parasympathetic system governs homeostasis or maintenance functions of the body such as digestion and regulation of baseline temperature, respiration, and blood pressure. In the late 1920s and early 1930s, a number of investigators following Hess proposed that these two peripheral nervous systems extended into the midbrain and beyond. They proposed naming the entire sympathetic system, including parts projecting into the midbrain, the "ergotropic," or energy-expending system. Likewise, they proposed that the parasympathetic system extending into the midbrain be called the "trophotropic" or energy-conserving system. In our work we have adopted this nomenclature, because *energy-expending* and *energy-conserving* capture the essence of what these autonomic subsystems do.

We have previously suggested that rhythmicity in the environment, be it visual, auditory, tactile, or proprioceptive, drives the sympathetic-ergotropic system to maximal capacity with intermittent spillover and simultaneous activation of the parasympathetic-trophotropic system, thus creating unusual subjective states. One of the things that happens is progressive activation of certain parts of the nondominant parieto-occipital region of the brain (which we are calling the "holistic operator"), creating an increasing sense of wholeness becoming more dominant over the sense of multiplicity of baseline reality. All this has very complicated consequences, which we will consider later.

Activation of the holistic operator and the attainment of certain ecstatic and blissful states also can be strongly reinforced, if not totally achieved, by means of other mechanisms. Thus, meditation approaches the problem from the direction opposite

from ritual and highly rhythmic behavior. Certain types of meditation drive the parasympathetic trophotropic system to saturation and spillover, with simultaneous activation of the sympathetic-ergotropic system. The end result is the same in both cases. Likewise, the use of incense and other powerful fragrances directly affects the limbic system, which, in the old neurological terminology, used to be called the *rhinencephalon*, or the *nose brain*. There are a number of connections both direct and indirect between the olfactory bulb and various midbrain-limbic structures, including the median forebrain bundle. This latter structure is generally considered a major pleasure center, and it has been shown that rats would much rather stimulate this center than eat. In fact, rats can die of starvation by overstimulating their median forebrain bundles and not taking enough time to eat. The stimulation of the olfactory bulbs and adjacent structures by the use of incense represents a powerful synergistic mechanism to both rhythmicity and meditation in the production of ecstatic unitary states.

It seems that as far as religion goes, *unitary states* are of fundamental importance. The essential point in understanding the phenomenology of subjective religious experience is to understand that every religious experience involves a sense of the unity of reality at least somewhat greater than the baseline perception of unity in day-to-day life (d'Aquili 1986). This is another way of saying that a more intense application of the holistic operator to incoming stimuli, over and above its baseline function, coupled with the limbic or emotional stimulation that accompanies such increased functioning, always results in experiences that are described as religious or spiritual in varying degrees. Whatever the mechanism for the increased functioning of the holistic operator may be, whether it is rhythmicity and entrainment of brainwaves, profound meditation, olfactory stimulation in certain contexts, extreme fasting, or electrolyte imbalance, the end result is stimulation of the holistic operator with accompanying experiences of increased unity over multiplicity.

This now brings us to the most important mystical state, Absolute Unitary Being, or AUB. AUB is a state described in the mystical literature of all the world's great religions. When people are in that state they lose all sense of discrete being, and even the difference between self and other is obliterated. There is no sense of the passing of time, and all that remains is a perfect timeless undifferentiated consciousness. When such a state is suffused with positive affect, there is a tendency to describe the experience, after the fact, as personal. Hence, such experiences often are described as a perfect union with God (the *unio mystica* of the Christian tradition), or else the perfect manifestation of God in the Hindu tradition. When such experiences are accompanied by neutral affect, they tend to be described, after the fact, as impersonal. This likely results in generating concepts such as the abyss of Jacob Boeme, the Void, or Nirvana, of Buddhism, or the Absolute of a number of philosophical traditions. There is no question that whether the experience is interpreted personally as God or impersonally as the Absolute, it possesses a quality of transcendent wholeness without any temporal or spatial division whatsoever.

We have postulated that these rare states of AUB are attained through the absolute functioning of the holistic operator (d'Aquili 1982). In all likelihood, the neurological substrate for the holistic operator involves the function of a part of the parietal lobe on the nondominant side. We have previously described a model which attempts to explain the attainment of Absolute Unitary Being by integrating W. R. Hess's ergotropic-trophotropic model with the split-brain research described by Roger Sperry (1974) and elaborated upon by J. E. Bogan (1969), C. Trevarthen (1969), and others. In this model we proposed that the ergotrophic system actually extended upward to include the dominant hemisphere, and that the trophotropic system extended upward to include the nondominant hemisphere. We postulated that if either one or the other system were driven to a state of saturation, the opposite system would be briefly stimulated, as we know occurs in third-state autonomic stimulation such that for a brief period there would be firing of both systems. Thus, during Absolute Unitary Being, not only would there be maximum discharge from the holistic operator and other neural structures

on the nondominant side generating a sense of absolute wholeness, but there would also be an intense firing of structures on the left, or dominant, hemisphere associating with that wholeness the intense consciousness of the reflexive ego associated with normal left-hemispheric functioning. Thus, the experience of Absolute Unitary Being is not a vague sense of undifferentiated wholeness but a sense of intense consciousness, because both systems are firing maximally. If this model is correct, it should be obvious that AUB involves an extreme state of functioning of the holistic operator. More usual or ordinary perceptions reflect some sort of balance between analytic and synthetic, or gestalt, perception. We propose, however, that even in more normal perceptions, whenever the sense of wholeness exceeds the sense of multiplicity of parts or of discrete elements, there is an affective discharge by means of the right brain—limbic connections that Schwartz, Davidson, and Maer (1975) have shown to be of such importance. This tilting of the balance toward an increased perception of wholeness, depending on its intensity, can be experienced along a spectrum as beauty, romantic love, numinosity, or the religious awe described by Smart (1958, 1967, 1969), or religious exaltation in the perception of unity in multiplicity described by Stace (1961) as extrovertive mystical experience, all merging into various trance states ultimately terminating in AUB.

We are proposing that there is an aesthetic-religious spectrum and that the point on this spectrum of any perception depends on how far it is tilted in the direction of wholeness (d'Aquili 1986). As we move to the far end of the spectrum, we enter into the realm of trance states often associated with hyperlucid visions in which the increased sense of unity begins to obliterate the boundaries between perceived entities, both in the external environment and especially in the boundaries between self and other. Examples of such trance states and visions include the states achieved by members of flagellant sects during the Middle Ages, the states known to be achieved by Taiwanese mediums, and states attained by practitioners of voodoo in Haiti and the Umbanda of Brazil. Certainly trance states can exist in varying degrees, from a mild blurring of boundaries at one end all the way to merging into the state of Absolute Unitary Being at the other. As we have described it, AUB represents the extreme of the aesthetic-religious continuum and the absolute functioning of the holistic operator. During this final state there is nothing but a timeless and perfect sense of meaning and wholeness without any perception of discrete entities. One might call AUB the ultimate trance.

It is clear that all these experiences in one way or another involve self-transcendence. This is the second manifestation of religion. Theoretically it can stand on its own, but it rarely if ever does. It is usually integrated in one form or another, at least minimally, with the first aspect of religion mentioned above, that is, an attempt to control the external environment. One might ask why one would wish to transcend oneself. It is intuitively obvious why human beings would wish to control their environment. It is not so clear why one would wish to transcend the self. The answer is obvious to those who have had mystical experiences. It seems that such experiences are characterized, at the lower end of the aesthetic-religious spectrum, by a sense of insight into the world of the mysterious bordering on the supernatural, and at the extreme end of the spectrum, by a sense of attaining absolute reality, union with God or the Absolute, a sense of either bliss or utter tranquility, and perhaps most important of all, a lack of fear of death. It is almost universally reported from those who have experienced the final two stages of the aesthetic-religious spectrum, that is, either cosmic consciousness or Absolute Unitary Being, that they simply have no fear of death. This is not necessarily because they believe in an afterlife. They may or may not, depending on the general structure of the religious belief which they hold separate from their mystical experiences. Even if they do not believe in a specific afterlife, mystical experiences tend to generate a sense of the ultimate goodness and appropriateness of reality, and death is perceived as simply an ordinary part of that reality, something which is not feared.

Thus, it is easy to see why self-transcendence is highly prized. To a greater or lesser extent it makes an individual invulnerable to the exigencies of life and to the effects of evil in the world. It is something of a paradox that this second manifestation of

religion, at least toward the end of the aesthetic-religious spectrum, seems to involve a surrender to God, the Absolute, or to the universal fact of ultimate reality. In some respects, the state of AUB is distinguished from the first manifestation of religion that we considered in this paper, that is, the attempt to control the environment. It seems that AUB actually represents a surrender of the individual to absolute reality. In its more perfect or complete forms this second aspect of religion positively rejects any attempt at control of the physical universe, or even of one's own life, as being inimical to spiritual development. This being the case, it is curious that it is rare for either the first or the second manifestation of religion to stand on its own. However, the surrender of the self in AUB leads to a feeling of oneness with the universe and in this way allows the persons to feel ultimate control, because they actually are the universe. In other words, control of the universe from the perspective of the individual self is lost, but control is obtained on a more fundamental level.

Thus, in most cultures, the two manifestations of religion are integrated to a greater or lesser extent. The first manifestation of religion, control of the environment, is more likely to stand on its own, but even in primitive religions shamans or witch doctors enter into the other world of the gods and spirits and return to testify to its reality. Indeed, it is not too difficult to see how the second, or mystical, manifestation of religion can help the first. Insofar as altered states of consciousness and hyperlucid visions can be perceived as experiencing the world of the gods, they can be seen as immediate empirical verification of the existence of the personal power sources that are automatically constructed by the causal operator.

We are now in a position to see more clearly why religions and God won't go away. It seems that the essential elements of religion are hardwired in the brain. Cultural input may advance or diminish their effect, but they are always there ready to make an appearance when they are needed, psychologically for the individual or socially for the group. Their older cultural manifestations may recede from prominence, but ever-new ones jump on the stage ready to replace the older actors. Unless the hardwiring of the brain is fundamentally changed by evolution, which, by the way, would alter our humanity into an unrecognizable form, we must expect that religions and their gods will always be with us.

4. RELIGION AND REALITY—THE TRUTH CLAIM

Although on the basis of the model presented in this paper, it seems clear that all hyperlucid unitary states including AUB have their basis in neuroanatomy, neurophysiology, and the flux of neurotransmitters, it is equally true that baseline reality (lucid consciousness), which both the average person and the average scientist construe to be really real, is based on exactly the same parameters. Thus, one can never get at what is really out there without its being processed in one way or another by the brain.

Many find it deeply disturbing that the experience of God, the sense of the absolute, the sense of mystery and beauty in the universe, the most profoundly moving experiences of which humans are capable, might be reducible to neural tuning, to specific patterns of neural blips on an oscilloscope, or to measurable changes in brain-imaging studies. However, such a pessimistic interpretation misses a few rather important points. First of all, our experience of baseline reality (e.g., chairs, tables, love, hate), indeed of our whole physical and psychological environment, can also be reduced to neural blips and fluxes of brain chemistry. So what criteria can we use to evaluate whether God, other hyperlucid unitary experiences, or our everyday world is more real? Can we use our subjective sense of the absolute certainty of the objective reality of our everyday world to establish that that world is really real?

To simplify the issue somewhat, let us for the moment contrast the most extreme hyperlucid unitary state, that of AUB, with baseline reality. In such an exercise one can see that there is no question that AUB wins out as being experienced as more real. People who have experienced AUB,

and this includes some very learned and previously materialistically oriented scientists, regard AUB as being more fundamentally real than baseline reality. Even the memory of it is, for them, more fundamentally real than reality. A number of years ago we interviewed several people who had undergone this experience. There is no doubt that it, and even the memory of it, carried the sense of greater fundamental reality than that generated by their experiences of day-to-day living. If we use the criterion, therefore, of the sense of certainty of the objective reality of that state, AUB wins hands down.

To further clarify this point, let us compare four characteristics of baseline reality (coherent lucid consciousness) with the hyperlucid consciousness of the various unitary states. Baseline reality demonstrates the following four fundamental properties:

1. A strong sense of the reality of what is experienced.
2. Endurance of that reality through very long periods of time, usually interrupted only by sleeping.
3. The sense that when elements in baseline reality disappear from all forms of sensory detection, they have ceased to be.
4. High cross-subjective validation both for details of perception and core meaning. In other words, other people corroborate our perceptions of the world, that is, reality is a collective hunch.

The essential characteristics of hyperlucid unitary consciousness are the following:

1. An extremely strong sense of reality, to the point of its being absolutely compelling under almost all circumstances.
2. Endurance for short periods of time relative to the sense of time of baseline reality.
3. A sense of its underlying persistence and continued existence even when the perception of the overall state has ended.
4. High cross-subjective validation for core perceptions. Moderate to low cross-subjective validation for perceptual detail in those hyperlucid states in which discrete being is perceived (as in near-death experiences).

We would maintain that it is impossible to determine whether the various hyperlucid unitary states or baseline reality is more real, that is, which represents the ultimate objective reality without the need for gratuitous and unsubstantiated assumptions. Clearly baseline reality has some significant claim to being ultimate reality. However, Absolute Unitary Being is so compelling that it is very difficult indeed to write off the assertion of its reality. Actually, for individuals who have experienced AUB, it seems virtually impossible to negate that experience, no matter what level of education or sophistication such experiencers may have. This being the case, it is a foolish reductionism indeed that states that, because hyperlucid unitary consciousness can be understood in terms of neuropsychological processes, it is therefore derivative from baseline reality. Indeed the reverse argument could just as well be made. Neuropsychology can give no answer to the question of which state is more real, baseline reality or hyperlucid unitary consciousness often experienced as God. We are reduced to saying that each is real in its own way and for its own adaptive ends.

Specifically, the essential characteristics of different states of reality are eventually reducible only to the strength of the sense of reality, the *phantasia catalyptica* of the Stoics or the *Anwesenheit* (compelling presence) of certain modern German philosophers. A vivid sense of reality may be the only thing that we can use to help determine what is really real until someone determines a method for going beyond the brain's perception of reality. This conclusion may not be very satisfying epistemologically, but until now any alternative has escaped us.

Therefore we must conceive of the brain as a machine which operates upon whatever fundamental reality may be and produces, at the very least, two basic versions. One version is a world of discrete beings, usually baseline reality, and the other version is Absolute Unitary Being, usually

experienced as God. Both perceptions are accompanied by a profound subjective certainty of their objective reality. Whatever is prior to the experience of either Absolute Unity or the baseline reality of everyday life is in principle unknowable, because what is in any way known must be translated, and in this sense transformed, by the brain. Such considerations indeed put us in the presence of the *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*.

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III.5

Religious Experience and Naturalistic Explanations

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Jeff Jordan (1959–) is professor of philosophy at the University of Delaware. His primary area of research is the philosophy of religion, and he is best known for his work on Pascal's Wager. In the present article, Jordan argues that the evidential value of religious experiences is undercut by the availability of naturalistic explanations for them. However, he also notes that there is no reason at present to think that all religious experiences will admit of naturalistic explanation.

Would the discovery of an adequate naturalistic explanation of religious experiences diminish the evidential value of those experiences? Many prominent philosophers such as C.D. Broad, John Hick, Richard Swinburne and William Wainwright, among others, argue that a naturalistic explanation need not be detrimental to the evidential value of religious experiences at all.[1] These philosophers hold that a naturalistic explanation would be detrimental only if it were demonstrated that there is no God.

Now the contention that, even if a naturalistic explanation were discovered, that alone would have no impact on the evidential value of religious experiences, in the absence of a good reason to think that God does not exist, is surprising. It is surprising because a naturalistic explanation of religious experience appears, at least *prima facie*, to threaten the evidential value of religious experience, since a naturalistic explanation would explain the occurrence of religious experiences via a list of purely natural (nonsupernatural) antecedents, with no need to include God among the causes. For instance, Freud saw religion as an illusory defence created by the human imagination against the dangers of nature. Such a reduction to purely natural causes leaves divine activity out of the picture. And if God is out of the picture, there seems to be no reason to consider these experiences as evidence of divine activity. It is the argument of this paper that not only is the contention of those philosophers mentioned above surprising, it is also wrong. In what follows, I argue that a naturalistic explanation, if considered adequate, would seriously diminish the evidential value of any argument from religious experience for theistic belief. While it is true that a naturalistic explanation, if considered adequate, would not prove that every religious experience is delusive, such an explanation would undermine any evidential value we would otherwise be inclined to grant those experiences.

I

Before asking whether a naturalistic explanation would undermine the evidential value of a religious experience, one must answer a prior question having to do with the relevance of examining an experience's causal origins with regard to its epistemic value. A long tradition championed by William James claims that it is the behavourial fruit which results from a given experience that is to be the criterion of epistemic value, and not the causal root of the experience.[2] The inquiry into the causes

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of an experience, according to this tradition, is irrelevant in an epistemic assessment of that purported religious experience.

But this Jamesian attitude neglects an important feature of any appeal to religious experience as evidence for the existence of God: the epistemic legitimacy of religious experience is said to derive largely from the similarities between it and sense experience. Religious experience, the claim goes, is as much a mode of perception as sense experience: either because of some general principle which subsumes both, or because of the large number of common features shared by the two modes of experience.[3] This epistemic parity provides a sort of perceptual authority to religious experience; it would also allow for the relevance of causal inquiry. Assessments of controversial sensory perceptual claims often involve causal inquiries. For example, S's claim to have seen a certain tree is vitiated by pointing out that the tree cannot be seen from S's viewpoint because of, say, a wall. The epistemic value of a given sense perception rests upon an assumed causal relationship: one's experience of X must have the presence of X as a relevant contributing cause if it is to be judged a veridical perception. Likewise, with religious experiences: S's claim to have experienced God can be considered veridical only if her experience of the presence of God was in fact caused by God being present.

Accepting the causal theory of perception as correct, then for all persons S and objects X, we can say that S's experience of X is a veridical perception only if:

> A. (a) X is present to S; and (b) S's experience of X is caused by X in an appropriate way; and (c) S knows that it is X that she is perceiving.[4]

Condition (a), the "presence condition," entails that a perception is veridical only if the object of the perception exists, and is within the epistemic scope of the subject. So, for a person to see a particular tree, that tree must be within one's eyesight. Condition (b), the "causal condition," entails that the object of a veridical perception plays a relevant role in bringing about the experience. While it is true that the notions of causation and presence involved in (a) and (b) are vague and, as has been pointed out by Strawson and others, vary according to the mode of perception involved, they capture the important claim of the causal theory — if S's awareness of X is to be taken as a veridical perception, X must have been epistemically accessible to S and X must have played a relevant role in bringing about the experience of S.[5]

If a religious experience is to be taken as a sort of perception, both (a) and (b) must be met: God must be there for S to perceive, and God must play a relevant causal role in S's experience. An adequate naturalistic explanation of a purported religious experience would show (or at least tend to show) that one or the other of the two relevant conditions of (A) did not obtain.

II

Presumably a purported adequate naturalistic explanation of a religious experience would diminish the evidential value of that experience by denying it consideration as a legitimate mode of perception. Denying religious experience consideration as a legitimate mode of perception would be accomplished by showing—either conclusively or probabilistically—that one or the other of the necessary conditions for perception did not obtain for the religious experience in question. For example, a proponent of, say, the logical problem of evil might claim that the presence condition does not obtain when God is the object of that experience. This is so, according to the LPE proponent, because there is no God which could present himself to S.

It is often claimed that an attack on the presence condition requires a good argument—whether conclusive or probablistic—against the existence of God.[6] But it is not clear that such is required. For instance, two ways which might be cited as arguing against the epistemic accessibility of God without denying the existence of God, might be termed the "Kantian" and the "Barthian" ways respectively. The Kantian way would proceed along the line that God must be unknowable in order to leave

room for faith and morality. Faith, if it is to be genuine, requires the hiddenness of God. The Barthian would make the characteristic Reformed claim that because of sin and moral turpitude, the human intellect, as well as the human will, is unreliable and cannot know the hidden God. Despite the complexity and obscurity of these two ways, it does seem clear enough that neither entails that God does not exist even though both do argue (or at least claim) that God is unknowable and so epistemically inaccessible.

On the other hand, short of a good argument for the nonexistence of God, an adequate naturalistic explanation of religious experience would be, at best, a good reason to hold that neither (a) nor (b) probably holds for religious experiences. A naturalistic explanation, *sans* an argument for the nonexistence of God, could not be a conclusive reason to think that neither (a) nor (b) holds for all religious experiences. Even if, up till now, all religious experiences thought to be veridical originated from purely physical causes, it does not follow that all experiences thought to be religious will originate from physical causes. If there is a God then it is possible that he may yet reveal himself; and so, it would be possible that there may yet be veridical religious experiences not subsumed under a naturalistic explanation. One further point is clear also: that an attack on the presence condition (utilizing either the Kantian or the Barthian way) would entail much supporting argumentation. The more promising target, it would seem then, would be not the presence condition of an apparent veridical perception; but rather, what we called the causal condition.

The causal condition requires that S has had a veridical perception of X only if X played a relevant causal role in bringing about the experience of S. That is, X must be a relevant causally necessary condition of S's experience of X. So to produce an experience of X without involving X as an appropriate causally necessary condition of that experience would demonstrate that the experience of X was not a veridical perception of X: that the causal condition did not obtain. One can show that the causal condition did not obtain by showing that the experience of X was due to something other than X. X was not, in other words, causally involved in bringing about one's apparent experience of X. Notice also, however, that an experience of X must have X as an *appropriate* causal condition.[7] For instance, if Teresa, through the use of an elaborate scheme of mirrors, causes John to have an experience of herself standing in front of him, that experience should be judged delusory because Teresa was not a causally necessary condition in an appropriate way. John did not see Teresa herself; he saw only a reflection, while Teresa, let us suppose, actually stood behind John manipulating the mirrors. John's experience is delusive because, even though Teresa is involved in the causal train leading up to it, the presence of Teresa was not a causal condition in an appropriate way: being behind John, Teresa could not have been causally involved in an appropriate way in John's visual experience. Teresa herself was beyond John's arc of vision and so a necessary feature of visual appropriateness was not met. John's experience is, at best, an indirect perception of Teresa.[8] One has not experienced the cup on the table, if the apparent cup is a hologram—even though the real cup may be a causally necessary condition in the production of the hologram and, consequently, of one's experience. So the causal condition can be impugned in either of two ways: (I) one may show that X had no causal input in an apparent experience of X; or (II) one may show mat X had no relevant, no appropriate, causal input in the experience.

Suppose that we could produce, say with the use of a certain drug, experiences which were indistinguishable phenomenologically from those experiences traditionally taken to be religious experiences. That is, the ingestion of our hypothetical drug is sufficient to produce an apparent experience of God. The existence of a natural means of inducing an apparent religious experience would serve as evidence against the evidential value of any religious experience: the fact that religious experiences can be produced by purely natural causes would greatly diminish the probability that these experiences are veridical perceptions of their purported object. The existence of such a drug would constitute a plausible reason to think that (I) holds. Or again, suppose that it was

discovered that religious experiences originated from some psychological abnormality present in all those and only those who have had such experiences. One might hold, as John Hick does, that "there may be a religious as well as a naturalistic interpretation of the psychological facts."[9] In other words, religious experiences could be overdetermined: they may admit of more than one sufficient causal condition at a time. But if one reasonably believed that religious experiences were due to some psychological state, then it would seem problematic to hold that these same experiences were a kind of perception of God. The attribution of God as a sufficient cause of the experiences may, in fact, be true: according to classical theism, God is a sufficient causal cause of all contingent things. But such an attribution seems wholly irrelevant as regards (A). God's causal input at this point, assuming for a moment that there is a God, does not seem to be the sort necessary for the satisfaction of (A). This sort of divine causation seems too general to constitute the sort required by (A). Even if God is a sufficient causal cause of all contingent things, such a drug-induced experience would be a good reason to think that (II) holds.

One possible objection to this would run as follows. Suppose we can produce a drug which generates delusive yet phenomenologically similar experiences of cups, say, or of persons. Does this by itself greatly diminish the probability that these experiences (experiences of real cups or of real persons) are veridical perceptions? Would the experience of such a drug serve as a good reason to think that (I) obtains vis-à-vis cup experiences or people experiences? It does not seem to; but then, why think so with regard to religious experiences?

One relevant difference between the cup/persons case and the religious case with regard to the "replication problem" involves the plausible, albeit defeasible, principle that:

> B. whenever there are distinct yet phenomenologically similar experiences M and N, it is likely that the causes of M and N are similar.[10]

A veridical perception of a cup or a person involves a physical cause—respectively the real cup or the person herself—just as the drug-generated replication involves a physical cause: namely, the drug itself. But in the case of religious experiences, the purported object of a veridical religious experience, God, is wholly unlike any physical cause. And this radical qualitative difference between the possible causes of religious experience seems to render (B) pernicious in the case of religious experiences. That is, (B) conjoined with the fact (if it is a fact) that there are, say, drug-induced experiences which replicate those experiences traditionally taken to be genuinely religious, seems to diminish greatly the probability that any religious experience is a veridical perception of God. No doubt this is not the full story of why a drug-generated replication is telling in the one case and not in the other. Nonetheless, it is enough to indicate that there is a relevant difference between the cases, and so, it is not surprising that the "replication problem" should impact the respective cases differently.

In the following sections we will examine two arguments—one having to do with the object of religious experience; the other, with the nature of religious experience—which support the contention that an adequate naturalistic explanation of religious experience would seriously diminish the cognitive worth of the experience.

III

In an influential essay published in 1939, C.D. Broad argued that a naturalistic explanation of religious experiences (specifically a psychological explanation) would not prove those experiences to be delusive.[11] Even if it were shown that religious experiences resulted from some psychological abnormality, one could not infer validly that religious experiences were delusive. This is so, Broad argued, because "one might need to be slightly 'cracked' in order to have some peep-holes into the supersensible world."[12] A certain psychological state might be a causally necessary condition for religious experiences to be veridical. According to Broad, then, the veridicality of religious experiences is compatible with a certain psychological state, even an abnormal psychological state, being the genetic origin of those experiences.

With regard to religious belief Broad's argument is sound; but with regard to the evidential value of religious experiences for theistic belief, Broad's argument could not provide support for a theistic use of psychologically generated experiences because of the following. Theists traditionally have claimed that God is sovereign by which is meant, at the least, that there are no causal determinates of the divine will independent of the divine nature. God is such a being that it is logically impossible that there be causally necessary conditions for the divine will. So to say that S experienced God is to say that God revealed himself to S—that the divine presence is a divine prerogative. God was experienced by S means according to classical theism that God actively manifested himself to S. It was up to God whether or not S would experience him. So, if we reasonably believed that religious experiences are causally due to a certain psychological state, then we would have a good reason to doubt the evidential value of those experiences with regard to the God of theism. Being sovereign, the God of theism, if he exists, is such as to have no causally necessary conditions of his will. Broad's claim, then, that it is possible that a certain psychological state be a causally necessary condition of veridicality is irrelevant. The discovery of such a natural origin of religious experiences would serve as a good reason to think that the causal condition did not obtain: the God of theism is sovereign with regard to causal determinates.

IV

Earlier it was noted that the criteria of appropriateness are relative to the mode of perception involved. We can now identify one such criterion for any theistic religious experience which is veridical:

> C. if there is a set of natural conditions which, when operative, bring about an experience which is phenomenologically indistinguishable from those experiences traditionally taken to be theistic experiences, then no experience which appears to be theistic can be taken as veridical perceptions.

According to (C), a theistic experience E should be considered veridical only if E lacks, as far as one can determine, a purely naturalistic explanation. If there was some naturalistic explanation N, such that whenever N was present, a theistic experience invariably occurred, we would have good reason to discount the evidential value of every theistic experience. It is not that the presence of N shows that every theistic experience is delusory. It is, rather, that N makes it appear likely that (II) holds for religious experiences. Some religious experiences may be veridical, but given that we know of a naturalistic way to produce those experiences, all religious experiences would lose any epistemic presumption that they would have enjoyed in the absence of a naturalistic explanation.

It may be objected that it is possible that God may will to reveal himself only to those who have satisfied certain conditions (such as, being virtuous, or being humble, or having a focused consciousness, or those who have fasted for a specified period). No doubt this is true, but it does not rescue Broad's argument. There is a real distinction between an intentional effort to fulfill certain objectives and being in certain mental states (one does not consciously will oneself to be neurotic, for instance). Broad's position, I take it, has to do with the latter and not the former. But those theists who claim that there are certain prerequisites, or at least facilitators, of religious experience are concerned with the former and not the latter. Broad's argument has to do with psychological states which are unintentional and which serve as necessary causal conditions of a revelation of God.[13] This, as has been argued, seems incompatible with theistic belief.

V

Both Richard Swinburne and William Wainwright argue that there could not be a naturalistic explanation which would impugn the causal condition of a religious experience.[14] According to these philosophers, the hypothetical drug of section III would not be sufficient to impugn the causal condition

because if there is a God, then that being is involved in all causal processes. Any experience would have God among the causes: specifically, any religious experience will have God involved in its causal process by virtue of the fact that there are causal processes only because God sustains them.

Swinburne's argument can be formulated so:

1. According to classical theism God is both omnipresent and the sustainer of all causal processes. So,
2. if God exists, then any experience apparently of God will be a genuine experience of God (both the presence and the causal conditions will be satisfied). So,
3. in order to show that either the presence condition or the causal condition did not obtain, one would need a good argument against the existence of God. And,
4. such an argument is very unlikely.

Therefore,

5. a naturalistic explanation of religious experience would be detrimental to the evidential value of those experiences only if there is a good argument for the nonexistence of God.

There are two problems with this argument. The first has to do with the second premise: even a theist could not be comfortable with the truth of (2). Not all experiences of God, most theists would claim, turn out to be just that: genuine experiences of God. Satan, St. Paul writes, can disguise himself as "an angel of light."[15] So if (2) were true, the theistically desirable distinction between genuine experiences and deceptive experiences would be lost.[16]

A second objection to the argument has to do with both the second and third premises and with the nature of perception itself. (A) entails that S's experience of X is veridical only if X played a relevant causal role in the production of S's experience. That is, X must be causally involved in an appropriate way. According to (1), if God exists, then he is a causally necessary condition in all causal processes. So, with our hypothetical drug, even though it alone seemed sufficient to induce a religious experience, it is possible that God was a causally necessary condition in the drug's efficacy. The drug was effective, according to this line of thought, only because God sustained the causal interactions; and therefore, his constant preservation was a causally necessary factor in the production of the experience. This notion of God as the necessary sustainer of all, found in (1), results from the doctrine of conservation.

There is no doubt that the doctrine of conservation is in fact a traditional belief of classical theism. Augustine wrote of it, "for the power and might of the creator, who rules and embraces all, makes every creature abide; and if this power ever ceased to govern creatures, their essences would pass away and all nature would perish."[17] Concerning the doctrine Thomas wrote that "the being of every creature depends on God, so that not for a moment could it subsist, but would fall into nothingness, were it not kept in being by the operation of the divine power."[18] And in the Third Meditation, Descartes utilized the doctrine in his causal proof for the existence of God. The import of the doctrine of conservation is the claim that the existence of every contingent being and event depends causally on the creative powers of God.[19] In other words:

> D. for any contingent thing X, X exists at a time t if and only if God brings about at t that X exists.

Now (D) not only entails that God is a causally necessary condition in all causal processes, but (D) also entails that God is a logically necessary condition in the existence of all contingent things.[20] Being preserved by God is an essential property of all contingent things because a thing could not remain what it is in the absence of God's constant conservation.

So the idea found in premise one of Swinburne's argument is right: if (D) is true (which is possible), then God is a causally necessary condition in all causal processes. But it is not clear that the possibility of (D) is at all relevant to whether (A) obtains or not. Remember (A) entails that X be an appropriate cause in the production of S's experience. So, by either showing that (I) or (II) holds, one can show that (A) does not obtain. While (D)

precludes (I) from holding, it certainly seems irrelevant to whether (II) holds.

One feature of the appropriateness of theistic religious experience, as we have seen, is that all experiences of God, if genuine, are revelations on God's part. God intended to manifest himself to S, if S has had a veridical experience of God. God makes himself known. But not every apparent experience of God fulfills this feature of appropriateness. St. Teresa, for example, was constantly wary of taking a delusive experience as veridical, because not every apparent experience of God, she held, is a genuine experience of God. Some experiences are deceptive. In these spurious experiences, God did not, we might say, intend to reveal himself. According to (D), however, God is nonetheless a causally necessary condition in a delusive experience. Indeed, (D) entails that God would be a causally necessary condition in all experiences—whether he intended to reveal himself or not. Perhaps we can say with regard to (D) that God permits all contingent things—beings, experiences, events—to obtain. But he does not intend to reveal himself in all contingent things. To hold otherwise would extinguish the distinction that theists have traditionally wanted to hold between genuine experiences (those of God) and deceptive experiences (those of the devil).

With the distinction between God intending an experience and merely permitting an experience, we can see that both (2) and (3) are false: there is a real distinction between genuine and deceptive experiences of God even for the theist; and one can show that the causal condition does not obtain independent of showing that there is no God. The latter is accomplished by showing that an experience of X is delusive because X was not a causally necessary condition in an appropriate way. This can be done even though X was, in fact, a causally necessary condition of the experience. The attempt by Wainwright and Swinburne to show that the causal condition of religious experience could not be impugned by, say, our hypothetical drug example fails. Even though (D) is possible, it is also irrelevant in the determination of whether the causal condition obtains in a given experience.

VI

A naturalistic explanation of religious experiences would, if considered adequate, seriously diminish the evidential value of those experiences. Such has been the argument of this paper. The loss of evidential value would come as a result of showing that the experiences were not appropriately connected to their purported object. The apparent object of the experience was just that: only an apparent and not a real contributing factor in a causally appropriate way. Just as a cup hologram does not constitute a veridical visual perception, neither does an experience purportedly of God that arises merely from physical causes.

Of course the question of whether there are naturalistic explanations of religious experiences is a completely different question from the one we have been considering. Certainly some historically influential thinkers, such as Feuerbach and Freud, have claimed that one can indeed provide an adequate naturalistic explanation of religious experience. But it is not controversial to note that such theories have not gained a wide acceptance. Perhaps, a cautions answer to this latest question is this: given our present state of knowledge, no one has yet provided a good reason to think that all religious experiences admit of a naturalistic explanation; and are, therefore, delusory.

NOTES

1. By religious experience I mean those experiences traditionally taken to be theistic experiences.
2. Actually we can identify two closely related but distinct traditions concerning the relevance of an inquiry into an experiences's causal origins. The first tradition holds that an experience's fruits would identify the causal roots of that experience E. If E resulted in moral living, for instance, then, according to this tradition, E was produced by God. As Teresa of Avila put it, "when a location comes from the devil, it not only fails to leave behind good effects, but leaves bad ones" (*The Life of Teresa of Jesus*, trans. E.A. Pears (Garden City, NY: Image Books, 1960), p. 237. See also Jonathan Edwards, *A Treatise on Religious Affections* (Grand Rapids, MN: Baker, 1982), pp. 258–64).

   The second tradition, of which James was certainly a participant, held that all concern should be with the effects of E, and only indifference is shown to the causal origins of E. It does not matter, according to this second view, what the causal origin of a beneficial experience is. See *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (NY: Modern Library, 1936), pp. 16–22. W.T. Stace would also fit in this second tradition. See *Mysticism and Philosophy* (London: MacMillan, 1960), pp. 29–31.
3. Included among versions of the former sort are Richard Swinburne, *The Existence of God* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1978), pp. 254–71. And W.L. Alston, "Religious Experience as a Ground of Religious Belief," *Religious Experience and Religious Belief*, ed. J. Runzo and C.K. Ihara (NY: University Press of America, 1986), pp. 31–51. Of the latter sort, see Gary Gutting, *Religious Belief and Religious Scepticism* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1982), pp. 151–3. And William Wainwright, *Mysticism* (London: Harvester Press, 1981), pp. 100–1.
4. On the causal theory of perception see the classic essay by H.P. Grice, "The Causal Theory of Perception," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* supplementary volume, 35 (1961): 121–54, and *P.F.* Strawson, "Causation in Perception", *Freedom and Resentment* (London: Methuen, 1974). pp. 66–84, and R.M. Chisholm, *Preceiving: A Philosophical Study* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell, 1957), pp. 142–51. And see Robert Audi, *Belief, Justification and Knowledge* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1988), pp. 15–6.
5. So Strawson, op. cit., pp. 79–81. And Chisholm, op. cit., pp. 149–50.
6. See for example: Richard Swinburne, *The Existence of God*, p. 270; and see William Rowe, "Religious Experience and the Principle of Credulity," *International Journal for the Philosophy of Religion* 13 (1982): 88–9.
7. The criteria of appropriateness are relative to the mode of perception involved. A criterion of appropriateness for religious experience will be discussed in Section IV.
8. When the astronomer looks through the telescope at Mars, some philosophers would contend that she sees both Mars and the reflection of Mars. (So, George Mavrodes, *Belief in God*, (1970; rept., Washington, DC: University Press of America), pp. 58–70). But given the noncontroversial distinction between an object p and an image of p, it seems more accurate to hold that the astronomer sees the image of Mars, and knowing (or at least believing) that her telescope is reliable and in good working order (it is not distorting the refracted light), she has then a good idea of what Mars looks like. Mavrodes's "rule of input alignment" is, therefore, if not false, metaphorical at best. See his *Belief in God*, p. 60.
9. *Philosophy of Religion* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1983), pp. 34–6. See also C.R. Brakenhielm, *Problems of Religious Experience* (Stockholm: Uppsala, 1985), pp. 95–101.
10. Principle (B) is, confessedly, much too imprecise. But the domain of "similar" must be construed as being broad enough to allow (B) to escape obvious falsehood; yet, narrow enough to escape vacuity.
11. *Religion, Philosophy and Psychical Research* (NY: Humanities Press, 1969), pp. 175–201.
12. Ibid., p. 198.
13. See *Religion, Philosophy and Psychical Research*, pp. 197–8.
14. So Swinburne, *The Existence of God*, pp. 269–71; and see Wainwright, "Natural Explanations and Religious Experience," *Ratio* 15 (1973): 99–101; and Wainwright's *Philosophy of Religion* (Belmont,

CA: Wadsworth, 1988), pp. 126–8. The arguments are similar, so we will look at Swinburne's version.

15. II Corinthians 11:14. See also George Mavrodes, "Real vs. Deceptive Mystical Experiences," *Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis*, ed. S.T. Katz (NY: Oxford U.P., 1978), pp. 235–58.
16. A version of this objection can be found in Michael P. Levine's "If there is a God, any Experience which seems to be of God, will be Genuine," *Religious Studies* 26/2 (1990): 207–18.
17. *The Literal Meaning of Genesis* IV. 12, trans. J.H. Taylor (NY: Newman Press, 1982), p. 117.
18. *Summa Theologica*, trans. A. Pegis (NY: Random House). IA IIae, q 104, al.
19. The act of conservation is usually seen as being identical with the act of creation. As Descartes put it "conservation and creation differ merely in respect of our mode of thinking and not in reality." (*Meditations*, trans. J. Veitch (La Salle, IL.: Open Court, 1950), pp. 58–9). This idea of "Continuous creation" is found also in Thomas (See *St* Ia IIae, q 104, al.).
20. So Robert Oakes, "Perishability, the Actual World, and the Existence of God," *Religious Studies* 19 (1983), pp. 493–504.

III.6

Divine Hiddenness, Divine Silence

MICHAEL REA

Michael Rea (1968–) is professor of philosophy at the University of Notre Dame, and co-editor of the present volume. His research focuses primarily on metaphysics and philosophical theology. In the present article, he explains why divine silence poses a serious intellectual obstacle to belief in God, and then goes on to consider ways of overcoming that obstacle. After considering several ways in which divine silence might actually be beneficial to human beings, he argues that perhaps silence is nothing more or less than God's preferred mode of interaction with creatures like us. Perhaps God simply desires communion *rather than overt communication with human beings, and perhaps God has provided ways for us to experience God's presence richly even amidst the silence.*

Several years ago, and a short while after her death, some of the private writings of Mother Teresa were published under the title *Come Be My Light*. The journal entries were shocking— not because they disclosed hidden sins or scandals, but because they revealed something far more troubling. They painted a picture of a woman celebrated for her faith and devotion to God but wracked by pain and doubt for lack of the felt presence of God in her life—a woman who sought God with tears and cried out for years for some small taste of the divine, for some tiny assurance in her soul of God's love and presence in her life, but, like so many of the rest of us, received nothing but silence in response.

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In one of the most poignant passages of the book, she writes:

> Lord, my God, who am I that You should forsake me? The child of your love—and now become as the most hated one—the one You have thrown away as unwanted-unloved. I call, I cling, I want—and there is no One to answer—no One on Whom I can cling—no, No One.—Alone. The darkness is so dark…The loneliness of the heart that wants love is unbearable.—Where is my faith?—even deep down, right in, there is nothing but emptiness & darkness.—My God—how painful is this unknown pain. It pains without ceasing… I am told God loves me—and yet the reality of darkness & coldness & emptiness is so great that nothing touches my soul. … The whole time smiling—Sisters & people pass such remarks.—They think my faith, trust & love are filling my very being & that the intimacy with God and union to His will must be absorbing my heart.—Could they but know—and how my cheerfulness is the cloak by which I cover the emptiness & misery.—What are You doing My God to one so small? (Mother Teresa, *Come Be My Light: The Private Writings of the Saint of Calcutta,* edited with commentary by Brian Kolodiejchuk, New York: Doubleday, 2007, pp. 186–87)

What indeed? What are we to make of the silence of God?

Divine silence—or, as many think of it, divine hiddenness—is the source of one of the two most important and widely discussed objections to belief in God. It is also, I venture to say, one of the most important sources of doubt and spiritual distress for religious believers. Mother Teresa eventually reconciled herself to a certain extent with God's hiddenness, but (moving all the way to the other edge of the continuum) Friedrich Nietzsche saw it as just one more reason to sneer at religious belief. He writes:

> A god who is all-knowing and all-powerful and who does not even make sure his creatures understand his intention—could that be a god of goodness? Who allows countless doubts and uncertainties to persist, for thousands of years, as though the salvation of mankind were unaffected by them, or who, on the other hand, holds out the prospect of frightful consequences if any mistake is made as to the nature of truth? Would he not be a cruel god if he possessed the truth and could behold mankind miserably tormenting itself over that truth?—But perhaps he is a god of goodness notwithstanding and merely *could* express himself more clearly! Did he perhaps lack the intelligence to do so? Or the eloquence? So much the worse! For then he was perhaps also in error as to that which he calls his "truth," and is himself not so very far from being the "poor deluded devil"! (*Daybreak*, trans R. J. Holingdale, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982, pp. 89–90)

It's pretty clear that Nietzsche thinks that the existence of an all good, all powerful God is outright incompatible with our experience of divine hiddenness. But why? In the next section of this article, I will try briefly to answer this question. That is, I will try briefly to get clear on exactly what the problem of divine hiddenness is supposed to be. (Only briefly, though, because I think we all have at least a basic grasp of what the worry is.) After that, I'll spend the remainder of the article discussing three strategies for dealing with the problem.

THE PROBLEM OF DIVINE HIDDENNESS

The problem of divine hiddenness starts with the supposition that *God exists*. There is no problem (for adults) about the hiddenness of Santa Claus, or of unicorns, or leprechauns, or the like. We simply don't believe in these sorts of things. The problem of divine hiddenness arises under the supposition—genuine, or "for the sake of argument"—that God

exists. The problem gains traction because our concept of God is the concept of a being that we *ought* to encounter—*tangibly and vividly*, it would seem—at some point in our lives. Again, there is no real problem of the hiddenness of abstract objects. Nobody says, "Well, if there are such things, why don't they show themselves once in a while?" They're just not that sort of thing. God, however, is supposed to be the sort of being who *would* show up once in awhile. But almost none of us ever really see God, hear God, touch God, or encounter God in any other palpable way. Even those who say that God speaks to them in prayer don't usually mean that they hear voices—or have any other experience apart from the felt conviction that some particular idea they've had is, in some sense, "from the Lord." That, in a nutshell, is the problem.

Why do we think that we ought to encounter God? Simple: Our concept of God is the concept of a perfectly rational, perfectly wise being who loves us like a perfect parent. A being like that would want to have a relationship with us; and we all know that, in order to have a relationship with someone, you have to communicate with him or her. This is why the junior high approach to romance does not work. You know how this goes: Boy sees girl; boy likes girl; and … boy takes every possible measure to prevent this fact from becoming known to girl. If people never grew out of this sort of immaturity, the human race would die out. So it's a safe bet that a perfectly *rational* God wouldn't take this approach in trying to relate to us. So it stands to reason that God would show up in our lives once in a while.

More seriously: The theistic religions are in full agreement about the fact that it is *bad for us* to spend our lives without a relationship with God. We all know that, all else being equal, it is bad for a child to grow up without a father or a mother, or to believe—for *good* reasons or bad—that her father or mother doesn't love her. We all know that good parents go out of their way to talk to their children, to reassure them of their love, to be present in vivid and tangible ways—ways that the child can understand and benefit from at whatever stage of life she's at— and so on. Good parents don't lock themselves in a room day after day, waiting for their children to acquire the wherewithal to seek them out. Good parents don't expect that their children will discover their love for them simply by way of inference from the orderliness of the living room and the presence of fun toys in the basement. Good parents go out of their way to say, "I love you," and to hold their children and to comfort them when they're sad. How much more, then, should we expect the same from a being who (we're told) loves us *like a perfect parent*? If my daughter were crying out for my presence in the way that Mother Teresa cried out for God's, I would move heaven and earth if I could to be there for her. If my son were in despair because he thought that he had irreparably disappointed me, I would hold his hand and tell him that that's not true. How could I not? And yet I'm selfish, imperfect, lacking in resources, and short on wisdom, only human. How much more then should we expect God to respond to such cries?

Of course, I don't mean to suggest that God would be bound to respond in some *very particular way* to us when we cry out for his presence. Nor, I should think, would God be bound to respond *every single time*. Good parents sometimes turn a deaf ear to their children's cries, and often for the child's good; they sometimes leave their children with babysitters (even when it's not strictly necessary), ignoring vehement protests; and so on. So what kind of encounter with God am I saying that we ought to expect?

Well, it's hard to say exactly. But you might think that, at a minimum we ought to expect at least one of the following to be the case:

- *Our evidence should be conclusive:* It shouldn't be the case that one can be fully aware of the available evidence of God's existence and at the same time rationally believe that God does not exist. OR
- *Experience of God's love and presence should be widely available:* It shouldn't be the case that, in general, people never (or only very rarely) have experiences that seem to be experiences of the love or presence of God.

And yet both of these things that seem like they *shouldn't* be the case *are* the case. It is exactly this that I have in mind when I say that God is *hidden* or

silent, and when I say that we don't encounter God often in palpable ways: Our evidence is inconclusive; religious experience—of the interesting and unambiguous sort—is rare. And it's really hard to see any good reason why God might leave matters this way.

So it looks like we have only three options: (a) We identify some mistake in our reasoning thus far; (b) we find some believable, good reason why God might remain hidden; or (c) we concede that there is no God. There is really no other way forward.

If you're interested in identifying a mistake in the reasoning, it helps to have the premises of the argument carefully laid out and numbered. Like so:

1. Suppose that God exists—that is, suppose that there is a perfectly powerful, perfectly wise being who loves us like a perfect parent.
2. God is mostly hidden from people: Our evidence is inconclusive; religious experience of the interesting and unambiguous sort is rare.
3. There is no good reason for God to remain hidden.
4. If God is mostly hidden and there is no good reason for God to remain hidden, then one of the following is true:
   a. God exists but, like a **negligent father**, does not love us enough to make himself known.
   b. God exists but, like an **inept lover**, lacks the wisdom to appreciate the importance or proper way of revealing himself to us.
   c. God exists but is **too weak** to reveal himself in the ways that he should in order to secure his relational goals.
5. Premises (1)–(4) are inconsistent.
6. Therefore: God does not exist.

This will be our official statement of the problem of divine hiddenness.[1]

DEALING WITH THE PROBLEM

The advantage to articulating a problem in the way that I just have—with numbered premises and inferences signaled with "therefore's"—is that it gives us a pretty systematic way of addressing the problem. If premises (1–4) *really are inconsistent* (and I think they are, since our concept of God rules out 4a–4c), then one of them is false. The trick then is to ask about each one, "Is this premise true or false? And if it is false, why is it false?" In the next few minutes, I'll suggest some reasons for thinking that premises (2) and (3) might be false. My own sympathies lie with those who reject premise (3). But I'll start with some thoughts about premise (2).

Conclusive Evidence?

In St. Paul's epistle to the Romans, Paul writes:

> The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness,[19] since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them.[20] For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.[21] For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. (Rom. 1:18–21; New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright 1989, Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America)

Does it sound like St. Paul would agree with the claim that God is mostly hidden? No. On Paul's view, as some people read it, there is no reasonable Non-belief: Non-belief is due to sin. Or, a bit more softly, what passes for non-belief is really a kind of self-deception. Being an atheist is sort of like being an alcoholic in denial: You want so badly not to see the truth that you suppress it and convince yourself that things are how you want them to be.

This is an offensive doctrine. But I think that it has to be taken seriously. Self-deception is a real

phenomenon; and there is nothing at all implausible about the idea that people would prefer—indeed, would want very badly—for there to be no God. One of my colleagues once pointed out that most sensible people would recoil in horror upon hearing that a person of great power and influence had taken a special interest in them and had very definite, detailed, and not-easily-implemented views about how they ought to live their lives. Along the same lines, eminent philosopher Thomas Nagel, in a now famous chapter entitled "Naturalism and the Fear of Religion," writes:

> I want atheism to be true and am made uneasy by the fact that some of the most intelligent and well-informed people I know are religious believers. It is not just that I do not believe in God, and, naturally, hope that I'm right in my belief. It's that I hope there is no God! I do not want there to be a God; I do not want the universe to be like that….
>
> My guess is that this cosmic authority problem is not a rare condition and that it is responsible for much of the scientism and reductionism of our time. (*The Last Word*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 2009; pp. 130–131)

So is it really so crazy to think—*on the supposition that there is a God, remember*—that many people would be in the grip of this kind of self-deception? No. To be sure, the view implies that a great many people—including many whom we regard as otherwise very wise and intelligent—suffer from a kind of deep-seated irrationality. But I don't think we should shrink from this sort of claim on principle. After all, atheists say that sort of thing about theists all the time.

Still, this is a hard doctrine, and it has some real problems as a general explanation of the phenomenon of divine hiddenness. Remember, even believers struggle with God's hiddenness. Many people seem to be utterly broken by divine silence in the midst of their own suffering or the suffering of others, or simply by the ongoing and unsatisfied longing for the presence of God. I've seen more than one friend break down in tears over this sort of thing. And remember Mother Teresa. Moreover, many people are atheists or agnostics despite years of what at least *seems* to them to be honest seeking after God. Is it possible that all of these people are radically self-deceived? Sure. But then we must ask why a compassionate God would allow such pervasive and destructive self-deception to go unchecked. Every day drug, alcohol, and sex addicts, people with eating disorders and abusive personalities, and many others as well are made to face up to their own self-deception and admit to themselves and others what they very badly want to hide. Often—maybe mostly—they're made to do this by someone who simply confronts them vividly one way or another with the truth. Why wouldn't God do that for us? This question calls out for an answer as much as the original question of why God would remain hidden calls out for an answer. So denying that second premise seems to me to be just a way of relocating the problem—sort of like pushing around a bulge under the carpet instead of stomping it out entirely. And it seems that the only sensible answer is: God must have some very good reason.

Good Reason?

So now we come to the third premise: Maybe God does have a good reason for remaining hidden. But what could such a reason be? Here I want to consider two different *kinds* of response. One response says that he does it for *our* sake. Many philosophers think that, in general, God could be justified in permitting suffering of innocents only if the innocents themselves benefit.[2] The idea is that a perfectly loving being wouldn't make *me* suffer for the benefit of someone else. And even folks who think that God could allow some people to suffer for the benefit of others typically think that, at the very least, there would have to be some benefit to *human beings generally* in order for God to be justified in permitting the evils that come from his remaining hidden. The other sort of response denies this: God has reasons, but his reasons are his own and have nothing directly to do with benefiting us

(which is why we often can't *see* any benefit to us in God's hiddenness). I'll take each in turn.

So first, what might be some of the ways in which *we* (humans generally) could benefit from divine hiddenness? Here I'll consider two suggestions.

First, one might think that hiddenness is necessary for preserving the *freedom and integrity* of our own responses to God.

Some folks suggest that if God were to show himself openly, we would effectively be coerced into submission. I have kids, and they each in their own ways sometimes try to manipulate and bully the other one. I want them to *freely* choose not to do this—which means I often don't appear in the doorway when I hear that the conditions for manipulation and bullying are growing ripe. If I appear in the doorway, they'll be on their guard; their freedom to grow will be, in a certain way, undermined.

That's one way of pitching the idea that divine hiddenness might help to preserve our freedom. But here's another: Suppose Bill Gates were to go back on the dating scene. Wouldn't it be natural for him to want to be with someone who would love him for himself rather than for his resources? Yet wouldn't it also be natural for him to worry that even the most virtuous of prospective dating partners would find it difficult to avoid having her judgment clouded by the prospect of living in unimaginable wealth? The worry wouldn't be that there would be anything coercive about his impressive circumstances; rather, it's that a certain kind of genuineness in a person's response to him is made vastly more difficult by those circumstances. But, of course, Bill Gates's impressiveness pales in comparison with God's; and, unlike Gates, God's resources and intrinsic nature are so incredibly impressive as to be not only overwhelmingly and unimaginably beautiful but also overwhelmingly and unimaginably *terrifying*. Viewed in this light, it is easy to suppose that God *must* hide from us if he wants to allow us to develop the right sort of non-self-interested love for him.

Note too that if this is God's motivation, divine hiddenness is as much for our benefit as God's. Which brings me to the second, but related, "benefit to us" strategy for understanding divine hiddenness. Perhaps God's hiddenness is good for our souls. Perhaps it helps to produce virtues in us that we wouldn't otherwise acquire. Maybe it teaches us to seek God, to hunger and thirst after him, to not take him for granted. Much in the scriptures suggests that this is what God wants for us. The psalmist writes, "As a deer longs for flowing streams, so my soul longs for you, O God," (Ps. 42:1, *New Revised Standard Bible*) and the idea seems clearly to be that we *all* should long after God in this way. Likewise, at one point in the Gospels Jesus gives thanks to God for hiding certain things from those who are not seeking him; and he admonishes us to ask, *seek*, and *knock* (Mt. 11:25; Mt. 7:7). God wants us to be seekers after him, and what better way to cultivate that disposition than to hide?

Or maybe divine hiddenness teaches us that God cannot be manipulated by us—that God is not at our beck and call. We cannot summon God by performing the right sorts of incantations; God is maximally free, maximally authoritative, and will be manipulated by no one. This too might be a lesson that is good for us to learn, and so it, too, might be among the purposes of divine hiddenness.

The Personality of God?

Or maybe … just maybe … although divine hiddenness often *does* have these salutary effects, and others, that still is not their point at all.

The last suggestion I'd like to consider is one that sees divine hiddenness not as something that God does to produce some great good for us, but rather as something that God engages in for his own reasons, independently of (though not in violation of) our good. Throughout this talk I have sometimes used the term divine *silence* to refer to the phenomenon of hiddenness. I think that that's a more fruitful way of thinking of God's mode of interaction with us. And what I want to suggest is that perhaps divine silence is nothing more or less than an expression of God's personality.

Remember our problem: We experience divine silence and, under the assumption that God

exists, we ask, *"What's his problem? Doesn't he love me? Doesn't he care? Doesn't he understand that you have to* talk *to people to relate to them? What kind of father is he?"* The objections implied by these rhetorical questions are altogether natural, but they are flawed. They are flawed in just the same way in which complaints about the behavior of human persons are often flawed: They depend on a particular interpretation of behavior that can in fact be interpreted in a number of different ways, depending upon what assumptions we make about the person's beliefs, desires, motives, dispositions, and overall personality.

Someone from your school doesn't greet you in the hallway. Have you hurt her feelings? Does she think you're a fool and not want to be seen talking to you? Does she think so poorly of herself that she thinks *you* wouldn't want to be seen talking to her? Is she depressed and having a bad day? As a matter of fact, she's the class genius—beautiful mind sort of genius—and she's always off in her own world, introverted and totally preoccupied. Does that affect your interpretation of her behavior?

You're on a first date. After a while you notice that you've been doing almost all the talking. You start asking questions to draw her out, but her answers are brief, and the silences in between grow longer and longer. You spend the entire ride home without saying a word. Does she hate you? Does she find you boring? Have you offended her? Or is she just rude? As it happens, she just arrived in the United States and was raised with the view that if you *really* want to win a man over, you should be quiet and let him do all the talking. Does that information affect your interpretation?

My point? Interpreting silence requires a lot of information about what sort of person you're dealing with—about the person's cultural background, about what sorts of social norms he or she is likely to recognize and respect, about his or her views about what various kinds of behavior (both verbal and not) communicate to others, about his or her general "style" of interacting with other people, about what's going on in his or her life, and so on. But if this is what it takes to interpret the behavior of an ordinary human person, imagine how difficult it must be to interpret the behavior of an invisible and transcendent *divine* person.

Seen in this light, the suggestion that divine silence *in and of itself* somehow indicates disinterest or lack of love and concern on God's part is absurd. God is as alien and "wholly other" from us as it is possible for another person to be. So isn't it almost ridiculous to think that we would have any idea what divine silence would indicate? To assume that divine silence indicates a lack of concern for us involves quite a lot of unwarranted assumptions about the degree to which divine modes of interaction would likely resemble 21st-century human modes of interaction.

Granted, divine silence *would* indicate a lack of concern for rational creatures if we had good reason to think that God had provided no way for us to find him or to experience his presence in the midst of his silence. This would indicate a lack of concern because it would indicate that God is *trying* to prevent us from finding him, or at least doing nothing to help, and thus bringing about something that is both intrinsically very bad for us and totally beyond our control. But as far as I can tell, we don't have good reason for thinking that God has left us without *any* way of finding him or experiencing his presence.

I think that we have a tendency to assume that we can experience God's presence only if we tangibly *perceive* something—a voice, a vision, an ache in our stomachs or our heads, a tingly feeling of some sort. But experiencing the presence of a person sometimes involves none of this. Sometimes it is just a matter of the person *being* present, together with our believing that she is present and taking a certain attitude toward her presence. Consider: You're studying in the library. You look up and you see a reflection in the window: The girl you've been in love with all year but never had the courage to ask out has entered the library behind you. Without seeing you, she turns down the aisle of books adjacent to yours—just a single stack of shelves separates you—and takes up a seat. She's out of your view, but is there any doubt that you'll experience her presence? And you would, even

apart from the initial glimpse that alerted you to her presence—all you'd need to experience it—to *genuinely experience it*—is the true conviction that she's right there on the other side of those books, together with a certain kind of attention and attitude toward that conviction.

In her book *A Wind in the Door*, Madeline L'Engle makes this point very nicely by way of the distinction between communication and communion:

> "Hey, Meg! [says Calvin] Communication implies sound. Communion doesn't." He sent her a brief image of walking silently through the woods, the two of them alone together, their feet almost noiseless on the rusty carpet of pine needles. They walked without speaking, without touching, and yet they were as close as it is possible for two human beings to be. … Mr. Jenkins had never had that kind of communion with another human being, a communion so rich and full that silence speaks more powerfully than words." (*A Wind in the Door*, New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1973, p. 171)

And, of course, silent communion is not the only way to experience a person unseen. Think of times when you relay a story about an encounter with another person and, after a bit of effort, you falter and say, "Well, you just had to be there." What you communicate, I think, is that your words have failed at their goal—the goal of *putting us there, of mediating to us an experience of a person we don't see and maybe have never met*. Sometimes we do fail in that way, but often we succeed. When you say "You just had to be there," nobody ever says, "Well, of course! You *always* have to be there; you simply can't convey an experience like that in words!" *Stories about other persons can mediate their presence to us—they can give us a taste of what it is like to be in the presence of the person, sort of like memories give us a taste of what it is like to be in the presence of the remembered event, even when we 're not*. Again, though, it matters that we *believe* that the person reporting the events in question is reporting events involving *real persons*. When we do, we can be transported and get at least a bit of what it's like to be around the person we're being told about. And this, it seems, is what biblical narrative—and, to a certain extent, the liturgies of the church—can do for us when we approach them with eyes of faith.[3]

My claim, then, is that divine silence might just be an expression of God's preferred mode of interaction, and that we need not experience his silence as *absence*—especially if we see Biblical narratives and liturgies as things that in some sense mediate the presence of God to us, if we live out our lives in the conviction that God is ever present with us, and if we seek something more like *communion* with God rather than just communication.

The pressing question, however, is what to do with the fact that God's silence is *painful* for us. Many believers experience crippling doubt, overwhelming sadness, and ultimate loss of faith as a result of ongoing silence from their heavenly Father. On the assumption that God exists and that a loving relationship with God is a great good, it would appear that many people have been positively damaged by divine silence. Isn't it just this that leads us to take divine silence as evidence of God's lack of concern? Perhaps silence is just an expression of God's personality, but then, the objector might say, God's personality is just that of an unloving and inattentive parent.

The problem with this objection is that it completely ignores the fact that sometimes our being pained by another person's behavior is *our* problem rather than theirs—due to our own dysfunctional attitudes and ways of relating to others, our own epistemic or moral vices, our own immaturity, and the like. In such cases, it is our responsibility to find a way out of our suffering rather than the other person's responsibility to stop behaving in the ways that cause us pain. And maybe this is how it is with divine silence, too. Maybe our suffering in the face of divine silence is unreasonable, due more to our own immaturity or dysfunction than to any lack of kindness on God's part. Maybe it is a result of our own untrusting, uncharitable interpretations of divine silence, or an

inappropriate refusal to accept God for who God is and to accept God's preferences about when and in what ways to communicate with us. And maybe there are ways of experiencing the world that are fully available to us, if only we would strive for maturity in the ways that we ought to, that would allow us to be content with or even to appreciate the silence of God in the midst of our joys and sufferings. Coping with divine silence, then, would just be a matter of finding these more positive ways of experiencing it.

It helps, in this vein, to be reminded of a fact about God and a fact about ordinary human relationships. The fact about God is that the most enigmatic, eccentric, and complicated people we might ever encounter in literature or in real life are, by comparison with God, utterly familiar and mundane. The fact about human relationships is that experiencing the silence of another person can, in the right context and seen in the right way, be an incredibly rich way of experiencing the *person*—all the more so with a person who is sufficiently beyond you in intellect, wisdom, and virtue. A wise and virtuous person who is utterly beyond you intellectually and silently leads you on a journey that might teach you a lot more about herself and about other things on your journey than she would if she tried to tell you all of the things that she wants to teach you. In such a case, objecting to the silence, interpreting it as an offence, or wishing that the person would just talk to you rather than make you figure things out for yourself might just be childish—an immature refusal to tolerate legitimate differences among persons and to be charitable in the way that you interpret another's behavior. And there is no reason to think that the person would owe it to you to cater to these objections—even if her decision to be silent was arrived at not for the sake of your greater good, but simply because *that's who she is, and that's how she prefers to communicate with people like you*.

You might be tempted to object that, on this view, God is like a father who neglects his children, leaving them bereft and unloved while he sits in stony silence thinking "I just gotta be me." But to object like this is to fail to take seriously the idea that God might have a genuine, robust personality and that it might be *deeply good* for God to live out his own personality. One odd feature of much contemporary philosophy of religion is that it seems to portray God as having a "personality" that is almost entirely empty, allowing his behavior to be almost exhaustively determined by facts about how it would be best *for others* for an omnipotent being to behave. But why should we think of God like this? God is supposed to be a person not only of unsurpassable love and goodness but of unsurpassable beauty. Could God really be *that* sort of person if he's nothing more than a cosmic, others-oriented, utility-maximizing machine? On that way of thinking, God—the being who is supposed to be a person *par excellence*—ends up having no real *self*. So, as I see it, silence of the sort we experience from God might just flow out of who God is, *and it might be deeply good for God to live out his personality*. If that's right, and if our suffering in the face of divine silence is indeed unreasonable, the result of immaturity or other dysfunctions that we can and should overcome anyway, then I see no reason why even perfect love would require God to desist from his preferred mode of interaction in order to alleviate our suffering.

On the view that I am developing, then, it is not true that divine silence serves no *greater good*. Rather, it serves the good that comes of the most perfect and beautiful person in the universe expressing himself in the way that he sees fit. This is good on its own terms, and it is justified if—as theists generally believe—God has provided ways (not our preferred ways, but ways nonetheless) of finding and experiencing his presence despite his silence. And if, as I have suggested, there are ways of experiencing divine silence that we would find non-burdensome or even beautiful, and if God's persisting in his silence provides opportunities for us to grow in maturity or in our ability to relate to others, then divine silence might even be good for us.[4]

NOTES

1. The most widely discussed articulation of the problem of divine hiddenness is J.L. Schellenberg's *Divine Hiddenness and Human Reason* (Ithaca, NY: Cambridge University Press). *Divine Hiddenness: New Essays,* edited by Daniel Howard-Snyder and Paul K. Moser (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) is another important volume which includes both further articulations of the problem as well as a variety of responses. All but the last of the responses that I present in the section entitled "Dealing with the Problem" are represented and defended in some detail in that volume. Finally, see also Ted Poston and Trent Dougherty, "Divine Hiddenness and the Nature of Belief," *Religious Studies* 43 (2007): 183–98, and my "Narrative, Liturgy, and the Hiddenness of God," pp. 76–96, in *Metaphysics and God: Essays in Honor of Eleonore Stump*, edited by Kevin Timpe (New York: Routledge, 2009).
2. See, e.g., Eleonore Stump, "The Problem of Evil," *Faith and Philosophy* 2 (1985): 393–423, and "Providence and the Problem of Evil," pp. 51–91 in *Christian Philosophy*, edited by Thomas P. Flint (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990). For critical discussion of this principle, along with references to other philosophers who endorse it, see Jeff Jordan, "Divine Love and Human Suffering," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 56 (2004): 169–78.
3. I develop this idea in more detail in "Narrative, Liturgy, and the Hiddenness of God." The idea takes inspiration from recent work by Eleonore Stump—especially her *Wandering in Darkness* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).
4. This essay has been given as a talk aimed at undergraduate and non-academic audiences on several occasions, most recently at Wake Forest University and Bethel College, South Bend. It is published here for the first time.

PART IV



The Problem of Evil

Is he willing to prevent evil, but not able? then is he impotent.
Is he able, but not willing? then is he malevolent. Is he both
able and willing? whence then is evil?
EPICURUS (341-270 BCE)

In Part II, we examined several arguments in favor of God's existence. The agnostic and atheist usually base their case on the *absence* of evidence for God's existence. But they do have at least one arrow in their own quiver, an argument for disbelief. It is the problem of evil. With it, the "atheologian" (one who argues against the existence of God) hopes either to neutralize any positive evidence for God's existence, based on whatever in the traditional arguments survives their criticism, or to demonstrate that it is unreasonable to believe in God.

The problem of evil arises from the apparent tension between the divine attributes of omnipotence, omniscience, and omnibenevolence on the one hand and the existence of evil on the other. The Judeo-Christian tradition has affirmed each of the following propositions:

1. God is all-powerful.
2. God is all-knowing.
3. God is perfectly good.
4. Evil exists.

But if God is perfectly good, it seems that God would not want evil to exist, and, being omniscient, God must surely know what potentials for evil lurk in the world and what evils will arise apart from divine intervention. Being omnipotent, God could prevent any evil that God knows about and wants to prevent. So, then, why does our world contain so much evil? Indeed, why does it contain any evil at all? It seems that the existence of God logically precludes the existence of evil, and vice versa.

Generally, Western thought has distinguished between two types of evil: moral and natural. "Moral evil" covers all those bad things for which creatures are morally responsible. "Natural evil" includes those terrible events that occur in nature of their own accord, such as hurricanes, tornadoes, earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, natural diseases, and so on, that cause suffering to humans and animals. However, some defenses of theism affirm that all evil is essentially moral evil, with the devil brought in as the cause of natural evil.

The main defense of theism in response to the problem of evil is the free will defense, going back as far as St. Augustine (354–430) and receiving modern treatment in the work of John Hick, Alvin Plantinga, and Richard Swinburne. The free will defense maintains that premises 1–4 are not inconsistent with one another since (a) it is logically impossible for God to create free creatures and guarantee that they will never do evil, and (b) for all we know, freedom might be a great enough good that God is justified in permitting evil in order to make room for freedom.

Those developing the free will defense typically assume a libertarian view of freedom. That is, they assume that humans are free to choose between good and evil acts and that freedom is inconsistent with determinism. This view is opposed to determinism as well as to compatibilism (a view that tries to reconcile freedom of action with determinism). It is widely believed that if either compatibilism or determinism is true, the free will defense will not be effective against the argument from evil. This matter is well treated in Chapter 9 of J. L. Mackie's *The Miracle of Theism*.

Proponents of the free will defense claim that all moral evil derives from creatures' freedom of will. But how does the theist account for natural evil? There are two different ways. The first one, suggested by Alvin Plantinga (see Part IV bibliography), is to attribute natural evil, such as disease and tornadoes, to the work of the devil and his angels. The second way, favored by Swinburne, argues that natural evil is part and parcel of the nature of things, resulting from the combination of deterministic physical laws that are necessary for consistent action and the responsibility given to humans to exercise their freedom.

There is one further distinction necessary to work through this problem: the distinction between *defense* and *theodicy*. A theodicy is a theory whose aim is to explain why God in fact permits evil; a defense is simply a demonstration of consistency—an effort to show that there is no formal contradiction in premises 1–4 above. The difference is that one can offer a defense without believing the details, and so without really having a *theory* about why God permits evil. For example: You are told that the defendant's fingerprints were found on the gun, and security cameras in an outside room place him at the scene of the crime within five minutes of when the crime took place. If (as is unlikely) your goal is simply to show that the evidence is logically consistent with the defendant's innocence, you might say, "Well, for all we know, he walked in, saw the crime being committed, went over and handled the gun right afterward, and then departed without calling the police." You probably won't believe this story, and you might even go on to qualify it by saying something like, "Of course, I really doubt that that's what happened; but my point is just that it's

possible." But that doesn't matter if your goal is simply to demonstrate consistency. This is analogous to a defense. If, on the other hand, you tried to offer a theory explaining the evidence in a way consistent with the defendant's innocence—perhaps, say, a story, complete with suspects, motives and opportunities, according to which the defendant was framed, and which you were proposing for us actually to believe—you would be giving something analogous to a theodicy.

We begin our treatment of the problem of evil in the first section with three of the most important and widely discussed historical and literary treatments of the problem of evil. In the second section, we examine several contemporary formulations. Finally, in the third section, we look at replies.

IV.A. HISTORICAL AND LITERARY PERSPECTIVES

In the first reading, "The Argument from Evil," David Hume argues through his persona Philo that the existence of God is called into doubt not just by the mere existence of evil, but by the enormous amount of evil in the world. It is arguable that there is actually more evil than good in the world, and it is hard to reconcile this fact with the existence of an all-powerful, omnibenevolent deity.

In the second reading, "Theodicy: A Defense of Theism," Gottfried Leibniz (1646–1716) argues that the fact of evil in no way refutes theism, and he answers the kinds of objections raised by Hume. He contends that God permitted evil to exist in order to bring about greater goods and that Adam's fall was a *felix culpa* ("blessed fault") because it led to the incarnation of the Son of God, raising humanity to an ultimately higher destiny. (The *felix culpa* idea is also explored and defended in one of the essays by Alvin Plantinga later on in this part—reading IV.C.3.) Leibniz's response to the problem of evil also includes the idea that, as the creation of a perfectly good God, our world must be the best of all possible worlds. As we saw in Part I.B, this idea raises interesting questions about divine freedom.

Finally, in the third reading—the famous "Rebellion" chapter from Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*—we find a poignant response to the Leibnizian idea that God is justified in permitting evil in order to bring about greater goods. The troubled Ivan Karamazov angrily describes cases of horrendous suffering on the part of children and then challenges his religious brother Alyosha to say whether, if *he* were the architect of the universe, he could bring himself to permit such suffering in order to bring about global happiness. The expected answer is "No"; and that is precisely the answer that Alyosha sadly gives.

IV.A.1

The Argument from Evil

DAVID HUME

A short biographical sketch of David Hume precedes selection II.C.2. In the present selection, Hume argues through his persona Philo that not merely the fact of evil, but the enormous amount of evil makes it dubious that a deity exists. It is arguable that there is actually more evil than good in the world, so it is hard to see how one can reconcile the existence of evil with the existence of an all-powerful, omnibenevolent deity.

PART X

It is my opinion, I own, replied Demea, that each man feels, in a manner, the truth of religion within his own breast, and, from a consciousness of his imbecility and misery rather than from any reasoning, is led to seek protection from that Being on whom he and all nature is dependent. So anxious or so tedious are even the best scenes of life that futurity is still the object of all our hopes and fears. We incessantly look forward and endeavour, by prayers, adoration, and sacrifice, to appease those unknown powers whom we find, by experience, so able to afflict and oppress us. Wretched creatures that we are! What resource for us amidst the innumerable ills of life did not religion suggest some methods of atonement, and appease those terrors with which we are incessantly agitated and tormented?

I am indeed persuaded, said Philo, that the best and indeed the only method of bringing everyone to a due sense of religion is by just representations of the misery and wickedness of men. And for that purpose a talent of eloquence and strong imagery is more requisite than that of reasoning and argument. For is it necessary to prove what everyone feels within himself? It is only necessary to make us feel it, if possible, more intimately and sensibly.

The people, indeed, replied Demea, are sufficiently convinced of this great and melancholy truth. The miseries of life, the unhappiness of man, the general corruptions of our nature, the unsatisfactory enjoyment of pleasures, riches, honours—these phrases have become almost proverbial in all languages. And who can doubt of what all men declare from their own immediate feeling and experience?

In this point, said Philo, the learned are perfectly agreed with the vulgar; and in all letters, *sacred* and *profane*, the topic of human misery has been insisted on with the most pathetic eloquence that sorrow and melancholy could inspire. The poets, who speak from sentiment, without a system, and whose testimony has therefore the more authority, abound in images of this nature. From Homer down to Dr. Young, the whole inspired tribe have ever been sensible that no other representation of things would suit the feeling and observation of each individual.

As to authorities, replied Demea, you need not seek them. Look round this library of Cleanthes. I shall venture to affirm that, except authors of

Reprinted from David Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* (1779); London: Longmans Green, 1878.

particular sciences, such as chemistry or botany, who have no occasion to treat of human life, there is scarce one of those innumerable writers from whom the sense of human misery has not, in some passage or other, extorted a complaint and confession of it. At least, the chance is entirely on that side; and no one author has ever, so far as I can recollect, been so extravagant as to deny it.

There you must excuse me, said Philo: Leibniz has denied it, and is perhaps the first[1] who ventured upon so bold and paradoxical an opinion; at least, the first who made it essential to his philosophical system.

And by being the first, replied Demea, might he not have been sensible of his error? For is this a subject in which philosophers can propose to make discoveries especially in so late an age? And can any man hope by a simple denial (for the subject scarcely admits of reasoning) to bear down the united testimony of mankind, founded on sense and consciousness?

And why should man, added he, pretend to an exemption from the lot of all other animals? The whole earth, believe me, Philo, is cursed and polluted. A perpetual war is kindled amongst all living creatures. Necessity, hunger, want stimulate the strong and courageous; fear, anxiety, terror agitate the weak and infirm. The first entrance into life gives anguish to the new-born infant and to its wretched parent; weakness, impotence, distress attend each stage of that life, and it is, at last, finished in agony and horror.

Observe, too, says Philo, the curious artifices of nature in order to embitter the life of every living being. The stronger prey upon the weaker and keep them in perpetual terror and anxiety. The weaker, too, in their turn, often prey upon the stronger, and vex and molest them without relaxation. Consider that innumerable race of insects, which either are bred on the body of each animal or, flying about, infix their stings in him. These insects have others still less than themselves which torment them. And thus on each hand, before and behind, above and below, every animal is surrounded with enemies which incessantly seek his misery and destruction.

Man alone, said Demea, seems to be, in part, an exception to this rule. For by combination in society he can easily master lions, tigers, and bears, whose greater strength and agility naturally enable them to prey upon him.

On the contrary, it is here chiefly, cried Philo, that the uniform and equal maxims of nature are most apparent. Man, it is true, can, by combination, surmount all his real enemies and become master of the whole animal creation; but does he not immediately raise up to himself *imaginary* enemies, the demons of his fancy, who haunt him with superstitious terrors and blast every enjoyment of life? His pleasure, as he imagines, becomes in their eyes a crime; his food and repose give them umbrage and offence; his very sleep and dreams furnish new materials to anxious fear; and even death, his refuge from every other ill, presents only the dread of endless and innumerable woes. Nor does the wolf molest more the timid flock than superstition does the anxious breast of wretched mortals.

Besides, consider, Demea: This very society by which we surmount those wild beasts, our natural enemies, what new enemies does it not raise to us? What woe and misery does it not occasion? Man is the greatest enemy of man. Oppression, injustice, contempt, contumely, violence, sedition, war, calumny, treachery, fraud—by these they mutually torment each other, and they would soon dissolve that society which they had formed were it not for the dread of still greater ills which must attend their separation.

But though these external insults, said Demea, from animals, from men, from all the elements, which assault us form a frightful catalogue of woes, they are nothing in comparison of those which arise within ourselves, from the distempered condition of our mind and body. How many lie under the lingering torment of diseases? Hear the pathetic enumeration of the great poet.

> *Intestine stone and ulcer, colic-pangs, Demoniac frenzy, moping melancholy, And moon-struck madness, pining atrophy, Marasmus, and*

wide-wasting pestilence. Dire was the tossing, deep the groans: Despair Tended the sick, busiest from couch *to couch. And over them triumphant Death his dart Shook: but delay'd to strike, though oft invok'd With vows, as their chief good and final hope.*[2]

The disorders of the mind, continued Demea, though more secret, are not perhaps less dismal and vexatious. Remorse, shame, anguish, rage, disappointment, anxiety, fear, dejection, despair—who has ever passed through life without cruel inroads from these tormentors? How many have scarcely ever felt any better sensations? Labour and poverty, so abhorred by everyone, are the certain lot of the far greater number; and those few privileged persons who enjoy ease and opulence never reach contentment or true felicity. All the goods of life united would not make a very happy man, but all the ills united would make a wretch indeed; and any one of them almost (and who can be free from every one?), nay, often the absence of one good (and who can possess all?) is sufficient to render life ineligible.

Were a stranger to drop on a sudden into this world, I would show him, as a specimen of its ills, an hospital full of diseases, a prison crowded with malefactors and debtors, a field of battle strewed with carcases, a fleet foundering in the ocean, a nation languishing under tyranny, famine, or pestilence. To turn the gay side of life to him and give him a notion of its pleasures—whither should I conduct him? To a ball, to an opera, to court? He might justly think that I was only showing him a diversity of distress and sorrow.

There is no evading such striking instances, said Philo, but by apologies which still further aggravate the charge. Why have all men, I ask, in all ages, complained incessantly of the miseries of life? … They have no just reason, says one: these complaints proceed only from their discontented, repining, anxious disposition.… And can there possibly, I reply, be a more certain foundation of misery than such a wretched temper?

But if they were really as unhappy as they pretend, says my antagonist, why do they remain in life? …

Not satisfied with life, afraid of death—

this is the secret chain, say I, that holds us. We are terrified, not bribed to the continuance of our existence.

It is only a false delicacy, he may insist, which a few refined spirits indulge, and which has spread these complaints among the whole race of mankind. … And what is this delicacy, I ask, which you blame? Is it anything but a greater sensibility to all the pleasures and pains of life? And if the man of a delicate, refined temper, by being so much more alive than the rest of the world, is only so much more unhappy, what judgment must we form in general of human life?

Let men remain at rest, says our adversary, and they will be easy. They are willing artificers of their own misery. … No! reply I: an anxious langour follows their repose; disappointment, vexation, trouble, their activity and ambition.

I can observe something like what you mention in some others, replied Cleanthes, but I confess I feel little or nothing of it in myself, and hope that it is not so common as you represent it.

If you feel not human misery yourself, cried Demea, I congratulate you on so happy a singularity. Others, seemingly the most prosperous, have not been ashamed to vent their complaints in the most melancholy strains. Let us attend to the great, the fortunate emperor, Charles V, when, tired with human grandeur, he resigned all his extensive dominions into the hands of his son. In the last harangue which he made on that memorable occasion, he publicly avowed *that the greatest prosperities which he had ever enjoyed had been mixed with so many adversities that he might truly say he had never enjoyed any satisfaction or contentment*. But did the retired life in which he sought for shelter afford him any greater happiness? If we may credit his son's account, his repentance commenced the very day of his resignation.

Cicero's fortune, from small beginnings, rose to the greatest lustre and renown; yet what pathetic

complaints of the ills of life do his familiar letters, as well as philosophical discourses, contain? And suitably to his own experience, he introduces Cato, the great, the fortunate Cato protesting in his old age that had he a new life in his offer he would reject the present.

Ask yourself, ask any of your acquaintance, whether they would live over again the last ten or twenty years of their life. No! but the next twenty, they say, will be better:

> *And from the dregs of life, hope to receive*
> *What the first sprightly running could not give.*[3]

Thus, at last, they find (such is the greatness of human misery, it reconciles even contradictions) that they complain at once of the shortness of life and of its vanity and sorrow.

And is it possible, Cleanthes, said Philo, that after all these reflections, and infinitely more which might be suggested, you can still persevere in your anthropomorphism, and assert the moral attributes of the Deity, his justice, benevolence, mercy, and rectitude, to be of the same nature with these virtues in human creatures? His power, we allow, is infinite; whatever he wills is executed; but neither man nor any other animal is happy; therefore, he does not will their happiness. His wisdom is infinite; he is never mistaken in choosing the means to any end; but the course of nature tends not to human or animal felicity; therefore, it is not established for that purpose. Through the whole compass of human knowledge there are no inferences more certain and infallible than these. In what respect, then, do his benevolence and mercy resemble the benevolence and mercy of men?

Epicurus' old questions are yet unanswered.

Is he willing to prevent evil, but not able? then is he impotent. Is he able, but not willing? then is he malevolent. Is he both able and willing? whence then is evil?

You ascribe, Cleanthes, (and I believe justly) a purpose and intention to nature. But what, I beseech you, is the object of that curious artifice and machinery which she has displayed in all animals—the preservation alone of individuals, and propagation of the species? It seems enough for her purpose, if such a rank be barely upheld in the universe, without any care or concern for the happiness of the members that compose it. No resource for this purpose: no machinery in order merely to give pleasure or ease; no fund of pure joy and contentment; no indulgence without some want or necessity accompanying it. At least, the few phenomena of this nature are overbalanced by opposite phenomena of still greater importance.

Our sense of music, harmony, and indeed beauty of all kinds, gives satisfaction, without being absolutely necessary to the preservation and propagation of the species. But what racking pains, on the other hand, arise from gouts, gravels, megrims, toothaches, rheumatisms, where the injury to the animal machinery is either small or incurable? Mirth, laughter, play, frolic seem gratuitous satisfactions which have no further tendency; spleen, melancholy, discontent, superstition are pains of the same nature. How then does the Divine benevolence display itself, in the sense of you anthropomorphites? None but we mystics, as you were pleased to call us, can account for this strange mixture of phenomena, by deriving it from attributes infinitely perfect but incomprehensible.

And have you, at last, said Cleanthes smiling, betrayed your intentions, Philo? Your long agreement with Demea did indeed a little surprise me, but I find you were all the while erecting a concealed battery against me. And I must confess that you have now fallen upon a subject worthy of your noble spirit of opposition and controversy. If you can make out the present point, and prove mankind to be unhappy or corrupted, there is an end at once of all religion. For to what purpose establish the natural attributes of the Deity, while the moral are still doubtful and uncertain?

You take umbrage very easily, replied Demea, at opinions the most innocent and the most generally received, even amongst the religious and devout themselves; and nothing can be more surprising than to find a topic like this—concerning the wickedness and misery of man—charged with no less than atheism and profaneness. Have not all pious divines and preachers who have indulged

their rhetoric on so fertile a subject, have they not easily, I say, given a solution of any difficulties which may attend it? This world is but a point in comparison of the universe; this life but a moment in comparison of eternity. The present evil phenomena, therefore, are rectified in other regions, and in some future period of existence. And the eyes of men, being then opened to larger views of things, see the whole connection of general laws, and trace, with adoration, the benevolence and rectitude of the Deity through all the mazes and intricacies of his providence.

No! replied Cleanthes, no! These arbitrary suppositions can never be admitted, contrary to matter of fact, visible and uncontroverted. Whence can any cause be known but from its known effects? Whence can any hypothesis be proved but from the apparent phenomena? To establish one hypothesis upon another is building entirely in the air; and the utmost we ever attain by these conjectures and fictions is to ascertain the bare possibility of our opinion, but never can we, upon such terms, establish its reality.

The only method of supporting Divine benevolence—and it is what I willingly embrace—is to deny absolutely the misery and wickedness of man. Your representations are exaggerated; your melancholy views mostly fictitious; your inferences contrary to fact and experience. Health is more common than sickness; pleasure than pain; happiness than misery. And for one vexation which we meet with, we attain, upon computation, a hundred enjoyments.

Admitting your position, replied Philo, which yet is extremely doubtful, you must at the same time allow that, if pain be less frequent than pleasure, it is infinitely more violent and durable. One hour of it is often able to outweigh a day, a week, a month of our common insipid enjoyments; and how many days, weeks, and months are passed by several in the most acute torments? Pleasure, scarcely in one instance, is ever able to reach ecstasy and rapture; and in no one instance can it continue for any time at its highest pitch and altitude. The spirits evaporate, the nerves relax, the fabric is disordered, and the enjoyment quickly degenerates into fatigue and uneasiness. But pain often, good God, how often! rises to torture and agony; and the longer it continues, it becomes still more genuine agony and torture. Patience is exhausted, courage languishes, melancholy seizes us, and nothing terminates our misery but the removal of its cause or another event which is the sole cure of all evil, but which, from our natural folly, we regard with still greater horror and consternation.

But not to insist upon these topics, continued Philo, though most obvious, certain, and important, I must use the freedom to admonish you, Cleanthes, that you have put the controversy upon a most dangerous issue, and are unawares introducing a total scepticism into the most essential articles of natural and revealed theology. What! no method of fixing a just foundation for religion unless we allow the happiness of human life, and maintain a continued existence even in this world, with all our present pains, infirmities, vexations, and follies, to be eligible and desirable! But this is contrary to everyone's feeling and experience; it is contrary to an authority so established as nothing can subvert. No decisive proofs can ever be produced against this authority; nor is it possible for you to compute, estimate, and compare all the pains and all the pleasures in the lives of all men and of all animals; and thus, by your resting the whole system of religion on a point which, from its very nature, must forever be uncertain, you tacitly confess that that system is equally uncertain.

But allowing you what never will be believed, at least, what you never possibly can prove, that animal or, at least, human happiness in this life exceeds its misery, you have yet done nothing; for this is not, by any means, what we expect from infinite power, infinite wisdom, and infinite goodness. Why is there any misery at all in the world? Not by chance, surely. From some cause then. Is it from the intention of the Deity? But he is perfectly benevolent. Is it contrary to his intention? But he is almighty. Nothing can shake the solidity of this reasoning, so short, so clear, so decisive, except we assert that these subjects exceed all human capacity, and that our common measures of truth and falsehood are not applicable to them—a topic which I have all along insisted on, but which you

have, from the beginning, rejected with scorn and indignation.

But I will be contented to retire still from this intrenchment, for I deny that you can ever force me in it. I will allow that pain or misery in man is *compatible* with infinite power and goodness in the Deity, even in your sense of these attributes: what are you advanced by all these concessions? A mere possible compatibility is not sufficient. You must prove these pure, unmixed, and uncontrollable attributes from the present mixed and confused phenomena, and from these alone. A hopeful undertaking! Were the phenomena ever so pure and unmixed, yet, being finite, they would be insufficient for that purpose. How much more, where they are also so jarring and discordant!

Here, Cleanthes, I find myself at ease in my argument. Here I triumph. Formerly, when we argued concerning the natural attributes of intelligence and design, I needed all my sceptical and metaphysical subtilty to elude your grasp. In many views of the universe and of its parts, particularly the latter, the beauty and fitness of final causes strike us with such irresistible force that all objections appear (what I believe they really are) mere cavils and sophisms; nor can we then imagine how it was ever possible for us to repose any weight on them. But there is no view of human life or of the condition of mankind from which, without the greatest violence, we can infer the moral attributes or learn that infinite benevolence, conjoined with infinite power and infinite wisdom, which we must discover by the eyes of faith alone. It is your turn now to tug the labouring oar, and to support your philosophical subtilties against the dictates of plain reason and experience.

NOTES

1. That sentiment had been maintained by Dr. King and some few others before Leibniz, though by none of so great fame as that German philosopher.
2. Milton: *Paradise Lost,* Bk. XI.
3. John Dryden, *Aureng-Zebe*, Act IV, sc. 1.

IV.A.2

Theodicy: A Defense of Theism

GOTTFRIED LEIBNIZ

Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646–1716) was a German idealist who tried to set forth a thoroughgoing theodicy, a justification of the ways of God. In this selection he argues that the fact of evil in no way refutes theism, and he answers the kinds of objections raised by

Reprinted from Gottfried Leibniz, *The Theodicy: Abridgement of the Argument Reduced to Syllogistic Form* (1710) in *The Philosophical Works of Leibnitz*, ed. & trans. by G. M. Duncan (New Haven: Tuttle, Morehouse, & Taylor, 1890).

Hume. He contends that God permitted evil to exist in order to bring about greater good and that Adam's fall was a felix culpa *(a "happy sin") because it led to the incarnation of the Son of God, raising humanity to an ultimately higher destiny. He argues that although God can foresee the future, humans are still free in that they act voluntarily.*

Some intelligent persons have desired that this supplement be made [to the Theodicy], and I have the more readily yielded to their wishes as in this way I have an opportunity again to remove certain difficulties and to make some observations which were not sufficiently emphasized in the work itself.

I. *Objection.* Whoever does not choose the best is lacking in power, or in knowledge, or in goodness.

God did not choose the best in creating this world.

Therefore, God has been lacking in power, or in knowledge, or in goodness.

Answer. I deny the minor, that is, the second premise of this syllogism; and our opponent proves it by this.

Prosyllogism. Whoever makes things in which there is evil, which could have been made without any evil, or the making of which could have been omitted, does not choose the best.

God has made a world in which there is evil; a world, I say, which could have been made without any evil, or the making of which could have been omitted altogether.

Therefore, God has not chosen the best.

Answer. I grant the minor of this prosyllogism; for it must be confessed that there is evil in this world which God has made, and that it was possible to make a world without evil, or even not to create a world at all, for its creation has depended on the free will of God; but I deny the major, that is, the first of the two premises of the prosyllogism, and I might content myself with simply demanding its proof; but in order to make the matter clearer, I have wished to justify this denial by showing that the best plan is not always that which seeks to avoid evil, since it may happen that *the evil is accompanied by a greater good*. For example, a general of an army will prefer a great victory with a slight wound to a condition without wound and without victory. We have proved this more fully in the large work by making it clear, by instances taken from mathematics and elsewhere, that an imperfection in the part may be required for a greater perfection in the whole. In this I have followed the opinion of St. Augustine, who has said a hundred times, that God has permitted evil in order to bring about good, that is, a greater good; and that of Thomas Aquinas (in libr. II. sent. dist. 32, qu. I, art. 1), that the permitting of evil tends to the good of the universe. I have shown that the ancients called Adam's fall *felix culpa*, a happy sin, because it had been retrieved with immense advantage by the incarnation of the Son of God, who has given to the universe something nobler than anything that ever would have been among creatures except for it. For the sake of a clearer understanding, I have added, following many good authors, that it was in accordance with order and the general good that God allowed to certain creatures the opportunity of exercising their liberty, even when he foresaw that they would turn to evil, but which he could so well rectify; because it was not fitting that, in order to hinder sin, God should always act in an extraordinary manner. To overthrow this objection, therefore, it is sufficient to show that a world with evil might be better than a world without evil; but I have gone even farther, in the work, and have even proved that this universe must be in reality better than every other possible universe.

II. *Objection.* If there is more evil than good in intelligent creatures, then there is more evil than good in the whole work of God.

Now, there is more evil than good in intelligent creatures.

Therefore, there is more evil than good in the whole work of God.

Answer. I deny the major and the minor of this conditional syllogism. As to the major, I do not

admit it at all, because this pretended deduction from a part to the whole, from intelligent creatures to all creatures, supposes tacitly and without proof that creatures destitute of reason cannot enter into comparison nor into account with those which possess it. But why may it not be that the surplus of good in the non-intelligent creatures which fill the world, compensates for, and even incomparably surpasses, the surplus of evil in the rational creatures? It is true that the value of the latter is greater; but, in compensation, the others are beyond comparison the more numerous, and it may be that the proportion of number and quantity surpasses that of value and of quality.

As to the minor, that is no more to be admitted; that is, it is not at all to be admitted that there is more evil than good in the intelligent creatures. There is no need even of granting that there is more evil than good in the human race, because it is possible, and in fact very probable, that the glory and the perfection of the blessed are incomparably greater than the misery and the imperfection of the damned, and that here the excellence of the total good in the smaller number exceeds the total evil in the greater number. The blessed approach the Divinity, by means of a Divine Mediator, as near as may suit these creatures, and make such progress in good as is impossible for the damned to make in evil, approach as nearly as they may to the nature of demons. God is infinite, and the devil is limited; the good may and does go to infinity, while evil has its bounds. It is therefore possible, and is credible, that in the comparison of the blessed and the damned, the contrary of that which I have said might happen in the comparison of intelligent and non-intelligent creatures, takes place; namely, it is possible that in the comparison of the happy and the unhappy, the proportion of degree exceeds that of number, and that in the comparison of intelligent and non-intelligent creatures, the proportion of number is greater than that of value. I have the right to suppose that a thing is possible so long as its impossibility is not proved; and indeed that which I have here advanced is more than a supposition.

But in the second place, if I should admit that there is more evil than good in the human race, I have still good grounds for not admitting that there is more evil than good in all intelligent creatures. For there is an inconceivable number of genii, and perhaps of other rational creatures. And an opponent could not prove that in all the City of God, composed as well of genii as of rational animals without number and of an infinity of kinds, evil exceeds good. And although in order to answer an objection, there is no need of proving that a thing is, when its mere possibility suffices; yet, in this work, I have not omitted to show that it is a consequence of the supreme perfection of the Sovereign of the universe, that the kingdom of God is the most perfect of all possible states or governments, and that consequently the little evil there is, is required for the consummation of the immense good which is found there.

III. ***Objection.*** If it is always impossible not to sin, it is always unjust to punish.

Now, it is always impossible not to sin; or, in other words, every sin is necessary.

Therefore, it is always unjust to punish.

The minor of this is proved thus:

1. *Prosyllogism*. All that is predetermined is necessary.

Every event is predetermined.

Therefore, every event (and consequently sin also) is necessary.

Again this second minor is proved thus:

2. *Prosyllogism*. That which is future, that which is foreseen, that which is involved in the causes, is predetermined.

Every event is such.

Therefore, every event is predetermined.

Answer. I admit in a certain sense the conclusion of the second prosyllogism, which is the minor of the first; but I shall deny the major of the first prosyllogism, namely, that every thing predetermined is necessary; understanding by the *necessity* of sinning, for example, or by the impossibility of not sinning, or of not performing any action, the

necessity with which we are here concerned, that is, that which is essential and absolute, and which destroys the morality of an action and the justice of punishments. For if anyone understood another necessity or impossibility, namely, a necessity which should be only moral, or which was only hypothetical (as will be explained shortly); it is clear that I should deny the major of the objection itself. I might content myself with this answer and demand the proof of the proposition denied; but I have again desired to explain my procedure in this work, in order to better elucidate the matter and to throw more light on the whole subject, by explaining the necessity which ought to be rejected and the determination which must take place. That *necessity* which is contrary to morality and which ought to be rejected, and which would render punishment unjust, is an insurmountable necessity which would make all opposition useless, even if we should wish with all our heart to avoid the necessary action, and should make all possible efforts to that end. Now, it is manifest that this is not applicable to voluntary actions, because we would not perform them if we did not choose to. Also their prevision and predetermination are not absolute, but presuppose the will: if it is certain that we shall perform them, it is not less certain that we shall choose to perform them. These voluntary actions and their consequences will not take place no matter what we do or whether we wish them or not; but, *through* that which we shall do and through that which we shall wish to do, which leads to them. And this is involved in prevision and in predetermination, and even constitutes their ground. And the necessity of such an event is called conditional or hypothetical, or the necessity of consequence, because it supposes the will, and the other *requisites*; whereas the necessity which destroys morality and renders punishment unjust and reward useless, exists in things which will be whatever we may do or whatever we may wish to do, and, in a word, is in that which is essential; and this is what is called an absolute necessity. Thus it is to no purpose, as regards what is absolutely necessary, to make prohibitions or commands, to propose penalties or prizes, to praise or to blame; it will be none the less. On the other hand, in voluntary actions and in that which depends upon them, precepts armed with power to punish and to recompense are very often of use and are included in the order of causes which make an action exist. And it is for this reason that not only cares and labors but also prayers are useful; God having had these prayers in view before he regulated things and having had that consideration for them which was proper. This is why the precept which says *ora et labora* (pray and work), holds altogether good; and not only those who (under the vain pretext of the necessity of events) pretend that the care which business demands may be neglected, but also those who reason against prayer, fall into what the ancients even then called the *lazy sophism*. Thus the predetermination of events by causes is just what contributes to morality instead of destroying it, and causes incline the will, without compelling it. This is why the *determination* in question is not a necessitation—it is certain (to him who knows all) that the effect will follow this inclination; but this effect does not follow by a necessary consequence, that is, one the contrary of which implies contradiction. It is also by an internal inclination such as this that the will is determined, without there being any necessity. Suppose that one has the greatest passion in the world (a great thirst, for example), you will admit to me that the soul can find some reason for resisting it, if it were only that of showing its power. Thus, although one may never be in a perfect indifference of equilibrium and there may be always a preponderance of inclination for the side taken, it, nevertheless, never renders the resolution taken absolutely necessary.

IV. ***Objection.*** Whoever can prevent the sin of another and does not do so, but rather contributes to it although he is well informed of it, is accessory to it.

God can prevent the sin of intelligent creatures; but he does not do so, and rather contributes to it

by his concurrence and by the opportunities which he brings about, although he has a perfect knowledge of it.

Hence, etc.

Answer. I deny the major of this syllogism. For it is possible that one could prevent sin, but ought not, because he could not do it without himself committing a sin, or (when God is in question) without performing an unreasonable action. Examples have been given and the application to God himself has been made. It is possible also that we contribute to evil and that sometimes we even open the road to it, in doing things which we are obliged to do; and, when we do our duty or (in speaking of God) when, after thorough consideration, we do that which reason demands, we are not responsible for the results, even when we foresee them. We do not desire these evils; but we are willing to permit them for the sake of a greater good which we cannot reasonably help preferring to other considerations. And this is a *consequent* will, which results from *antecedent* wills by which we will the good. I know that some persons, in speaking of the antecedent and consequent will of God, have understood by the *antecedent* that which wills that all men should be saved; and by the consequent, that which wills, in consequence of persistent sin, that some should be damned. But these are merely illustrations of a more general idea, and it may be said for the same reason that God, by his antecedent will, wills that men should not sin; and by his consequent or final and decreeing will (that which is always followed by its effect), he wills to permit them to sin, this permission being the result of superior reasons. And we have the right to say in general that the antecedent will of God tends to the production of good and the prevention of evil, each taken in itself and as if alone (*particulariter et secundum quid*, Thom. I, qu. 19, art. 6), according to the measure of the degree of each good and each evil; but that the divine consequent or final or total will tends toward the production of as many goods as may be put together, the combination of which becomes in this way determined, and includes also the permission of some evils and the exclusion of some goods, as the best possible plan for the universe demands. Arminius, in his *Antiperkinsus*, has very well explained that the will of God may be called consequent, not only in relation to the action of the creature considered beforehand in the divine understanding, but also in relation to other anterior divine acts of will. But this consideration of the passage cited from Thomas Aquinas, and that from Scotus (I. dist. 46, qu. XI), is enough to show that they make this distinction as I have done here. Nevertheless, if anyone objects to this use of terms let him substitute *deliberating* will, in place of antecedent, and final or decreeing will, in place of consequent. For I do not wish to dispute over words.

V. *Objection.* Whoever produces all that is real in a thing, is its cause.

God produces all that is real in sin.

Hence, God is the cause of sin.

Answer. I might content myself with denying the major or the minor, since the term real admits of interpretations which would render these propositions false. But in order to explain more clearly, I will make a distinction. *Real* signifies either that which is positive only, or, it includes also privative beings: in the first case, I deny the major and admit the minor; in the second case, I do the contrary. I might have limited myself to this, but I have chosen to proceed still farther and give the reason for this distinction. I have been very glad therefore to draw attention to the fact that every reality purely positive or absolute is a perfection; and that imperfection comes from limitation, that is, from the privative: for to limit is to refuse progress, or the greatest possible progress. Now God is the cause of all perfections and consequently of all realities considered as purely positive. But limitations or privations result from the original imperfection of creatures, which limits their receptivity. And it is with them as with a loaded vessel, which the river causes to move more or less slowly according to the weight which it carries: thus its speed depends upon the river, but the retardation which limits this speed comes from the load. Thus in the *Theodicy*, we have shown how the creature, in causing sin, is a defective cause; how

errors and evil inclinations are born of privation; and how privation is accidentally efficient; and I have justified the opinion of St. Augustine (lib. I, ad Simpl. qu. 2) who explains, for example, how God makes the soul obdurate, not by giving it something evil, but because the effect of his good impression is limited by the soul's resistance and by the circumstances which contribute to this resistance, so that he does not give it all the good which would overcome its evil. *Nec* (inquit) *ab illo erogatur aliquid quo homo fit deterior, sed tantum quo fit melior non erogatur*. But if God had wished to do more, he would have had to make either other natures for creatures or other miracles to change their natures, things which the best plan could not admit. It is as if the current of the river must be more rapid than its fall admitted or that the boats should be loaded more lightly, if it were necessary to make them move more quickly. And the original limitation or imperfection of creatures requires that even the best plan of the universe could not receive more good, and could not be exempt from certain evils, which, however, are to result in a greater good. There are certain disorders in the parts which marvelously enhance the beauty of the whole; just as certain dissonances, when properly used, render harmony more beautiful. But this depends on what has already been said in answer to the first objection.

VI. *Objection.* Whoever punishes those who have done as well as it was in their power to do, is unjust.

God does so.

Hence, etc.

Answer. I deny the minor of this argument. And I believe that God always gives sufficient aid and grace to those who have a good will, that is, to those who do not reject this grace by new sin. Thus, I do not admit the damnation of infants who have died without baptism or outside of the church; nor the damnation of adults who have acted according to the light which God has given them. And I believe that if *any one has followed the light which has been given him*, he will undoubtedly receive greater light when he has need of it, as the late M. Hulseman, a profound and celebrated theologian at Leipzig, has somewhere remarked; and if such a man has failed to receive it during his lifetime he will at least receive it when at the point of death.

VII. *Objection.* Whoever gives only to some, and not to all, the means which produces in them effectively a good will and salutary final faith, has not sufficient goodness.

God does this.

Hence, etc.

Answer. I deny the major of this. It is true that God could overcome the greatest resistance of the human heart; and does it, too, sometimes, either by internal grace, or by external circumstances which have a great effect on souls; but he does not always do this. Whence comes this distinction? it may be asked, and why does his goodness seem limited? It is because, as I have already said in answering the first objection, it would not have been in order always to act in an extraordinary manner, and to reverse the connection of things. The reasons of this connection, by means of which one is placed in more favorable circumstances than another, are hidden in the depths of the wisdom of God; they depend upon the universal harmony. The best plan of the universe, which God could not fail to choose, made it so. We judge from the event itself; since God has made it, it was not possible to do better. Far from being true that this conduct is contrary to goodness, it is supreme goodness which led him to it. This objection with its solution might have been drawn from what was said in regard to the first objection; but it seemed useful to touch upon it separately.

VIII. *Objection.* Whoever cannot fail to choose the best, is not free.

God cannot fail to choose the best.

Hence, God is not free.

Answer. I deny the major of this argument; it is rather true liberty, and the most perfect, to be able to use one's free will for the best, and to always exercise this power, without ever being turned aside either by external force or by internal passions, the first of which causes slavery of the body, the second, slavery of the soul. There is nothing less

servile, and nothing more in accordance with the highest degree of freedom, than to be always led toward the good, and always by one's own inclination, without any constraint and without any displeasure. And to object therefore that God had need of external things, is only a sophism. He created them freely; but having proposed to himself an end, which is to exercise his goodness, wisdom has determined him to choose the means best fitted to attain this end. To call this a need, is to take that term in an unusual sense which frees it from all imperfection, just as when we speak of the wrath of God.

Seneca has somewhere said that God commanded but once but that he obeys always, because he obeys laws which he willed to prescribe to himself: *semel jussit, semper paret*. But he might better have said that God always commands and that he is always obeyed; for in willing, he always follows the inclination of his own nature, and all other things always follow his will. And as this will is always the same, it cannot be said that he obeys only that will which he formerly had. Nevertheless, although his will is always infallible and always tends toward the best, the evil, or the lesser good, which he rejects, does not cease to be possible in itself; otherwise the necessity of the good would be geometrical (so to speak), or metaphysical, and altogether absolute; the contingency of things would be destroyed, and there would be no choice. But this sort of necessity, which does not destroy the possibility of the contrary, has this name only by analogy; it becomes effective, not by the pure essence of things, but by that which is outside of them, above them, namely, by the will of God. This necessity is called moral, because, to the sage, *necessity* and *what ought to be* are equivalent things; and when it always has its effect, as it really has in the perfect sage, that is, in God, it may be said that it is a happy necessity. The nearer creatures approach to it, the nearer they approach to perfect happiness. Also this kind of necessity is not that which we try to avoid and which destroys morality, rewards and praise. For that which it brings, does not happen whatever we may do or will, but because we will it so. And a will to which it is natural to choose well, merits praise so much the more; also it carries its reward with it, which is sovereign happiness. And as this constitution of the divine nature gives entire satisfaction to him who possesses it, it is also the best and the most desirable for the creatures who are all dependent on God. If the will of God did not have for a rule the principle of the best, it would either tend toward evil, which would be the worst; or it would be in some way indifferent to good and to evil, and would be guided by chance: but a will which would allow itself always to act by chance, would not be worth more for the government of the universe than the fortuitous concourse of atoms, without there being any divinity therein. And even if God should abandon himself to chance only in some cases and in a certain way (as he would do, if he did not always work entirely for the best and if he were capable of preferring a lesser work to a greater, that is, an evil to a good, since that which prevents a greater good is an evil), he would be imperfect, as well as the object of his choice; he would not merit entire confidence; he would act without reason in such a case, and the government of the universe would be like certain games, equally divided between reason and chance. All this proves that this objection which is made against the choice of the best, perverts the notions of the free and of the necessary, and represents to us the best even as evil: which is either malicious or ridiculous.

IV.A.3

Rebellion

FYODOR DOSTOEVSKY

Fyodor Dostoevsky (1821–1881) was one of the greatest and most influential Russian novelists. He is the author of Crime and Punishment, Notes from the Underground, The Gambler, *and* The Brothers Karamazov, *from which the present selection is taken. In this chapter, Ivan Karamazov challenges the idea that some greater good might justify the horrendous suffering of even one small child, much less the vast amounts of such suffering that our world has so far seen.*

"I must admit one thing to you," Ivan began. "I could never understand how one can love one's neighbors. It's just one's neighbors, to my mind, that one can't love, though one might love those at a distance. I once read somewhere of 'John the Merciful,' a saint, that when a hungry, frozen beggar came to him, and asked him to warm him up, he took him into his bed, held him in his arms, and began breathing into his mouth, which was putrid and loathsome from some awful disease. I am convinced that he did that from the laceration of falsity, for the sake of the love imposed by duty, as a penance laid on him. For anyone to love a man, he must be hidden, for as soon as he shows his face, love is gone."

"Father Zosima has talked of that more than once," observed Alyosha; "he, too, said that the face of a man often hinders many people not practised in love, from loving him. But yet there's a great deal of love in mankind, and almost Christ-like love. I know that myself, Ivan."

"Well, I know nothing of it so far, and can't understand it, and the innumerable mass of mankind are with me there. The question is, whether that's due to men's bad qualities or whether it's inherent in their nature. To my thinking, Christ-like love for men is a miracle impossible on earth. He was God. But we are not gods. Suppose I, for instance, suffer intensely. Another can never know how much I suffer, because he is another and not I. And what's more, a man is rarely ready to admit another's suffering (as though it were a distinction). Why won't he admit it, do you think? Because I smell unpleasant, because I have a stupid face, because I once trod on his foot. Besides there is suffering and suffering; degrading, humiliating suffering such as humbles me—hunger, for instance—my benefactor will perhaps allow me; but when you come to higher suffering—for an idea, for instance—he will very rarely admit that, perhaps because my face strikes him not at all as what he fancies a man should have who suffers for an idea. And so he deprives me instantly of his favor, and not at all from badness of heart. Beggars, especially general beggars, ought never to show themselves, but to ask for charity through the newspapers. One can love one's neighbors in the abstract, or even at a distance, but at close quarters it's almost impossible.

"Rebellion", from *The Brothers Karamazov*, A Norton Critical Edition, by Fyodor Dostoevsky, edited by Ralph E. Matlaw, translated by Constance Garnett, revised by Ralph Matlaw. Copyright © 1976 by W. W. Norton & Company, Inc. used by permission of W. W. Norton & Company, Inc.

If it were as on the stage, in the ballet, where if beggars come in, they wear silken rags and tattered lace and beg for alms dancing gracefully, then one might like looking at them. But even then we would not love them. But enough of that. I simply wanted to show you my point of view. I meant to speak of the suffering of mankind generally, but we had better confine ourselves to the sufferings of the children. That reduces the scope of my argument to a tenth of what it would be. Still we'd better keep to the children, though it does weaken my case. But, in the first place, children can be loved even at close quarters, even when they are dirty, even when they are ugly (I fancy, though, children never are ugly). The second reason why I won't speak of grown-up people is that, besides being disgusting and unworthy of love, they have retribution—they've eaten the apple and know good and evil, and they have become 'like God.' They go on eating it still. But the children haven't eaten anything, and are so far innocent. Are you fond of children, Alyosha? I know you are, and you will understand why I prefer to speak of them. If they, too, suffer horribly on earth, they must suffer for their fathers, they must be punished for their fathers, who have eaten the apple; but that reasoning is of the other world and is incomprehensible for the heart of man here on earth. The innocent must not suffer for another's sins, and especially such innocents! You may be surprised at me, Alyosha, but I am awfully fond of children, too. And observe, cruel people, the violent, the rapacious, the Karamazovs are sometimes very fond of children. Children while they are quite little—up to seven, for instance—are so remote from grown-up people; they are different creatures, as it were, of a different species. I knew a criminal in prison who had, in the course of his career as a burglar, murdered whole families, including several children. But when he was in prison, he had a strange affection for them. He spent all his time at his window, watching the children playing in the prison yard. He trained one little boy to come up to his window and made great friends with him.… You don't know why I am telling you all this, Alyosha? My head aches and I am sad."

"You speak with a strange air," observed Alyosha uneasily, "as though you were not quite yourself."

"By the way, a Bulgarian I met lately in Moscow," Ivan went on, seeming not to hear his brother's words, "told me about the crimes committed by Turks and Circassians in all parts of Bulgaria through fear of a general rising of the Slavs. They burn villages, murder, rape women and children, they nail their prisoners to the fences by the ears, leave them so till morning, and in the morning they hang them—all sorts of things you can't imagine. People talk sometimes of bestial cruelty, but that's a great injustice and insult to the beast; a beast can never be so cruel as a man, so artistically cruel. The tiger only tears and gnaws, that's all he can do. He would never think of nailing people by the ears, even if he were able to do it. These Turks took a pleasure in torturing children, too; cutting the unborn child from the mother's womb, and tossing babies up in the air and catching them on the points of their bayonets before their mother's eyes. Doing it before the mother's eyes was what gave zest to the amusement. Here is another scene that I thought very interesting. Imagine a trembling mother with her baby in her arms, a circle of invading Turks around her. They've planned a diversion; they pet the baby, laugh to make it laugh. They succeed, the baby laughs. At that moment a Turk points a pistol four inches from the baby's face. The baby laughs with glee, holds out its little hands to the pistol, and he pulls the trigger in the baby's face and blows out its brains. Artistic, wasn't it? By the way, Turks are particularly fond of sweet things, they say."

"Brother, what are you driving at?" asked Alyosha.

"I think if the devil doesn't exist, but man has created him, he has created him in his own image and likeness."

"Just as he did God, then?" observed Alyosha.

"It's wonderful how you can turn words, as Polonius says in *Hamlet,*" laughed Ivan. "You turn my words against me. Well, I am glad. Yours must be a fine God, if man created Him in His image and likeness. You asked just now

what I was driving at. You see, I am fond of collecting certain little facts, and, would you believe, I even copy anecdotes of a certain sort from newspapers and stories, and I've already got a fine collection. The Turks, of course, have gone into it, but they are foreigners. I have specimens from home that are even better than the Turks. You know we prefer beating—rods and scourges—that's our national institution. Nailing ears is unthinkable for us, for we are, after all, Europeans. But the rod and the scourge we have always with us and they cannot be taken from us. Abroad now they scarcely do any beating. Perhaps manners are more humane, or laws have been passed, so that they don't dare to flog men now. But they make up for it in another way just as national as ours. And so national that it would be practically impossible among us, though I believe we are being inoculated with it, since the religious movement began in our aristocracy. I have a charming pamphlet, translated from the French, describing how, quite recently, five years ago, a murderer, Richard, was executed—a young man, of twenty-three, I believe, who repented and was converted to the Christian faith at the very scaffold. This Richard was an illegitimate child who was *given* as a child of six by his parents to some shepherds on the Swiss mountains. They brought him up to work for them. He grew up like a little wild beast among them. The shepherds taught him nothing, and scarcely fed or clothed him, but sent him out at age seven to herd the flock in cold and wet, and no one hesitated or scrupled to treat him so. Quite the contrary, they thought they had every right, for Richard had been given to them as a chattel, and they did not even see the necessity of feeding him. Richard himself describes how in those years, like the Prodigal Son in the Gospel, he longed to eat of the mash given to the pigs, which were fattened for sale. But they wouldn't even give him that, and beat him when he stole from the pigs. And that was how he spent all his childhood and his youth, till he grew up and was strong enough to go away and be a thief. The savage began to earn his living as a day laborer in Geneva. He drank what he earned, he lived like a monster, and finished by killing and robbing an old man. He was caught, tried, and condemned to death. They are not sentimentalists there. And in prison he was immediately surrounded by pastors, members of Christian brotherhoods, philanthropic ladies, and the like. They taught him to read and write in prison, and expounded the Gospel to him. They exhorted him, worked upon him, drummed at him incessantly, till at last he solemnly confessed his crime. He was converted. He wrote to the court himself that he was a monster, but that in the end God had vouchsafed him light and shown grace. All Geneva was in excitement about him—all philanthropic and religious Geneva. All the aristocratic and well-bred society of the town rushed to the prison, kissed Richard and embraced him; 'You are our brother, you have found grace.' And Richard does nothing but weep with emotion, 'Yes, I've found grace! All my youth and childhood I was glad of pigs' food, but now even I have found grace. I am dying in the Lord.' 'Yes, Richard, die in the Lord; you have shed blood and must die in the Lord. Though it's not your fault that you knew not the Lord, when you coveted the pig's food and were beaten for stealing it (which was very wrong of you, for stealing is forbidden); but you've shed blood and you must die.' And on the last day, Richard, perfectly limp, did nothing but cry and repeat every minute 'This is my happiest day. I am going to the Lord.' 'Yes,' cry the pastors and the judges and philanthropic ladies. 'This is the happiest day of your life, for you are going to the Lord!' They all walk or drive to the scaffold in procession behind the prison van. At the scaffold they call to Richard: 'Die, brother, die in the Lord, for even thou hast found grace!' And so, covered with his brothers' kisses, Richard is dragged on to the scaffold, and led to the guillotine. And they chopped off his head in brotherly fashion, because he had found grace. Yes, that's characteristic. That pamphlet is translated into Russian by some Russian philanthropists of aristocratic rank and evangelical aspirations, and has been distributed gratis for the

enlightenment of the people. The case of Richard is interesting because it's national. Though to us it's absurd to cut off a man's head, because he has become our brother and has found grace, yet we have our own speciality, which is all but worse. Our historical pastime is the direct satisfaction of inflicting pain. There are lines in Nekrasov describing how a peasant lashes a horse on the eyes, 'on its meek eyes,' everyone must have seen it. It's peculiarly Russian. He describes how a feeble little nag had foundered under too heavy a load and cannot move. The peasant beats it, beats it savagely, beats it at last not knowing what he is doing in the intoxication of cruelty, thrashes it mercilessly over and over again. 'However weak you are, you must pull, if you die for it.' The nag strains, and then he begins lashing the poor defenseless creature on its weeping, on its 'meek eyes.' The frantic beast tugs and draws the load, trembling all over, gasping for breath, moving sideways, with a sort of unnatural spasmodic action—it's awful in Nekrasov. But that's only a horse, and God has given horses to be beaten. So the Tatars have taught us, and they left us the knout as a remembrance of it. But men, too, can be beaten. A well-educated, cultured gentleman and his wife beat their own child with a birch rod; a girl of seven. I have an exact account of it. The papa was glad that the birch was covered with twigs. 'It stings more,' said he, and so he began stinging his daughter. I know for a fact there are people who at every blow are worked up to sensuality, to literal sensuality, which increases progressively at every blow they inflict. They beat for a minute, for five minutes, for ten minutes, more often and more savagely. The child screams. At last the child cannot scream, it gasps, 'Daddy! daddy!' By some diabolical unseemly chance the case was brought into court. A lawyer is engaged. The Russian people have long called a lawyer 'a conscience for hire.' The lawyer protests in his client's defense. 'It's such a simple thing,' he says, 'an everyday domestic event. A father corrects his child. To our shame be it said, it is brought into court.' The jury, convinced by him, gives a favorable verdict. The public roars with delight that the torturer is acquitted. Ah, pity I wasn't there! I would have proposed to raise a subscription in his honor! … Charming pictures.

"But I've still better things about children. I've collected a great, great deal about Russian children, Alyosha. There was a little girl of five who was hated by her father and mother, 'most worthy and respectable people, of good education and breeding.' You see, I must repeat again, it is a peculiar characteristic of many people, this love of torturing children, and children only. To all other types of humanity these torturers behave mildly and benevolently, like cultivated and humane Europeans; but they are very fond of tormenting children, even fond of children themselves in that sense. It's just their defenselessness that tempts the tormentor, just the angelic confidence of the child who has no refuge and no appeal, that sets his vile blood on fire. In every man, of course, a beast lies hidden—the beast of rage, the beast of lustful heat at the screams of the tortured victim, the beast of lawlessness let off the chain, the beast of diseases that follow on vice, gout, kidney disease, and so on.

"This poor girl of five was subjected to every possible torture by those cultivated parents. They beat her, thrashed her, kicked her for no reason till her body was one bruise. Then, they went to greater refinements of cruelty—shut her up all night in the cold and frost in a privy, and because she didn't ask to be taken up at night (as though a child of five sleeping its angelic, sound sleep could be trained to wake and ask), they smeared her face and made her eat that excrement, and it was her mother, her mother did this. And that mother could sleep, hearing the poor child's groans locked up in that vile place! Can you understand why a little creature, who can't even understand what's done to her, should beat her little aching heart with her tiny fist in that vile place, in the dark and the cold, and weep her sanguine meek, unresentful tears to dear, kind God to protect her? Do you understand that infamy, my friend and my brother, my pious and humble novice? Do you understand why this rigmarole must be and is

permitted? Without it, I am told, man could not have existed on earth, for he could not have known good and evil. Why should he know that diabolical good and evil when it costs so much? Why, the whole world of knowledge is not worth that child's prayer to 'dear, kind God'! I say nothing of the sufferings of grown-up people, they have eaten the apple, damn them, and the devil take them all! But these little ones! I am making you suffer, Alyoshka, you are not yourself. I'll leave off if you like."

"Never mind, I want to suffer too," muttered Alyosha.

"One picture, only one more, because it's so curious, so characteristic, and I have only just read it in some collection of Russian antiquities in the *Archive*, or the *Past*. I've forgotten the name. I must look it up. It was in the darkest days of serfdom at the beginning of the century, and long live the Liberator of the People! There was in those days a general of aristocratic connections, the owner of great estates, one of those men—somewhat exceptional, I believe, even then—who, retiring from the service into a life of leisure, are convinced that they've earned the power of life and death over their subjects. There were such men then. So our general, settled on his property of two thousand souls, lives in pomp, and domineers over his poor neighbors as though they were dependents and buffoons. He has kennels of hundreds of hounds and nearly a hundred dog-boys—all mounted, and in uniform. One day a serf boy, a little child of eight, threw a stone in play and hurt the paw of the general's favorite hound. 'Why is my favorite dog lame?' He is told that the boy threw a stone that hurt the dog's paw. 'So you did it.' The general looked the child up and down 'Take him.' He was taken—taken from his mother and kept shut up all night. Early that morning the general comes out in full pomp, mounts his horse with the hounds, his dependents, dog-boys, and the huntsmen, all mounted around him. The servants are summoned for their edification, and in front of them all stands the mother of the child. The child is brought from the lockup. It's a gloomy cold, foggy autumn day, a capital day for hunting. The general orders the child to be undressed; the child is stripped naked. He shivers, numb with terror, not daring to cry…. 'Make him run,' commands the general. 'Run! run!' shout the dog-boys. The boy runs…. 'At him!' yells the general, and he sets the whole pack of hounds on the child. The hounds catch him, and tear him to pieces before his mother's eyes! … I believe the general was afterwards declared incapable of administering his estates. Well—what did he deserve? To be shot? To be shot for the satisfaction of our moral feelings? Speak, Alyoshka!"

"To be shot," murmured Alyosha, lifting his eyes to Ivan with a pale, twisted smile.

"Bravo!" shouted Ivan delighted. "If even you say so, it means… You're a pretty monk! So there is a little devil sitting in your heart, Alyoshka Karamazov!"

"What I said was absurd, but—"

"That's just the point, that 'but'!" cried Ivan. "Let me tell you, novice, that the absurd is only too necessary on earth. The world stands on absurdities, and perhaps nothing would have come to pass in it without them. We know what we know!"

"What do you know?"

"I understand nothing," Ivan went on, as though in delirium. "I don't want to understand anything now. I want to stick to the fact. I made up my mind long ago not to understand. If I try to understand anything, I shall be false to the fact and I have determined to stick to the fact."

"Why are you trying me?" Alyosha cried out with a bitter outburst. "Will you say what you mean at last?"

"Of course, I will; that's what I've been leading up to. You are dear to me, I don't want to let you go, and I won't give you up to your Zosima."

Ivan for a minute was silent, his face became all at once very sad.

"Listen! I took the case of children only to make my case clearer. Of the other tears of humanity with which the earth is soaked from its crust to its center, I will say nothing. I have narrowed my subject on purpose. I am a bug, and I recognize in all humility that I cannot understand why the world is arranged as it is. Men are themselves to blame, I

suppose; they were given paradise, they wanted freedom, and stole fire from heaven, though they knew they would become unhappy, so there is no need to pity them. With my pitiful, earthly, Euclidean understanding, all I know is that there is suffering and that there are none guilty; that cause follows effect, simply and directly; that everything flows and finds its level—but that's only Euclidean nonsense, I know that, and I can't consent to live by it! What comfort is it to me that there are none guilty and that cause follows effect simply and directly, and that I know it—I must have retribution, or I will destroy myself. And not retribution in some remote infinite time and space, but here on earth, and that I could see myself. I have believed in it. I want to see it, and if I am dead by then, let me rise again, for if it all happens without me, it will be too unfair. Surely I haven't suffered, simply that I, my crimes and my sufferings, may manure the soil of the future harmony for somebody else. I want to see with my own eyes the hind lie down with the lion and the victim rise up and embrace his murderer. I want to be there when everyone suddenly understands what it has all been for. All the religions of the world are built on this longing, and I am a believer. But then there are the children, and what am I to do about them? That's a question I can't answer. For the hundredth time I repeat, there are numbers of questions, but I've only taken the children, because in their case what I mean is so unanswerably clear. Listen! If all must suffer to pay for the eternal harmony, what have children to do with it, tell me, please? It's beyond all comprehension why they should suffer, and why they should pay for the harmony. Why should they, too, furnish material to enrich the soil for the harmony of the future? I understand solidarity in sin among men. I understand solidarity in retribution, too; but there can be no such solidarity in sin with children. And if it is really true that they must share responsibility for all their fathers' crimes, such a truth is not of this world and is beyond my comprehension. Some jester will say, perhaps, that the child would have grown up and have sinned, but you see he didn't grow up, he was torn to pieces by the dogs, at eight years old. Oh, Alyosha, I am not blaspheming! I understand, of course, what an upheaval of the universe it will be, when everything in heaven and earth blends in one hymn of praise and everything that lives and has lived cries aloud: 'Thou art just, O Lord, for Thy ways are revealed.' When the mother embraces the fiend who threw her child to the dogs, and all three cry aloud with tears, 'Thou art just, O Lord!' then, of course, the crown of knowledge will be reached and all will be made clear. But what pulls me up here is that I can't accept that harmony. And while I am on earth, I make haste to take my own measures. You see, Alyosha, perhaps it really may happen that if I live to that moment, or rise again to see it, I, too, perhaps, may cry aloud with the rest, looking at the mother embracing the child's torturer, 'Thou art just, O Lord!' but I don't want to cry aloud then. While there is still time, I hasten to protect myself and so I renounce the higher harmony altogether. It's not worth the tears of that one tortured child who beat itself on the breast with its little fist and prayed in its stinking outhouse, with its unexpiated tears to 'dear, kind God'! It's not worth it, because those tears are unatoned for. They must be atoned for, or there can be no harmony. But how? How are you going to atone for them? Is it possible? By their being avenged? But what do I care for avenging them? What do I care for a hell for oppressors? What good can hell do, since those children have already been tortured? And what becomes of harmony, if there is hell? I want to forgive. I want to embrace. I don't want more suffering. And if the sufferings of children go to swell the sum of sufferings which was necessary to pay for truth, then I protest that the truth is not worth such a price. I don't want the mother to embrace the oppressor who threw her son to the dogs! She dare not forgive him! Let her forgive him for herself, if she will, let her forgive the torturer for the immeasurable suffering of her mother's heart. But the sufferings of her tortured child she has no right to forgive; she dare not forgive the torturer, even if the child were to forgive him! And if that is so, if they dare not forgive, what becomes of harmony? Is there in the whole world a being who would have the right to forgive and could forgive?

I don't want harmony. From love for humanity I don't want it. I would rather be left with the unavenged suffering. I would rather remain with my unavenged suffering and unsatisfied indignation, *even if I were wrong*. Besides, too high a price is asked for harmony; it's beyond our means to pay so much to enter on it. And so I hasten to give back my entrance ticket, and if I am an honest man I am bound to give it back as soon as possible. And that I am doing. It's not God that I don't accept, Alyosha, only I most respectfully return Him the ticket."

"That's rebellion," murmured Alyosha, looking down.

"Rebellion? I am sorry you call it that," said Ivan earnestly. "One can hardly live in rebellion, and I want to live. Tell me yourself, I challenge you—answer. Imagine that you are creating a fabric of human destiny with the object of making men happy in the end, giving them peace and rest at last, but that it was essential and inevitable to torture to death only one tiny creature—that little child beating its breast with its fist, for instance—and to found that edifice on its unavenged tears, would you consent to be the architect on those conditions? Tell me, and tell the truth."

"No, I wouldn't consent," said Alyosha softly.

"And can you admit the idea that men for whom you are building it would agree to accept their happiness on the foundation of the unexpiated blood of a little victim? And accepting it would remain happy forever?"

"No, I can't admit it. Brother," said Alyosha suddenly, with flashing eyes, "you said just now, is there a being in the whole world who would have the right to forgive and could forgive? But there is a Being and He can forgive everything, all *and for all*, because He gave His innocent blood for all and everything. You have forgotten Him, and on Him is built the edifice, and it is to Him they cry aloud. 'Thou art just, O Lord, for Thy ways are revealed!' "

"Ah! the One without sin and his blood! No, I have not forgotten Him; on the contrary I've been wondering all the time how it was you did not bring Him in before, for usually all arguments on your side put Him in the foreground. Do you know, Alyosha—don't laugh! I composed a poem about a year ago. If you can waste another ten minutes on me, I'll tell it to you."

"You wrote a poem?"

"Oh, no, I didn't write it," laughed Ivan, "and I've never written two lines of poetry in my life. But I composed up this poem in prose and I remembered it. I was carried away when I composed it. You will be my first reader— that is, listener. Why should an author forego even one listener?" smiled Ivan. "Shall I tell it to you?"

"I am all attention," said Alyosha….

IV.B. CONTEMPORARY FORMULATIONS

The previous three essays presented two (rather different) historical formulations of the problem of evil and one of the most well-known historical replies. In the present section, we turn to contemporary philosophical formulations of the problem.

We begin with J. L. Mackie's classic statement of the "logical problem of evil"—an argument for the conclusion that the existence of the God of the Judeo-Christian tradition is logically inconsistent with the existence of evil. A perfectly good being, Mackie contends, always eliminates evil as far as it can; and an omnipotent and omniscient being, he argues, can eliminate evil entirely. He considers the response that the value of creating a world with free creatures

might justify God in permitting the existence of evil. But he argues that since it is not *impossible* for there to be a world in which free creatures always do what is right, God must have been able to create such a world. And so, since a world in which free creatures always do what is right is clearly better than one in which free creatures sometimes do what is wrong, the appeal to freedom fails to solve the problem.

Despite the intuitive appeal of Mackie's argument, most philosophers nowadays agree that the argument fails. As William Rowe puts it in one of the endnotes to our next selection:

> *Some philosophers have contended that the existence of evil is logically inconsistent with the existence of the theistic God. No one, I think, has succeeded in establishing such an extravagant claim.*

Rowe goes on to credit Alvin Plantinga for showing in a clear and compelling way why Mackie's argument fails. (Plantinga's argument is given in selection IV. C.1 below.) Nevertheless, Rowe says,

> *[t]here remains…what we may call the evidential form—as opposed to the logical form—of the problem of evil; the view that the variety and profusion of evil in our world although perhaps not logically inconsistent with the existence of the theistic God, provides, nevertheless, rational support for atheism.*

It is the evidential form of the argument with which his article (selection IV.B.2) is concerned.

As it is typically presented, the "evidential problem of evil" relies on the premise that a good God would permit evil only if it contributed to some greater good, together with the claim that many of the evils we in fact observe seem not to contribute to any greater good. This is roughly the argument defended by Rowe; but Paul Draper, in the final reading of this section, takes a different tack. According to Draper, the "pattern of both pain and pleasure" in the world constitutes evidence against theism and in favor of naturalism. (As he defines it, naturalism is the hypothesis that the universe is a closed system, and it entails that there are no supernatural beings—divine or otherwise.) In his view, the pattern of pain and pleasure that we in fact observe isn't what we would naturally expect if pain existed (say) to serve the purpose of punishing sinners, or of building moral character. Rather, it is systematically connected with reproductive success, which is what we would expect on the supposition that naturalism and evolutionary theory are both true. Thus, on his view, the fact that pain and pleasure are systematically connected with reproductive success, together with the truth of evolutionary theory, provides evidence in support of naturalism.

IV.B.1

Evil and Omnipotence

J. L. MACKIE

John L. Mackie (1917–1981) was born in Australia and taught at Oxford University until his death. He made important contributions to the fields of metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, and philosophy of religion. Among his works are The Cement of the Universe *(1974),* Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong *(1977), and* The Miracle of Theism *(1982). In this essay, Mackie argues that the argument from evil demonstrates the incoherence of theism. If there is a God who is all-powerful and completely good, he will be able and willing to eliminate all evil in the world. But there is evil, so no God exists.*

The traditional arguments for the existence of God have been fairly thoroughly criticised by philosophers. But the theologian can, if he wishes, accept this criticism. He can admit that no rational proof of God's existence is possible. And he can still retain all that is essential to his position, by holding that God's existence is known in some other, non-rational way. I think, however, that a more telling criticism can be made by way of the traditional problem of evil. Here it can be shown, not that religious beliefs lack rational support, but that they are positively irrational, that the several parts of the essential theological doctrine are inconsistent with one another, so that the theologian can maintain his position as a whole only by a much more extreme rejection of reason than in the former case. He must now be prepared to believe, not merely what cannot be proved, but what can be *disproved* from other beliefs that he also holds.

The problem of evil, in the sense in which I shall be using the phrase, is a problem only for someone who believes that there is a God who is both omnipotent and wholly good. And it is a logical problem, the problem of clarifying and reconciling a number of beliefs: it is not a scientific problem that might be solved by further observations, or a practical problem that might be solved by a decision or an action. These points are obvious; I mention them only because they are sometimes ignored by theologians, who sometimes parry a statement of the problem with such remarks as "Well, can you solve the problem yourself?" or "This is a mystery which may be revealed to us later" or "Evil is something to be faced and overcome, not to be merely discussed."

In its simplest form the problem is this: God is omnipotent; God is wholly good; and yet evil exists. There seems to be some contradiction between these three propositions, so that if any two of them were true the third would be false. But at the same time all three are essential parts of most theological positions: the theologian, it seems, at once *must* adhere and *cannot consistently* adhere to all three. (The problem does not arise only for theists, but I shall discuss it in the form in which it presents itself for ordinary theism.)

However, the contradiction does not arise immediately; to show it we need some additional

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premises, or perhaps some quasi-logical rules connecting the terms "good, evil," and "omnipotent." These additional principles are that good is opposed to evil, in such a way that a good thing always eliminates evil as far as it can, and that there are no limits to what an omnipotent thing can do. From these it follows that a good omnipotent thing eliminates evil completely, and then the propositions that a good omnipotent thing exists, and that evil exists, are incompatible.

A. ADEQUATE SOLUTIONS

Now once the problem is fully stated it is clear that it can be solved, in the sense that the problem will not arise if one gives up at least one of the propositions that constitute it. If you are prepared to say that God is not wholly good, or not quite omnipotent, or that evil does not exist, or that good is not opposed to the kind of evil that exists, or that there are limits to what an omnipotent thing can do, then the problem of evil will not arise for you.

There are, then, quite a number of adequate solutions of the problem of evil, and some of these have been adopted, or almost adopted, by various thinkers. For example, a few have been prepared to deny God's omnipotence, and rather more have been prepared to keep the term "omnipotence" but severely to restrict its meaning, recording quite a number of things that an omnipotent being cannot do. Some have said that evil is an illusion, perhaps because they held that the whole world of temporal, changing things is an illusion, and that what we call evil belongs only to this world, or perhaps because they held that although temporal things are much as we see them, those that we call evil are not really evil. Some have said that what we call evil is merely the privation of good, that evil in a positive sense, evil that would really be opposed to good, does not exist. Many have agreed with Pope that disorder is harmony not understood, and that partial evil is universal good. Whether any of these views is true is, of course, another question. But each of them gives an adequate solution of the problem of evil in the sense that if you accept it this problem does not arise for you, though you may, of course, have *other* problems to face.

But often enough these adequate solutions are only *almost* adopted. The thinkers who restrict God's power, but keep the term "omnipotence," may reasonably be suspected of thinking, in other contexts, that his power is really unlimited. Those who say that evil is an illusion may also be thinking, inconsistently, that this illusion is itself an evil. Those who say that "evil" is merely privation of good may also be thinking, inconsistently, that privation of good is an evil. (The fallacy here is akin to some forms of the "naturalistic fallacy" in ethics, where some think, for example, that "good" is just what contributes to evolutionary progress, and that evolutionary progress is itself good.) If Pope meant what he said in the first line of his couplet, that "disorder" is only harmony not understood, the "partial evil" of the second line must, for consistency, mean "that which, taken in isolation, falsely appears to be evil," but it would more naturally mean "that which, in isolation, really is evil." The second line, in fact, hesitates between two views, that "partial evil" isn't really evil, since only the universal quality is real, and that "partial evil" is really an evil, but only a little one.

In addition, therefore, to adequate solutions, we must recognise unsatisfactorily inconsistent solutions, in which there is only a half-hearted or temporary rejection of one of the propositions which together constitute the problem. In these, one of the constituent propositions is explicitly rejected, but it is covertly re-asserted or assumed elsewhere in the system.

B. FALLACIOUS SOLUTIONS

Besides these half-hearted solutions, which explicitly reject but implicitly assert one of the constituent propositions, there are definitely fallacious solutions which explicitly maintain all the constituent propositions, but implicitly reject at least one of them in

the course of the argument that explains away the problem of evil.

There are, in fact, many so-called solutions which purport to remove the contradiction without abandoning any of its constituent propositions. These must be fallacious as we can see from the very statement of the problem, but it is not so easy to see in each case precisely where the fallacy lies. I suggest that in all cases the fallacy has the general form suggested above: in order to solve the problem one (or perhaps more) of its constituent propositions is given up, but in such a way that it appears to have been retained, and can therefore be asserted without qualification in other contexts. Sometimes there is a further complication: the supposed solution moves to and fro between, say, two of the constituent propositions, at one point asserting the first of these but covertly abandoning the second, at another point asserting the second but covertly abandoning the first. These fallacious solutions often turn upon some equivocation with the words "good" and "evil," or upon some vagueness about the way in which good and evil are opposed to one another, or about how much is meant by "omnipotence." I propose to examine some of these so-called solutions, and to exhibit their fallacies in detail. Incidentally, I shall also be considering whether an adequate solution could be reached by a minor modification of one or more of the constituent propositions, which would, however, still satisfy all the essential requirements of ordinary theism.

(1) "Good cannot exist without evil" or "Evil is necessary as a counterpart to good."

It is sometimes suggested that evil is necessary as a counterpart to good, that if there were no evil there could be no good either, and that this solves the problem of evil. It is true that it points to an answer to the question "Why should there be evil?" But it does so only by qualifying some of the propositions that constitute the problem.

First, it sets a limit to what God can do, saying that God *cannot* create good without simultaneously creating evil, and this means either that God is not omnipotent or that there are *some* limits to what an omnipotent thing can do. It may be replied that these limits are always presupposed, that omnipotence has never meant the power to do what is logically impossible, and on the present view the existence of good without evil would be a logical impossibility. This interpretation of omnipotence may, indeed, be accepted as a modification of our original account which does not reject anything that is essential to theism, and I shall in general assume it in the subsequent discussion. It is, perhaps, the most common theistic view, but I think that some theists at least have maintained that God can do what is logically impossible. Many theists, at any rate, have held that logic itself is created or laid down by God, that logic is the way in which God arbitrarily chooses to think. (This is, of course, parallel to the ethical view that morally right actions are those which God arbitrarily chooses to command, and the two views encounter similar difficulties.) And this account of logic is clearly inconsistent with the view that God is bound by logical necessities—unless it is possible for an omnipotent being to bind himself, an issue which we shall consider later, when we come to the Paradox of Omnipotence. This solution of the problem of evil cannot, therefore, be consistently adopted along with the view that logic is itself created by God.

But, secondly, this solution denies that evil is opposed to good in our original sense. If good and evil are counterparts, a good thing will not "eliminate evil as far as it can." Indeed, this view suggests that good and evil are not strictly qualities of things at all. Perhaps the suggestion is that good and evil are related in much the same way as great and small. Certainly, when the term "great" is used relatively as a condensation of "greater than so-and-so," and "small" is used correspondingly, greatness and smallness are counterparts and cannot exist without each other. But in this sense greatness is not a quality, not an intrinsic feature of anything; and it would be absurd to think of a movement in favour of greatness and against smallness in this sense. Such a movement would be self-defeating, since relative greatness can be promoted only by a simultaneous promotion of relative smallness. I feel sure that no theists would be content to regard God's goodness

as analogous to this—as if what he supports were not the *good* but the *better*, and if he had the paradoxical aim that all things should be better than other things.

This point is obscured by the fact that "great" and "small" seem to have an absolute as well as a relative sense. I cannot discuss here whether there is absolute magnitude or not, but if there is, there could be an absolute sense for "great," it could mean of at least a certain size, and it would make sense to speak of all things getting bigger, of a universe that was expanding all over, and therefore it would make sense to speak of promoting greatness. But in *this* sense great and small are not logically necessary counterparts: either quality could exist without the other. There would be no logical impossibility in everything's being small or in everything's being great.

Neither in the absolute nor in the relative sense, then, of "great" and "small" do these terms provide an analogy of the sort that would be needed to support this solution of the problem of evil. In neither case are greatness and smallness *both* necessary counterparts *and* mutually opposed forces or possible objects for support and attack.

It may be replied that good and evil are necessary counterparts in the same way as any quality and its logical opposite: redness can occur, it is suggested, only if non-redness also occurs. But unless evil is merely the privation of good, they are not logical opposites, and some further argument would be needed to show that they are counterparts in the same way as genuine logical opposites. Let us assume that this could be given. There is still doubt of the correctness of the metaphysical principle that a quality must have a real opposite: I suggest that it is not really impossible that everything should be, say, red, that the truth is merely that if everything were red we should not notice redness, and so we should have no word "red"; we observe and give names to qualities only if they have real opposites. If so, the principle that a term must have an opposite would belong only to our language or to our thought, and would not be an ontological principle, and correspondingly, the rule that good cannot exist without evil would not state a logical necessity of a sort that God would just have to put up with. God might have made everything good, though *we* should not have noticed it if he had.

But, finally, even if we concede that this is an ontological principle, it will provide a solution for the problem of evil only if one is prepared to say, "Evil exists, but only just enough evil to serve as the counterpart of good." I doubt whether any theist will accept this. After all, the ontological requirement that non-redness should occur would be satisfied even if all the universe, except for a minute speck, were red, and, if there were a corresponding requirement for evil as a counterpart to good, a minute dose of evil would presumably do. But theists are not usually willing to say, in all contexts, that all the evil that occurs is a minute and necessary dose.

(2) "Evil is necessary as a means to good."

It is sometimes suggested that evil is necessary for good not as a counterpart but as a means. In its simple form this has little plausibility as a solution of the problem of evil, since it obviously implies a severe restriction of God's power. It would be a *causal* law that you cannot have a certain end without a certain means, so that if God has to introduce evil as a means to good, he must be subject to at least some causal laws. This certainly conflicts with what a theist normally means by omnipotence. This view of God as limited by causal laws also conflicts with the view that causal laws are themselves made by God, which is more widely held than the corresponding view about the laws of logic. This conflict would, indeed, be resolved if it were possible for an omnipotent being to bind himself, and this possibility has still to be considered. Unless a favourable answer can be given to this question, the suggestion that evil is necessary as a means to good solves the problem of evil only by denying one of its constituent propositions, either that God is omnipotent or that "omnipotent" means what it says.

(3) "The universe is better with some evil in it than it could be if there were no evil."

Much more important is a solution which at first seems to be a mere variant of the previous one,

that evil may contribute to the goodness of a whole in which it is found, so that the universe as a whole is better as it is, with some evil in it, than it would be if there were no evil. This solution may be developed in either of two ways. It may be supported by an aesthetic analogy, by the fact that contrasts heighten beauty, that in a musical work, for example, there may occur discords which somehow add to the beauty of the work as a whole. Alternatively, it may be worked out in connection with the notion of progress, that the best possible organization of the universe will not be static, but progressive, that the gradual overcoming of evil by good is really a finer thing than would be the eternal unchallenged supremacy of good.

In either case, this solution usually starts from the assumption that the evil whose existence gives rise to the problem of evil is primarily what is called physical evil, that is to say, pain. In Hume's rather half-hearted presentation of the problem of evil, the evils that he stresses are pain and disease, and those who reply to him argue that the existence of pain and disease makes possible the existence of sympathy, benevolence, heroism, and the gradually successful struggle of doctors and reformers to overcome these evils. In fact, theists often seize the opportunity to accuse those who stress the problem of evil of taking a low, materialistic view of good and evil, equating these with pleasure and pain, and of ignoring the more spiritual goods which can arise in the struggle against evils.

But let us see exactly what is being done here. Let us call pain and misery "first order evil" or "evil (1)." What contrasts with this, namely, pleasure and happiness, will be called "first order good" or "good (1)." Distinct from this is "second order good" or "good (2)" which somehow emerges in a complex situation in which evil (1) is a necessary component—logically not merely causally, necessary. (Exactly *how* it emerges does not matter: in the crudest version of this solution good (2) is simply the heightening of happiness by the contrast with misery, in other versions it includes sympathy with suffering, heroism in facing danger, and the gradual decrease of first order evil and increase of first order good.) It is also being assumed that second order good is more important than first order good or evil, in particular that it more than outweighs the first order evil it involves.

Now this is a particularly subtle attempt to solve the problem of evil. It defends God's goodness and omnipotence on the ground that (on a sufficiently long view) this is the best of all logically possible worlds, because it includes the important second order goods, and yet it admits that real evils, namely first order evils, exist. But does it still hold that good and evil are opposed? Not, clearly, in the sense that we set out originally: good does not tend to eliminate evil in general. Instead, we have a modified, a more complex pattern. First order good (*e.g.* happiness*) contrasts with* first order evil (*e.g.* misery): these two are opposed in a fairly mechanical way; some second order goods (*e.g.* benevolence) try to maximize first order good and minimize first order evil; but God's goodness is not this, it is rather the will to maximize *second* order good. We might, therefore, call God's goodness an example of a third order goodness, or good (3). While this account is different from our original one, it might well be held to be an improvement on it, to give a more accurate description of the way in which good is opposed to evil, and to be consistent with the essential theist position.

There might, however, be several objections to this solution.

First, some might argue that such qualities as benevolence—and *a fortiori* the third order goodness which promotes benevolence—have a merely derivative value, that they are not higher sorts of good, but merely means to good (1), that is, to happiness, so that it would be absurd for God to keep misery in existence in order to make possible the virtues of benevolence, heroism, etc. The theist who adopts the present solution must, of course, deny this, but he can do so with some plausibility, so I should not press this objection.

Secondly, it follows from this solution that God is not in our sense benevolent or sympathetic: he is not concerned to minimize evil (1), but only to promote good (2); and this might be a disturbing conclusion for some theists.

But, thirdly, the fatal objection is this. Our analysis shows clearly the possibility of the existence of a *second* order evil, an evil (2) contrasting with good (2) as evil (1) contrasts with good (1). This would include malevolence, cruelty, callousness, cowardice, and states in which good (1) is decreasing and evil (1) increasing. And just as good (2) is held to be the important kind of good, the kind that God is concerned to promote, so evil (2) will, by analogy, be the important kind of evil, the kind which God, if he were wholly good and omnipotent, would eliminate. And yet evil (2) plainly exists, and indeed most theists (in other contexts) stress its existence more than that of evil (1). We should, therefore, state the problem of evil in terms of second order evil, and against this form of the problem the present solution is useless.

An attempt might be made to use this solution again, at a higher level, to explain the occurrence of evil (2); indeed the next main solution that we shall examine does just this, with the help of some new notions. Without any fresh notions, such a solution would have little plausibility: for example, we could hardly say that the really important good was a good (3), such as the increase of benevolence in proportion to cruelty, which logically required for its occurrence the occurrence of some second order evil. But even if evil (2) could be explained in this way, it is fairly clear that there would be third order evils contrasting with this third order good: and we should be well on the way to an infinite regress, where the solution of a problem of evil, stated in terms of evil (n), indicated the existence of an evil ($n + 1$), and a further problem to be solved.

(4) "Evil is due to human free will."

Perhaps the most important proposed solution of the problem of evil is that evil is not to be ascribed to God at all, but to the independent actions of human beings, supposed to have been endowed by God with freedom of the will. This solution may be combined with the preceding one: first order evil (*e.g.* pain) may be justified as a logically necessary component in second order good (*e.g.* sympathy) while second order evil (*e.g.* cruelty) is not *justified*, but is so ascribed to human beings that God cannot be held responsible for it. This combination evades my third criticism of the preceding solution.

The free will solution also involves the preceding solution at a higher level. To explain why a wholly good God gave men free will although it would lead to some important evils, it must be argued that it is better on the whole that men should act freely, and sometimes err, than that they should be innocent automata, acting rightly in a wholly determined way. Freedom that is to say, is now treated as a third order good, and as being more valuable than second order goods (such as sympathy and heroism) would be if they were deterministically produced, and it is being assumed that second order evils, such as cruelty, are logically necessary accompaniments of freedom, just as pain is a logically necessary precondition of sympathy.

I think that this solution is unsatisfactory primarily because of the incoherence of the notion of freedom of the will: but I cannot discuss this topic adequately here, although some of my criticisms will touch upon it.

First I should query the assumption that second order evils are logically necessary accompaniments of freedom. I should ask this: if God has made men such that in their free choices they sometimes prefer what is good and sometimes what is evil, why could he not have made men such that they always freely choose the good? If there is no logical impossibility in a man's freely choosing the good on one, or on several, occasions, there cannot be a logical impossibility in his freely choosing the good on every occasion. God was not, then, faced with a choice between making innocent automata and making beings who, in acting freely, would sometimes go wrong: there was open to him the obviously better possibility of making beings who would act freely but always go right. Clearly, his failure to avail himself of this possibility is inconsistent with his being both omnipotent and wholly good.

If it is replied that this objection is absurd, that the making of some wrong choices is logically necessary for freedom, it would seem that "freedom" must here mean complete randomness or

indeterminacy, including randomness with regard to the alternatives good and evil, in other words that men's choices and consequent actions can be "free" only if they are not determined by their characters. Only on this assumption can God escape the responsibility for men's actions; for if he made them as they are, but did not determine their wrong choices, this can only be because the wrong choices are not determined by men as they are. But then if freedom is randomness, how can it be a characteristic of *will?* And, still more, how can it be the most important good? What value or merit would there be in free choices if these were random actions which were not determined by the nature of the agent?

I conclude that to make this solution plausible two different senses of "freedom" must be confused, one sense which will justify the view that freedom is a third order good, more valuable than other goods would be without it, and another sense, sheer randomness, to prevent us from ascribing to God a decision to make men such that they sometimes go wrong when he might have made them such that they would always freely go right.

This criticism is sufficient to dispose of this solution. But besides this there is a fundamental difficulty in the notion of an omnipotent God creating men with free will, for if men's wills are really free this must mean that even God cannot control them, that is, that God is no longer omnipotent. It may be objected that God's gift of freedom to men does not mean that he *cannot* control their wills, but that he always *refrains* from controlling their wills. But why, we may ask, should God refrain from controlling evil wills? Why should he not leave men free to will rightly, but intervene when he sees them beginning to will wrongly? If God could do this, but does not, and if he is wholly good, the only explanation could be that even a wrong free act of will is not really evil, that its freedom is a value which outweighs its wrongness, so that there would be a loss of value if God took away the wrongness and the freedom together. But this is utterly opposed to what theists say about sin in other contexts. The present solution of the problem of evil, then, can be maintained only in the form that God has made men so free that he *cannot* control their wills.

This leads us to what I call the Paradox of Omnipotence: can an omnipotent being make things which he cannot subsequently control? Or, what is practically equivalent to this, can an omnipotent being make rules which then bind himself? (These are practically equivalent because any such rules could be regarded as setting certain things beyond his control, and *vice versa*.) The second of these formulations is relevant to the suggestions that we have already met, that an omnipotent God creates the rules of logic or causal laws, and is then bound by them.

It is clear that this is a paradox: the questions cannot be answered satisfactorily either in the affirmative or in the negative. If we answer "Yes," it follows that if God actually makes things which he cannot control, or makes rules which bind himself, he is not omnipotent once he has made them: there are then things which he cannot do. But if we answer "No," we are immediately asserting that there are things which he cannot do, that is to say that he is already not omnipotent.

It cannot be replied that the question which sets this paradox is not a proper question. It would make perfectly good sense to say that a human mechanic has made a machine which he cannot control: if there is any difficulty about the question it lies in the notion of omnipotence itself.

This, incidentally, shows that although we have approached this paradox from the free will theory, it is equally a problem for a theological determinist. No one thinks that machines have free will, yet they may well be beyond the control of their makers. The determinist might reply that anyone who makes anything determines its ways of acting, and so determines its subsequent behaviour: even the human mechanic does this by his *choice* of materials and structure for his machine, though he does not know all about either of these: the mechanic thus determines, though he may not foresee, his machine's actions. And since God is omniscient, and since his creation of things is total, he both determines and foresees the ways in which his creatures will act. We may grant this, but it is beside the

point. The question is not whether God *originally* determined the future actions of his creatures, but whether he can *subsequently* control their actions, or whether he was able in his original creation to put things beyond his subsequent control. Even on determinist principles the answers "Yes" and "No" are equally irreconcilable with God's omnipotence.

Before suggesting a solution of this paradox, I would point out that there is a parallel Paradox of Sovereignty. Can a legal sovereign make a law restricting its own future legislative power? For example, could the British parliament make a law forbidding any future parliament to socialise banking, and also forbidding the future repeal of this law itself? Or could the British parliament, which was legally sovereign in Australia in, say, 1899, pass a valid law, or series of laws, which made it no longer sovereign in 1933? Again, neither the affirmative nor the negative answer is really satisfactory. If we were to answer "Yes," we should be admitting the validity of a law which, if it were actually made, would mean that parliament was no longer sovereign. If we were to answer "No," we should be admitting that there is a law, not logically absurd, which parliament cannot validly make, that is, that parliament is not now a legal sovereign. This paradox can be solved in the following way. We should distinguish between first order laws, that is laws governing the actions of individuals and bodies other than the legislature, and second order laws, that is laws about laws, laws governing the actions of the legislature itself. Correspondingly, we should distinguish two orders of sovereignty, first order sovereignty (sovereignty (1)) which is unlimited authority to make first order laws, and second order sovereignty (sovereignty (2)) which is unlimited authority to make second order laws. If we say that parliament is sovereign we might mean that any parliament at any time has sovereignty (1), or we might mean that parliament has both sovereignty (1) and sovereignty (2) at present, but we cannot without contradiction mean both that the present parliament has sovereignty (2) and that every parliament at every time has sovereignty (1), for if the present parliament has sovereignty (2) it may use it to take away the sovereignty (1) of later parliaments. What the paradox shows is that we cannot ascribe to any continuing institution legal sovereignty in an inclusive sense.

The analogy between omnipotence and sovereignty shows that the paradox of omnipotence can be solved in a similar way. We must distinguish between first order omnipotence (omnipotence (1)), that is unlimited power to act, and second order omnipotence (omnipotence (2)), that is unlimited power to determine what powers to act things shall have. Then we could consistently say that God all the time has omnipotence (1), but if so no beings at any time have powers to act independently of God. Or we could say that God at one time had omnipotence (2), and used it to assign independent powers to act to certain things, so that God thereafter did not have omnipotence (1). But what the paradox shows is that we cannot consistently ascribe to any continuing being omnipotence in an inclusive sense.

An alternative solution of this paradox would be simply to deny that God is a continuing being, that any times can be assigned to his actions at all. But on this assumption (which also has difficulties of its own) no meaning can be given to the assertion that God made men with wills so free that he could not control them. The paradox of omnipotence can be avoided by putting God outside time, but the free will solution of the problem of evil cannot be saved in this way, and equally it remains impossible to hold that an omnipotent God *binds himself* by causal or logical laws.

CONCLUSION

Of the proposed solutions of the problem of evil which we have examined, none has stood up to criticism. There may be other solutions which require examination, but this study strongly suggests that there is no valid solution of the problem which does not modify at least one of the constituent propositions in a way which would seriously affect the essential core of the theistic position.

Quite apart from the problem of evil, the paradox of omnipotence has shown that God's omnipotence must in any case be restricted in one way or another, that unqualified omnipotence cannot be ascribed to any being that continues through time. And if God and his actions are not in time, can omnipotence, or power of any sort, be meaningfully ascribed to him?

IV.B.2

The Inductive Argument from Evil against the Existence of God

WILLIAM ROWE

A short biographical sketch of William Rowe appears before selection I.B.9. In the present selection, Rowe argues that an inductive or probabilistic version of the argument from evil justifies atheism. He concedes that deductive arguments against the existence of God on the basis of evil, such as J. L. Mackie uses (Reading IV. B. 1), do not succeed. Nevertheless, he says it is reasonable to believe that there is no God. In the last part of his essay, Rowe defines his position as "friendly atheism" since he admits that a theist may be justified in rejecting the probabilistic argument from evil.

This paper is concerned with three interrelated questions. The first is: Is there an argument for atheism based on the existence of evil that may rationally justify someone in being an atheist? To this first question I give an affirmative answer and try to support that answer by setting forth a strong argument for atheism based on the existence of evil.[1] The second question is: How can the theist best defend his position against the argument for atheism based on the existence of evil? In response to this question I try to describe what may be an adequate rational defense for theism against any argument for atheism based on the existence of evil. The final question is: What position should the informed atheist take concerning the rationality of theistic belief? Three different answers an atheist may give to this question serve to distinguish three varieties of atheism: unfriendly atheism, indifferent atheism, and friendly atheism. In the final part of the paper I discuss and defend the position of friendly atheism.

Before we consider the argument from evil, we need to distinguish a narrow and a broad sense of the terms "theist," "atheist," and "agnostic." By a "theist" in the narrow sense I mean someone who believes in the existence of an omnipotent, omniscient, eternal, supremely good being who created the world. By a "theist" in the

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Footnotes edited.

broad sense I mean someone who believes in the existence of some sort of divine being or divine reality. To be a theist in the narrow sense is also to be a theist in the broad sense, but one may be a theist in the broad sense—as was Paul Tillich—without believing that there is a supremely good, omnipotent, omniscient, eternal being who created the world. Similar distinctions must be made between a narrow and a broad sense of the terms "atheist" and "agnostic." To be an atheist in the broad sense is to deny the existence of any sort of divine being or divine reality. Tillich was not an atheist in the broad sense. But he was an atheist in the narrow sense, for he denied that there exists a divine being that is all-knowing, all-powerful and perfectly good. In this paper I will be using the terms "theism," "theist," "atheism," "atheist," "agnosticism," and "agnostic" in the narrow sense, not in the broad sense.

I

In developing the argument for atheism based on the existence of evil, it will be useful to focus on some particular evil that our world contains in considerable abundance. Intense human and animal suffering, for example, occurs daily and in great plenitude in our world. Such intense suffering is a clear case of evil. Of course, if the intense suffering leads to some greater good, a good we could not have obtained without undergoing the suffering in question, we might conclude that the suffering is justified, but it remains an evil nevertheless. For we must not confuse the intense suffering in and of itself with the good things to which it sometimes leads or of which it may be a necessary part. Intense human or animal suffering is in itself bad, an evil, even though it may sometimes be justified by virtue of being a part of, or leading to, some good which is unobtainable without it. What is evil in itself may sometimes be good as a means because it leads to something that is good in itself. In such a case, while remaining an evil in itself, the intense human or animal suffering is, nevertheless, an evil which someone might be morally justified in permitting.

Taking human and animal suffering as a clear instance of evil which occurs with great frequency in our world, the argument for atheism based on evil can be stated as follows:

1. There exist instances of intense suffering which an omnipotent, omniscient being could have prevented without thereby losing some greater good or permitting some evil equally bad or worse.[2]
2. An omniscient, wholly good being would prevent the occurrence of any intense suffering it could, unless it could not do so without thereby losing some greater good or permitting some evil equally bad or worse.
3. There does not exist an omnipotent, omniscient, wholly good being.

What are we to say about this argument for atheism, an argument based on the profusion of one sort of evil in our world? The argument is valid; therefore, if we have rotational grounds for accepting its premises, to that extent we have rational grounds for accepting atheism. Do we, however, have rational grounds for accepting the premises of this argument?

Let's begin with the second premise. Let s_1 be an instance of intense human or animal suffering which an omniscient, wholly good being could prevent. We will also suppose that things are such that s_1 will occur unless prevented by the omniscient, wholly good (OG) being. We might be interested in determining what would be a sufficient condition of OG failing to prevent s_1. But, for our purpose here, we need only try to state a necessary condition for OG failing to prevent s_1. That condition, so it seems to me, is this:

Either

(i) there is some greater good, G, such that G is obtainable by OG only if OG permits s_1,

or

(ii) there is some greater good, G, such that G is obtainable by OG only if OG permits either s_1 or some evil equally bad or worse,

or

(iii) s_1 is such that it is preventable by OG only if OG permits some evil equally bad or worse.

It is important to recognize that (iii) is not included in (i). For losing a good greater than s_1 is not the same as permitting an evil greater than s_1. And this because the *absence* of a good state of affairs need not itself be an evil state of affairs. It is also important to recognize that s_1 might be such that it is preventable by OG *without* losing G (so condition (i) is not satisfied) but also such that if OG did prevent it, G would be lost unless OG permitted some evil equal to or worse than s_1. If this were so, it does not seem correct to require that OG prevent s_1. Thus, condition (ii) takes into account an important possibility not encompassed in condition (i).

Is it true that if an omniscient, wholly good being permits the occurrence of some intense suffering it could have prevented, then either (i) or (ii) or (iii) obtains? It seems to me that it is true. But if it is true then so is premise (2) of the argument for atheism. For that premise merely states in more compact form what we have suggested must be true if an omniscient, wholly good being fails to prevent some intense suffering it could prevent. Premise (2) says that an omniscient, wholly good being would prevent the occurrence of any intense suffering it could, unless it could not do so without thereby losing some greater good or permitting some evil equally bad or worse. This premise (or something not too distant from it) is, I think, held in common by many atheists and nontheists. Of course, there may be disagreement about whether something is good, and whether, if it is good, one would be morally justified in permitting some intense suffering to occur in order to obtain it. Someone might hold, for example, that no good is great enough to justify permitting an innocent child to suffer terribly. Again, someone might hold that the mere fact that a given good outweighs some suffering and would be lost if the suffering were prevented, is not a morally sufficient reason for permitting the suffering. But to hold either of these views is not to deny (2). For (2) claims only that *if* an omniscient, wholly good being permits intense suffering *then* either there is some greater good that would have been lost, or some equally bad or worse evil that would have occurred, had the intense suffering been prevented. (2) does not purport to describe what might be a *sufficient* condition for an omniscient, wholly good being to permit intense suffering, only what is a *necessary* condition. So stated, (2) seems to express a belief that accords with our basic moral principles, principles shared by both theists and nontheists. If we are to fault the argument for atheism, therefore, it seems we must find some fault with its first premise.

Suppose in some distant forest lightning strikes a dead tree, resulting in a forest fire. In the fire a fawn is trapped, horribly burned, and lies in terrible agony for several days before death relieves its suffering. So far as we can see, the fawn's intense suffering is pointless. For there does not appear to be any greater good such that the prevention of the fawn's suffering would require either the loss of that good or the occurrence of an evil equally bad or worse. Nor does there seem to be any equally bad or worse evil so connected to the fawn's suffering that it would have had to occur had the fawn's suffering been prevented. Could an omnipotent, omniscient being have prevented the fawn's apparently pointless suffering? The answer is obvious, as even the theist will insist. An omnipotent, omniscient being could have easily prevented the fawn from being horribly burned, or, given the burning, could have spared the fawn the intense suffering by quickly ending its life, rather than allowing the fawn to lie in terrible agony for several days. Since the fawn's intense suffering was preventable and, so far as we can see, pointless, doesn't it appear that premise (1) of the argument is true, that there do exist instances of intense suffering which an omnipotent, omniscient being could have prevented without thereby losing

some greater good or permitting some evil equally bad or worse?

It must be acknowledged that the case of the fawn's apparently pointless suffering does not prove that (1) is true. For even though we cannot see how the fawn's suffering is required to obtain some greater good (or to prevent some equally bad or worse evil), it hardly follows that it is not so required. After all, we are often surprised by how things we thought to be unconnected turn out to be intimately connected. Perhaps, for all we know, there is some familiar good outweighing the fawn's suffering to which that suffering is connected in a way we do not see. Furthermore, there may well be unfamiliar goods, goods we haven't dreamed of, to which the fawn's suffering is inextricably connected. Indeed, it would seem to require something like omniscience on our part before we could lay claim to *knowing* that there is no greater good connected to the fawn's suffering in such a manner than an omnipotent, omniscient being could not have achieved that good without permitting that suffering or some evil equally bad or worse. So the case of the fawn's suffering surely does not enable us to *establish* the truth of (1).

The truth is that we are not in a position to prove that (1) is true. We cannot know with certainty that instances of suffering of the sort described in (1) do occur in our world. But it is one thing to *know* or *prove* that (1) is true and quite another thing to have *rational grounds* for believing (1) to be true. We are often in the position where in the light of our experience and knowledge it is rational to believe that a certain statement is true, even though we are not in a position to prove or to know with certainty that the statement is true. In the light of our past experience and knowledge it is, for example, very reasonable to believe that neither Goldwater nor McGovern will ever be elected President, but we are scarcely in the position of knowing with certainty that neither will ever be elected President. So, too, with (1), although we cannot know with certainty that it is true, it perhaps can be rationally supported, shown to be a rational belief.

Consider again the case of the fawn's suffering. Is it reasonable to believe that there is some greater good so intimately connected to that suffering that even an omnipotent, omniscient being could not have obtained that good without permitting that suffering or some evil at least as bad? It certainly does not appear reasonable to believe this. Nor does it seem reasonable to believe that there is some evil at least as bad as the fawn's suffering such that an omnipotent being simply could not have prevented it without permitting the fawn's suffering. But even if it should somehow be reasonable to believe either of these things of the fawn's suffering, we must then ask whether it is reasonable to believe either of these things of *all* the instances of seemingly pointless human and animal suffering that occur daily in our world. And surely the answer to this more general question must be no. It seems quite unlikely that all the instances of intense suffering occurring daily in our world are intimately related to the occurrence of greater goods or the prevention of evils at least as bad; and even more unlikely, should they somehow all be so related, that an omnipotent, omniscient being could not have achieved at least some of those goods (or prevented some of those evils) without permitting the instances of intense suffering that are supposedly related to them. In the light of our experience and knowledge of the variety and scale of human and animal suffering in our world, the idea that none of this suffering could have been prevented by an omnipotent being without thereby losing a greater good or permitting an evil at least as bad seems an extraordinary absurd idea, quite beyond our belief. It seems then that although we cannot prove that (1) is true, it is, nevertheless, altogether *reasonable* to believe that (1) is true, that (1) is a *rational* belief.

Returning now to our argument for atheism, we've seen that the second premise expresses a basic belief common to many theists and nontheists. We've also seen that our experience and knowledge of the variety and profusion of suffering in our world provides *rational support* for the first premise. Seeing that the conclusion, "There does

not exist an omnipotent, omniscient, wholly good being" follows from these two premises, it does seem that we have *rational support* for atheism, that it is reasonable for us to believe that the theistic God does not exist.

II

Can theism be rationally defended against the argument for atheism we have just examined? If it can, how might the theist best respond to that argument? Since the argument from (1) and (2) to (3) is valid, and since the theist, no less than the nontheist, is more than likely committed to (2), it's clear that the theist can reject this atheistic argument only by rejecting its first premise, the premise that states that there are instances of intense suffering which an omnipotent, omniscient being could have prevented without thereby losing some greater good or permitting some evil equally bad or worse. How, then, can the theist best respond to this premise and the considerations advanced in its support?

There are basically three responses a theist can make. First, he might argue not that (1) is false or probably false, but only that the reasoning given in support of it is in some way *defective*. He may do this either by arguing that the reasons given in support of (1) are *in themselves* insufficient to justify accepting (1), or by arguing that there are other things we know which, when taken in conjunction with these reasons, do not justify us in accepting (1). I suppose some theists would be content with this rather modest response to the basic argument for atheism. But given the validity of the basic argument and the theist's likely acceptance of (2), he is thereby committed to the view that (1) is false, not just that we have no good reasons for accepting (1) as true. The second two responses are aimed at showing that it is reasonable to believe that (1) is false. Since the theist is committed to this view, I shall focus the discussion on these two attempts, attempts which we can distinguish as "the direct attack" and "the indirect attack."

By a direct attack, I mean an attempt to reject (1) by pointing out goods, for example, to which suffering may well be connected, goods which an omnipotent, omniscient being could not achieve without permitting suffering. It is doubtful, however, that the direct attack can succeed. The theist may point out that some suffering leads to moral and spiritual development impossible without suffering. But it's reasonably clear that suffering often occurs in a degree far beyond what is required for character development. The theist may say that some suffering results from free choices of human beings and might be preventable only by preventing some measure of human freedom. But, again, it's clear that much intense suffering occurs not as a result of human free choices. The general difficulty with this direct attack on premise (1) is twofold. First, it cannot succeed; for the theist does not know what greater goods might be served, or evils prevented, by each instance of intense human or animal suffering. Second, the theist's own religious tradition usually maintains that in this life it is not given to us to know God's purpose in allowing particular instances of suffering. Hence, the direct attack against premise (1) cannot succeed and violates basic beliefs associated with theism.

The best procedure for the theist to follow in rejecting premise (1) is the indirect procedure. This procedure I shall call "the G. E. Moore shift," so-called in honor of the twentieth century philosopher G. E. Moore, who used it to great effect in dealing with the arguments of the skeptics. Skeptical philosophers such as David Hume have advanced ingenious arguments to prove that no one can know of the existence of any material object. The premises of their arguments employ plausible principles, principles which many philosophers have tried to reject directly, but only with questionable success. Moore's procedure was altogether different. Instead of arguing directly against the premises of the skeptic's arguments, he simply noted that the premises implied, for example, that he (Moore) did not know of the existence of a pencil. Moore then proceeded indirectly against the skeptic's premises by arguing:

I do know that this pencil exists.

If the skeptic's principles are correct I cannot know of the existence of this pencil.

∴ The skeptic's principles (at least one) must be incorrect.

Moore then noted that his argument is just as valid as the skeptic's, that both of their arguments contain the premise "If the skeptic's principles are correct Moore cannot know of the existence of this pencil," and concluded that the only way to choose between the two arguments (Moore's and the skeptic's) is by deciding which of the first premises it is more rational to believe—Moore's premise "I do know that this pencil exists" or the skeptic's premise asserting that his skeptical principles are correct. Moore concluded that his own first premise was the more rational of the two.

Before we see how the theist may apply the G. E. Moore shift to the basic argument of atheism, we should note the general strategy of the shift. We're given an argument: *p, q,* therefore, *r.* Instead of arguing directly against *p*, another argument is constructed not-*r, q,* therefore, not-*p*—which begins with the denial of the conclusion of the first argument, keeps its second premise, and ends with the denial of the first premise as its conclusion. Compare, for example, these two:

I. $\dfrac{p \quad q}{r}$ II. $\dfrac{\text{not-}r \quad q}{\text{not-}p}$

It is a truth of logic that if I is valid II must be valid as well. Since the arguments are the same so far as the second premise is concerned, any choice between them must concern their respective first premises. To argue against the first premise (*p*) by constructing the counter argument II is to employ the G. E. Moore shift.

Applying the G. E. Moore shift against the first premise of the basic argument for atheism, the theist can argue as follows:

not-3. There exists an omnipotent, omniscient, wholly good being.

2. An omniscient, wholly good being would prevent the occurrence of any intense suffering it could, unless it could not do so without thereby losing some greater good or permitting some evil equally bad or worse.

therefore,

not-1. It is not the case that there exist instances of intense suffering which an omnipotent, omniscient being could have prevented without thereby losing some greater good or permitting some evil equally bad or worse.

We now have two arguments: the basic argument for atheism from (1) and (2) to (3), and the theist's best response, the argument from (not-3) and (2) to (not-1). What the theist then says about (1) is that he has rational grounds for believing in the existence of the theistic God (not-3), accepts (2) as true, and sees that (not-1) follows from (not-3) and (2). He concludes, therefore, that he has rational grounds for rejecting (1). Having rational grounds for rejecting (1), the theist concludes that the basic argument for atheism is mistaken.

III

We've had a look at a forceful argument for atheism and what seems to be the theist's best response to that argument. If one is persuaded by the argument for atheism, as I find myself to be, how might one best view the position of the theist? Of course, he will view the theist as having a false belief, just as the theist will view the atheist as having a false belief. But what position should the atheist take concerning the *rationality* of the theist's belief? There are three major positions an atheist might take, positions which we may think of as some varieties of atheism. First, the atheist may believe that no one is rationally justified in believing that the theistic God exists. Let us call this position

"unfriendly atheism." Second, the atheist may hold no belief concerning whether any theist is or isn't rationally justified in believing that the theistic God exists. Let us call this view "indifferent atheism." Finally, the atheist may believe that some theists are rationally justified in believing that the theistic God exists. This view we shall call "friendly atheism." In this final part of the paper I propose to discuss and defend the position of friendly atheism.

If no one can be rationally justified in believing a false proposition then friendly atheism is a paradoxical, if not incoherent position. But surely the truth of a belief is not a necessary condition of someone's being rationally justified in having that belief. So in holding that someone is rationally justified in believing that the theistic God exists, the friendly atheist is not committed to thinking that the theist has a true belief. What he is committed to is that the theist has rational grounds for his belief, a belief the atheist rejects and is convinced he is rationally justified in rejecting. But is this possible? Can someone, like our friendly atheist, hold a belief, be convinced that he is rationally justified in holding that belief, and yet believe that someone else is equally justified in believing the opposite? Surely this is possible. Suppose your friends see you off on a flight to Hawaii. Hours after take-off they learn that your plane has gone down at sea. After a twenty-four hour search, no survivors have been found. Under these circumstances they are rationally justified in believing that you have perished. But it is hardly rational for you to believe this, as you bob up and down in your life vest, wondering why the search planes have failed to spot you. Indeed, to amuse yourself while awaiting your fate, you might very well reflect on the fact that your friends are rationally justified in believing that you are now dead, a proposition you disbelieve and are rationally justified in disbelieving. So, too, perhaps an atheist may be rationally justified in his atheistic belief and yet hold that some theists are rationally justified in believing just the opposite of what he believes.

What sort of grounds might a theist have for believing that God exists? Well, he might endeavor to justify his belief by appealing to one or more of the traditional arguments: Ontological, Cosmological, Teleological, Moral, etc. Second, he might appeal to certain aspects of religious experience, perhaps even his own religious experience. Third, he might try to justify theism as a plausible theory in terms of which we can account for a variety of phenomena. Although an atheist must hold that the theistic God does not exist, can he not also believe, and be justified in so believing, that some of these "justifications of theism" do actually rationally justify some theists in their belief that there exists a supremely good, omnipotent, omniscient being? It seems to me that he can.

If we think of the long history of theistic belief and the special situations in which people are sometimes placed, it is perhaps as absurd to think that no one was ever rationally justified in believing that the theistic God exists as it is to think that no one was ever justified in believing that human beings would never walk on the moon. But in suggesting that friendly atheism is preferable to unfriendly atheism, I don't mean to rest the case on what some human beings might reasonably have believed in the eleventh or thirteenth century. The more interesting question is whether some people in modern society, people who are aware of the usual grounds for belief and disbelief and are acquainted to some degree with modern science, are yet rationally justified in accepting theism. Friendly atheism is a significant position only if it answers this question in the affirmative.

It is not difficult for an atheist to be friendly when he has reason to believe that the theist could not reasonably be expected to be acquainted with the grounds for disbelief that he (the atheist) possesses. For then the atheist may take the view that some theists are rationally justified in holding to theism, but would not be so were they to be acquainted with the grounds for disbelief—those grounds being sufficient to tip the scale in favor of atheism when balanced against the reasons the theist has in support of his belief.

Friendly atheism becomes paradoxical, however, when the atheist contemplates believing that

the theist has all the grounds for atheism that he, the atheist, has, and yet is rationally justified in maintaining his theistic belief. But even so excessively friendly a view as this perhaps can be held by the atheist if he also has some reason to think that the grounds for theism are not as telling as the theist is justified in taking them to be.

In this paper I've presented what I take to be a strong argument for atheism, pointed out what I think is the theist's best response to that argument, distinguished three positions an atheist might take concerning the rationality of theistic belief, and made some remarks in defense of the position called "friendly atheism." I'm aware that the central points of the paper are not likely to be warmly received by many philosophers. Philosophers who are atheists tend to be tough minded—holding that there are no good reasons for supposing that theism is true. And theists tend either to reject the view that the existence of evil provides rational grounds for atheism or to hold that religious belief has nothing to do with reason and evidence at all. But such is the way of philosophy.

NOTES

1. Some philosophers have contended that the existence of evil is *logically inconsistent* with the existence of the theistic God. No one, I think, has succeeded in establishing such an extravagant claim. Indeed, granted incompatibilism, there is a fairly compelling argument for the view that the existence of evil is logically consistent with the existence of the theistic God. (For a lucid statement of this argument see Alvin Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil* (New York, 1974), 29-59.) There remains, however, what we may call the *evidential* form—as opposed to the *logical* form—of the problem of evil; the view that the variety and profusion of evil in our world, although perhaps not logically inconsistent with the existence of the theistic God, provides, nevertheless, *rational support* for atheism. In this paper I shall be concerned solely with the evidential form of the problem, the form of the problem which, I think, presents a rather severe difficulty for theism. William L. Rowe, "The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism," first published in *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 16 (1979), pp. 335-41. Used with permission.
2. If there is some good, G, greater than any evil, (1) will be false for the trivial reason that no matter what evil, E, we pick the conjunctive good state of affairs consisting of G and E will outweigh E and be such that an omnipotent being could not obtain it without permitting E. (See Alvin Plantinga, *God and Other Minds* (Ithaca, 1967), 167.) To avoid this objection we may insert "unreplaceable" into our premises (1) and (2) between "some" and "greater." If E isn't required for G, and G is better than G plus E, then the good conjunctive state of affairs composed of G and E would be replaceable by the greater good of G alone. For the sake of simplicity, however, I will ignore this complication both in the formulation and discussion of premises (1) and (2).

IV.B.3

Evolution and the Problem of Evil

PAUL DRAPER

A short biographical sketch of Paul Draper appears before selection II.B.5. In the present article, Draper notes that traditionally the problem of evil has been, with few exceptions, the only atheological argument against the existence of God. He argues that the naturalistic account of evolution can provide a cogent alternative to theism and that by combining that with the problem of evil, one can begin to build a cumulative case against theism.

I. INTRODUCTION

Naturalism and theism are powerful and popular worldviews. They suggest very different conceptions of the nature of human beings, our relationship to the world, and our future. Though I hope that theism is true, I believe that it faces a number of evidential problems, problems that prevent my hope from becoming belief. In this paper I will examine two of those problems: evolution and evil. I will use certain known facts about the origin of complex life and the pattern of pain and pleasure in the world to construct a powerful *prima facie* case against theism.

By "theism" I mean the hypothesis[1] that God is the creator of the physical universe. I take the word "God" to be a title that, by definition, can be borne only by a perfect supernatural person. To claim that God is a "person" is to claim that God performs actions and has beliefs and purposes. "Supernatural" persons are not natural— they are neither a part nor a product of the physical universe—and yet they can affect natural objects. A "perfect" person is, among other things, perfect in power (omnipotent), perfect in knowledge (omniscient), and perfect in moral goodness (morally perfect). While some have dismissed this conception of God as religiously insignificant, I am convinced that, for millions of Jews, Christians, and Muslims, factual belief in a perfect supernatural person is essential for making sense of their forms of worship. By "naturalism" I mean the hypothesis that the physical universe is a "closed system" in the sense that nothing that is neither a part nor a product of it can affect it. So naturalism entails the nonexistence of all supernatural beings, including the theistic God.

Arguments against theism can be divided into two main types. *Logical* arguments attempt to show that theism is either self-contradictory or logically inconsistent with some known fact. *Evidential* arguments attempt to show that certain known facts that are (at least so far as we can tell) consistent with theism nevertheless provide evidence against it.[2] The arguments in this paper will be evidential. I will show that certain known facts support the hypothesis of naturalism over the hypothesis of theism because we have considerably more reason to expect them to obtain on the assumption that naturalism is true than on the assumption that theism is

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true. This is a threat to theism because naturalism and theism are alternative hypotheses—they cannot both be true. Thus, if (after considering all of the evidence) naturalism turns out to be more probable than theism, then theism is probably false.

II. EVOLUTION

Ever since the publication of Darwin's *On the Origin of Species*, countless theologians, philosophers, and scientists have pointed out that evolution could be the means by which God has chosen to create human beings and the rest of the living world. This is thought to show that, while the truth of evolution does refute the biblical story of creation as told in the book of Genesis, it in no way threatens the more general belief that the universe was created by God. In other words, it provides no reason to doubt theism. The plausibility of this argument is reflected by the fact that many scientists are both evolutionists and theists. Commenting on this fact, Stephen Jay Gould says:

> Unless at least half my colleagues are dunces, there can be—on the most raw and direct empirical grounds—no conflict between science and religion. I know hundreds of scientists who share a conviction about the fact of evolution, and teach it in the same way. Among these people I note an entire spectrum of religious attitudes—from devout daily prayer and worship to resolute atheism. Either there's no correlation between religious belief and confidence in evolution—or else half these people are fools.[3]

What Gould neglects to mention is that many well-educated people, including many of Gould's colleagues on the irreligious end of the spectrum, reject theism precisely because they believe in evolution. For example, William B. Provine, a leading historian of science, maintains that those who retain their religious beliefs while accepting evolution "have to check [their] brains at the church-house door."[4]

So who is correct? Is it compatibilists like Gould and the liberal preacher Henry Ward Beecher, who claimed in 1885 that evolution "will change theology, but only to bring out the simple temple of God in clearer and more beautiful lines and proportions"[5]? Or is it incompatibilists like Provine and the fundamentalist preacher William Jennings Bryan, who once defined "theistic evolution" as "an anesthetic which deadens the patient's pain while atheism removes his religion"[6]? My own position, as my introductory remarks suggest, lies somewhere between the view that theistic evolution is a happy marriage and the view that it must end in divorce. I agree with the compatibilists that theism and evolution are logically consistent. What I disagree with is the compatibilist's inference from no inconsistency to no conflict. For while consistency implies that the truth of evolution does not disprove theism—that there is no good *logical* argument from evolution against theism just as there is no good logical argument from evil against theism—it does not imply that the truth of evolution is no evidence at all against theism. My position is that evolution is evidence favoring naturalism over theism. There is, in other words, a good *evidential* argument from evolution against theism.

By "evolution," I mean the conjunction of two theses. The first, which I will call "the genealogical thesis," asserts that evolution did in fact occur—complex life did evolve from relatively simple life. Specifically, it is the view that all multicellular organisms and all (relatively) complex unicellular organisms on earth (both present and past) are the (more or less) gradually modified descendents of a small number of relatively simple unicellular organisms. The second thesis, which I will call "the genetic thesis," addresses the issue of how evolution occurred. It states that all evolutionary change in populations of complex organisms either is or is the result of trans-generational genetic change (or, to be more precise, trans-generational change in nucleic acids). It is important to distinguish this claim about the mechanisms by which evolution takes place from the much more specific claim that natural selection operating on random genetic mutation is the principal mechanism driving

evolutionary change (or the principal mechanism driving the evolutionary change that results in increased complexity). Let's call this more specific claim "Darwinism" and its conjunction with evolution "Darwinian evolution."

Many evolutionary arguments against theism appeal to Darwinian evolution rather than just to evolution. I believe that such arguments overestimate the strength of the evidence for Darwinism. Darwinism may be highly probable on the assumption that naturalism is true. But it is far less probable on the assumption that theism is true, because on theism it is a real possibility that God has guided evolution by directly causing various genetic changes to occur. Thus, any argument against theism that is based on the truth of Darwinism is at best question-begging. This is why my argument appeals only to evolution rather than to Darwinian evolution. It is my belief (which I won't defend here) that the evidence for evolution, unlike the evidence for Darwinian evolution, is overwhelming—so overwhelming that evolution can legitimately be taken as fact rather than mere theory for the purpose of arguing against theism.

The specific claim I wish to defend is the following:

> Antecedently, evolution is much more probable on the assumption that naturalism is true than on the assumption that theism is true.

By "antecedently" I mean "independent of the observations and testimony that together constitute the primary evidence upon which what we know about evolution, as well as the connection between pain and pleasure and reproductive success, is based." Thus, I intend to abstract from our information about selective breeding and other changes within populations of animals, as well as what we know about the geographical distribution of living things, homologies, the fossil record, genetic and biochemical evidence, imperfect adaptations, and vestigial organs. The additional abstraction concerning pain and pleasure is necessary because eventually I will combine my argument concerning evolution with an argument concerning the systematic connection between pain and pleasure and reproductive success. The claim will be made that evolution and this connection are, taken together, antecedently much more likely on naturalism than on theism. One last point. No other abstraction from what we know is intended. For example, I do not intend to abstract from our knowledge that complex life of various forms exists nor from our knowledge that this life has not always existed. It is an interesting and difficult question whether these facts are evidence favoring theism over naturalism, but that issue is beyond the scope of this paper.

Let "T," "N," and "E" stand for theism, naturalism and evolution, let "Pr(p)" stand for the antecedent probability of p being true, and let "Pr(p/q)" stand for the antecedent probability of p being true on the assumption that q is true. Finally, let ">!"stand for "is much greater than." The claim I wish to defend can now be restated as follows:

$$Pr(E/N) >! Pr(E/T)$$

My strategy for proving this claim requires one more symbol and one more definition. Let "S" stand for special creationism, by which I mean the statement that some relatively complex living things did not descend from relatively simple single-celled organisms but rather were independently created by a supernatural person. (The use of the word "independently" here signifies not just that the creation in question violates genealogical continuity, but also that it involves the direct intervention of the deity in the natural order.) Since evolution entails that special creationism is false, some basic theorems of the probability calculus give us:

$$Pr(E/N) >! Pr(E/T) \text{ if and only if } Pr(\sim S/N) \times Pr(E/\sim S\&N) >! Pr(\sim S/T) \times Pr(E/\sim S\&T)$$[7]

My strategy for establishing that $Pr(E/N) >! Pr(E/T)$ will be to show both that $Pr(\sim S/N) >! Pr(\sim S/T)$ and that $Pr(E/\sim S\&N) >! Pr(E/\sim S\&T)$. In other words, I will show both that special creationism is antecedently much more likely to be false on naturalism than on theism and that, even on

the assumption that special creationism is false, evolution is still antecedently at least as likely to be true on naturalism as it is on theism.

Since naturalism entails that no supernatural beings exist, it entails that special creationism is false. Thus, the falsity of special creationism is antecedently certain on naturalism: $Pr(\sim S/N) = 1$. But on theism special creationism might, for all we know antecedently, be true: $Pr(\sim S/T) < 1$. Thus, the falsity of special creationism is antecedently more probable on naturalism than on theism, which implies that the falsity of special creationism is some evidence favoring naturalism over theism—it raises the ratio of the probability of naturalism to the probability of theism. But how strong is this evidence? Is the falsity of special creationism *much* more probable on naturalism than on theism? I will show that ~S is at least twice as probable antecedently on naturalism as it is on theism, which implies that it at least doubles the ratio of the probability of naturalism to the probability of theism.[8] Since $Pr(\sim S/N) = 1$, my task is to show that $Pr(\sim S/T) \leq 1/2$, which is to say that $Pr(S/T) \geq 1/2$—that, independent of the evidence for evolution, special creationism is at least as likely as not on the assumption that theism is true. To defend this claim, I will first evaluate some antecedent reasons for believing that God, assuming he exists, did not create any complex living things independently. Then I will show that we have a very strong antecedent reason for believing that God, assuming he exists, did specially create.

At first glance, it seems that the evidence for evolution is the only strong reason theists have for believing that God is not a special creator (which is to say that we don't have any strong *antecedent* reasons for believing this). After all, for all we know antecedently, God might have chosen to create in a variety of different ways. For example, while he might have created life in a way consistent with genealogical continuity, he might also have created each species independently. Or he might have created certain basic types independently, allowing for evolutionary change, including change resulting in new species, within these types. Or he might have independently created only a few species or even only a single species, humans perhaps. Antecedently—that is, independent of the evidence for evolution—it appears we have no reason at all to think that an omnipotent, omniscient, and morally perfect creator would prefer evolution or any other "naturalistic" approach to one of these forms of special creation.

Some theists, however, are quite confident on purely *a priori* grounds that God is not a special creator. According to Diogenes Allen and Howard J. Van Till, for example, special creationism was implausible even before the evidence for evolution was discovered, because it is an implication of God's "rationality" or his status as creator rather than as "member of the universe" that God "creates a universe with members that are coherently connected."[9] This coherence precludes God's intervening in the natural order and hence precludes any sort of special creation, including the creation of those first simple life forms from which all subsequent life has evolved. Thus, according to these theists, the only sort of explanations of natural phenomena that theistic scientists should look for are ones that are consistent with naturalism. In short, these theists are committed methodological naturalists.

I don't find these arguments at all convincing. What possible justification could be given for thinking that if God were the immediate cause of a natural event that would reduce God's status from creator to "member of the universe"? Also, what does God's rationality have to do with this? Perhaps the idea is that, just as a perfectly rational car manufacturer would produce a car that never needed its gas tank filled or its air filter replaced, a perfectly rational creator would make a universe that ran on its own. But such a car would be preferable because filling up with gas or replacing parts has a cost in terms of time, energy, and so on. An omnipotent and omniscient creator wouldn't have such worries. In general, what counts as a rational or perfect or defective universe depends on the creator's goals. What goal or plan of God would be better served by a universe in which God never intervenes? Of course, human freedom may place limitations on

the amount and type of God's interventions. But it doesn't rule out special creation. For all we know, God may have some goal that is furthered by the laws of nature we have, but those laws are such that they will not by themselves produce the sort of complex life God wants. If this were the case, then God would independently create that life. Surely such intervention in the course of nature would not conflict with God's status as creator or with his rationality. Nor would it imply that the universe is in some way defective or inferior to universes in which God never intervenes.

Another theist who holds that we have antecedent reasons for believing that God would not perform any special creative acts is the philosopher Ernan McMullin. In response to Alvin Plantinga's defense of special creationism, McMullin says that "from the theological and philosophical standpoints, such intervention is, if anything, antecedently *improbable*."[10] McMullin claims that "the eloquent texts of *Genesis*, *Job, Isaiah,* and *Psalms*" support his position, because "The Creator whose powers are gradually revealed in these texts is omnipotent and all-wise, far beyond the reach of human reckoning. His Providence extends to all His creatures; they are all part of His single plan, only a fragment of which we know, and that darkly."[11] But how this is supposed to support his position is never explained. It seems to do the opposite, since any claim to know that God would never intervene in the natural order will be difficult to justify if we are as much in the dark about God's plans as these texts suggest.[12]

Incidentally, I find it interesting that, when confronted with arguments against theism based on the idea that it is antecedently unlikely that God would permit heinous evil, theistic philosophers are quick to suggest that, since God is omniscient, humans are not in a position to make such a judgment. Yet, if we are to believe Allen and Van Till (McMullin has his doubts), then humans are in a position to judge that it is antecedently unlikely that God would create any life forms independently! Personally, I find the claim that the torturing of innocent children is antecedently improbable on theism vastly more plausible than the claim that special creationism is antecedently improbable on theism.

The problem with the theistic objections to special creationism considered so far is that they all involve *a priori* theological or philosophical speculation, the direction of which is influenced far too much by the conclusion desired.[13] Indeed, these attempts to make special creation seem incompatible with theism are no more objective and no more plausible than William B. Provine's attempt to make evolution seem incompatible with theism. While Allen, Van Till, and McMullin claim that God would never intervene in nature to create life, Provine claims that the idea of a God who "works through the laws of nature" is "worthless" and "equivalent to atheism."[14] How convenient!

A more serious attempt to show that special creationism is antecedently unlikely on theism is a posteriori in nature. We know by past experience that God, if he exists, has at least latent deistic tendencies. Teleology was, after all, eliminated from the physical sciences well before Darwin wrote *On the Origin of Species*. And even independent of the evidence for evolution there is considerable evidence that various biological processes work quite well without divine intervention. In general, even independent of the evidence on which evolution is based, the history of science is a history of success for naturalistic explanations and failure for supernaturalistic ones. Thus, we have a good antecedent *a posteriori* reason to believe that, assuming theism is true, God does not intervene in nature.

I believe that the past success of naturalistic science does provide some reason for theists to believe that God is not a special creator. But it is easy to overestimate the strength of this reason, especially for intellectual theists who must admit to living in a "post-mythological" era or else risk being held personally responsible for the plight of Galileo. But putting scientific propaganda aside, it is important to remember how little we actually know about the causal history of the universe! Were it not for the evidence for evolution, our sample of successful naturalistic explanations seems to me to be much too small to justify great confidence in the claim that, *assuming God exists*, God is not a special

creator. Of course, it is worth mentioning that, if I am underestimating how successful the search for naturalistic explanations has been, then theists hardly escape unscathed. For if the search for such explanations has been so successful that any supernaturalistic explanation of a natural phenomenon is implausible even on the assumption that theism is true, then that would be powerful evidence against theism. For such extraordinary success would be antecedently much more likely on naturalism—which entails that all supernaturalistic explanations are false—than it would on theism.

More to the point, however, I believe theists have a very strong antecedent reason for believing that God did create at least some complex life independently. For the division between conscious and nonconscious life is enormously significant if theism is true. Theism implies an extreme metaphysical dualism—a mind existed prior to the physical world and was responsible for its existence. Thus, on the assumption that theism is true, it is antecedently likely that minds are fundamentally nonphysical entities and hence that conscious life is fundamentally different from nonconscious life. But this in turn makes it likely that conscious living things are not just the genetically modified descendents of nonconscious living things—that conscious life was created independently. And since special creationism is defined as the position that at least some complex life was created independently, it follows that, on the assumption that theism is true, it is antecedently likely that special creationism is true.

The dualism inherent in theism may explain why so many theists were drawn to the idea of special creationism before (and in many cases even after) the evidence for evolution was discovered. For this dualism supports a dualistic view of human nature—a view that must have made the idea that we are the effect of altering the nucleic acids of single-celled organisms seem ludicrous. Offspring don't have to be identical to their parents, but surely genetic change can't result in fundamental metaphysical lines being crossed! Thus, even if we know by past experience that God, assuming he exists, generally doesn't intervene in nature, the sort of metaphysics presupposed by theism makes it antecedently likely that God did intervene in the physical world in order to create a mental world within it. So it's hardly surprising that, before Darwin, many theists were special creationists. They had a good reason and we have a good *antecedent* reason to believe that God, assuming he or she exists, performed at least one special creative act. Thus, $Pr(S/T) \geq 1/2$. And this implies that the falsity of special creationism is at least twice as probable antecedently on naturalism as it is on theism: $Pr(\sim S/N) \geq 2 \times Pr(\sim S/T)$.

Recall that, in order to show that $Pr(E/N) >! Pr(E/T)$, it is sufficient to show first that $Pr(\sim S/N) >! Pr(\sim S/T)$ and second that $Pr(E/\sim S\&N) \geq Pr(E/\sim S\&T)$. I have completed the first of these two tasks. Turning to the second, we are now assuming that special creationism is false and asking how likely evolution is on naturalism and on theism. Of course, naturalism entails that special creationism is false, so the denial of special creationism conjoined with naturalism ($\sim S\&N$) just is naturalism (N). I will call the denial of special creationism conjoined with theism ($\sim S\&T$) "regular theism." So my task is to show that evolution is antecedently at least as probable on naturalism as it is on regular theism.

It is important to recognize that the probabilities in question are to be assessed relative to the background knowledge that various complex life forms do exist. Thus, the issue is not whether complex life together with the evolutionary mechanisms that produce it are more surprising on theism or on naturalism. (Again, whether or not there is a good anthropic design argument supporting theism is beyond the scope of this paper.) Given that complex life exists, what makes evolution so likely on naturalism is the lack of plausible naturalistic alternatives to evolution. On naturalism, it is antecedently much more likely that all complex organisms descended from a small number of relatively simple organisms than that complex life descended from a large number of relatively simple single-celled organisms all of which arose independently from nonliving matter or that complex life arose directly from nonliving matter. Furthermore, given the

genealogical thesis, it is antecedently likely on naturalism that all evolutionary change in complex life is or results from one basic sort of change like genetic change. On regular theism, alternatives to evolution are somewhat more likely, simply because there is less reason to assume that the complex must arise from the simple. When one starts with omnipotence and omniscience, so much is possible!

Even if the regular theist grants that these considerations favor naturalism, she might counter that it has never been proven that naturalistic evolution is biologically possible. Perhaps evolution could not have produced complex life without supernatural assistance. For example, it might be argued that, without some intelligent being guiding genetic change, such magnificent ordered systems as the human eye would never have evolved. The stronger the evidence for this, the lower the antecedent probability of evolution on naturalism. I do not believe, however, that the evidence for this is very strong. Admittedly, no one can describe in detail exactly how the eye or any other complex organic system could have come about without supernatural assistance. And it's hard to see how anyone could prove that evolution could produce complex life in a naturalistic universe. But neither has anyone provided good reason for thinking that it couldn't either. (Some special creationists have tried, but their arguments are very weak.[15]) This is not to say that there are no real difficulties for naturalistic evolution. (For example, it's notoriously difficult to explain how sexual reproduction evolved.) It's just to say that no one has given a good reason to believe that naturalistic solutions to these problems will not be found. Indeed, the fact that plausible solutions have been found to some of these problems (e.g., the problem of altruistic behavior) gives the naturalist reason for optimism. So any advantage that the problems faced by naturalistic evolution give to regular theism is more than offset by the considerations favoring naturalism mentioned above. All things considered, then, the modest conclusion that evolution is at least as probable antecedently on naturalism as it is on regular theism is justified. Therefore, since the falsity of special creationism is antecedently much more probable on naturalism than on theism, it follows for the reasons explained earlier that evolution is antecedently much more probable on naturalism than on theism.

III. PAIN AND PLEASURE

It is true by definition that a morally perfect God would permit an instance of pain only if he or she had a morally sufficient reason to do so. (By "pain" I mean any suffering, physical or mental.) Thus, the "logical" problem of pain is the problem of whether or not God's being both omnipotent and omniscient is logically compatible with God's having a morally sufficient reason to permit all of the suffering in the world. No one has been able to demonstrate an incompatibility because not even an omnipotent being can do the logically impossible and it might, for all we know or can prove, be logically impossible to bring about certain important goods without at least risking the existence of the suffering we find in our world. So demonstrative logical arguments from pain have been unsuccessful. And nondemonstrative or probabilistic logical arguments from pain have been challenged on the grounds that they involve questionable inductive generalizations, questionable inferences from there being no *known* morally sufficient reasons for an omnipotent and omniscient being to permit certain instances of suffering to their probably being no such morally sufficient reasons. But these discussions of the logical problem of pain leave unsettled the issue of whether or not the suffering in our world is evidence against theism or evidence favoring naturalism over theism. In other words, the failure of logical arguments from evil, including probabilistic ones, does not preclude a successful evidential argument from evil.

I do not, however, wish to consider suffering in isolation. Instead, I will address the issue of whether the pattern of both pain and pleasure in the world is evidence favoring naturalism over theism. The more common strategy of focusing only on evil, indeed only on a few particularly heinous

evils, has its advantages. I choose not to pursue this strategy because the theist might counter such an argument by pointing out a few particularly glorious goods and plausibly claiming that they are equally strong evidence favoring theism over naturalism. So my argument will be based on both pain and pleasure. There may, of course, be other intrinsic evils and intrinsic goods besides pain and pleasure, but the issue of whether or not there are, and whether or not, if there are, their existence is evidence against theism, will not be addressed in this paper.

There are many facts about pain and pleasure that might provide the resources for an evidential argument against theism. Because I wish to explore how our knowledge of evolution affects the problem of evil, I will focus on the fact that much of the pain and pleasure we find in the world is systematically connected (in a variety of often complex ways) to reproductive success. For example, it is no accident that we find a warm fire on a cold night pleasurable and lying naked in a snowbank painful. Maintaining a constant body temperature increases our chances of (temporary) survival and thereby increases our chances of reproducing. Of course, the connections are not all this obvious or this direct. For example, children enjoy playing, which promotes the development of various physical, social, and intellectual skills, which in turn increases children's chances of surviving and reproducing. Even less obviously and less directly, adults find play pleasurable (though typically not as much as children do), which may or may not promote reproductive success, but which results from our capacity to enjoy play as children, which, as we have seen, does promote reproductive success. I could give countless other examples, but the connection between pain and pleasure and reproductive success and the systematic nature of that connection is so striking that additional examples aren't really needed. Instead, I will now turn to the task of showing that, antecedently, this connection is much more probable on evolutionary naturalism than it is on evolutionary theism. I will offer a two-part argument for this position, and then reply to two objections.

The first part of my argument appeals to natural selection. I suggested earlier that Darwinism is much more likely to be true if evolutionary naturalism is true than if evolutionary theism is true. Allow me to explain why. Darwinism is likely on evolutionary naturalism both because it explains the increase in the complexity of life over time better than other naturalistic mechanisms and, most importantly for our purposes, it solves an explanatory problem for naturalism: the problem of explaining teleological or "means–end" order in organic systems. Since evolutionary theism can explain teleological order in terms of God's conscious purposes, it wouldn't be at all surprising on theism if the principal mechanisms driving evolution themselves displayed teleological order—if, for example, organisms had built-in mechanisms that would produce precisely those genetic changes needed to solve a problem arising because of some environmental change. (Such mechanisms would have made William Paley a happy evolutionist!) On naturalism, natural selection is just the sort of process one would expect to drive evolution: a simple "blind" process that can explain the extremely complex teleological order in the living world without itself displaying such order. Notice also that, contrary to popular belief, natural selection does not generally promote the good of individual animals. Variations that result in reproductive success will be favored, regardless of the other consequences—good or bad—of the variation. For example, if walking upright gave our distant ancestors a reproductive advantage (e.g., by allowing them to carry tools while they walked), then this trait was selected despite the foot, back, heart, and numerous other ailments that resulted from it. Further, natural selection requires competition for scarce resources and thus entails that many living things will not flourish. So the claim that natural selection is the principal mechanism driving evolutionary change is much more probable on evolutionary naturalism than on evolutionary theism.

Of course, if natural selection is the principal mechanism driving evolution, then it is likely on evolutionary naturalism that it played a significant role in the evolution of pain and pleasure and so it

is likely on evolutionary naturalism that pain and pleasure will, like anything produced by natural selection, be systematically connected to reproductive success. Thus, the fact that natural selection is antecedently much more likely to have governed the evolution of pain and pleasure if evolutionary naturalism is true than if evolutionary theism is true supports my position that the systematic connection between reproductive success and the pain and pleasure we find in the world is antecedently much more likely on evolutionary naturalism than on evolutionary theism.

This position is further supported by our antecedent knowledge that many other parts of organic systems are systematically connected to reproductive success. This gives us much more reason to believe that pain and pleasure will also be so connected if we assume that evolutionary naturalism is true than if we assume that evolutionary theism is true. To see why, consider the inductive inference from a sample consisting of other physical and mental parts of organic systems that are systematically connected to reproductive success to the conclusion that pain and pleasure are also systematically connected to reproductive success. Although a good number of parts of organic systems lack such a connection, this inference is potentially quite strong given the suitability of pain and pleasure for promoting reproductive success. But the assumption that evolutionary theism is true undermines this inference, while the assumption that evolutionary naturalism is true does not. To see why, notice that this inference is an inductive inference from a sample to another member of a population, and the strength of any such inference depends on how much reason one has to believe that this other member is relevantly different from the members of the sample. Now pain and pleasure are strikingly different from other parts of organic systems in one way: They have a specific sort of moral significance that other parts lack. (Other parts of organic systems may have moral significance, but not of the same sort.) But is this a relevant difference? We have much more reason to believe it is on the assumption that evolutionary theism is true than on the assumption that evolutionary naturalism is true. For the biological goal of reproductive success does not provide an omnipotent omniscient creator with a morally sufficient reason for permitting humans and animals to suffer in the ways they do or for limiting their pleasure to the sorts and amounts we find. Thus, on evolutionary theism, pain and pleasure would be systematically connected to the biological goal of reproductive success only if this goal and some unknown justifying moral goal happened to coincide in such a way that each could be simultaneously satisfied. Such a coincidence is (to say the least) antecedently far from certain. So on the assumption that evolutionary theism is true, the inference to the conclusion that pain and pleasure are systematically connected to reproductive success from the premise that other parts of organic systems are so connected is very weak. This inference is much stronger on the assumption that evolutionary naturalism is true because evolutionary naturalism entails nothing that would undermine the inference—on evolutionary naturalism the moral significance of pain and pleasure provides no antecedent reason at all to doubt that they will resemble other parts of organic systems by being systematically connected to reproductive success. Therefore, our antecedent knowledge that pain and pleasure have a certain sort of moral significance adds further support to my position that the systematic connection between pain and pleasure and reproductive success is antecedently much more probable on evolutionary naturalism than on evolutionary theism.

One might object that my argument ignores the many instances of pain and pleasure that are, so far as we can tell, disconnected from the biological goal of reproductive success. For example, some aesthetic pleasures seem to have at most a very remote connection to reproductive success. But neither the existence of such pain and pleasure, nor the fact that, in general, such pain and pleasure is more common in animals that are psychologically complex, is at all surprising on evolutionary naturalism. For the greater the complexity of a system, the more likely that some of its characteristics will be epiphenomenal. Also, much biologically gratuitous pain and pleasure is pathological—it results

from the failure of an organic system to function properly. And the existence of this sort of pain and pleasure is also unsurprising on evolutionary naturalism. So on evolutionary naturalism, what we know about biologically gratuitous pain and pleasure is not surprising, while on evolutionary theism, the excess pleasure is perhaps to be expected, but this advantage is offset by the limited amount of such pleasure, by the existence of biologically gratuitous pain, and by the fact that a significant amount of biologically gratuitous pleasure and pain is pathological.

One might also object that theodicies undermine my argument; for theodicies make certain facts about pain antecedently more likely than they would otherwise be. The problem with existing theodicies, however, is that they explain certain facts at the price of making others even more mysterious. That is, they make certain facts more likely only by making others less likely. For example, if one of God's reasons for permitting pain is to punish sinners, then why do the innocent suffer as much as the guilty? Or, if we assume that God wants to use pain to build moral character, then pain (and pleasure) that is demoralizing becomes even more surprising. If, instead of focusing on a few isolated cases, one looks at the overall pattern of pain and pleasure in the world, one cannot help but be struck by its apparent moral randomness. Pain and pleasure do not systematically promote justice or moral virtue. Nor are moral agents treated all that differently from nonmoral agents. Nonhuman animals suffer in many of the ways humans suffer (the more similar the animal, the more similar the suffering), despite the fact that such suffering cannot play a moral role in their lives, since they are not moral agents.

All of these facts, which might be summed up by saying that pain and pleasure do not systematically promote any discernible moral ends, are exactly what one would expect on evolutionary naturalism. For on evolutionary naturalism, the causes of good and evil are morally indifferent. Thus, on the assumption that evolutionary naturalism is true, it would be surprising in the extreme if pain and pleasure appeared to be anything but morally random. But a discernible moral pattern would be less surprising on theism even if, given the cognitive distance between humans and an omniscient being, it should not be expected. Notice that I am not claiming that the apparent moral randomness of pain and pleasure is antecedently unlikely on evolutionary theism. I'm just claiming that it is antecedently less likely on evolutionary theism than on evolutionary naturalism. And it seems to me that this is obvious. But that means that this apparent randomness adds to the evidence favoring evolutionary naturalism over evolutionary theism. It may not add a lot, but it certainly offsets any advantage evolutionary theism has as a result of the moral roles that pain and pleasure admittedly do play in human lives.

IV. CONCLUSION

I have argued both that evolution is antecedently much more probable on naturalism than on theism and that the systematic connection between pain, as well as pleasure, and reproductive success is antecedently much more probable on evolutionary naturalism than on evolutionary theism. This entails that the conjunction of evolution and the statement that pain and pleasure are systematically connected to reproductive success is antecedently very much more probable on naturalism than on theism. And since neither the truth nor falsity of naturalism or theism is certain, it follows that this conjunction substantially raises the ratio of the probability of naturalism to the probability of theism. Of course, if naturalism were far less plausible than theism (or if it were compatible with theism), then this sort of evidence would be worthless. But naturalism is a very serious alternative to theism. Neither evolution nor anything about pain and pleasure is built into it in an *ad hoc* way. (It is not as if I were claiming, for example, that *evolution* is antecedently more probable on *evolutionary* naturalism than on theism.) Also, naturalism doesn't deny the existence of all nonnatural beings—it only denies the existence of supernatural beings. And surely this is no less plausible than asserting the existence of a very specific

sort of supernatural being. So naturalism is at least as plausible as theism.

Therefore, it follows from my arguments concerning evil and evolution that, other evidence held equal, naturalism is very much more probable than theism. And since naturalism and theism are alternative hypotheses—they cannot both be true—this implies that, other evidence held equal, it is highly likely that theism is false. So the evidence discussed in this paper provides a powerful *prima facie* case against theism. To put it another way, if one looks only at the evidence discussed here—evolution, the ability of natural selection to explain complex biological order without purpose, the systematic connection between pain and pleasure and reproductive success, and the apparent moral randomness of pain and pleasure—then Hume's words ring true: "The whole presents nothing but the idea of a blind nature, impregnated by a great vivifying principle, and pouring forth from her lap, without discernment or parental care, her maimed and abortive children."[16,17]

APPENDIX

My argument in this paper is based on the following two theorems of the probability calculus:

$$\text{A}: \frac{\Pr(\text{N/E\&P})}{\Pr(\text{T/E\&P})} = \frac{\Pr(\text{N})}{\Pr(\text{T})} \times \frac{\Pr(\text{E\&P/N})}{\Pr(\text{E\&P/T})}$$

$$\text{B}: \frac{\Pr(\text{E\&P/N})}{\Pr(\text{E\&P/T})} = \frac{\Pr(\text{E/N})}{\Pr(\text{E/T})} \times \frac{\Pr(\text{P/E\&N})}{\Pr(\text{P/E\&T})}$$

In using these two equations, I assume that neither naturalism nor theism is certainly true or certainly false.

Pr(N/E&P) is the antecedent probability of naturalism given the conjunction of evolution and the statement (P) that pain and pleasure are systematically connected to reproductive success. In other words, it is the probability of naturalism, all things considered. (I assume here that the "given E&P" puts back everything of significance that the "antecedent" takes out.) Similarly, Pr(T/E&P) is the probability of theism, all things considered. So the left side of equation A is the ratio of the probability of naturalism to the probability of theism. If this ratio is greater than 1, then naturalism is more probable than theism and hence theism is probably false.

Now consider the right side of equation A. The main purpose of my paper was to evaluate the second ratio here: The ratio of the antecedent probability of evolution conjoined with P given naturalism to the antecedent probability of this conjunction given theism. This ratio was evaluated using equation B. The first of the two ratios on the right side of B is the ratio of the antecedent probability of evolution given naturalism to the antecedent probability of evolution given theism. And the second is the ratio of the antecedent probability of P given evolutionary naturalism to the antecedent probability of P given evolutionary theism. I argued that each of these two ratios is much greater than 1. From this it follows (using equation B) that the ratio of Pr(E&P/N) to Pr(E&P/T) is very much greater than 1.

Now look at the first ratio on the right side of equation A. Pr(N) is the antecedent probability of naturalism. In other words, it is the probability of naturalism independent of our knowledge of E&P. And Pr(T) is the probability of theism independent of our knowledge of E&P. So the first ratio on the right side of equation A depends on the plausibility of naturalism and theism as well as on other evidence (propositional or nonpropositional) for and against naturalism and theism (e.g., the existence of life on earth, the success of science, religious experiences, immorality, etc.). I argued very briefly that considerations of plausibility do not give us any reason to believe that this ratio is less than one. But I did not, of course, evaluate all of the other relevant evidence for and against theism and naturalism. So I did not come to any conclusion about this first ratio. This is why my case against theism is a *prima facie* one. I am entitled to conclude only that, other evidence held equal, the ratio on the left side of equation A is very much greater than 1. And this implies that, other evidence held equal, it is highly probable that theism is false.

The following summarizes my argument:

(1) Evolution is antecedently much more probable on the assumption that naturalism is true than on the assumption that theism is true [i.e., Pr(E/N) >! Pr(E/T)].

(2) The statement that pain and pleasure are systematically connected to reproductive success is antecedently much more probable on the assumption that evolutionary naturalism is true than on the assumption that evolutionary theism is true [i.e., Pr(P/E&N) >! Pr(P/E&T)].

(3) Therefore, evolution conjoined with this statement about pain and pleasure is antecedently very much more probable on the assumption that naturalism is true than on the assumption that theism is true [i.e., Pr(E&P/N) >!! Pr(E&P/T)]. (From 1 and 2)

(4) Naturalism is at least as plausible as theism [i.e., other evidence held equal, Pr(N) ≥ Pr(T)].

(5) Therefore, other evidence held equal, naturalism is very much more probable than theism [i.e., other evidence held equal, Pr(N/E&P) >!! Pr(T/E&P)]. (From 3 and 4)

(6) Naturalism entails that theism is false.

(7) Therefore, other evidence held equal, it is highly probable that theism is false [i.e., other evidence held equal, Pr(T/E&P) <!! 1/2. (From 5 and 6)

NOTES

1. By "hypothesis" I mean a statement that is neither certainly true nor certainly false.
2. It is worth noting that, although "probabilistic" arguments from evil are usually classified as evidential, many such arguments are logical—they attempt to show that theism is probably inconsistent with some known fact about evil.
3. "Darwinism Defined: The Difference Between Fact and Theory," *Discover*, Jan. 1987, p. 70. Quoted in James Rachels, *Created from Animals: The Moral Implications of Darwinism* (Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 100.
4. Quoted in Phillip E. Johnson, *Darwin on Trial* (InterVarsity Press, 1993), p. 126.
5. "The Two Revelations," in Gail Kennedy, *Evolution and Religion* (D. C. Heath and Company, 1957), p. 20. Also quoted on p. xiv.
6. Quoted in Kennedy, p. xiv.
7. Proof: Since E entails S, E is logically equivalent to ~S&E. Thus, since it is a theorem of the probability calculus that logically equivalent statements are equally probable, it follows that Pr(E/N) >! Pr(E/T) if and only if Pr(~S&E/N) >! Pr(~S&E/T). But it is also a theorem of the probability calculus that Pr(p&q/r) = Pr(p/r) × Pr(q/p&r). Therefore, Pr(E/N) >! Pr(E/T) if and only if Pr(~S/N) × Pr(E/~S&N) >! Pr(~S/T) × Pr(E/~S&T).
8. Of course, whether this strong evidence is also significant depends on what the ratio of the probability of naturalism to the probability of theism is prior to considering the fact that special creationism is false. If it is extremely high or low, then the falsity of special creationism will not be significant evidence favoring naturalism. If, on the other hand, the other evidence is nearly balanced and both hypotheses are plausible, then this evidence will be significant. For example, if theism starts out twice as probable as naturalism, then the two hypotheses will end up being equally probable.
9. Diogenes Allen, *Christian Belief in a Postmodern World* (Westminster: John Knox Press, 1989), p. 59. Quoted with approval in Howard J. Van Till, "When Faith and Reason Cooperate," *Christian Scholar's Review* 21.1 (1991), p. 43.
10. "Plantinga's Defense of Special Creation," *Christian Scholar's Review* 21.1 (1991), p. 74. Plantinga refers to McMullin's position as "semideism." McMullin complains that this terminology is loaded, yet he describes his own position as believing in "the integrity of the natural order." It would seem then that Christians have a dilemma. No good Christian wants to be called a "deist," but no good Christian would want to deny that God's creation has "integrity"!

11. Ibid., p. 75.
12. For additional criticisms of the positions of Van Till and McMullin, see Alvin Plantinga, "Evolution, Neutrality, and Antecedent Probability: A Reply to Van Till and McMullin," *Christian Scholar's Review* 21.1 (1991), pp. 80–109.
13. Cf. Plantinga, p. 100.
14. Review of "Trial and Error: The American Controversy over Creation and Evolution," *Academe* 73.1 (1987), 50–52. Quoted in McMullin, p. 58.
15. For an excellent defense of evolution against special creationist objections, see Philip Kitcher, *Abusing Science: The Case Against Creationism* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1982).
16. *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, ed. Norman Kemp Smith (Macmillan Publishing Co., 1947), p. 211.
17. I am grateful to Kai Draper, Daniel Howard Snyder, James Keller, George Mavrodes, Wes Morriston, William L. Rowe, Michael Tooley, and Stephen J. Wykstra for helpful comments on earlier versions of this paper.

IV.C. REPLIES

Having now considered various different formulations of the problem of evil, we turn to replies.

In our first reading, Alvin Plantinga rebuts J. L. Mackie's defense of the "logical problem of evil." He argues that Mackie is wrong in thinking that the existence of evil is inconsistent with the existence of God, and he also argues that Mackie is wrong in thinking that every *possible* world is *creatable*. Unlike Leibniz, Plantinga is offering merely a defense rather than a theodicy. (See the main introduction to Part IV for the distinction between "defense" and "theodicy.") Central to Plantinga's defense are the following three ideas: (a) a perfectly good being might have morally sufficient reason to permit evil, (b) the value of free will might provide such a morally sufficient reason if it is impossible for God to guarantee that a world containing free creatures would be free from evil, and (c) for all we know, it *is* impossible for God to guarantee that a world containing free creatures would be free from evil. In defense of (c), Plantinga sets forth the hypothesis of *transworld depravity*. Roughly, to suffer from transworld depravity is to be such that, no matter what total creative act God had performed, if God had created you and left you free, you would freely have done something wrong. According to Plantinga, for all we know everyone in the actual world suffers from transworld depravity. If that's so, then no matter what creative act God had performed, if he had created just those creatures who in fact exist, the world would have contained moral evil. Thus, though there are *possible* worlds in which everyone freely does what is right, those worlds are not *creatable*. They are not creatable because, in effect, free creatures *cooperate* with God in determining what sort of world will exist; and (given the hypothesis of transworld depravity) no matter what God had done, his creatures would not have cooperated in such a way as to keep the world free from evil.

Our second reading, John Hick's "Evil and Soul-Making," is an example of a theodicy that is based on the free will defense. Hick distinguishes between two

different types of theodicy. The Augustinian theodicy starts with the idea that God created humans without sin and set them in a sinless paradise and goes on to maintain that humanity fell into sin *through the misuse of free will*. So we are to blame, not God, for the existence of suffering in the world. God's grace will save some of us, but others will perish everlastingly. In this division, God's goodness is manifested, for his mercy redeems some and his justice is served on the rest. On the other hand, the Irenaean theodicy, stemming from Irenaeus (AD 120 – 202), views Adam not as a free agent rebelling against God, but as more akin to a very small child. The fall is humanity's first faulty step in the direction of freedom. God is still working with humanity in order to bring it from undeveloped life (*bios*) to a state of self-realization in divine love, spiritual life (*zoe*). This life is viewed as the "vale of soul-making." Spiritual development requires obstacles and the opportunity to fail as well as to succeed. Hick declares that those who are opposed to the challenge that our freedom grants us are looking for a hedonistic paradise in which every desire is gratified and we are treated by God as pet animals rather than autonomous agents. On the other hand, those who accept the challenge of freedom consider themselves to be co-workers with God in bringing forth the kingdom of God.

In our third selection, we revisit a line of response that came up in the selection by Leibniz in Section IV.A. As noted earlier, Leibniz regarded the fall of Adam as a "blessed fault" because it led to the incarnation of the Son of God. In our third selection, Alvin Plantinga takes up the same idea. Perhaps, Plantinga suggests, what justifies God in permitting the evils in our world is just that (a) our world (or something worse) is what would have resulted if God permitted humanity to fall into sin, (b) the incarnation of the Son of God and the subsequent redemption of humanity would not have happened had humanity not fallen into sin, and (c) any possible world which includes the Son of God becoming incarnate for the redemption of humanity is better, overall, than any world which doesn't include those events. If that is right, then, contrary to what is suggested by "free will theodicies" (and defenses), it is not the value of human freedom on its own that justifies God in permitting the evils we find in our world, but rather the value of the incarnation and atonement (perhaps in conjunction with the value of free will).

As should be clear by now, the typical strategy in both defense and theodicy is to look for *goods* that might somehow justify the *evil* of human suffering. The final three readings in this section each in their own way offer correctives to this trend. In the fourth selection, Eleonore Stump notes that a great deal of human suffering comes from unfulfilled "desires of the heart"—desires that matter to us a great deal but whose satisfaction isn't strictly necessary for our flourishing as human beings. Traditional theodicies fail to accord sufficient value to this sort of suffering—as if it is rather easily outweighed, offset, or defeated by global goods (like the value of freedom) or by "replacement goods" (like a new family, to replace the old one that was lost in some catastrophe). To the extent that they do fail in this way, she argues, such theodicies are, at best, incomplete.

In a somewhat similar vein, Marilyn Adams argues that traditional responses to the problem of evil do not deal adequately with *horrendous evil*, where horrendous evil is (roughly) evil that we might intuitively regard as life-wrecking. The problem, she argues, is that, when it comes to accounting for horrendous evils,

the standard responses to the problem of evil fail to accord these evils the weight they deserve, or they fail in other ways to respect our moral intuitions or our intuitions about value. She then goes on to sketch a way of responding to the problem of evil that does deal adequately with horrors. At the heart of her response is the idea that horrors in our lives are, or can be, defeated by a kind of intimacy and identification with God which is made possible by the incarnation.

Finally, in our sixth reading, Laura Waddell Ekstrom explores the idea that, far from constituting evidence *against* the existence of God (as the atheologians would have it), suffering may in fact be an avenue *to* knowledge of God. Finding affinities between her own (partial) theodicy and responses to the problem of evil offered by Eleonore Stump and Marilyn Adams, Ekstrom argues that some instances of suffering satisfy standard conceptions of religious experience and serve as means of intimacy with God.

IV.C.1

The Free Will Defense

ALVIN PLANTINGA

A brief biographical sketch of Alvin Plantinga appears before selection I.B.8. In the present selection, Plantinga argues that Mackie and other atheologians (those who argue against the existence of God) are mistaken in thinking that the existence of evil is inconsistent with the existence of a perfectly good and powerful God.

2. DOES THE THEIST CONTRADICT HIMSELF?

In a widely discussed piece entitled "Evil and Omnipotence" John Mackie makes this claim:

I think, however, that a more telling criticism can be made by way of the traditional problem of evil. Here it can be shown, not that religious beliefs lack rational support, but that they are positively irrational, that the several parts of the

From *God, Freedom, and Evil* by Alvin Plantinga (Harper & Row, 1974). Reprinted by permission of the author. Footnotes edited.

> essential theological doctrine are *inconsistent* with one another….[1]

Is Mackie right? Does the theist contradict himself? But we must ask a prior question: just what is being claimed here? That theistic belief contains an inconsistency or contradiction, of course. But what, exactly, is an inconsistency or contradiction? There are several kinds. An *explicit* contradiction is a *proposition* of a certain sort—a conjunctive proposition, one conjunct of which is the denial or negation of the other conjunct. For example:

> Paul is a good tennis player, and it's false that Paul is a good tennis player.

(People seldom assert explicit contradictions.) Is Mackie charging the theist with accepting such a contradiction? Presumably not; what he says is

> In its simplest form the problem is this: God is omnipotent; God is wholly good; yet evil exists. There seems to be some contradiction between these three propositions, so that if any two of them were true the third would be false. But at the same time all three are essential parts of most theological positions; the theologian, it seems, at once *must* adhere and *cannot consistently* adhere to all three.

According to Mackie, then, the theist accepts a group or set of three propositions; this set is inconsistent. Its members, of course, are

(1) God is omnipotent

(2) God is wholly good

and

(3) Evil exists.

Call this set A; the claim is that A is an inconsistent set. But what is it for a *set* to be inconsistent or contradictory? Following our definition of an explicit contradiction, we might say that a set of propositions is explicitly contradictory if one of the members is the denial or negation of another member. But then, of course, it is evident that the set we are discussing is not explicitly contradictory; the denials of (1), (2), and (3), respectively, are

(1′) God is not omnipotent (or it's false that God is omnipotent)

(2′) God is not wholly good

and

(3′) There is no evil

none of which is in set A.

Of course many sets are pretty clearly contradictory, in an important way, but not explicitly contradictory. For example, set B:

(4) If all men are mortal, then Socrates is mortal

(5) All men are mortal

(6) Socrates is not mortal.

This set is not explicitly contradictory; yet surely *some* significant sense of that term applies to it. What is important here is that by using only the rules of ordinary logic—the laws of propositional logic and quantification theory found in any introductory text on the subject—we can deduce an explicit contradiction from the set. Or to put it differently, we can use the laws of logic to deduce a proposition from the set, which proposition, when added to the set, yields a new set that is explicitly contradictory. For by using the law *modus ponens* (if p, then q; p; therefore q) we can deduce

(7) Socrates is mortal

from (4) and (5). The result of adding (7) to B is the set {(4), (5), (6), (7)}. This set, of course, is explicitly contradictory in that (6) is the denial of (7). We might say that any set which shares this characteristic with set B is *formally* contradictory. So a formally contradictory set is one from whose members an explicit contradiction can be deduced by the laws of logic. Is Mackie claiming that set A is formally contradictory?

If he is, he's wrong. No laws of logic permit us to deduce the denial of one of the propositions in A from the other members. Set A isn't formally contradictory either.

But there is still another way in which a set of propositions can be contradictory or inconsistent. Consider set *C*, whose members are

(8) George is older than Paul

(9) Paul is older than Nick

and

(10) George is not older than Nick.

This set is neither explicitly nor formally contradictory; we can't, just by using the laws of logic, deduce the denial of any of these propositions from the others. And yet there is a good sense in which it is inconsistent or contradictory. For clearly it is *not possible* that its three members all be true. It is *necessarily true* that

(11) If George is older than Paul, and Paul is older than Nick, then George is older than Nick.

And if we add (11) to set *C*, we get a set that is formally contradictory; (8), (9), and (11) yield, by the laws of ordinary logic, the denial of (10).

I said that (11) is *necessarily true*; but what does *that* mean? Of course we might say that a proposition is necessarily true if it is impossible that it be false, or if its negation is not possibly true. This would be to explain necessity in terms of possibility. Chances are, however, that anyone who does not know what necessity is, will be equally at a loss about possibility; the explanation is not likely to be very successful. Perhaps all we can do by way of explanation is to give some examples and hope for the best. In the first place many propositions can be established by the laws of logic alone—for example,

(12) If all men are mortal and Socrates is a man, then Socrates is mortal.

Such propositions are truths of logic; and all of them are necessary in the sense of question. But truths of arithmetic and mathematics generally are also necessarily true. Still further, there is a host of propositions that are neither truths of logic nor truths of mathematics but are nonetheless necessarily true; (11) would be an example, as well as

(13) Nobody is taller than himself

(14) Red is a color

(15) No numbers are persons

(16) No prime number is a prime minister

and

(17) Bachelors are unmarried.

So here we have an important kind of necessity—let's call it "broadly logical necessity." Of course there is a correlative kind of *possibility*: a proposition *p* is possibly true (in the broadly logical sense) just in case its negation or denial is not necessarily true (in that same broadly logical sense). This sense of necessity and possibility must be distinguished from another that we may call *causal* or *natural* necessity and possibility. Consider

(18) Henry Kissinger has swum the Atlantic.

Although this proposition has an implausible ring, it is not necessarily false in the broadly logical sense (and its denial is not necessarily true in that sense). But there is a good sense in which it is impossible: it is *causally* or *naturally* impossible. Human beings, unlike dolphins, just don't have the physical equipment demanded for this feat. Unlike Superman, furthermore, the rest of us are incapable of leaping tall buildings at a single bound or (without auxiliary power of some kind) traveling faster than a speeding bullet. These things are *impossible* for us—but not *logically* impossible, even in the broad sense.

So there are several senses of necessity and possibility here. There are a number of propositions, furthermore, of which it's difficult to say whether they are or aren't possible in the broadly logical sense; some of these are subjects of philosophical controversy. Is it possible, for example, for a person never to be conscious during his entire existence? Is it possible for a (human) person to exist *disembodied*? If that's possible, is it possible that there be a person who *at no time at all* during his entire existence has a body? Is it possible to see without eyes? These are propositions about whose possibility in that broadly logical sense there is disagreement and dispute.

Now return to set *C*.... What is characteristic of it is the fact that the conjunction of its members—the proposition expressed by the result of putting

"and's" between (8), (9), and (10)—is necessarily false. Or we might put it like this: what characterizes set *C* is the fact that we can get a formally contradictory set by adding a necessarily true proposition—namely (11). Suppose we say that a set is *implicitly contradictory* if it resembles *C* in this respect. That is, a set *S* of propositions is implicitly contradictory if there is a necessary proposition *p* such that the result of adding *p* to *S* is a formally contradictory set. Another way to put it: *S* is implicitly contradictory if there is some necessarily true proposition *p* such that by using just the laws of ordinary logic, we can deduce an explicit contradiction from *p* together with the members of *S*. And when Mackie says that set *A* is contradictory, we may properly take him, I think, as holding that it is implicitly contradictory in the explained sense. As he puts it:

> However, the contradiction does not arise immediately; to show it we need some additional premises, or perhaps some quasi-logical rules connecting the terms "good" and "evil" and "omnipotent." These additional principles are that good is opposed to evil, in such a way that a good thing always eliminates evil as far as it can, and that there are no limits to what an omnipotent thing can do. From these it follows that a good omnipotent thing elimi-nates evil completely, and then the propositions that a good omnipotent thing exists, and that evil exists, are incompatible.[2]

Here Mackie refers to "additional premises"; he also calls them "additional principles" and "quasi-logical rules"; he says we need them to show the contradiction. What he means, I think, is that to get a formally contradictory set we must add some more propositions to set *A*; and if we aim to show that set *A* is implicitly contradictory, these propositions must be necessary truths—"quasi-logical rules" as Mackie calls them. The two additional principles he suggests are

(19) A good thing always eliminates evil as far as it can

and

(20) There are no limits to what an omnipotent being can do.

And, of course, if Mackie means to show that set *A* is implicitly contradictory, then he must hold that (19) and (20) are not merely *true* but *necessarily true*.

But, are they? What about (20) first? What does it mean to say that a being is omnipotent? That he is *all-powerful*, or *almighty*, presumably. But are there no limits at all to the power of such a being? Could he create square circles, for example, or married bachelors? Most theologians and theistic philosophers who hold that God is omnipotent, do not hold that He can create round squares or bring it about that He both exists and does not exist. These theologians and philosophers may hold that there are no *nonlogical* limits to what an omnipotent being can do, but they concede that not even an omnipotent being can bring about logically impossible states of affairs or cause necessarily false propositions to be true. Some theists, on the other hand—Martin Luther and Descartes, perhaps—have apparently thought that God's power is unlimited even by the laws of logic. For these theists the question whether set *A* is contradictory will not be of much interest. As theists they believe (1) and (2), and they also, presumably, believe (3). But they remain undisturbed by the claim that (1), (2), and (3) are jointly inconsistent—because, as they say, God can do what is logically impossible. Hence He can bring it about that the members of set *A* are all true, even if that set is contradictory (concentrating very intensely upon this suggestion is likely to make you dizzy). So the theist who thinks that the power of God isn't *limited at all*, not even by the laws of logic, will be unimpressed by Mackie's argument and won't find any difficulty in the contradiction set *A* is alleged to contain. This view is not very popular, however, and for good reason; it is quite incoherent. What the theist typically means when he says that God is omnipotent is not that there are *no* limits to God's power, but at most that there are no nonlogical limits to what He can do; and given this qualification, it is perhaps initially plausible to suppose that (20) is necessarily true.

But what about (19), the proposition that every good thing eliminates every evil state of affairs that it can eliminate? Is that necessarily true? Is it true at all? Suppose, first of all, that your friend Paul unwisely goes for a drive on a wintry day and runs out of gas on a deserted road. The temperature dips to −10°, and a miserably cold wind comes up. You are sitting comfortably at home (twenty-five miles from Paul) roasting chestnuts in a roaring blaze. Your car is in the garage; in the trunk there is the full five-gallon can of gasoline you always keep for emergencies. Paul's discomfort and danger are certainly an evil, and one which you could eliminate. You don't do so. But presumably you don't thereby forfeit your claim to being a "good thing"—you simply didn't know of Paul's plight. And so (19) does not appear to be necessary. It says that every good thing has a certain property—the property of eliminating every evil that it can. And if the case I described is possible—a good person's failing through ignorance to eliminate a certain evil he can eliminate—then (19) is by no means necessarily true.

But perhaps Mackie could sensibly claim that if you *didn't know* about Paul's plight, then in fact you were not, at the time in question, able to eliminate the evil in question; and perhaps he'd be right. In any event he could revise (19) to take into account the kind of case I mentioned:

(19a) Every good thing always eliminates every evil that *it knows about* and can eliminate.

{(1), (2), (3), (20), (19a)}, you'll notice is not a formally contradictory set—to get a formal contradiction we must add a proposition specifying that God *knows about* every evil state of affairs. But most theists do believe that God is omniscient or all-knowing; so if this new set—the set that results when we add to set A the proposition that God is omniscient—is implicitly contradictory then Mackie should be satisfied and the theist confounded. (And, henceforth, set A will be the old set A together with the proposition that God is omniscient.)

But is (19a) necessary? Hardly. Suppose you know that Paul is marooned as in the previous example, and you also know another friend is similarly marooned fifty miles in the opposite direction. Suppose, furthermore, that while you can rescue one or the other, you simply can't rescue both. Then each of the two evils is such that it is within your power to eliminate it; and you know about them both. But you can't eliminate *both*; and you don't forfeit your claim to being a good person by eliminating only one—it wasn't within your power to do more. So the fact that you don't doesn't mean that you are not a good person. Therefore (19a) is false; it is not a necessary truth or even a truth that every good thing eliminates every evil it knows about and can eliminate.

We can see the same thing another way. You've been rock climbing. Still something of a novice, you've acquired a few cuts and bruises by inelegantly using your knees rather than your feet. One of these bruises is fairly painful. You mention it to a physician friend, who predicts the pain will leave of its own accord in a day or two. Meanwhile, he says, there's nothing he can do, short of amputating your leg above the knee, to remove the pain. Now the pain in your knee is an evil state of affairs. All else being equal, it would be better if you had no such pain. And it is within the power of your friend to eliminate this evil state of affairs. Does his failure to do so mean that he is not a good person? Of course not; for he could eliminate this evil state of affairs only by bringing about another, much worse evil. And so it is once again evident that (19a) is false. It is entirely possible that a good person fail to eliminate an evil state of affairs that he knows about and can eliminate. This would take place, if, as in the present example, he couldn't eliminate the evil without bringing about a *greater* evil.

A slightly different kind of case shows the same thing. A really impressive good state of affairs G will outweigh a trivial E—that is, the conjunctive state of affairs G and E is itself a good state of affairs. And surely a good person would not be obligated to eliminate a given evil if he could do so only by eliminating a good that outweighed it. Therefore (19a) is not necessarily true; it can't be used to show that set A is implicitly contradictory.

These difficulties might suggest another revision of (19); we might try

(19b) A good being eliminates every evil *E* that it knows about and that it can eliminate without either bringing about a greater evil or eliminating a good state of affairs that outweighs *E*.

Is this necessarily true? It takes care of the second of the two difficulties afflicting (19a) but leaves the first untouched. We can see this as follows. First, suppose we say that a being *properly eliminates* an evil state of affairs if it eliminates that evil without either eliminating an outweighing good or bringing about a greater evil. It is then obviously possible that a person find himself in a situation where he could properly eliminate an evil *E* and could also properly eliminate another evil *E*′, but couldn't properly eliminate them *both*. You're rock climbing again, this time on the dreaded north face of the Grand Teton. You and your party come upon Curt and Bob, two mountaineers stranded 125 feet apart on the face. They untied to reach their cigarettes and then carelessly dropped the rope while lighting up. A violent, dangerous thunderstorm is approaching. You have time to rescue one of the stranded climbers and retreat before the storm hits; if you rescue both, however, you and your party and the two climbers will be caught on the face during the thunderstorm, which will very likely destroy your entire party. In this case you can eliminate one evil (Curt's being stranded on the face) without causing more evil or eliminating a greater good; and you are also able to properly eliminate the other evil (Bob's being thus stranded). But you can't properly eliminate them *both*. And so the fact that you don't rescue Curt, say, even though you could have, doesn't show that you aren't a good person. Here, then, each of the evils is such that you can properly eliminate it; but you can't properly eliminate them both, and hence can't be blamed for failing to eliminate one of them.

So neither (19a) nor (19b) is necessarily true. You may be tempted to reply that the sort of counterexamples offered—examples where someone is able to eliminate an evil *A* and also able to eliminate a different evil *B*, but unable to eliminate them both—are irrelevant to the case of a being who, like God, is both omnipotent and omniscient. That is, you may think that if an omnipotent and omniscient being is able to eliminate each of two evils, it follows that he can eliminate them *both*. Perhaps this is so; but it is not strictly to the point. The fact is the counterexamples show that (19a) and (19b) are not necessarily true and hence can't be used to show that set *A* is implicitly inconsistent. What the reply does suggest is that perhaps the atheologian will have more success if he works the properties of omniscience and omnipotence into (19). Perhaps he could say something like

(19c) An omnipotent and omniscient good being eliminates every evil that it can properly eliminate.

And suppose, for purposes of argument, we concede the necessary truth of (19c). Will it serve Mackie's purposes? Not obviously. For we don't get a set that is formally contradictory by adding (20) and (19c) to set *A*. This set (call it *A*′) contains the following six members:

(1) God is omnipotent

(2) God is wholly good

(2′) God is omniscient

(3) Evil exists

(19c) An omnipotent and omniscient good being eliminates every evil that it can properly eliminate

and

(20) There are no nonlogical limits to what an omnipotent being can do.

Now if *A*′ were formally contradictory, then from any five of its members we could deduce the denial of the sixth by the laws of ordinary logic. That is, any five would *formally entail* the denial of the sixth. So if *A*′ were formally inconsistent, the denial of (3) would be formally entailed by the remaining five. That is, (1), (2), (2′), (19c), and (20) would formally entail

(3′) There is no evil.

But they don′t; what they formally entail is not that there is no evil *at all* but only that

(3″) There is no evil that God can properly eliminate.

So (19c) doesn't really help either—not because it is not necessarily true but because its addition [with (20)] to set *A* does not yield a formally contradictory set.

Obviously, what the atheologian must add to get a formally contradictory set is

(21) If God is omniscient and omnipotent, then he can properly eliminate every evil state of affairs.

Suppose we agree that the set consisting in *A* plus (19c), (20), and (21) is formally contradictory. So if (19c), (20), and (21) are all necessarily true, then set *A* is implicitly contradictory. We've already conceded that (19c) and (20) are indeed necessary. So we must take a look at (21). Is this proposition necessarily true?

No. To see this let us ask the following question. Under what conditions would an omnipotent being be unable to eliminate a certain evil *E* without eliminating an outweighing good? Well, suppose that *E* is *included in* some good state of affairs that outweighs it. That is, suppose there is some good state of affairs *G* so related to *E* that it is impossible that *G* obtain or be actual and *E* fail to obtain. (Another way to put this: a state of affairs *S* includes *S′* if the conjunctive state of affairs *S but not S′* is impossible, or if it is necessary that *S′* obtains if *S* does.) Now suppose that some good state of affairs *G* includes an evil state of affairs *E* that it outweighs. Then not even an omnipotent being could eliminate *E* without eliminating *G*. But are there any cases where a good state of affairs includes, in this sense, an evil that it outweighs?[3] Indeed there are such states of affairs. To take an artificial example, let's suppose that *E* is Paul's suffering from a minor abrasion and *G* is your being deliriously happy. The conjunctive state of affairs, *G and E*—the state of affairs that obtains if and only if both *G* and *E* obtain—is then a good state of affairs: it is better, all else being equal, that you be intensely happy and Paul suffer a mildly annoying abrasion than that this state of affairs not obtain. So *G and E* is a good state of affairs. And clearly *G and E* includes *E*: obviously it is necessarily true that if you are deliriously happy and Paul is suffering from an abrasion, then Paul is suffering from an abrasion.

But perhaps you think this example trivial, tricky, slippery, and irrelevant. If so, take heart; other examples abound. Certain kinds of values, certain familiar kinds of good states of affairs, can't exist apart from evil of some sort. For example, there are people who display a sort of creative moral heroism in the face of suffering and adversity—a heroism that inspires others and creates a good situation out of a bad one. In a situation like this the evil, of course, remains evil; but the total state of affairs—someone's bearing pain magnificently, for example—may be good. If it is, then the good present must outweigh the evil; otherwise the total situation would not be *good*. But, of course, it is not possible that such a good state of affairs obtain unless some evil also obtain. It is a necessary truth that if someone bears pain magnificently, then someone is in pain.

The conclusion to be drawn, therefore, is that (21) is not necessarily true. And our discussion thus far shows at the very least that it is no easy matter to find necessarily true propositions that yield a formally contradictory set when added to set *A*.[4] One wonders, therefore, why the many atheologians who confidently assert that this set is contradictory make no attempt whatever to *show* that it is. For the most part they are content just to *assert* that there is a contradiction here. Even Mackie, who sees that some "additional premises" or "quasi-logical rules" are needed, makes scarcely a beginning towards finding some additional premises that are necessarily true and that together with the members of set *A* formally entail an explicit contradiction.

3. CAN WE SHOW THAT THERE IS NO INCONSISTENCY HERE?

To summarize our conclusions so far: although many atheologians claim that the theist is involved in contradiction when he asserts the members of

set *A*, this set, obviously, is neither *explicitly nor formally* contradictory; the claim, presumably, must be that it is *implicitly* contradictory. To make good this claim the atheologian must find some necessarily true proposition *p* (it could be a conjunction of several propositions) such that the addition of *p* to set *A* yields a set that is formally contradictory. No atheologian has produced even a plausible candidate for this role, and it certainly is not easy to see what such a proposition might be. Now we might think we should simply declare set *A* implicitly consistent on the principle that a proposition (or set) is to be presumed consistent or possible until proven otherwise. This course, however, leads to trouble. The same principle would impel us to declare the atheologian's claim—that set *A* is inconsistent—possible or consistent. But the claim that a given set of propositions is implicitly contradictory, is itself either necessarily true or necessarily false; so if such a claim is *possible*, it is not necessarily false and is, therefore, true (in fact, necessarily true). If we followed the suggested principle, therefore, we should be obliged to declare set *A* implicitly consistent (since it hasn't been shown to be otherwise), but we should have to say the same thing about the atheologian's claim, since we haven't shown *that* claim to be inconsistent or impossible. The atheologian's claim, furthermore, is necessarily true if it is possible. Accordingly, if we accept the above principle, we shall have to declare set *A* both implicitly consistent and implicitly inconsistent. So all we can say at this point is that set *A* has not been shown to be implicitly inconsistent.

Can we go any further? One way to go on would be to try to *show* that set *A* is implicitly consistent or possible in the broadly logical sense. But what is involved in showing such a thing? Although there are various ways to approach this matter, they all resemble one another in an important respect. They all amount to this: to show that a set *S* is consistent you think of a *possible state of affairs* (it needn't *actually obtain*) which is such that if it were actual, then all of the members of *S* would be true. This procedure is sometimes called *giving a model of S*. For example, you might construct an axiom set and then show that it is consistent by giving a model of it; this is how it was shown that the denial of Euclid's parallel postulate is formally consistent with the rest of his postulates.

There are various special cases of this procedure to fit special circumstances. Suppose, for example, you have a pair of propositions *p* and *q* and wish to show them consistent. And suppose we say that a proposition *p*1 entails a proposition *p*2 if it is impossible that *p*1 be true and *p*2 false—if the conjunctive proposition *p*1 and not *p*2 is necessarily false. Then one way to show that *p* is consistent with *q* is to find some proposition *r* whose conjunction with *p* is both possible, in the broadly logical sense, and entails *q*. A rude and unlettered behaviorist, for example, might hold that thinking is really nothing but movements of the larynx; he might go on to hold that

P Jones did not move his larynx after April 30 is inconsistent (in the broadly logical sense) with

Q Jones did some thinking during May.

By way of rebuttal, we might point out that *P* appears to be consistent with

R While convalescing from an April 30 laryngotomy, Jones whiled away the idle hours by writing (in May) a splendid paper on Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*.

So the conjunction of *P* and *R* appears to be consistent; but obviously it also entails *Q* (you can't write even a passable paper on Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* without doing some thinking); so *P* and *Q* are consistent.

We can see that this is a special case of the procedure I mentioned above as follows. This proposition *R* is consistent with *P*; so the proposition *P and R* is possible, describes a possible state of affairs. But *P* and *R* entails *Q*; hence if *P and R* were true, *Q* would also be true, and hence both *P* and *Q* would be true. So this is really a case of producing a possible state of affairs such that, if it were actual, all the members of the set in question (in this case the pair set of *P* and *Q*) would be true.

How does this apply to the case before us? As follows, let us conjoin propositions (1), (2), and (2′) and henceforth call the result (1):

(1) God is omniscient, omnipotent, and wholly good.

The problem, then, is to show that (1) and (3) (evil exists) are consistent. This could be done, as we've seen, by finding a proposition *r* that is consistent with (1) and such that (1) and (*r*) together entail (3). One proposition that might do the trick is

(22) God creates a world containing evil and has a good reason for doing so.

If (22) is consistent with (1), then it follows that (1) and (3) (and hence set *A*) are consistent. Accordingly, one thing some theists have tried is to show that (22) and (1) are consistent.

One can attempt this in at least two ways. On the one hand, we could try to apply the same method again. Conceive of a possible state of affairs such that, if it obtained, an omnipotent, omniscient, and wholly good God would have a good reason for permitting evil. On the other, someone might try to specify *what God's reason is* for permitting evil and try to show, if it is not obvious, that it is a good reason. St. Augustine, for example, one of the greatest and most influential philosopher-theologians of the Christian Church, writes as follows:

> … some people see with perfect truth that a creature is better if, while possessing free will, it remains always fixed upon God and never sins; then, reflecting on men's sins, they are grieved, not because they continue to sin, but because they were created. They say: He should have made us such that we never willed to sin, but always to enjoy the unchangeable truth.
>
> They should not lament or be angry. God has not compelled men to sin just because He created them and gave them the power to choose between sinning and not sinning. There are angels who have never sinned and never will sin.
>
> Such is the generosity of God's goodness that He has not refrained from creating even that creature which He foreknew would not only sin, but remain in the will to sin. As a runaway horse is better than a stone which does not run away because it lacks self-movement and sense perception, so the creature is more excellent which sins by free will than that which does not sin only because it has no free will.[5]

In broadest terms Augustine claims that God could create a better, more perfect universe by permitting evil than He could by refusing to do so:

> Neither the sins nor the misery are necessary to the perfection of the universe, but souls as such are necessary, which have the power to sin if they so will, and become miserable if they sin. If misery persisted after their sins had been abolished, or if there were misery before there were sins, then it might be right to say that the order and government of the universe were at fault. Again, if there were sins but no consequent misery, that order is equally dishonored by lack of equity.[6]

Augustine tries to tell us *what God's reason is* for permitting evil. At bottom, he says, it's that God can create a more perfect universe by permitting evil. A really top-notch universe requires the existence of free, rational, and moral agents; and some of the free creatures He created went wrong. But the universe with the free creatures it contains and the evil they commit is better than it would have been had it contained neither the free creatures nor this evil. Such an attempt to specify God's reason for permitting evil is what I earlier called a *theodicy*; in the words of John Milton it is an attempt to "justify the ways of God to man," to show that God is just in permitting evil. Augustine's kind of theodicy might be called a Free Will Theodicy, since the idea of rational creatures with free will plays such a prominent role in it.

A theodicist, then, attempts to tell us why God permits evil. Quite distinct from a Free Will

Theodicy is what I shall call a Free Will Defense. Here the aim is not to say what God's reason *is*, but at most what God's reason *might possibly be*. We could put the difference like this. The Free Will Theodicist and Free Will Defender are both trying to show that (1) is consistent with (22), and of course if so, then set *A* is consistent. The Free Will Theodicist tries to do this by finding some proposition *r* which in conjunction with (1) entails (22); he claims, furthermore, that this proposition is true, not just consistent with (1). He tries to tell us what God's reason for permitting evil *really is*. The Free Will Defender, on the other hand, though he also tries to find a proposition *r* that is consistent with (1) and in conjunction with it entails (22), does *not* claim to know or even believe that *r* is true. And here, of course, he is perfectly within his rights. His aim is to show that (1) is consistent with (22); all he need do then is find an *r* that is consistent with (1) and such that (1) and (*r*) entail (22); whether *r* is true is quite beside the point.

So there is a significant difference between a Free Will Theodicy and a Free Will Defense. The latter is sufficient (if successful) to show that set *A* is consistent; in a way a Free Will Theodicy goes beyond what is required. On the other hand, a theodicy would be much more satisfying, if possible to achieve. No doubt the theist would rather know what God's reason is for permitting evil than simply that it's possible that He has a good one. But in the present context (that of investigating the consistency of set A), the latter is all that's needed. Neither a defense or a theodicy, of course, gives any hint to what God's reason for some *specific* evil—the death or suffering of someone close to you, for example—might be. And there is still another function[7]—a sort of pastoral function—in the neighborhood that neither serves. Confronted with evil in his own life or suddenly coming to realize more clearly than before the *extent* and *magnitude* of evil, a believer in God may undergo a crisis of faith. He may be tempted to follow the advice of Job's "friends"; he may be tempted to "curse God and die." Neither a Free Will Defense nor a Free Will Theodicy is designed to be of much help or comfort to one suffering from such a storm in the soul (although in a specific case, of course, one or the other could prove useful). Neither is to be thought of first of all as a means of pastoral counseling. Probably neither will enable someone to find peace with himself and with God in the face of the evil the world contains. But then, of course, neither is intended for that purpose.

4. THE FREE WILL DEFENSE

In what follows I shall focus attention upon the Free Will Defense. I shall examine it more closely, state it more exactly, and consider objections to it; and I shall argue that in the end it is successful. Earlier we saw that among good states of affairs there are some that not even God can bring about without bringing about evil: those goods, namely, that *entail* or *include* evil states of affairs. The Free Will Defense can be looked upon as an effort to show that there may be a very different kind of good that God can't bring about without permitting evil. These are good states of affairs that don't include evil; they do not entail the existence of any evil whatever; nonetheless God Himself can't bring them about without permitting evil.

So how does the Free Will Defense work? And what does the Free Will Defender mean when he says that people are or may be free? What is relevant to the Free Will Defense is the idea of *being free with respect to an action*. If a person is free with respect to a given action, then he is free to perform that action and free to refrain from performing it; no antecedent conditions and/or causal laws determine that he will perform the action, or that he won't. It is within his power, at the time in question, to take or perform the action and within his power to refrain from it. Freedom so conceived is not to be confused with unpredictability. You might be able to predict what you will do in a given situation even if you are free, in that situation, to do something else. If I know you well, I may be able to predict what action you will take in response to a certain set of conditions; it does not follow that you are not free with respect to that action. Secondly, I shall say that an action is *morally significant*, for a

given person, if it would be wrong for him to perform the action but right to refrain or vice versa. Keeping a promise, for example, would ordinarily be morally significant for a person, as would refusing induction into the army. On the other hand, having Cheerios for breakfast (instead of Wheaties) would not normally be morally significant. Further, suppose we say that a person is *significantly free*, on a given occasion, if he is then free with respect to a morally significant action. And finally we must distinguish between *moral evil* and *natural evil*. The former is evil that results from free human activity; natural evil is any other kind of evil.[8]

Given these definitions and distinctions, we can make a preliminary statement of the Free Will Defense as follows. A world containing creatures who are significantly free (and freely perform more good than evil actions) is more valuable, all else being equal, than a world containing no free creatures at all. Now God can create free creatures, but He can't *cause* or *determine* them to do only what is right. For if He does so, then they aren't significantly free after all; they do not do what is right *freely*. To create creatures capable of *moral good*, therefore, He must create creatures capable of moral evil; and He can't give these creatures the freedom to perform evil and at the same time prevent them from doing so. As it turned out, sadly enough, some of the free creatures God created went wrong in the exercise of their freedom; this is the source of moral evil. The fact that free creatures sometimes go wrong, however, counts neither against God's omnipotence nor against His goodness; for He could have forestalled the occurrence of moral evil only by removing the possibility of moral good.

I said earlier that the Free Will Defender tries to find a proposition that is consistent with

(1) God is omniscient, omnipotent, and wholly good

and together with (1) entails that there is evil. According to the Free Will Defense, we must find this proposition somewhere in the above story. The heart of the Free Will Defense is the claim that it is *possible* that God could not have created a universe containing moral good (or as much moral good as this world contains) without creating one that also contained moral evil. And if so, then it is possible that God has a good reason for creating a world containing evil.

Now this defense has met with several kinds of objections. For example, some philosophers say that *causal determinism* and *freedom*, contrary to what we might have thought, are not really incompatible.[9] But if so, then God could have created free creatures who were free, and free to do what is wrong, but nevertheless were causally determined to do only what is right. Thus He could have created creatures who were free to do what was wrong, while nevertheless preventing them from ever performing any wrong actions—simply by seeing to it that they were causally determined to do only what is right. Of course this contradicts the Free Will Defense, according to which there is inconsistency in supposing that God determines free creatures to do only what is right. But is it really possible that all of a person's actions are causally determined while some of them are free? How could that be so? According to one version of the doctrine in question, to say that George acts freely on a given occasion is to say only this: *if George had chosen to do otherwise, he would have done otherwise*. Now George's action *A* is causally determined if some event *E*—some event beyond his control—has already occurred, where the state of affairs consisting in *E*'s occurrence conjoined with George's *refraining* from performing *A*, is a causally impossible state of affairs. Then one can consistently hold both that all of a man's actions are causally determined and that some of them are free in the above sense. For suppose that all of a man's actions are causally determined and that he *couldn't*, on any occasion, have made any choice or performed any action different from the ones he did make and perform. It could still be true that if he *had* chosen to do otherwise, he would have done otherwise. Granted, he couldn't have chosen to do otherwise; but this is consistent with saying that *if* he had, things would have gone differently.

This objection to the Free Will Defense seems utterly implausible. One might as well claim that

being in jail doesn't really limit one's freedom on the grounds that if one were *not* in jail, he'd be free to come and go as he pleased. So I shall say no more about this objection here.[10]

A second objection is more formidable. In essence it goes like this. Surely it is possible to do only what is right, even if one is free to do wrong. It is *possible*, in that broadly logical sense, that there would be a world containing free creatures who always do what is right. There is certainly no *contradiction* or *inconsistency* in this idea. But God is omnipotent; his power has no nonlogical limitations. So if it's possible that there be a world containing creatures who are free to do what is wrong but never in fact do so, then it follows that an omnipotent God could create such a world. If so, however, the Free Will Defense must be mistaken in its insistence upon the possibility that God is omnipotent but unable to create a world containing moral good without permitting moral evil.). J. L. Mackie … states this objection:

> If God has made men such that in their free choices they sometimes prefer what is good and sometimes what is evil, why could he not have made men such that they always freely choose the good? If there is no logical impossibility in a man's freely choosing the good on one, or on several occasions, there cannot be a logical impossibility in his freely choosing the good on every occasion. God was not, then, faced with a choice between making innocent automata and making beings who, in acting freely, would sometimes go wrong; there was open to him the obviously better possibility of making beings who would act freely but always go right. Clearly, his failure to avail himself of this possibility is inconsistent with his being both omnipotent and wholly good.[11]

Now what, exactly, is Mackie's point here? This. According to the Free Will Defense, it is possible both that God is omnipotent and that He was unable to create a world containing moral good without creating one containing moral evil. But, replies Mackie, this limitation on His power to create is inconsistent with God's omnipotence. For surely it's *possible* that there be a world containing perfectly virtuous persons—persons who are significantly free but always do what is right. Surely there are *possible worlds* that contain moral good but no moral evil. But God, if He is omnipotent, can create any possible world He chooses. So it is *not* possible, contrary to the Free Will Defense, both that God is omnipotent and that He could create a world containing moral good only by creating one containing moral evil. If He is omnipotent, the only limitations of His power are *logical* limitations; in which case there are no possible worlds He could not have created.

This is a subtle and important point. According to the great German philosopher G. W. Leibniz, *this* world, the actual world, must be the best of all possible worlds. His reasoning goes as follows. Before God created anything at all, He was confronted with an enormous range of choices; He could create or bring into actuality any of the myriads of different possible worlds. Being perfectly good, He must have chosen to create the best world He could; being omnipotent, He was able to create any possible world He pleased. He must, therefore, have chosen the best of all possible worlds; and hence *this* world, the one He did create, must be the best possible. Now Mackie, of course, agrees with Leibniz that God, if omnipotent, could have created any world He pleased and would have created the best world he could. But while Leibniz draws the conclusion that this world, despite appearances, must be the best possible, Mackie concludes instead that there is no omnipotent, wholly good God. For, he says, it is obvious enough that this present world is not the best of all possible worlds.

The Free Will Defender disagrees with both Leibniz and Mackie. In the first place, he might say, what is the reason for supposing that there is such a thing as the best of all possible worlds? No matter how marvelous a world is—containing no matter how many persons enjoying unalloyed bliss—isn't it possible that there be an even better world containing even more persons enjoying

even more unalloyed bliss? But what is really characteristic and central to the Free Will Defense is the claim that God, though omnipotent, could not have actualized just any possible world He pleased.

5. WAS IT WITHIN GOD'S POWER TO CREATE ANY POSSIBLE WORLD HE PLEASED?

This is indeed the crucial question for the Free Will Defense. If we wish to discuss it with insight and authority, we shall have to look into the idea of *possible worlds*. And a sensible first question is this: what sort of thing is a possible world? The basic idea is that a possible world is *a way things could have been*; it is a *state of affairs* of some kind. Earlier we spoke of states of affairs, in particular of good and evil states of affairs. Suppose we look at this idea in more detail. What sort of thing is a state of affairs? The following would be examples:

Nixon's having won the 1972 election

7 + 5's being equal to 12

All men's being mortal

and

Gary, Indiana's, having a really nasty pollution problem.

These are *actual* states of affairs: states of affairs that do in fact obtain. And corresponding to each such actual state of affairs there is a true proposition—in the above cases, the corresponding propositions would be *Nixon won the 1972 presidential election, 7 + 5 is equal to 12, all men are mortal, and Gary, Indiana, has a really nasty pollution problem*. A proposition *p corresponds* to a state of affairs s_1, in this sense, if it is impossible that *p* be true and s_1 fail to obtain and impossible that s_1 obtain and *p* fail to be true.

But just as there are false propositions, so there are states of affairs that do *not* obtain or are *not* actual. *Kissinger's having swum the Atlantic* and *Hubert Horatio Humphrey's having run a mile in four minutes* would be examples. Some states of affairs that do not obtain are impossible: e.g., *Hubert's having drawn a square circle, 7 + 5's being equal to 75,* and *Agnew's having a brother who was an only child*. The propositions corresponding to these states of affairs, of course, are necessarily false. So there are states of affairs that *obtain* or are *actual* and also states of affairs that don't obtain. Among the latter some are *impossible* and others are possible. And a possible world is a possible state of affairs. Of course not every possible state of affairs is a possible world; *Hubert's having run a mile in four minutes* is a possible state of affairs but not a possible world. No doubt it is an *element* of many possible worlds, but it isn't itself inclusive enough to be one. To be a possible world, a state of affairs must be very large—so large as to be *complete* or *maximal*.

To get at this idea of completeness we need a couple of definitions. As we have already seen … a state of affairs *A includes* a state of affairs *B* if it is not possible that *A* obtain and *B* not obtain or if the conjunctive state of affairs *A* but not *B*—the state of affairs that obtains if and only if *A* obtains and *B* does not—is not possible. For example, *Jim Whittaker's being the first American to climb Mt. Everest* includes *Jim Whittaker's being an American*. It also includes *Mt. Everest's being climbed, something's being climbed, no American's having climbed Everest before Whittaker did*, and the like. *Inclusion* among states of affairs is like *entailment* among propositions; and where a state of affairs *A* includes a state of affairs *B*, the proposition corresponding to *A* entails the one corresponding to *B*. Accordingly, *Jim Whittaker is the first American to climb Everest* entails *Mt. Everest has been climbed, something has been climbed,* and *no American climbed Everest before Whittaker did*. Now suppose we say further that a state of affairs *A precludes* a state of affairs *B* if it is not possible that *both* obtain, or if the conjunctive state of affairs *A* and *B* is impossible. Thus *Whittaker's being the first American to climb Mt. Everest* precludes *Luther Jerstad's being the first American to climb Everest,* as well as Whittaker's never having climbed any mountains. If *A* precludes *B*, than *A's* corresponding proposition entails the denial of the one corresponding to *B*. Still further, let's say that the *complement* of a state of affairs is the state of affairs that obtains just in case *A* does not

obtain. [Or we might say that the complement (call it $\bar{A}$) of A is the state of affairs corresponding to the *denial* or *negation* of the proposition corresponding to A.] Given these definitions, we can say what it is for a state of affairs to be *complete*: A is a complete state of affairs if and only if for every state of affairs B, either A *includes* B or A *precludes* B. (We could express the same thing by saying that if A is a complete state of affairs, then for every state of affairs B, either A includes B or A includes $\bar{B}$, the complement of B.) And now we are able to say what a possible world is: a possible world is any possible state of affairs that is complete. If A is a possible world, then it says something about everything; every state of affairs S is either included in or precluded by it.

Corresponding to each possible world W, furthermore, there is a set of propositions that I'll call the book on W. A proposition is in the book on W just in case the state of affairs to which it corresponds is included in W. Or we might express it like this. Suppose we say that a proposition P *is true in a world* W if and only if P *would have been true if* W *had been actual*—if and only if, that is, it is not possible that W be actual and P be false. Then the book on W is the set of propositions true in W. Like possible worlds, books are *complete*; if B is a book, then for any proposition P, either P or the denial of P will be a member of B. A book is a *maximal consistent set* of propositions; it is so large that the addition of another proposition to it always yields an explicitly inconsistent set.

Of course, for each possible world there is exactly one book corresponding to it (that is, for a given world W there is just one book B such that each member of B is true in M; and for each book there is just one world to which it corresponds). So every world has its book.

It should be obvious that exactly one possible world is actual. At *least* one must be, since the set of true propositions is a maximal consistent set and hence a book. But then it corresponds to a possible world, and the possible world corresponding to this set of propositions (since it's the set of *true* propositions) will be actual. On the other hand there is at *most* one actual world. For suppose there were two: W and W'. These worlds cannot include all the very same states of affairs; if they did, they would be the very same world. So there must be at least one state of affairs S such that W includes S and W' does not. But a possible world is maximal; W', therefore, includes the complement $\bar{S}$ of S. So if both W and W' were actual, as we have supposed, then both S and $\bar{S}$ would be actual—which is impossible. So there can't be more than one possible world that is actual.

Leibniz pointed out that a proposition p is necessary if it is true in every possible world. We may add that p is possible if it is true in one world and impossible if true in none. Furthermore, p *entails* q if there is no possible world in which p is true and q is false, and p *is consistent with* q if there is at least one world in which both p and q are true.

A further feature of possible worlds is that people (and other things) exist in them. Each of us exists in the actual world, obviously; but a person also exists in many worlds distinct from the actual world. It would be a mistake, of course, to think of all of these worlds as somehow "going on" at the same time, with the same person reduplicated through these worlds and actually existing in a lot of different ways. This is not what is meant by saying that the same person exists in different possible worlds. What is meant, instead, is this: a person Paul exists in each of those possible worlds W which is such that, if W *had been actual,* Paul would have existed—actually existed. Suppose Paul had been an inch taller than he is, or a better tennis player. Then the world that does in fact obtain would not have been actual; some other world—W', let's say—would have obtained instead. If W' had been actual, Paul would have existed; so Paul exists in W'. (Of course there are still other possible worlds in which Paul does not exist—worlds, for example, in which there are no people at all.) Accordingly, when we say that Paul exists in a world W, what we mean is that Paul *would have* existed had W been actual. Or we could put it like this: Paul exists in each world W that includes the state of affairs consisting in Paul's existence. We can put this still more simply by saying that Paul exists in those worlds whose books contain the proposition *Paul exists*.

But isn't there a problem here? *Many* people are named "Paul": Paul the apostle, Paul J. Zwier, John Paul Jones, and many other famous Pauls. So who goes with "Paul exists"? Which Paul? The answer has to do with the fact that books contain *propositions*—not sentences. They contain the sort of thing sentences are used to express and assert. And the same sentence—"Aristotle is wise," for example—can be used to express many different propositions. When Plato used it, he asserted a proposition predicating wisdom of his famous pupil; when Jackie Onassis uses it, she asserts a proposition predicating wisdom of her wealthy husband. These are distinct propositions (we might even think they differ in truth value); but they are expressed by the same sentence. Normally (but not always) we don't have much trouble determining which of the several propositions expressed by a given sentence is relevant in the context at hand. So in this case a given person, Paul, exists in a world W if and only if W' book contains the proposition that says that *he*— that particular person—exists. The fact that the sentence we use to express this proposition can also be used to express *other* propositions is not relevant.

After this excursion into the nature of books and worlds we can return to our question. Could God have created just any world He chose? Before addressing the question, however, we must note that God does not, strictly speaking, *create* any possible worlds or states of affairs at all. What He creates are the heavens and the earth and all that they contain. But He has not created states of affairs. There are, for example, the state of affairs consisting in God's existence and the state of affairs consisting in His nonexistence. That is, there is such a thing as the state of affairs consisting in the existence of God, and there is also such a thing as the state of affairs consisting in the nonexistence of God, just as there are the two propositions *God exists* and *God does not exist*. The theist believes that the first state of affairs is actual and the first proposition true; the atheist believes that the second state of affairs is actual and the second proposition true. But, of course, both propositions *exist*, even though just one is true. Similarly, there are two states of affairs here, just one of which is actual. So both states of affairs *exist*, but only one *obtains*. And God has not created either one of them since there never was a time at which either did not exist. Nor has he created the state of affairs consisting in the earth's existence; there was a time when *the earth* did not exist, but none when the state of affairs consisting in the earth's existence didn't exist. Indeed, God did not bring into existence any states of affairs at all. What He did was to perform actions of a certain sort—creating the heavens and the earth, for example—which resulted in the *actuality* of certain states of affairs. God *actualizes* states of affairs. He actualizes the possible world that does in fact obtain; He does not create it. And while He has created Socrates, He did not create the state of affairs consisting in Socrates' existence.[12]

Bearing this in mind, let's finally return to our question. Is the atheologian right in holding that if God is omnipotent, then he could have actualized or created any possible world He pleased? Not obviously. First, we must ask ourselves whether God is a *necessary* or a *contingent* being. A necessary being is one that exists in every possible world—one that would have existed no matter which possible world had been actual; a contingent being exists only in some possible worlds. Now if God is not a necessary being (and many, perhaps most, theists think that He is not), then clearly enough there will be many possible worlds He could not have actualized—all those, for example, in which He does not exist. Clearly, God could not have created a world in which He doesn't even exist.

So, if God is a contingent being then there are many possible worlds beyond His power to create. But this is really irrelevant to our present concerns. For perhaps the atheologian can maintain his case if he revises his claim to avoid this difficulty; perhaps he will say something like this: if God is omnipotent, then He could have actualized any of these possible worlds *in which He exists*. So if He exists and is omnipotent, He could have actualized (contrary to the Free Will Defense) any of those possible worlds in which He exists and in which there exist free creatures who do no wrong. He could have

actualized worlds containing moral good but no moral evil. Is this correct?

Let's begin with a trivial example. You and Paul have just returned from an Australian hunting expedition: your quarry was the elusive double-waffled cassowary. Paul captured an aardvark, mistaking it for a cassowary. The creature's disarming ways have won it a place in Paul's heart; he is deeply attached to it. Upon your return to the States you offer Paul $500 for his aardvark, only to be rudely turned down. Later you ask yourself, "What would he have done if I'd offered him $700?" Now what is it, exactly, that you are asking? What you're really asking in a way is whether, under a *specific set of conditions*, Paul would have sold it. These conditions include your having offered him $700 rather than $500 for the aardvark, everything else being as much as possible like the conditions that did in fact obtain. Let S' be this set of conditions or state of affairs. S' includes the state of affairs consisting in your offering Paul $700 (instead of the $500 you did offer him); of course it does not include his *accepting* your offer, and it does not include his *rejecting* it; for the rest, the conditions it includes are just like the ones that did obtain in the actual world. So, for example, S' includes Paul's being free to accept the offer and free to refrain; and if in fact the going rate for an aardvark was $650, then S' includes the state of affairs consisting in the going rate's being $650. So we might put your question by asking which of the following conditionals is true:

(23) If the state of affairs S' had obtained, Paul would have accepted the offer

(24) If the state of affairs S' had obtained, Paul would not have accepted the offer.

It seems clear that at least one of these conditionals is true, but naturally they can't both be; so exactly one is.

Now since S' includes neither Paul's accepting the offer not his rejecting it, the antecedent of (23) and (24) does not entail the consequent of either. That is,

(25) S' *obtains* does not entail either

(26) Paul accepts the offer

or

(27) Paul does not accept the offer.

So there are possible worlds in which both (25) and (26) are true, and other possible worlds in which both (25) and (27) are true.

We are now in a position to grasp an important fact. Either (23) or (24) is in fact true; and either way there are possible worlds God could not have actualized. Suppose, first of all, that (23) is true. Then it was beyond the power of God to create a world in which (1) Paul is free to sell his aardvark and free to refrain, and in which the other states of affairs included in S' obtain, and (2) Paul does not sell. That is, it was beyond His power to create a world in which (25) and (27) are both true. There is at least one possible world like this, but God, despite His omnipotence, could not have brought about its actuality. For let W be such a world. To actualize W, God must bring it about that Paul is free with respect to this action, and that the other states of affairs included in S' obtain. But (23), as we are supposing, is true; so if God had actualized S' and left Paul *free* with respect to this action, he would have sold: in which case W would not have been actual. If, on the other hand, God had *brought it about* that Paul didn't sell or had *caused him to* refrain from selling, then Paul would not have been free with respect to this action; then S' would not have been actual (since S' includes Paul's being free with respect to it), and W would not have been actual since W includes S'.

Of course if it is (24) rather than (23) that is true, then another class of worlds was beyond God's power to actualize—those, namely, in which S' obtains and Paul *sells* his aardvark. These are the worlds in which both (25) and (26) are true. But either (23) or (24) is true. Therefore, there are possible worlds God could not have actualized. If we consider whether or not God could have created a world in which, let's say, both (25) and (26) are true, we see that the answer depends upon a peculiar kind of fact; it depends upon what Paul would

have freely chosen to do in a certain situation. So there are any number of possible worlds such that it is partly up to Paul whether God can create them.[13]

That was a past tense example. Perhaps it would be useful to consider a future tense case, since this might seem to correspond more closely to God's situation in choosing a possible world to actualize. At some time t in the near future Maurice will be free with respect to some insignificant action—having freeze-dried oatmeal for breakfast, let's say. That is, at time t Maurice will be free to have oatmeal but also free to take something else—shredded wheat, perhaps. Next, suppose we consider S', a state of affairs that is included in the actual world and includes Maurice's being free with respect to taking oatmeal at time t. That is, S' includes Maurice's being free at time t to take oatmeal and free to reject it. S' does not include Maurice's taking oatmeal, however; nor does it include his rejecting it. For the rest S' is as much as possible like the actual world. In particular there are many conditions that do in fact hold at time t and are *relevant* to his choice—such conditions, for example, as the fact that he hasn't had oatmeal lately, that his wife will be annoyed if he rejects it, and the like; and S' includes each of these conditions. Now God no doubt knows what Maurice will do at time t, if S obtains; He knows which action Maurice would freely perform if S were to be actual. That is, God knows that one of the following conditionals is true:

(28) If S' were to obtain, Maurice will freely take the oatmeal

or

(29) If S' were to obtain, Maurice will freely reject it.

We may not know which of these is true, and Maurice himself may not know; but presumably God does.

So either God knows that (28) is true, or else He knows that (29) is. Let's suppose it is (28). Then there is a possible world that God, though omnipotent, cannot create. For consider a possible world W' that shares S' with the actual world (which for ease of reference I'll name "Kronos") and in which Maurice does not take oatmeal. (We know there is such a world, since S' does not include Maurice's taking the oatmeal.) S' obtains in W' just as it does in Kronos. Indeed, everything in W' is just as it is in Kronos up to time t. But whereas in Kronos Maurice takes oatmeal at time t, in W' he does not. Now W' is a perfectly possible world; but it is not within God's power to create it or bring about its actuality. For to do so He must actualize S'. But (28) is in fact true. So if God actualizes S' (as He must to create W') and leaves Maurice free with respect to the action in question, then he will take the oatmeal; and then, of course, W' will not be actual. If, on the other hand, God causes Maurice to *refrain* from taking the oatmeal, then he is not free to take it. That means, once again, that W' is not actual; for in W' Maurice is free to take the oatmeal (even if he doesn't do so). So if (28) is true, then this world W' is one that God can't actualize, it is not within His power to actualize it even though He is omnipotent and it is a possible world.

Of course, if it is (29) that is true, we get a similar result; then too there are possible worlds that God can't actualize. These would be worlds which share S' with Kronos and in which Maurice *does* take oatmeal. But either (28) or (29) is true; so either way there is a possible world that God can't create. If we consider a world in which S' obtains and in which Maurice freely chooses oatmeal at time t, we see that whether or not it is within God's power to actualize it depends upon what Maurice would do if he were free in a certain situation. Accordingly, there are any number of possible worlds such that it is partly up to Maurice whether or not God can actualize them. It is, of course, up to God whether or not to create Maurice and also up to God whether or not to make him free with respect to the action of taking oatmeal at time t. (God could, if He chose, cause him to succumb to the dreaded *equine obsession*, a condition shared by some people and most horses, whose victims find it *psychologically impossible* to refuse oats or oat products.) But if He creates Maurice and creates him free with respect to this

action, then whether or not he actually performs the action is up to Maurice—not God.[14]

Now we can return to the Free Will Defense and the problem of evil. The Free Will Defender, you recall, insists on the possibility that it is not within God's power to create a world containing moral good without creating one containing moral evil. His atheological opponent—Mackie, for example—agrees with Leibniz in insisting that *if* (as the theist holds) God is omnipotent, then it *follows* that He could have created any possible world He pleased. We now see that this contention—call it "Leibniz' Lapse"—is a mistake. The atheologian is right in holding that there are many possible worlds containing moral good but no moral evil; his mistake lies in endorsing Leibniz' Lapse. So one of his premises—that God, if omnipotent, could have actualized just any world He pleased—is false.

6. COULD GOD HAVE CREATED A WORLD CONTAINING MORAL GOOD BUT NO MORAL EVIL?

Now suppose we recapitulate the logic of the situation. The Free Will Defender claims that the following is possible:

(30) God is omnipotent, and it was not within His power to create a world containing moral good but no moral evil.

By way of retort the atheologian insists that there are possible worlds containing moral good but no moral evil. He adds that an omnipotent being could have actualized any possible world he chose. So if God is omnipotent, it follows that He could have actualized a world containing moral good but no moral evil, hence (30), contrary to the Free Will Defender's claim, is not possible. What we have seen so far is that his second premise—Leibniz' Lapse—is false.

Of course, this does not settle the issue in the Free Will Defender's favor. Leibniz' Lapse (appropriately enough for a lapse) is false; but this doesn't show that (30) is possible. To show this latter we must demonstrate the possibility that among the worlds God could not have actualized are all the worlds containing moral good but no moral evil. How can we approach this question?

Instead of choosing oatmeal for breakfast or selling an aardvark, suppose we think about a morally significant action such as taking a bribe. Curley Smith, the mayor of Boston, is opposed to the proposed freeway route; it would require destruction of the Old North Church along with some other antiquated and structurally unsound buildings. L. B. Smedes, the director of highways, asks him whether he'd drop his opposition for $1 million. "Of course," he replies. "Would you do it for $2?" asks Smedes. "What do you take me for?" comes the indignant reply. "That's already established," smirks Smedes; "all that remains is to nail down your price." Smedes then offers him a bribe of $35,000; unwilling to break with the fine old traditions of Bay State politics, Curley accepts. Smedes then spends a sleepless night wondering whether he could have bought Curley for $20,000.

Now suppose we assume that Curley was free with respect to the action of taking the bribe— free to take it and free to refuse. And suppose, furthermore, that he would have taken it. That is, let us suppose that

(31) If Smedes had offered Curley a bribe of $20,000, he would have accepted it.

If (31) is true, then there is a state of affairs S' that (1) includes Curley's being offered a bribe of $20,000; (2) does not include either his accepting the bribe or his rejecting it; and (3) is otherwise as much as possible like the actual world. Just to make sure S' includes every relevant circumstance, let us suppose that it is a *maximal world segment*. That is, add to S' any state of affairs compatible with but not included in it, and the result will be an entire possible world. We could think of it roughly like this: S' is included in at least one world W in which Curley takes the bribe and in at least one world W'

in which he rejects it. If S' is a maximal world segment, then S' is what remains of W when *Curley's taking the bribe* is deleted; it is also what remains of W' when *Curley's rejecting the bribe* is detected. More exactly, if S' is a maximal world segment, then every possible state of affairs that includes S', but isn't included by S', is a possible world. So if (31) is true, then there is a maximal world segment S' that (1) includes Curley's being offered a bribe of $20,000; (2) does not include either his accepting the bribe or his rejecting it; (3) is otherwise as much as possible like the actual world—in particular, it includes Curley's being free with respect to the bribe; and (4) is such that if it were actual then Curley would have taken the bribe. That is

(32) if S' were actual, *Curley would have accepted the bribe* is true.

Now, of course, there is at least one possible world W' in which S' is actual and Curley does not take the bribe. But God could not have created W'; to do so, he would have been obliged to actualize S', leaving Curley free with respect to the action of taking the bribe. But under these conditions Curley, as (32) assures us, would have accepted the bribe, so that the world thus created would not have been S'.

Curley, as we see, is not above a bit of Watergating. But there may be worse to come. Of course, there are possible worlds in which he is significantly free (i.e., free with respect to a morally significant action) and never does what is wrong. But the sad truth about Curley may be this. Consider W', any of these worlds: in W' Curley is significantly free, so in W' there are some actions that are morally significant for him and with respect to which he is free. But at least one of these actions—call it A—has the following peculiar property. There is a maximal world segment S' that obtains in W' and is such that (1) S' includes Curley's being free *re* A but neither his performing A nor his refraining from A; (2) S' is otherwise as much as possible like W' and (3) if S' had been actual, Curley would have gone wrong with respect to A.[15] (Notice that this third condition holds in fact, in the actual world; it does not hold in that world W'.)

This means, of course, that God could not have actualized W'. For to do so He'd have been obliged to bring it about that S' is actual; but then Curley would go wrong with respect to A. Since in W' he always does what is right, the world thus actualized would not be W'. On the other hand, if God *causes* Curley to go right with respect to A or *brings it about* that he does so, then Curley isn't free with respect to A; and so once more it isn't W' that is actual. Accordingly God cannot create W'. But W' was just any of the worlds in which Curley is significantly free but always does only what is right. It therefore follows that it was not within God's power to create a world in which Curley produces moral good but no moral evil. Every world God can actualize is such that if Curley is significantly free in it, he takes at least one wrong action.

Obviously Curley is in serious trouble. I shall call the malady from which he suffers transworld depravity. (I leave as homework the problem of comparing transworld depravity with what Calvinists call "total depravity.") By way of explicit definition:

(33) A person P *suffers from transworld depravity* if and only if the following holds: for every world W such that P is significantly free in W and P does only what is right in W, there is an action A and a maximal world segment S' such that

(1) S' includes A's being morally significant for P

(2) S' includes P's being free with respect to A

(3) S' is included in W and includes neither P's performing A nor P's refraining from performing A

and

(4) If S' were actual, P would go wrong with respect to A.

(In thinking about this definition, remember that (4) is to be true in fact, in the actual world—not in that world W.)

What is important about the idea of transworld depravity is that if a person suffers from it, then it

wasn't within God's power to actualize any world in which that person is significantly free but does no wrong—that is, a world in which he produces moral good but no moral evil.

We have been here considering a crucial contention of the Free Will Defender: the contention, namely, that

(30) God is omnipotent, and it was not within His power to create a world containing moral good but no moral evil.

How is transworld depravity relevant to this? As follows. Obviously it is possible that there be persons who suffer from transworld depravity. More generally, it is possible that *everybody* suffers from it. And if this possibility were actual, then God, though omnipotent, could not have created any of the possible worlds containing just the persons who do in fact exist, and containing moral good but no moral evil. For to do so He'd have to create persons who were significantly free (otherwise there would be no moral good) but suffered from transworld depravity. Such persons go wrong with respect to at least one action in any world God could have actualized and in which they are free with respect to morally significant actions; so the price for creating a world in which they produce moral good is creating one in which they also produce moral evil.

NOTES

1. John Mackie, "Evil and Omnipotence," in *The Philosophy of Religion*, ed. Basil Mitchell (London Oxford University Press:, 1971), p. 92. [See previous reading.]
2. Ibid., p. 93. [*Philosophy of Religion: Selected Readings, Second Edition*, p. 224.]
3. More simply, the question is really just whether any good state of affairs includes an evil; a little reflection reveals that no good state of affairs can include an evil that it does not outweigh.
4. In Plantinga, *God and Other Minds* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1967), chap. 5, I explore further the project of finding such propositions.
5. *The Problem of Free Choice,* Vol. 22 of *Ancient Christian Writers* (Westminster, Md.: The Newman Press, 1955), bk. 2, pp. 14–15.
6. Ibid., bk. 3, p. 9.
7. I am indebted to Henry Schuurman (in conversation) for helpful discussion of the difference between this pastoral function and those served by a theodicy or a defense.
8. This distinction is not very precise (how, exactly, are we to construe "results from"?), but perhaps it will serve our present purposes.
9. See, for example, A. Flew, "Divine Omnipotence and Human Freedom," in *New Essays in Philosophical Theology*, eds. A. Flew and A. MacIntyre (London SCM:, 1955), pp. 150–53.
10. For further discussion of it see Plantinga, *God and Other Minds*, pp. 132–35.
11. Mackie, in *The Philosophy of Religion*, pp. 100–101.
12. Strict accuracy demands, therefore, that we speak of God as actualizing rather than creating possible worlds. I shall continue to use both locutions, thus sacrificing accuracy to familiarity. For more about possible worlds see my book *The Nature of Necessity* (Oxford The Clarendon Press:, 1974), chaps. 4–8.
13. For a fuller statement of this argument see Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity*, chap. 9, secs. 4–6.
14. For a more complete and more exact statement of this argument see Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity*, chap. 9, secs. 4–6.
15. A person goes wrong with respect to an action if he either wrongfully performs it or wrongfully fails to perform it.

IV.C.2

Evil and Soul-Making

JOHN HICK

John Hick (1922–) was for many years professor of theology at the University of Birmingham in England and, until his retirement, was professor of philosophy at Claremont Graduate School. His book Evil and the God of Love *(1966), from which the following selection is taken, is considered one of the most thorough treatises on the problem of evil. "Evil and Soul-Making" is an example of a theodicy argument that is based on the free will defense. Theodicies can be of two differing types depending on how they justify the ways of God in the face of evil. The Augustinian position is that God created humans without sin and set them in a sinless, paradisical world. However, humanity fell into sin through the misuse of free will. God's grace will save some of us, but others will perish everlastingly. The second type of theodicy stems from the thinking of Irenaeus (120–202), of the Greek Church. The Irenaean tradition views Adam not as a free agent rebelling against God but as more akin to a small child. The fall is humanity's first faulty step in the direction of freedom. God is still working with humanity in order to bring it from undeveloped life (bios) to a state of self-realization in divine love, spiritual life (zoe). This life is viewed as the "vale of soul-making." Hick favors this version and develops it in this reading.*

Fortunately there is another and better way. As well as the "majority report" of the Augustinian tradition, which has dominated Western Christendom, both Catholic and Protestant, since the time of Augustine himself, there is the "minority report" of the Irenaean tradition. This latter is both older and newer than the other, for it goes back to Sr. Irenaeus and others of the early Hellenistic Fathers of the Church in the two centuries prior to St. Augustine, and it has flourished again in more developed forms during the last hundred years.

Instead of regarding man as having been created by God in a finished state, as a finitely perfect being fulfilling the divine intention for our human level of existence, and then falling disastrously away from this, the minority report sees man as still in process of creation. Irenaeus himself expressed the point in terms of the (exegetically dubious) distinction between the "image" and the "likeness" of God referred to in Genesis i.26: "Then God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness." His view was that man as a personal and moral being already exists in the image, but has not yet been formed into the finite likeness of God. By this "likeness" Irenaeus means something more than personal existence as such; he means a certain valuable quality of personal life which reflects finitely the divine life. This represents the perfecting of man, the fulfillment of God's purpose for humanity, the "bringing of many sons to glory," the creating

Pp. 253–261 from *Evil and the God of Love*, revised edition, by John Hick. Copyright © 1966, 1977 by John Hick. Used with permission. Footnotes edited.

of "children of God" who are "fellow heirs with Christ" of his glory.

And so man, created as a personal being in the image of God, is only the raw material for a further and more difficult stage of God's creative work. This is the leading of men as relatively free and autonomous persons, through their own dealings with life in the world in which He has placed them, towards that quality of personal existence that is the finite likeness of God. The features of this likeness are revealed in the person of Christ, and the process of man's creation into it is the work of the Holy Spirit. In St. Paul's words, "And we all, with unveiled faces, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being changed into his likeness (εικών) from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit";[1] or again, "For God knew his own before ever they were, and also ordained that they should be shaped to the likeness (εικών) of his Son."[2] In Johannine terms, the movement from the image to the likeness is a transition from one level of existence, that of animal life (*Bios*), to another and higher level, that of eternal life (*Zoe*), which includes but transcends the first. And the fall of man was seen by Irenaeus as a failure within the second phase of this creative process, a failure that has multiplied the perils and complicated the route of the journey in which God is seeking to lead mankind.

In the light of modern anthropological knowledge some form of two-stage conception of the creation of man has become an almost unavoidable Christian tenet. At the very least we must acknowledge as two distinguishable stages the fashioning of *homo sapiens* as a product of the long evolutionary process, and his sudden or gradual spiritualization as a child of God. But we may well extend the first stage to include the development of man as a rational and responsible person capable of personal relationship with the personal Infinite who has created him. This first stage of the creative process was, to our anthropomorphic imaginations, easy for divine omnipotence. By an exercise of creative power God caused the physical universe to exist, and in the course of countless ages to bring forth within it organic life, and finally to produce out of organic life personal life; and when man had thus emerged out of the evolution of the forms of organic life, a creature had been made who has the possibility of existing in conscious fellowship with God. But the second stage of the creative process is of a different kind altogether. It cannot be performed by omnipotent power as such. For personal life is essentially free and self-directing. It cannot be perfected by divine fiat, but only through the uncompelled responses and willing co-operation of human individuals in their actions and reactions in the world in which God has placed them. Men may eventually become the perfected persons whom the New Testament calls "children of God," but they cannot be created ready-made as this.

The value-judgment that is implicitly being invoked here is that one who has attained to goodness by meeting and eventually mastering temptations, and thus by rightly making responsible choices in concrete situations, is good in a richer and more valuable sense than would be one created *ab initio* in a state either of innocence or of virtue. In the former case, which is that of the actual moral achievements of mankind, the individual's goodness has within it the strength of temptation overcome, a stability based upon an accumulation of right choices, and a positive and responsible character that comes from the investment of costly personal effort. I suggest, then, that it is an ethically reasonable judgment, even though in the nature of the case not one that is capable of demonstrative proof, that human goodness slowly built up through personal histories of moral effort has a value in the eyes of the Creator which justifies even the long travail of the soul-making process.

The picture with which we are working is thus developmental and teleological. Man is in process of becoming the perfected being whom God is seeking to create. However, this is not taking place—it is important to add—by a natural and inevitable evolution, but through a hazardous adventure in individual freedom. Because this is a pilgrimage within the life of each individual, rather than a racial evolution, the progressive fulfillment of God's purpose does not entail any corresponding progressive improvement in the moral state of the

world. There is no doubt a development in man's ethical situation from generation to generation through the building of individual choices into public institutions, but this involves an accumulation of evil as well as of good. It is thus probable that human life was lived on much the same moral plane two thousand years ago or four thousand years ago as it is today. But nevertheless during this period uncounted millions of souls have been through the experience of earthly life, and God's purpose has gradually moved towards its fulfillment within each one of them, rather than within a human aggregate composed of different units in different generations.

If, then, God's aim in making the world is "the bringing of many sons to glory," that aim will naturally determine the kind of world that He has created. Antitheistic writers almost invariably assume a conception of the divine purpose which is contrary to the Christian conception. They assume that the purpose of a loving God must be to create a hedonistic paradise; and therefore to the extent that the world is other than this, it proves to them that God is either not loving enough or not powerful enough to create such a world. They think of God's relation to the earth on the model of a human being building a cage for a pet animal to dwell in. If he is humane he will naturally make his pet's quarters as pleasant and healthful as he can. Any respect in which the cage falls short of the veterinarian's ideal, and contains possibilities of accident or disease, is evidence of either limited benevolence or limited means, or both. Those who use the problem of evil as an argument against belief in God almost invariably think of the world in this kind of way. David Hume, for example, speaks of an architect who is trying to plan a house that is to be as comfortable and convenient as possible. If we find that "the windows, doors, fires, passages, stairs, and the whole economy of the building were the source of noise, confusion, fatigue, darkness, and the extremes of heat and cold" we should have no hesitation in blaming the architect. It would be in vain for him to prove that if this or that defect were corrected greater ills would result: "still you would assert in general, that, if the architect had had skill and good intentions, he might have formed such a plan of the whole, and might have adjusted the parts in such a manner, as would have remedied all or most of these inconveniences."[3]

But if we are right in supposing that God's purpose for man is to lead him from human *Bios*, or the biological life of man, to that quality of *Zoe*, or the personal life of eternal worth, which we see in Christ, then the question that we have to ask is not, Is this the kind of world that an all-powerful and infinitely loving being would create as an environment for his human pets? or, Is the architecture of the world the most pleasant and convenient possible? The question that we have to ask is rather, Is this the kind of world that God might make as an environment in which moral beings may be fashioned, through their own free insights and responses, into "children of God"?

Such critics as Hume are confusing what heaven ought to be, as an environment for perfected finite beings, with what this world ought to be, as an environment for beings who are in process of becoming perfected. For if our general conception of God's purpose is correct the world is not intended to be a paradise, but rather the scene of a history in which human personality may be formed towards the pattern of Christ. Men are not to be thought of on the analogy of animal pets, whose life is to be made as agreeable as possible, but rather on the analogy of human children, who are to grow to adulthood in an environment whose primary and overriding purposeis not immediate pleasure but the realizing of the most valuable potentialities of human personality.

Needless to say, this characterization of God as the heavenly Father is not a merely random illustration but an analogy that lies at the heart of the Christian faith. Jesus treated the likeness between the attitude of God to man, and the attitude of human parents at their best towards their children, as providing the most adequate way for us to think about God. And so it is altogether relevant to a Christian understanding of this world to ask, How does the best parental love express itself in its influence upon the environment in which children are to grow up? I think it is clear that a parent who loves his children, and wants them to become the

best human beings that they are capable of becoming, does not treat pleasure as the sole and supreme value. Certainly we seek pleasure for our children, and take great delight in obtaining it for them; but we do not desire for them unalloyed pleasure at the expense of their growth in such even greater values as moral integrity, unselfishness, compassion, courage, humour, reverence for the truth, and perhaps above all the capacity for love. We do not act on the premise that pleasure is the supreme end of life; and if the development of these other values sometimes clashes with the provision of pleasure, then we are willing to have our children miss a certain amount of this, rather than fail to come to possess and to be possessed by the finer and more precious qualities that are possible to the human personality. A child brought up on the principle that the only or the supreme value is pleasure would not be likely to become an ethically mature adult or an attractive or happy personality. And to most parents it seems more important to try to foster quality and strength of character in their children than to fill their lives at all times with the utmost possible degree of pleasure. If, then, there is any true analogy between God's purpose for his human creatures, and the purpose of loving and wise parents for their children, we have to recognize that the presence of pleasure and the absence of pain cannot be the supreme and overriding end for which the world exists. Rather, this world must be a place of soul-making. And its value is to be judged, not primarily by the quantity of pleasure and pain occurring in it at any particular moment, but by its fitness for its primary purpose, the purpose of soul-making.

In all this we have been speaking about the nature of the world considered simply as the God given environment of man's life. For it is mainly in this connection that the world has been regarded in Irenaean and in Protestant thought. But such a way of thinking involves a danger of anthropocentrism from which the Augustinian and Catholic tradition has generally been protected by its sense of the relative insignificance of man within the totality of the created universe. Man was dwarfed within the medieval worldview by the innumerable hosts of angels and archangels above him—unfallen rational natures which rejoice in the immediate presence of God, reflecting His glory in the untarnished mirror of their worship. However, this higher creation has in our modern world lost its hold upon the imagination. Its place has been taken, as the minimizer of men, by the immensities of outer space and by the material universe's unlimited complexity transcending our present knowledge. As the spiritual environment envisaged by Western man has shrunk, his physical horizons have correspondingly expanded. Where the human creature was formerly seen as an insignificant appendage to the angelic world, he is now seen as an equally insignificant organic excrescence, enjoying a fleeting moment of consciousness on the surface of one of the planets of a minor star. Thus the truth that was symbolized for former ages by the existence of the angelic hosts is today impressed upon us by the vastness of the physical universe, countering the egoism of our species by making us feel that this immense prodigality of existence can hardly all exist for the sake of man—though, on the other hand, the very realization that it is not all for the sake of man may itself be salutary and beneficial to man!

However, instead of opposing man and nature as rival objects of God's interest, we should perhaps rather stress man's solidarity as an embodied being with the whole natural order in which he is embedded. For man is organic to the world; all his acts and thoughts and imaginations are conditioned by space and time; and in abstraction from nature he would cease to be human. We may, then, say that the beauties and sublimities and powers, the microscopic intricacies and macroscopic vastnesses, the wonders and the terrors of the natural world and of the life that pulses through it, are willed and valued by their Maker in a creative act that embraces man together with nature. By means of matter and living flesh God both builds a path and weaves a veil between Himself and the creature made in His image. Nature thus has permanent significance; for God has set man in a creaturely environment, and the final fulfilment of our nature in relation to God will accordingly take the form of an embodied life within "a new heaven and a new earth." And as in the present age man moves slowly

towards that fulfillment through the pilgrimage of his earthly life, so also "the whole creation" is "groaning in travail," waiting for the time when it will be "set free from its bondage to decay."

And yet however fully we thus acknowledge the permanent significance and value of the natural order, we must still insist upon man's special character as a personal creature made in the image of God; and our theodicy must still centre upon the soul-making process that we believe to be taking place within human life.

This, then, is the starting-point from which we propose to try to relate the realities of sin and suffering to the perfect love of an omnipotent Creator. And as will become increasingly apparent, a theodicy that starts in this way must be eschatological in its ultimate bearings. That is to say, instead of looking to the past for its clue to the mystery of evil, it looks to the future, and indeed to that ultimate future to which only faith can look. Given the conception of a divine intention working in and through human time towards a fulfilment that lies in its completeness beyond human time, our theodicy must find the meaning of evil in the part that it is made to play in the eventual outworking of that purpose; and must find the justification of the whole process in the magnitude of the good to which it leads. The good that outshines all ill is not a paradise long since lost but a kingdom which is yet to come in its full glory and permanence.

NOTES

1. II Corinthians iii. 18.
2. Romans viii. 29. Other New Testament passages expressing a view of man as undergoing a process of spiritual growth within God's purpose are: Ephesians ii. 21, iii. 16; Colossians ii. 19; I John iii. 2; II Corinthians iv. 16.
3. *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, pt. xi. Kemp-Smith's ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1935), p.251.

IV.C.3

Supralapsarianism, or "O Felix Culpa"

ALVIN PLANTINGA

A short biographical sketch of Alvin Plantinga precedes selection I.B.8. In the present article, Plantinga develops the idea that humanity's fall into sin is a felix culpa *("blessed fault"). Plantinga suggests that a world that includes the incarnation of the Son of God and the subsequent redemption of humanity might be better than any world that lacks these events. If that is right, then perhaps the great good of the incarnation and atonement is sufficient to justify God's allowing humanity to fall into sin.*

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Among the tenets of a certain sort of Calvinism is supralapsarianism, a claim about the order of the decrees of God. God has decreed to permit humanity to fall into sin; he has also decreed to save at least some of the fallen.[1] Does the former decree precede or succeed the latter? According to supralapsarianism the decree to save some of the fallen precedes the decree to permit sin; according to infralapsarianism, it's the other way around. The debate between Supra and Infra has sometimes been held up as an example of Protestant scholasticism run amok. That is because, in part, it is extremely hard to see just what the debate is. The main problem here is the "precede" and "succeed." As the disputants saw, the question isn't about temporal precedence (it isn't that God promulgated part of his decree at one time and part at a later); they therefore suggested that the precedence in question is logical. As Carl Henry says, "The terms supra and infra stipulate whether the divine decree to elect some to salvation comes logically before or after the decrees to create and to permit the fall."[2] But what would that mean? Would the idea be that one of the decrees entailed but was not entailed by the other? But then, apparently, the Infras would have to think the decree to permit the fall entails but is not entailed by the decree to save some of the fallen. The Infras may have been misguided, but they weren't as obtuse as all that; surely they saw that the proposition *God decrees to save some of the fallen* entails but is not entailed by the proposition *God decrees to permit some to fall*; but then presumably that's compatible with their infralapsarianism. So what does this dispute amount to?

One understandable reaction is that it doesn't much matter what the dispute amounts to; the question concerns wholly arcane matters where Scripture is for the most part silent; why waste time on something like that? Isn't this something like arguing about how many angels can dance on the head, or maybe even the point, of a pin? I have some sympathy for this reaction. Nevertheless, I think we can see which of these is right and what kind of priority is relevant. And we can see which is right by thinking about the problem of evil.

SUFFERING AND EVIL

The late and unlamented twentieth century displayed an absolutely appalling amount and variety both of suffering and of evil; no previous century rivals it. As I'm thinking of the matter, suffering encompasses any kind of pain or discomfort: pain or discomfort that results from disease, injury, oppression, overwork, old age, sorrow for one's sins, disappointment with one's self or with one's lot in life (or that of persons close to one), the pain of loneliness, isolation, betrayal, unrequited love, and awareness of the suffering of others. I'm thinking of evil, on the other hand, as, fundamentally, a matter of free creatures' doing what is wrong and/or displaying vicious character traits. Often pain and suffering is a result of evil, as in some of the events for which our century will be remembered—the horrifying seventy-year-long Marxist experiments in eastern Europe and China with their many millions of victims, the Holocaust, genocide in late twentieth-century Europe and Africa, and the like. Of course much suffering and evil is banal, prosaic, commonplace, and is none the better for that.

It isn't only the twentieth century that has featured suffering and evil. Christians and other believers in God have long been baffled and perplexed by its presence, or by the amount of it, or by certain especially heinous displays of it, some of which are so horrifying that it seems callous and unfeeling to bring them up in the context of a scholarly discussion. Why does God permit evil, or why does he permit so much of it, or why does he permit those horrifying varieties of it? This bafflement and perplexity is widely represented in the Bible: perhaps especially in the Psalms and the book of Job, but elsewhere as well. And the perplexity is by no means merely theoretical: faced with an especially abhorrent example of suffering or evil in her own life, or the life of someone she loves, a believer can find herself tempted to take towards God an attitude she herself hates—an attitude of mistrust, or suspicion, or bitterness, or rebellion. A person in this condition may not be much tempted to doubt the existence or even the goodness of God;

nevertheless she may resent God, fail to trust him, be wary of him, be unable to think of him as a loving father, think of him as distant and indifferent.

Now many have urged that knowledge of the extent, variety, duration and distribution of suffering and evil ("the facts of evil," for short) confronts the believer with a problem of quite another sort.[3] The facts of evil, they argue, can serve as the premise of a powerful argument against the very existence of God—against the existence, that is, of an all-powerful, all-knowing, and wholly good person who has created the world and loves the creatures he has created. Call such an argument "atheological"; atheological arguments go all the way back to the ancient world—at least to Epicurus, whose argument is repeated in the eighteenth century by Hume: Epicurus' old questions are yet unanswered.

> Is he willing to prevent evil, but not able? then is he impotent. Is he able, but not willing? then is he malevolent. Is he both able and willing? whence then is evil?[4]

And the claim is that the facts of evil constitute a defeater for theistic belief for those theists who are fully aware of them—and if for theistic belief, then also for Christian belief. Christians may find this argument less than compelling;[5] nevertheless they may also find the facts of evil disturbing, both from a practical and from a theoretical point of view; understanding of evil and its place in God's world is an important goal for Christians, one where philosophers can perhaps be of some help.

Christian philosophers have for the most part concentrated on the apologetic effort of rebutting the various versions of the argument from evil. These rebuttals have taken several forms. One sort of response specifies some particular kind of good, and suggests that God could not have created a world displaying that kind of good without permitting evil. Thus perhaps the world is a vale of soul-making, with evil and suffering permitting human beings to achieve certain desirable spiritual states they couldn't otherwise attain. Alternatively, evil arises from creaturely free will: God wanted a world in which there are free creatures who freely obey his commands and enter into personal relationship with him; but of course whether a creature freely obeys God's commands is not up to God: it is up to the creature in question; and the counterfactuals of freedom are such that God couldn't actualize a really good world with free creatures without permitting evil. There is also the "no-see-um re-sponse":[6] God has his reasons for permitting evil, but the epistemic distance between him and us is such that we can't really hope to know what those reasons are, or why they require him to permit the evil we see.[7] Still another response: Donald Turner suggests that (to put it roughly and inaccurately) perhaps God creates concrete worlds or cosmoi corresponding to all of the possible worlds that are on balance good.[8] Some of these worlds, of course, will contain a great deal of evil (and even more good); our world is one of those worlds.

These responses are useful and important. But in addition to rebutting these arguments, Christian philosophers should also turn to a different task: that of understanding the evil our world displays from a Christian perspective. Granted, the atheological arguments are unsuccessful; but how should Christians think about evil?[9] I therefore want to suggest still another response, or rather I want to reinvent the wheel and propose for further consideration a response that has been with us for a long time. I don't claim that this response answers all our questions or relieves all of our perplexity. It does make a contribution along these lines, however, and in what follows I want to explore it, to see what it has to offer us.

Suppose initially we think about the matter as follows. God intends to create a world; to do so, he must weakly actualize a possible world.[10] He considers all the uncountably many possible worlds, each with its own degree of excellence or value. How shall we think of the value or goodness of a possible world? Well, what sorts of things are good or valuable or excellent, on the one hand, or bad or unhappy or deplorable on the other? The answer is easy; states of affairs (perhaps among other things) are good or bad.[11] John's being in pain is a bad state of affairs, and John's suffering pain magnificently, a

good one; there being many people who treat each other in accord with the law of love is a good state of affairs; there being people who hate God and each other is a bad. Since possible worlds are states of affairs, they are precisely the sorts of things that are good or bad, valuable or disvaluable. Perhaps there is no best possible world (there is a tie, or for each world, no matter how good, there is another better yet) but in any event what God intended, in creating, was to actualize (weakly actualize) a really good possible world.

Now many of these possible worlds, I take it, are such that it is not within God's power to weakly actualize them. I've argued for this elsewhere;[12] here I'll just sketch the argument. For a given possible world W, let T(W) be the largest state of affairs God strongly actualizes in W.[13] Assuming that there are nontrivial true counterfactuals of freedom,[14] God would be able to weakly actualize a given possible world W only if the counterfactual

(1) If God were to strongly actualize T(W), then W would be actual

were true. Now there are possible worlds W and W★ such that God strongly actualizes the same states of affairs in W as in W★; that is, there are many possible worlds W and W★ such that T(W) = T(W★). Where T(W) = T(W★), it is of course impossible that both (1) and

(2) If God were to strongly actualize T(W★), then W★ would be actual

be true; that is because it is not possible that both W and W★ be actual. Accordingly, either W or W★ is a world God could not have actualized. Following Thomas Flint, we could say that the worlds God could have weakly actualized are the feasible worlds. God's aim in creating, then, is to create an extremely good feasible world.

So far so good; but what are good-making qualities among worlds—what sort of features will make one world better than another? Here one thinks, for example, of the amount of creaturely happiness; a world with a great deal of creaturely happiness (i.e., a world such that if it were actual, there would be a great deal of creaturely happiness) is so far forth a better world than one in which there is little such happiness. Other characteristics on which the goodness of a world depends would be the amount of beauty, justice, creaturely goodness, performance of duty, and the like. The existence of creatures who conform to the divine law to love God above all and their neighbor as themselves (which presumably holds not just for humans but for other rational creatures—angels, other rational species in our universe, if there are any others) would also be an important determinant of a world's goodness or excellence. And of course there are also badmaking characteristics of a world: containing much suffering, pain, creaturely rejection of God, hatred, sin, and the like. Fundamentally, a world W is a better world than a world W★ just if God would prefer the actuality of W to the actuality of W★.

The above list of good-making characteristics, however, omits the two most important. First, any world in which God exists is enormously more valuable than any world in which he does not exist. According to the traditional doctrine of God's necessary existence, of course, God is both concrete and necessarily existent, and the only being who displays both those characteristics. If this doctrine is correct, then there aren't any worlds in which God does not exist. Still further, regardless of whether there are any such worlds, God will be able to choose only among those in which he exists; hence this great-making characteristic, trivially, will be present in any world he chooses for weak actualization.

Given the truth of Christian belief, however, there is also a contingent good-making characteristic of our world—one that isn't present in all worlds—that towers enormously above all the rest of the contingent states of affairs included in our world: the unthinkably great good of divine incarnation and atonement. Jesus Christ, the second person of the divine Trinity, incomparably good, holy, and sinless, was willing to empty himself, to take on our flesh and become incarnate, and to suffer and die so that we human beings can have life and be reconciled to the Father. In order to

accomplish this, he was willing to undergo suffering of a depth and intensity we cannot so much as imagine, including even the shattering climax of being abandoned by God the Father himself: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" God the Father, the first being of the whole universe, perfectly good and holy, all-powerful and all-knowing, was willing to permit his Son to undergo this suffering, and to undergo enormous suffering himself, in order to make it possible for us human beings to be reconciled to him. And this in face of the fact that we have turned our back upon God, have rejected him, are sunk in sin, indeed, are inclined to resent God and our neighbor. Could there be a display of love to rival this? More to the present purpose, could there be a goodmaking feature of a world to rival this?

Suppose we think about these points a bit further. We are considering just the worlds in which God exists; for present purposes, let's assume that traditional theism is true, and that these are all the worlds there are. The first thing to note, I think, is that all of these worlds—all possible worlds, then—are very good. For God is unlimited in goodness and holiness, as well as in power and knowledge; these properties, furthermore, are essential to him; and this means, I believe, that God not only has created a world that is very good, but that there aren't any conditions under which he would have created a world that is less than very good. It isn't possible that he create such a world; every possible world in which God creates is very good. For every possible world containing creatures is a world such that it is possible, in the broadly logical sense, that God weakly actualize it;[15] none is such that God's goodness or love or mercy would make it impossible for him to actualize it. There is therefore no level of value among possible worlds such that God couldn't actualize possible worlds whose value falls below that level (and such that some possible worlds fall below that level). The class of possible worlds God's love and goodness prevents him from actualizing is empty. All possible worlds, we might say, are eligible worlds: worlds that God's goodness, mercy, and love would permit him to actualize.

Now I don't mean to suggest that every imaginable or in some sense conceivable world is a very good world. Perhaps we can imagine or in some sense conceive of worlds in which the only things that exist are persons always in excruciating pain. No such world is in fact possible, however, if God, as we are assuming, is a necessary being who has essentially such properties as unlimited goodness, love, knowledge, and power. For first, of course, every world includes the existence of God. But neither would any world contain just God and creatures always in excruciating pain: God wouldn't create such worlds. So perhaps there are imaginable or even conceivable worlds that are not very good; the fact is, however, no such world is possible. All possible worlds are very good.

Of course it is also possible that God refrain from creating altogether. If he had done so, however, the world still would have been very good; for his own existence, of course, would have been actual. Indeed, any world in which God exists is in a good sense infinitely valuable. I don't mean to suggest that we can apply Cantorian infinitary mathematics to these topics. I don't mean to suggest that there are proper units of goodness—felicifics, for example—such that any world containing God displays infinitely many of those units of goodness. Still, God himself, who is unlimited in goodness, love, knowledge, power, and the like, exists in any such world; it follows, I suggest, that the value of any state of affairs in which God alone exists is itself unlimited.

But what is the force of "unlimited" here? I take it to mean that there are no nonlogical limits to God's display of these great-making properties: no nonlogical limit to his goodness, love, knowledge, and power. From this it follows, I believe, that any state of affairs containing God alone—any state of affairs that would have been actual had God not created anything at all—is also in a sensible sense infinite in value. It is not that any such world W is of maximal value, so that there are no possible worlds better than W. On the contrary: a world that also contains very good creatures—free creatures, perhaps, who always

do what is right—would be a better world than W. No: it's something else. To see what, consider a possible world W and then consider the state of affairs W-consisting just in the existence and properties of the free creatures W contains. Let us also suppose that we have a coherent sense of entailment in which W- does not entail the existence of God, even though the latter is a necessary state of affairs. (I believe there are such senses, but don't have the space to pursue the matter here.) Now the way in which such a world W is unlimited in value is that W-, no matter how good, and no matter how many wonderful creatures with splendid properties it displays, is not as good as the state of affairs consisting in the existence of God. We might say that in this way the good of God's existence is incommensurable with creaturely goods. But it is also incommensurable with creaturely evils. No matter how much sin and suffering and evil W-contains, it is vastly outweighed by the goodness of God, so that W is a good world, and indeed a very good world. It follows, once more, that every possible world is a very good world.

But that doesn't mean that none are more valuable than others. The fact is: some possible worlds are much better than others. For there is a second and enormously impressive good-making feature of our world, a feature to be found only in some and not in all possible worlds. This is the towering and magnificent good of divine incarnation and atonement. According to the traditional Christian way of looking at the matter, God was in no way obliged to provide a way of salvation for his erring creatures. It would have been consistent with his love, goodness, and mercy not to institute this marvelous plan by which we sinful creatures can have life and be reconciled with God. Hence there are possible worlds in which there are free creatures who go wrong, and in which there is no atonement; in these worlds all these free creatures suffer the consequences of their sin and are ultimately cut off from God. Such a world, I say, is not as good—perhaps not nearly as good—as a world in which sinful creatures are offered redemption and salvation from their sins.

In fact I believe we can go further. I believe that any world with incarnation and atonement is a better world than any without it—or at any rate better than any world in which God does nothing comparable to incarnation and atonement. It is hard to imagine what God could do that is in fact comparable to incarnation and atonement; but perhaps this is just a limitation of our imagination. But since this is so hard to imagine, I propose that we ignore those possible worlds, if there are any, in which God does not arrange for incarnation and atonement, but does something else of comparable excellence. So consider the splendid and gracious marvel of incarnation and atonement. I believe that the great goodness of this state of affairs, like that of the divine existence itself, makes its value incommensurable with the value of states of affairs involving creaturely good and bad. Thus the value of incarnation and atonement cannot be matched by any aggregate of creaturely goods. No matter how many excellent creatures there are in a world, no matter how rich and beautiful and sinless their lives, the aggregated value of their lives would not match that of incarnation and atonement; any world with incarnation and atonement would be better yet. And no matter how much evil, how much sin and suffering a world contains, the aggregated badness would be outweighed by the goodness of incarnation and atonement, outweighed in such a way that the world in question is very good. In this sense, therefore, any world with incarnation and atonement is of infinite value by virtue of containing two goods of infinite value: the existence of God, and incarnation and atonement. Under this assumption, there will be a certain level L of excellence or goodness, among possible worlds, such that all the worlds at that level or above contain incarnation and atonement. Call this "the strong value assumption," and say that any world whose value equals or exceeds it, is a highly eligible world.

I am inclined to accept the strong value assumption, but I don't need anything quite as powerful as all that for my argument. I can hold something weaker. Contrast two kinds of possible worlds. In the first kind, there are free creatures who always do only what is right, who live in

love and harmony with God and each other, and do so, let's add, through all eternity. Now for each of these worlds W of this kind, there is a world W★ of the second kind. In W★ God creates the very same creatures as in W; but in W★ these free creatures rebel against him, fall into sin and wickedness, turn their backs upon God. In W★, however, God graciously provides a means of salvation by way of incarnation and atonement. My claim is that for any such worlds W and W★, W★ is a better world than W. Unlike the strong value assumption, this claim does not entail that every world with incarnation and atonement is better than any world without them, and it does not entail that there is a level of value such that every world at or above that level contains incarnation and atonement. What it does imply, however, is that there is no level of value such that none of the worlds at or above that level contain incarnation and atonement. Call this the moderate value assumption.

But my argument doesn't require even the moderate value assumption.[16] All it really requires is that among the worlds of great value, there be some that include incarnation and atonement. Indeed, we can go further: given that all of the possible worlds including creatures are worlds sufficiently good for God to actualize them, all that is really required, for my argument, is that incarnation and atonement be possible, i.e., that there be possible worlds that include them. Since, according to Christian thought, this state of affairs is actual, it is a fortiori possible.

I shall conduct the argument under the strong value assumption, merely reminding the reader that the argument can also be conducted under the moderate or weak assumptions. Under the strong assumption, the value of any world which displays incarnation and atonement will exceed that of any world without those features. Perhaps, even, the value of incarnation and atonement, (i.e., the complex event involving the actions of God the Father and God the Son) is so great that any world in which it occurs is as valuable as any other world, so that the value of all the worlds in which atonement occurs is equal. We needn't go as far as all that, however; more modestly, we can say that the value of the worlds with atonement exceeds that of worlds without atonement, and the value of the former are clumped together in such a way that while some may be more valuable than others, none is very much more valuable than any other. More modestly still, we can say simply that all the worlds in which incarnation and atonement are present are worlds of very great goodness, achieving that level L of goodness such that no world without incarnation and atonement achieves that level.

Accordingly, if God proposes to actualize a really good possible world, one whose value exceeds L, he will create a world with incarnation and atonement. But of course all the worlds with incarnation and atonement contain evil. For atonement is among other things a matter of creatures' being saved from the consequences of their sin; therefore if there were no evil, there would be no sin, no consequences of sin to be saved from, and hence no atonement. Therefore a necessary condition of atonement is sin and evil. But all the highly eligible worlds contain atonement; hence all the highly eligible worlds contain sin and evil, and the suffering consequent upon them. You can't have a world whose value exceeds L without sin and evil; sin and evil is a necessary condition of the value of every really good possible world. O Felix Culpa indeed![17] But then this gives us a very straightforward and simple response to the question "Why is there evil in the world?" The response is that God wanted to create a highly eligible world, wanted to actualize one of the best of all the possible worlds; all those worlds contain atonement, hence they all contain sin and evil. I've claimed elsewhere that theodicies are unsuccessful: "And here I must say that most attempts to explain why God permits evil—theodicies, as we may call them—strike me as tepid, shallow, and ultimately frivolous."[18] But doesn't the above furnish us with an answer to the question "Why does God permit evil?" The answer is: because he wanted to actualize a possible world whose value was greater than L; but all those possible worlds contain incarnation and atonement; hence all those worlds contain evil. So if a theodicy is an attempt to explain why God permits evil, what

we have here is a theodicy—and, if I'm right, a successful theodicy.

And as a bonus, we get a clear resolution of the Supra/Infra debate: the Supras are right. God's fundamental and first intention is to actualize an extremely good possible world, one whose value exceeds L; but all those worlds contain incarnation and atonement and hence also sin and evil; so the decree to provide incarnation and atonement and hence salvation is prior to the decree to permit fall into sin. The priority in question isn't temporal, and isn't exactly logical either; it is a matter, rather, of ultimate aim as opposed to proximate aim. God's ultimate aim, here, is to create a world of a certain level of value. That aim requires that he aim to create a world in which there is incarnation and atonement—which, in turn, requires that there be sin and evil. So there is a clear sense in which the decree to provide salvation precedes the decree to permit sin; but there is no comparable sense in which the decree to permit sin precedes the decree to permit evil.

One final point before we turn to objections. In "Salvifici Doloris," a recent apostolic letter from Pope John Paul II on the Christian meaning of suffering, we read that

> Each one is also called to share in that suffering through which the Redemption was accomplished. He is called to share in that suffering through which all human suffering has also been redeemed.... Thus each man, in his suffering, can also become a sharer in the redemptive suffering of Christ. (p. 31)

Here the suggestion seems to be that we human beings, by virtue of suffering, can participate and take part in, can contribute to the divine suffering by which humankind is redeemed. Now this seems to suggest that Christ's suffering and sacrifice was somehow incomplete: if my contribution is genuinely useful, must there not be something in some sense lacking in what Christ himself did in the Atonement? From a Christian perspective, this seems a bit suspect. But the same suggestion is made by the apostle Paul, whose credentials here are certainly beyond question: "Now I rejoice in what was suffered for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body which is the church" (Colossians 1:24).[19] "What is still lacking in regard to Christ's affliction"? What could still be lacking? What could this lack be?

From the present perspective there is an answer: highly eligible possible worlds, those whose value exceeds level L, also contain creaturely suffering, suffering on the part of victims and perpetrators of sin. This suffering is a necessary condition of the goodness of the world in question. In suffering, then, we creatures can be like Christ. We get to take part and participate in his redemptive activity. So, for a highly eligible world to be actualized, more is needed than just the suffering of Christ. All of these worlds contain atonement; so they all contain divine suffering; but they also all contain creaturely suffering. Creatures, therefore, can fill up what is lacking in regard to Christ's suffering in the following way: there is a necessary condition of the goodness of truly good (highly eligible) possible worlds that is not and cannot be satisfied by Christ's suffering; it requires creaturely suffering as well. It is in this sense that Paul as well as the rest of us can fill up what is still lacking in regard to Christ's suffering.

OBJECTIONS

Accordingly, the Felix Culpa approach can perhaps provide us with a theodicy. But of course it does so properly only if it isn't itself subject to fatal flaws. Is it? What might be objections to it? There are at least three principal objections to this line of thought, or perhaps three kinds of difficult questions to answer. First, why does God permit suffering as well as sin and evil? Second, why does God permit so much suffering and evil? And third, if God permitted human suffering and evil in order to achieve a world in which there is incarnation and atonement, wouldn't he be manipulative, calculating, treating his creatures like means instead of

ends? There is a sort of psychological disorder called "Munchausen syndrome by proxy"[20] in which parents harm their children and then rush them to the hospital in order to look heroic and get attention; wouldn't this be a bit like that? In the interests of decency and good order I will take these up one at a time and in order.

Why Suffering?

I said above that the Felix Culpa line of thought offers a theodicy: an answer to the question "Why does God permit evil?" But perhaps a serious theodicy would have to answer other questions as well: for example, why does God permit so much evil, and why does God permit suffering? Concede that you can't have atonement without evil; why do you also need suffering? Incarnation and atonement requires sin and evil: why think it also requires suffering? Wouldn't the cosmos have been better if God had permitted sin and evil, so that there was occasion for incarnation and atonement, but no suffering? Maybe the Felix Culpa line of thought explains the existence of sin and evil; how does it help with respect to suffering?

The answer is twofold: (a) significantly free creatures are free to do evil, and some of them in fact do evil, causing suffering; (b) suffering itself is instrumentally valuable. So first, one good-making feature of a world is the existence, in it, of free and rational creatures. But free creatures come in a variety of versions, and not all free creatures are equal with respect to value, i.e., to the value of the worlds in which they exist. In general, the more free creatures resemble God, the more valuable they are and the more valuable are the worlds in which they exist. In particular, creatures that have a great deal of power, including power to do both good and evil, are more valuable than creatures who are free, but whose power is limited or meager. God therefore created a world in which there are creatures with at least two features: (a) a great deal of power, including the power to work against God, and (b) the freedom to turn their backs upon God, to rebel against him, fight against what he values. Thus Milton's Satan declares "Evil, be Thou my Good!"; in so doing he announces his intention to take up arms against God, to resist him, to try to destroy what God values, to do his best to wreck God's world, to promote what God hates. Suffering is intrinsically a bad thing; accordingly God hates it; Satan therefore aims to promote suffering, to cause as much of it as he can. Much of the suffering in the world results in this way from the free actions of creatures who actively oppose God and what he values. But free creatures also cause suffering, sometimes, not because they intend in this way actively to oppose God, but just because they don't have any objection to inflicting suffering on others in order to achieve their own selfish or foolish ends. Here one thinks of the enormous suffering inflicted, in the twentieth century, on the population of the former Soviet Union in order to attain that Marxist paradise; Stalin and his henchmen recklessly ran roughshod over the rights and goods of others in order to achieve something they saw as valuable. At least some of the suffering the world displays results from the free actions of significantly free creatures.

But what about so-called natural evil, evil that cannot be attributed to the free actions of human beings? What about the suffering due to disease, earthquake, flood, famine, pestilence, and the like? What about animal suffering and the savagery displayed in the natural world? What about the Ichneumonid wasp Darwin found so upsetting, a wasp that lays its eggs in a live caterpillar, so that when the eggs hatch, the pupae eat the caterpillar alive from the inside? Well, perhaps, as Peter van Inwagen suggests, this is the price God had to pay for a regular world. But there is another and more traditional suggestion here. Perhaps the term "natural evil" is something of a misnomer, or perhaps, at any rate, the contrast between natural evil and moral evil is misleading in that the former is really an instance of the latter. It is plausible to think that there are deeper layers to the sin and evil the world displays, than that exhibited by human beings and embodied in their actions. According to the apostle Paul, the whole creation is groaning, and groaning because of sin.[21] Here a traditional suggestion is that suffering and evil of this sort is to be attributed to

the actions of Satan and his cohorts; Satan is a mighty non-human free creature who rebelled against the Lord long before human beings were on the scene; and much of the natural evil the world displays is due to the actions of Satan and his cohorts.[22]

This suggestion is not at present widely popular in Western academia, and not widely endorsed by the contemporary intellectual elite. But it is less than clear that Western academia has much to say by way of evidence against the idea. That beings of these sorts should be involved in the history of our world seems to me (as to, e.g., C. S. Lewis and many others) not at all unlikely, in particular not unlikely with respect to Christian theism. The thought that much evil is due to Satan and his cohorts is of course entirely consistent with God's being omnipotent, omniscient, and perfectly good; furthermore it isn't nearly as improbable with respect to "what we now know" as most philosophers seem to assume. Objections to it consist much more in amused contempt or instinctive revulsion than in reasoned refutation. They are like those incredulous stares David Lewis complains of—not much by way of considered thought. But how much evidential value should be attached to a thing like that?

> So the fallen angels which have power over the universe and over this planet in particular, being motivated by an intense angelic hatred of God and of all creatures, have acted upon the forces of matter, actuating them in false proportions so far as lay in their power, and this from the very outset of evolution, thus producing a deep-set disorder in the very heart of the universe which manifests itself today in the various physical evils which we find in nature, and among them the violence, the savagery, and the suffering of animal life. This does not mean that, for instance, an earthquake or a thunderstorm is due directly to satanic action. It is due to purely natural causes, but these causes are what they now are owing to the deep-set disorder in the heart of nature resulting from this action of fallen spirits, most subtly mingled with the action of good spirits, throughout the long ages of the world's formation—"an enemy came and sowed tares also amid the wheat."

Why Does God Permit Evil? (London: Burns, Oates & Washbourne Ltd., 1941), pp. 49–50. Aquinas approvingly quotes Damascene to the same effect: "The devil was one of the angelic powers who presided over the terrestrial order" (ST I, Q. 110, a. 1, ad 3).

So suffering results, at least in part, from the actions of free creatures; and perhaps it wasn't within the power of God to create free creatures who are both capable of causing suffering and turning to evil, but never in fact do cause suffering. But further, perhaps even if God could create such creatures, he wouldn't want to, or wouldn't want to create only them. Perhaps worlds with free powerful creatures who sin but do not cause suffering are not as good as worlds in which they create suffering; for suffering is also itself of instrumental value. First, some suffering has the effect of improving our character and preparing God's people for life in his kingdom;[23] this world is in part a vale of soul-making, as John Hick and many others (including the apostle Paul) before him have suggested. Some suffering may also be the price of a regular world, as Peter van Inwagen suggests.[24] But according to the apostle Paul, there are other subtle ways in which suffering is of instrumental value. He suggests, for example, that our present suffering is a means to the eternal weight of glory prepared for those who follow him:

> We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. For we who are alive are always being given over to death so that his life may be revealed in our mortal body. (2 Corinthians 4:10–11, 14)

> We are … fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him. I consider that the sufferings of this present

> time are not worthy to be compared.... (Romans 8)
>
> For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. (2 Corinthians 4:17)

Our suffering can enable us to be glorified, and achieve for us an eternal glory; but we aren't told how this works: how is it that our suffering is a means to this eternal glory? Elsewhere there are tantalizing suggestions:

> I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead. (Philippians 3:10–11)

I believe three things are suggested. First, there is the suggestion that sharing in the suffering of Christ is a means to attain "the resurrection from the dead," i.e., salvation. Second, it is a good thing that the followers of Christ share in his sufferings because this is a means of fellowship with him at a very profound level and a way in which they achieve a certain kind of solidarity with him; and third, in thus sharing his suffering, his followers come to resemble Christ in an important respect, thus displaying more fully the image of God.[25] Although these are deep waters, I'd like to say just a bit about the second and third suggestions. Consider the idea of fellowship with Christ in his suffering, then: what is valuable about fellowship in sharing in the sufferings of Christ? The suggestion, I think, is just that our suffering with Christ, thus joining him in the most profound expression of his love and enjoying solidarity with him in his central mission, is a good state of affairs; it is good that creatures, whose sins require this activity on his part, join him in it. Secondly, those who suffer resemble Christ in an important respect, thus displaying more fully the image of God, i.e., displaying that image more fully than they could have without the suffering. An absolutely central part of Christ's mission is his suffering; it is through this suffering that he atones for human sin and enables human beings to achieve union with God. But then if it is a good thing that creatures resemble Christ, it is a good thing that they resemble him in this respect as well. According to Jonathan Edwards, by virtue of our fall and subsequent redemption, we can achieve a level of intimacy with God that can't be achieved in any other way; by virtue of suffering we are invited to join the charmed circle of the Trinity itself. And according to Abraham Kuyper, the angels see this and are envious.[26] Perhaps another part of what is required for membership in this circle is solidarity with Christ and resemblance to him with respect to suffering. The really mature Christian, furthermore, one like St. Paul, will welcome this opportunity. Furthermore, perhaps all of us who suffer will welcome the opportunity in retrospect. Julian of Norwich suggests that those who suffer will receive God's gratitude[27] and will of course much rather have had the suffering and received the divine gratitude than to have had neither. That too is a good state of affairs.

I say that our fellowship and solidarity in Christ's suffering and our resembling him in suffering are good states of affairs; I do not say that we can clearly see that they are indeed good states of affairs. My reason for saying that they are in fact good is not that it is simply obvious and apparent to us that they are good states of affairs, in the way in which it is simply apparent that severe suffering is intrinsically a bad thing. Perhaps this is indeed apparent to some especially mature or especially favored human beings, but it isn't to the rest of us. So I don't say this because it is evident to us, but rather because we learn from Scripture that these are good states of affairs—or, more modestly, we learn this from what seems to me to be the best understanding of the scriptural passages in question. Someone might object that in a theodicy, one cannot appeal to goods we can't ourselves recognize to be goods; but why think a thing like that? A theodicy will of course make reference to states of affairs that are known to be good, or reasonably thought to be good. How this information is acquired is neither here nor there.

So why is suffering present in the really good possible worlds; why is it that they contain not just

sin, evil, and rebellion, but also suffering? Because, first, some of the free creatures God has created have turned their backs on God and behaved in such a way as to cause suffering; and second, because suffering is itself of instrumental value, and thus will be found in really good worlds. Suffering is of instrumental value, furthermore, in several different ways. In addition to the ways suggested by Hick, Swinburne, and van Inwagen, there is also the fact that the suffering of God's children enables them to be in fellowship and solidarity with the Lord Jesus Christ; it also enhances the image of God in them.

Why So Much Sin and Suffering?

But why is there so much sin and suffering? Concede that every really good world contains both evil and suffering; but why does there have to be as much of these dubious quantities as our world in fact manifests?

Wouldn't a world with much less sin and suffering than ours be a better world, even if it contains both incarnation and atonement and also some sin and suffering? Here there are two considerations. First, perhaps the counterfactuals of freedom come out in such a way that a world as good as ours will contain as much sin and suffering as ours. But secondly, there is the question how much sin and suffering a highly eligible world contains. This is not an easy question. As I've argued, the best worlds contain incarnation and atonement. But for all we know, there isn't any maximal amount of sin and suffering contained in such worlds; that is, there isn't an amount *a* of sin and suffering such that some world in this class contains *a* units (turps, perhaps) of sin and suffering and no world in this class contains more. Perhaps for every degree of sin and suffering contained in some highly eligible world, there is another highly eligible world with more. In the same way, for all we know there is no minimum degree of suffering among these highly eligible worlds. Perhaps for every degree of sin and suffering contained in some highly eligible world, there is another highly eligible world with less.

This is compatible with the degree of sin and suffering, in such worlds, being bounded both above and below: perhaps there is a degree of suffering and evil *a* such that every highly eligible world contains at least that much suffering and evil, and a degree $a^\star$ such that no highly eligible world contains more than that amount of suffering and evil. Then it could also be that for any given evil, God could have actualized a highly eligible world without permitting that evil; it doesn't follow that he would be unjustified in permitting it. It could also be that God could have actualized a world that is better than alpha, the actual world; it doesn't follow that he ought to have done so, since perhaps for every possible world there is a better he could have actualized.

A second complication: how much sin is required to warrant incarnation and atonement? Suppose the extent of sin were one small misstep on the part of an otherwise admirably disposed angel: would that be sufficient to warrant such drastic and dramatic action on the part of God? Wouldn't such a response on the part of God be somehow inappropriate, something like overkill, perhaps? Probably, although one hardly knows what to say. It might be objected that God, given the unlimited extent of his love, would be willing to undergo the suffering involved in incarnation and atonement, even to save just one sinner. Perhaps so; but that is compatible with its being more appropriate that God's magnificent action here save many, perhaps indefinitely many. Christian doctrine includes, of course, the teaching that human beings are immortal, and can spend eternity with God; the more creatures who attain that state, presumably, the better. Jonathan Edwards and Abraham Kuyper believe, as we saw above, that fallen creatures who are redeemed can be admitted to a greater degree of intimacy with God (can join that charmed circle) than creatures who have not fallen. If so, the highly eligible worlds would no doubt contain a good deal of sin and evil—and, also, consequently, a good deal of suffering. How much sin and evil, then, will a highly eligible world contain? That is hard to say; and again, of course, there may be no answer.

Considering all of these then—our lack of knowledge of the relevant counterfactuals of freedom, the fact that suffering is of instrumental value in a variety of ways—it seems to me that we have no way at all of estimating how much suffering the best worlds will contain, or where the amount of suffering and evil contained in alpha stands in comparison with those worlds. This objection, therefore, is inconclusive.

Munchausen Syndrome by Proxy?

Finally, an objection that has no doubt been clamoring for attention; this objection is powerful, but a little hard to state. The basic idea, however, goes something like this: wouldn't God, in the scenario we're thinking about, be using his creatures, treating them like means, not ends?[28] God has this magnificent end of actualizing a highly eligible possible world (one in which he incidentally plays the stellar role); this requires suffering and evil on the part of his creatures, and apparently requires a good deal of innocent suffering and evil: is that fair, or right? More crucially, would this be consistent with God's loving these creatures,[29] as according to Christian belief he certainly does? If he loved them, would he compel them to suffer in this way so that he can achieve these fine ends? Or perhaps we could put it like this: isn't there something unduly calculating about this procedure? Isn't this a scenario for a sort of cosmic Munchausen syndrome by proxy?[30] Isn't it too much like a father who throws his children into the river so that he can then heroically rescue them, or a doctor who first spreads a horrifying disease so that he can then display enormous virtue in fighting it in heroic disregard of his own safety and fatigue? Could we really think God would behave in this way? How could it be in character for God to riffle through the whole range of possible creatures he could create and the circumstances in which he could create them, to find some who would freely sin, and then create them, so that he could display his great love by saving them? How could God be so manipulative?

According to my dictionary, manipulation, in the currently relevant sense, is "management with the use of unfair, scheming, or underhanded methods, especially for one's own advantage"; and calculating behavior is "marked by coldhearted calculation as to what will most promote self-interest." Manipulation thus involves seeking one's own advantage by unfair means; and the problem with calculating behavior is that it is "coldhearted." The idea, then, is that if God acted according to the Felix Culpa line of thought, he would be unfair to his creatures and would be acting in a coldhearted, i.e., unloving way. This coldheartedness part of the present strand of the objection, therefore, reduces to the charge of unlovingness, the other strand in the objection. This leaves the charge of unfairness. But why would it be unfair of God to behave in this way toward his creatures? For two reasons, perhaps: (a) this way of behaving on God's part requires suffering on the part of his creatures; and it is unfair of God to act in such a way as to require suffering on the part of his creatures in order to attain or achieve his own ends as opposed to what is good for them; and (b) involving his creatures in this way is unfair because it fails to respect their autonomy. And both of these could be thought of as treating his creatures as means, not ends.

Of course it isn't always wrong for you to treat me as a means rather than an end. You hire me to weed your garden or repair your car or instruct your children: are you not then treating me as a means rather than an end? You are not thinking first, or perhaps at all, of my needs and interests, but of your own; and you get me to do something that serves your ends. Of course I am perhaps also treating you as means under those conditions: I take the job so that I can earn some money, enabling me to accomplish some of my own ends. So exactly why would it be out of character for God to treat his creatures as a means? Perhaps the problem is along the following lines: you offer to hire me to weed your garden, and of course I can refuse; similarly, I don't force you to hire me. But with God, of course, it is quite different. He doesn't ask our permission before creating us, before actualizing this world in which we are called upon to suffer. We don't accept the suffering voluntarily; we don't get a choice; God doesn't consult us before actualizing

this world, this world that requires our suffering. Obviously he couldn't have consulted us about whether we wish to be created in a world such as this, but still he doesn't; and isn't that somehow unfair? So with respect to this strand of the objection, the charge is twofold: (a) God requires his creatures to suffer, not for their own good, but in order to advance some aims or ends of his own; and (b) God does this without asking their permission.

The second strand of the objection—the strand according to which if God loved his creatures, he would not act in accord with the Felix Culpa scenario—reduces to the same charge: God's love for his creatures is incompatible with his requiring them to suffer in order to advance divine aims or ends that do not advance the creatures' good or welfare. The claim is that if God loves creatures the way he is said to, he would not treat them in that fashion. Marilyn Adams and Eleonore Stump, both extraordinarily thoughtful writers on evil and suffering, have both proposed what Adams calls "agent centered restrictions" on the way in which a holy, just and loving God would treat us. Asking how Christian philosophers can now best contribute to the solution of the problem of evil, she replies that they "should focus on God's agent centered goodness: the very dimension rendered so baffling in the face of horrific individual sufferings." And Stump says … The thought is that Christian philosophers should recognize that God is wholly good, but also perfectly loving, loves each of his creatures with a perfect love. If so, could it be that he would permit a person S to suffer for the good of someone else (or, more abstractly, permit S to suffer because S's suffering is an element in the best world God can actualize)? If God perfectly loves his creatures, he would not require one of them to suffer in order to advance an end or aim that wasn't directly connected with that agent's own welfare. God wouldn't require me to suffer in order to benefit someone else; he wouldn't even require me to suffer in order to actualize an extremely good world; he wouldn't require me to suffer, unless that suffering was necessary for some good for me myself.

Now as we have seen, some suffering is directly connected with the agent's good. But it doesn't appear that all suffering is. So suppose some suffering is not. How shall we think about this? Here we must make some distinctions. First, of course, God might, in perfect consonance with his love, permit me to suffer in order to benefit someone else or to achieve a highly eligible good world if I freely consent to it and (like Christ) voluntarily accept the suffering. But suppose I don't voluntarily accept it: perhaps I am unable, for one reason or another, to make the decision whether or not to accept the suffering in question. (Perhaps the suffering is childhood suffering.) Well, of course we sometimes quite properly make important decisions for someone (in a coma, say) who can't make the decision for herself; we try to determine what the person in question would decide if she could make the decision herself. So suppose further that God knew that if I were able to make that decision, I would freely accept the suffering: then too, so far as I can see, his being perfectly loving wouldn't at all preclude his permitting me to suffer for the benefit of others, or to enable him to achieve his end of actualizing a highly eligible good world. But suppose still further, that I am able to make the decision and in fact would not accept the suffering; but suppose God knows that this unwillingness on my part would be due only to ignorance: if I knew the relevant facts, then I would accept the suffering. In that case too, God's perfect love, as far as I can see, would not preclude his permitting me to suffer. Finally, suppose further yet that God knows that I would not accept the suffering in question, but only because of disordered affections; if I had the right affections (and also knew enough), then I would accept the suffering: in this case too, as far as I can see, his being perfectly loving would not preclude his allowing me to suffer. In this case God would be like a mother who, say, insists that her eight-year-old child take piano lessons or go to church or school.

There is another distinction that must be made. Perhaps God's reason for permitting me to suffer is not that by undergoing this suffering I can thus achieve a greater good (the good of enjoying his

gratitude, for example: see footnote 27) but because he can thus achieve a better world overall. Nevertheless, perhaps it is also true that he would not permit me to suffer for that end, an end outside my own good, unless he could also bring good for me out of the evil. Then his reason for permitting me to suffer would not be that this suffering contributes to my own improvement; nevertheless he would not permit me to suffer unless the suffering could somehow be turned to my own good.[31] A constraint on God's reasons (induced, perhaps, by his being perfectly loving) is one thing; a constraint on the conditions under which he would permit involuntary and innocent suffering is another. To return to an earlier example (above, p. 7), perhaps God sees that the best worlds he can actualize are ones that include the unthinkably great good of divine incarnation and atonement. Suppose he therefore actualizes a highly eligible world that includes incarnation and atonement, and in which human beings fall into sin, evil, and consequent suffering. Suppose also that the final condition of human beings, in this world, is better than it is in the worlds in which there is no fall into sin but also no incarnation and redemption; they receive God's thanks, enjoy a greater intimacy with him, are invited to join that charmed circle. Then God's actualizing the world in question involves suffering for many human beings; his reason for permitting that suffering is not that thereby the suffering individuals will be benefited (his reason is that he wishes to actualize a highly eligible world, one with the great goods of incarnation, atonement, and redemption). Nevertheless his perfect love perhaps mandates that he actualize a world in which those who suffer are benefited in such a way that their condition is better than it is in those worlds in which they do not suffer.

By way of conclusion: the Felix Culpa approach does not dispel all the perplexity surrounding human suffering and evil; I suppose nothing can do that. But perhaps it reduces the perplexity, and perhaps it provides the means for a deeper grasp of the salvific meaning of suffering and evil.

NOTES

1. Many Supras also held that God's first decree included that some should be damned as well as that some should be saved; perhaps this accounts for the association of supralapsarianism with the sterner sort of Calvinism.
2. *God Who Stands and Stays,* vol. VI of *God, Revelation, and Authority* (Waco, Tex.: Word, 1983), p. 88.
3. It is worth noting that there are many *different* problems, questions, and topics that fall under the rubric of the problem of evil. There are, for example, the problems of *preventing* suffering and evil, that of *alleviating* it (knowing how to comfort and help those that suffer from it), that of maintaining the right attitude towards those who suffer, the pastoral or spiritual problem I mentioned above, and more; and of course a proper response to one of these problems might be totally inappropriate as a response to another.
4. *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion*, ed. Richard Popkin (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1980), p. 63. Hume puts the argument in the mouth of Philo, widely thought to represent Hume's own views.
5. See, e.g., Chapter 14 of my book *Warranted Christian Belief* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).
6. A no-see-um is a very small midge with a bite out of all proportion to its size. The reference is to the fact that your failing to see a no-see-um in your tent is no evidence that there aren't any there; similarly, failing to see what God's reason is for a given evil is no reason to think he doesn't or couldn't have a reason.
7. See, e.g., Steve Wykstra, "Difficulties in Rowe's Argument for Atheism, and in One of Plantinga's Fustigations against It," read on the *Queen Mary* at the Pacific Division Meeting of the American

Philosophical Association, 1983, and "The Humian Obstacle to Evidential Arguments from Suffering: On Avoiding the Evils of 'Appearance,'" *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 16 (1984): 73–94.

8. See Donald Turner's 1994 Ph.D. dissertation *God and the Best of All Possible Worlds* (University of Pittsburgh). Here we must be careful: there is a good world W where you wear your blue shirt today, and another that differs from W only (substantially) in that you wear your yellow shirt today; a good world W where you have a Coke with lunch and another just like it except that you have coffee. God does not, of course, create cosmoi corresponding to all of these. That is because you yourself could not be in more than one cosmos; so while he creates cosmoi corresponding to each of the good possible worlds, the appropriate function is many-one. For details see Turner's dissertation.
9. Here Marilyn Adams and Eleonore Stump have led the way: see, for example. Stump's "Aquinas on the Sufferings of Job" in *The Evidential Argument from Evil*, ed. Daniel Howard-Snyder (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1996) and "Second Person Accounts and the Problem of Evil," in *Faith and the Problem of Evil*, Stob Lectures at Calvin College, January 1999 (Grand Rapids: Calvin College, 1999), and Adams' "Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God" in *The Problem of Evil*, ed. Marilyn McCord Adams and Robert Merrihew Adams (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).
10. For the notion of possible worlds in play here, see my *The Nature of Necessity* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), Chapter 4, and "Actualism and Possible Worlds," *Theoria* 1976: 139ff., reprinted in Michael Loux, *The Actual and the Possible* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1979). For the notions of strong and weak actualization, see the Profiles volume *Alvin Plantinga*, ed. James Tomberlin and Peter van Inwagen (Dordrecht: D. Reidel Publishing Co., 1985) (hereafter Profiles), pp. 49ff.
11. I don't mean to address here the question whether it is states of affairs or objects or events that are the primary locus of value; in either case states of affairs will be good or bad.
12. *The Nature of Necessity*, pp. 18off., and Profiles, pp. 50ff.
13. God strongly actualizes a given state of affairs S just if he causes S to be actual.
14. I don't have the space here to respond to objections to this assumption. Perhaps the most important of these objections is the so-called "grounding" objection offered by Robert Adams in "Middle Knowledge and the Problem of Evil," *American Philosophical Quarterly, 1977*, and William Hasker in "A Refutation of Middle Knowledge," *Noûs*, December 1986. This objection goes all the way back to the Jesuit/Dominican controversy in the sixteenth century, a dispute whose increasing rancor finally induced the Pope to forbid the disputants to vilify one another in public (although he apparently didn't object to vilification among consenting adults in the privacy of their own quarters). The grounding and founding objection has been dealt with in magisterial fashion in my colleague Thomas Flint's book *Divine Providence: The Molinist Account* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1998).
15. This is trivial; every possible world W containing creatures is such that there is some possible world in which God actualizes W: W itself.
16. As was pointed out to me by Tom Flint, for whose penetrating comments on this and other topics of this paper I am extremely grateful.
17. The Roman Catholic Easter Vigil liturgy contains the words, "O felix culpa, quae talem ac tantum meruit habere Redemptorem."
18. Profiles, p. 35.
19. The same idea is to be found elsewhere in Paul's writings: see, e.g., Romans 1:17.
20. Here I am indebted for a correction to Tom Flint.
21. "For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time" (Romans 1:18–22).
22. Thus, for example, Dom Bruno Well:
23. "God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for

those who have been trained by it" (Hebrews 12:10–11).

24. See, e.g., "The Magnitude, Duration, and Distribution of Evil" in *God, Knowledge, and Mystery* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornëll University Press, 1995), p. 118.
25. Simone Weil: "… the distress of the abandoned Christ is a good. There cannot be a greater good for us on earth than to share in it." "The Love of God and Affliction" in *On Science, Necessity and the Love of God* (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), p. 177.
26. *To Be Near unto God*, trans. John Hendrik de Vries (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1918,) p. 307.
27. *Revelation of Divine Love,* Chapter 14.
28. This way of putting the objection was suggested to me by Michael Schryna-macher.
29. See Marilyn Adams, "Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God" in *The Problem of Evil*, ed. Marilyn McCord Adams and Robert Merrihew Adams (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).
30. "[Child abuse] includes not only children who have suffered physical abuse with fractures and bruises ('the battered child') but also those who have experienced emotional abuse, sexual abuse, deliberate poisoning, and the infliction of fictitious illness on them by their parents (Munchausen syndrome …)" *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 11th ed., s.v. "child abuse."
31. See, e.g., Romans 8:28.

IV.C.4

The Problem of Evil and the Desires of the Heart

ELEONORE STUMP

Eleonore Stump (1947–) is professor of philosophy at St. Louis University. She has written extensively in the areas of medieval philosophy, metaphysics, and philosophy of religion. In this article, she argues that traditional theodicies often fail to accord proper importance to the suffering that results from unsatisfied "desires of the heart." She maintains that, to the extent that they fail in this way, such theodicies are, at best, incomplete.

I. INTRODUCTION

The problem of evil is raised by the existence of suffering in the world. Can one hold consistently both chat the world has such suffering in it and that it is governed by an omniscient, omnipotent, perfectly good God, as the major monotheisms claim? An affirmative answer to this question has often enough taken the form of a theodicy. A theodicy is an attempt to show that these claims are

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consistent by providing a morally sufficient reason for God to allow suffering. In the history of the discussions of the problem of evil, a great deal of effort has been expended on proposing and defending, or criticizing and attacking, theodicies and the putative morally sufficient reasons which theodicies propose.

Generally, a putative morally sufficient reason for God to allow suffering is centred on a supposed benefit which could not be gotten without the suffering and which outweighs it. And the benefit is most commonly thought of as some intrinsically valuable thing supposed to be essential to general human flourishing, such as the significant use of free will or virtuous character, either for human beings in general or for the sufferer in particular.[1]

So, for example, in his insightful reflections on the sort of sufferings represented by the afflictions of Job, the impressive tenth-century Jewish thinker Saadiah Gaon says,

> Now He that subjects the soul to its trials is none other than the Master of the universe, who is, of course, acquainted with all its doings. This testing of the soul [that is, the suffering of Job] has been compared to the assaying by means of fire of [lumps of metal] that have been referred to as gold or silver. It is thereby that the true nature of their composition is clearly established. For the original gold and silver remain, while the alloys that have been mingled with them are partly burned and partly take flight… The pure, clear souls that have been refined are thereupon exalted and ennobled.[2]

The same approach is common in contemporary times. So, for example, John Hick has proposed a soul-making theodicy, which justifies suffering as building the character of the sufferer and thereby contributing to the flourishing of the sufferer.[3] Or, to take a very different example which nonetheless makes the same point, Richard Swinburne has argued that suffering contributes to the flourishing of sufferers because, among other things, a person's suffering makes him useful to others, and being useful to others is an important constituent of human well-being in general.[4]

Those who have attacked theodicies such as these have tended to focus on the theodicist's claims about the connections between the putative benefit and the suffering. Opponents of theodicy have argued that the proposed benefit could have been obtained without the suffering, for example, or that the suffering is not a morally acceptable means to that (or any other) benefit. But these attacks on theodicy share an assumption with the attempted theodicies themselves. Both the attacks and the attempted theodicies suppose that a person's generic human flourishing would be sufficient to justify God in allowing that a person's suffering if only the suffering and the flourishing were connected in the right way. In this paper, I want to call this assumption into question.

I will argue that the sufferings of unwilling innocents cannot be justified only in terms of the intrinsically valuable things which make for general human flourishing (however that flourishing is understood). I will argue that even if such flourishing is connected in the appropriate ways to the suffering in a person's life, intrinsically valuable things essential to flourishing are not by themselves sufficient to constitute a morally sufficient reason for God to allow human suffering. That is because human beings can set their hearts on things which are not necessary for such flourishing, and they suffer when they lose or fail to get what they set their hearts on.[5] That suffering also needs to be addressed in consideration of the problem of evil.

II. THE DESIRES OF THE HEART

The suffering to which I want to call attention can be thought of in terms of what the Psalmist calls "the desires of the heart."[6] When the Psalmist says, "Delight yourself in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart,"[7] we all have some idea what the Psalmist is promising. We are clear, for example, that some abstract theological

good which a person does not care much about does not count as one of the desires of that person's heart. Suffering also arises when a human being falls to get a desire of her heart or has and then loses a desire of her heart.

I do not know how to make the notion of a desire of the heart precise; but, clearly, we do have some intuitive grasp of it, and we commonly use the expression or others related to it in ordinary discourse. We say, for example, that a person is heartsick because he has lost his heart's desire. He is filled with heartache because his heart's desire is kept from him. He loses heart, because something he had put his heart into is taken from him. It would have been different for him if he had wanted it only half-heartedly; but since it was what he had at heart, he is likely to be heartsore a long time over the loss of it, unless, of course, he has a change of heart about it—and so on, and on.

Perhaps we could say that a person's heart's desire is a particular kind of commitment on her part to something—a person or a project—which matters greatly to her but which need not be essential to her flourishing, in the sense that human flourishing for her may be possible without it. So, for example, Coretta Scott King's life arguably exemplifies flourishing, on any ordinary measure of human flourishing and yet her husband's assassination was undoubtedly heartbreaking for her. If there is such a thing as a web of belief, with some beliefs peripheral and others central to a person's set of beliefs, maybe there is also a web of desire. A desire of a person's heart is a desire which is at or near the centre of the web of desire for her. If she loses what she wants when her desire is at or near the centre of the web, then other things which she had wanted begin to lose their ability to attract her because what she had most centrally wanted is gone. The web of desire starts to fall apart when the centre does not hold, we might say. That is why the ordinary good things of life, like food and work, fail to draw a person who has lost the desires of her heart. She is heartbroken, we say, and that is why she has no heart for anything else now.

If things essential to general human flourishing are intrinsically valuable for all human beings, then those things which are the desires of the heart can be thought of as the things which have the value they do for a particular person primarily because she has set her heart on them, like the value a child has for its parents, the value they have *for her* is derivative from her love of them, not the other way around. A loving father, trying to deal gently with his small daughter's childish tantrums, finally said to her with exasperated adult feeling, "It isn't reasonable to cry about these things!" Presumably, the father means that the things for which his little daughter was weeping did not have much value on the scale which measures the intrinsic value of good things essential to human flourishing; and, no doubt, he was right in that assessment. But there is another scale by which to measure, too, and that is the scale which measures the value a thing has for a particular person because of the love she has for it. The second scale cannot be reduced to the first. Clearly, we care not just about general human flourishing and the intrinsically valuable things essential to it. We also care about those things which are the desires of our hearts, and we suffer when we are denied our heart's desires. I would say that it is not reasonable to say to a weeping child that it is not reasonable for her to weep about the loss of something she had her heart set on.

Suffering which stems from a loss of the heart's desires is often enough compatible with flourishing.[8] As far as that goes, for any particular historical person picked as an exemplar of a flourishing life, it is certainly arguable that, at some time in her life, that person will have lost or failed to get something on which she had fixed her heart. Think, for example, not only of Coretta Scott King but also of Sojourner Truth, who was sold away from her parents at the age of nine, or Harriet Tubman, who suffered permanent neurological damage from the beatings she sustained in adolescence. If any human lives manifest flourishing, the lives of these women certainly do. Each of them is an exemplar of a highly admirable, meaningful life. Yet each of these women undoubtedly experienced heartbreak.

In fact, stern-minded thinkers in varying cultures, including some Stoics, Buddhists, and many in the Christian tradition, have been fiercely committed to the position that human flourishing is independent of the vicissitudes of fortune. On their view, human flourishing ought to be understood in a way which makes it compatible even with such things as poverty, disease and disabilities, the death of loved ones, betrayal by intimate friends, estrangements from friends or family, and imprisonment. But it certainly seems as if each of these is sufficient to break the heart of a person who suffers them if the person is not antecedently in the grip of such a stern-minded attitude.

So, for example, in the history of the medieval Christian tradition, for example, human flourishing was commonly taken as a matter of a certain relationship with God, mediated by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. On this view of flourishing, most of the evils human beings suffer are compatible with flourishing. That is because, as Christian confessional literature makes clear, a human person can feel that she is in such a relationship with God, even when she is afflicted with serious suffering of body or mind.

This sort of position is also common among the reflective in our own culture. In a moving passage reflecting on his long experience of caring for and living with the severely disabled, Jean Vanier says about the disabled and about himself, too,

> we can only accept … [the] pain [in our lives] if we discover our true self beneath all the masks and realize that if we are broken, we are also more beautiful than we ever dared to suspect. When we realize our brokenness, we do not have to fall into depression … Seeing our own brokenness and beauty allows us to recognize, hidden under the brokenness and self-centeredness of others, their beauty, their value, and their sacredness. This discovery is … a blessed moment, a moment of grace, and a moment of enlightenment that comes in a meeting with the God of love, who reveals to us that we are beloved and so is everyone else … We can start to live the pain of loss and accept anguish because a new love and a new consciousness of self are being given to us.[9]

A particularly poignant example of such an attitude is given by John Hull in his memoir about his own blindness. After many pages of documenting the great suffering caused him by blindness, Hull summarizes his attitude towards his disability in this powerful passage:

> the thought keeps coming back to me … Could there be a strange way in which blindness is a dark, paradoxical gift? Does it offer a way of life, a purification, an economy? Is it really like a kind of painful purging through a death? … If blindness is a gift, it is not one that I would wish on anybody … [But in the midst of the experience of music in church] as the whole place and my mind were filled with that wonderful music, I found myself saying, "I accept the gift. I accept the gift." I was filled with a profound sense of worship. I felt that I was in the very presence of God, that the giver of the gift had drawn near to me to inspect his handiwork … If I hardly dared approach him, he hardly dared approach me…. He had, as it were, thrown his cloak of darkness around me from a distance, but had now drawn near to seek a kind of reassurance from me that everything was all right, that he had not misjudged the situation, that he did not have to stay. "It's all right," I was saying to him, "There's no need to wait. Go on, you can go now; everything's fine."[10]

Everything *is* fine, in some sense having to do with relationship to God, and so with flourishing, on this understanding of flourishing. I have no wish to undermine the appealing attitude exemplified in this powerful text. And yet something more needs to be said. The problem is that suffering is not

confined to things which undermine a person's flourishing and keep him from being *fine*, in this deep sense of "fine." What is bad about the evils human beings suffer is not just that they can undermine a person's flourishing, but also that they can keep her from having the desires of her heart, when the desires of her heart are for something which is not essential for general human flourishing. Suffering arises also from the loss of the desires of one's heart; and, in considerations of the problem of evil and proposed theodicies, this suffering needs to be addressed as well. This suffering also needs to be justified.

III. THE STERN-MINDED ATTITUDE

Stated so baldly, this last claim looks less open to question than it really is. We do not ordinarily suppose that a parent's goodness is impugned if the parent refuses to provide for the child anything at all which the child happens to set its heart on. But, as regards the problem of evil, what is at issue is apparently analogous, namely, God's allowing some human being to fail to have the desires of her heart when those desires are focused on something not essential to her flourishing. Why, someone might ask, should we suppose that a good God must provide whatever goods not necessary for her flourishing a human person has fixed her heart on?

Now it is certainly true that there can be very problematic instances of heart's desires. A person could set his heart on very evil things, for example, or a person might set his heart in random ways on trivial things or on a set of mutually incompossible things. And no doubt, there are other examples as well. In cases such as these, reasonable people are unlikely to suppose that some explanation is needed for why a good God would fail to give a person the desires of his heart. Even if we exclude such cases, however, there remain many instances in which a person sets his heart, in humanly understandable and appropriate ways, on something which is not essential to his flourishing and whose value for him is derivative of his love for it.[11] Surely, in that restricted class of cases, some justification is needed for God's allowing a person to suffer heartbreak.

But even this weaker claim will strike some people as false. Some people will object, for example, that human flourishing is a very great good, sufficient to outweigh suffering. For those who think of human flourishing as a relationship to God, it can seem an infinite good or a good too great to be commensurable with other goods; and this good is possible even when many other goods are lost or denied.[12] If God provides *this* good for a human being, then, an objector might claim, that is or ought to be enough for her. A person who does not find this greatest of all goods good enough, an objector might say, is like a person who wins the lottery but who is nonetheless unhappy because she did not get exactly what she wanted for Christmas.

In the history of Christianity in particular, there have been stern-minded thinkers who would not accept the claim that the suffering caused by any loss of the heart's desires requires justification. In effect, this stern-minded attitude is unwilling to assign a positive value to anything which is not essential to general human flourishing. For this reason, the stern-minded approach is, at best, unwilling to accord any value to the desires of the heart and, at worst, eager to extirpate the desires themselves. Such an attitude is persistent in the history of Christian thought from the Patristic period onwards.

In its Patristic form, it can be seen vividly in a story which Cassian tells about a monk named "Patermutus." It is worth quoting at length the heartrendingly horrible story which Cassian recounts with so much oblivious admiration:

> Patermutus's constant perseverance [in his request to be admitted into the monastery finally] induced [the monks] to receive him along with his little son, who was about eight years old.... To test [Patermutus] the more, and see if he would be more moved by family affection and the love of his own brood

> than by the obedience and mortification of Christ, which every monk should prefer to his love, [the monks] deliberately neglected the child, dressed him in rags … and even subjected [the child] to cuffs and slaps, which … the father saw some of them inflict on the innocent for no reason, so that [the father] never saw [his son] without [the son's] cheeks being marked by the signs of tears. Although he saw the child being treated like this day after day before his eyes, the father's feelings remained firm and unmoving, for the love of Christ … The superior of the monastery … decided to test [the father's] strength of mind still further: one day when he noticed the child weeping, he pretended to be enraged at [the child], and ordered the father to pick up [his son] and throw him in the Nile. The father, as if the command had been given him by our Lord, at once ran and snatched up his son and carried him in his own arms to the river bank to throw him in. The deed would have been done … had not some of the brethren been stationed in advance to watch the riverbank carefully; as the child was thrown they caught him … Thus they prevented the command, performed as it was by the father's obedience and devotion, from having any effect.[13]

Cassian plainly prizes Patermutus's actions and attitude; but surely most of us will find it chilling and reprehensible. For my part, I would say that one can only wonder why the monks bothered to catch the child, if the father's willingness to kill the child was so praiseworthy in their eyes. Can it be morally praiseworthy to will an act whose performance is morally prohibited?

An attitude similar to Cassian's but less appalling can still be found more than a millenium later in some texts (but not others) of the work of Teresa of Avila, to take just one example from among a host of thinkers who could have been selected. Writing to her sister nuns, Teresa says,

> Oh, how desirable is … [the] union with God's will! Happy the soul that has reached it. Such a soul will live tranquilly in this life, and in the next as well. Nothing in earthly events afflicts it unless it finds itself in some danger of losing God …: neither sickness, nor poverty, nor death … For this soul sees well that the Lord knows what He is doing better than … [the soul] knows what it is desiring … But alas for us, how few there must be who reach [union with God's will!] … I tell you I am writing this with much pain upon seeing myself so far away [from union with God's will]—and all through my own fault …. Don't think the matter lies in my being so conformed to the will of God that if my father or brother dies I don't feel it, or that if there are trials or sicknesses I suffer them happily.[14]

Not feeling it when one's father dies, not weeping with grief over his death, is, in Teresa's view, a good spiritual condition which she is not yet willing to attribute to herself. Teresa is here echoing a tradition which finds its prime medieval exemplar in Augustine's *Confessions*. Augustine says that, at the death of his mother, by a powerful command of his will, he kept himself from weeping at her funeral, only to disgrace himself in his own eyes later by weeping copiously in private.[15]

In the same text from which I just quoted, Teresa emphasizes the importance of love of neighbour; but it is hard to see how love of neighbour coheres with the stern-minded attitude manifested by Teresa and Augustine in the face of the death (real or imagined) of a beloved parent. As I have argued elsewhere, it is the nature of love to desire the good of the beloved and union with him.[16] But the desire for the good of the beloved is frustrated if the beloved gets sick or dies. Or, if the stern-minded attitude is unwilling to concede that point, then this much is incontrovertible even on the stern-minded attitude: the desire for union with the beloved is frustrated when the beloved dies and

so is absent. One way or another, then, the desires of love are frustrated when the beloved dies.

Consequently, there is something bad and lamentable, something worth tears, something whose loss brings affliction with it, about the death of any person whom one loves—one's father, or even one's neighbour, whom one is bound to love too, as Teresa thinks.

Unmoved tranquillity at the death of another person is thus incompatible with love of that person. To the extent to which one loves another person, one cannot be unmoved at his death. And so love of neighbour is in fact incompatible with the stern-minded attitude.

The stance Teresa wishes she might take towards her father's death, as she imagines it, can be usefully contrasted with Bernard of Clairvaux's reaction to the death of his brother. Commenting on his grief at that death, Bernard says to his religious community, "You, my sons, know how deep my sorrow is, how galling a wound it leaves."[17] And, addressing himself, he says, "Flow on, flow on, my tears … Let my tears gush forth like fountains."[18] Reflecting on his own failure to repudiate his great sorrow over his brother's death, his failure, that is, to follow Augustine's model, Bernard says,

> It is but human and necessary that we respond to our friends with feeling, that we be happy in their company, disappointed in their absence. Social intercourse, especially between friends, cannot be purposeless: the reluctance to part and the yearning for each other when separated indicate how meaningful their mutual love must be when they are together.[19]

And Bernard is hardly the only figure in the Christian tradition who fails to accept and affirm Cassian's attitude. Aquinas is another.

There are isolated texts which might suggest to some readers that Aquinas himself is an adherent of Cassian's attitude. So, for example, in his commentary on Christ's line that he who loves his life will lose it, Aquinas reveals that he recognizes the concept of the desires of the heart; but, in this same passage, he also seems to suggest that such desires should be stamped out. He says.

> Everyone loves his own soul, but some love it *simpliciter* and some *secundum quid*. To love someone is to will the good for him; and so he who loves his soul wills the good for it. A person who wills for his soul the good *simpliciter* also loves his soul *simpliciter*. But a person who wills some particular good for his soul loves his soul *secundum quid*. The goods for the soul *simpliciter* are those things by which the soul is good, namely, the highest good, which is God. And so he who wills for his soul the divine good, a spiritual good, loves his soul *simpliciter*. But he who wills for his soul earthly goods such as riches and honors, pleasures, and things of that sort, he loves his soul [only] *secundum quid* … He who loves his soul *secundum quid* namely with regard to temporal goods, will lose it.[20]

And the implication seems to be that, for Aquinas, the person who does not want to lose his soul should extirpate from himself all desires for any good other than the highest good, which is, as Aquinas says, God.

But it is important to see that what is at issue for Aquinas in this passage is the desire for worldly things, that is for those goods, such as money or fame, which diminish when they are distributed. On Aquinas' scale of values, any good which diminishes when it is distributed is only a small good. When it comes to the desires of the heart for things which are earthly goods but great goods, such as the love of a particular person, Aquinas' attitude differs sharply from Cassian's. So, for example, in explaining why Christ told his disciples that he was going to the father in order to comfort them when they were sad at the prospect of being separated from him, Aquinas says,

> It is common among friends to be less sad over the absence of a friend when the friend is going to something which exalts him.

> That is why the Lord gives them this reason [for his leaving] in order to console them.[21]

Unlike Teresa's repudiation of grief at the prospect of losing her father, Aquinas is here, as in many other places, accepting the appropriateness of a person's grief at the loss of a loved person and validating the need for consolation for such grief

So Aquinas is not to be ranked among the members of the stern-minded group, any more than Bernard is; and, of course, in other moods, when she is not self-consciously evaluating her own spiritual progress, Teresa herself sounds more like Bernard and Aquinas than like Cassian. As far as that goes, the Psalmist who authored Psalm 37 is not on Cassian's side. The Psalmist claims that God will give the desires of the heart to those who delight in the Lord; so the Psalmist is supposing that, for those who trust in God, God himself honours the desires of the heart. On this subject, then, the Christian tradition is of two minds. Not all its influential figures stand with Cassian; and, even among those who do, many are double-minded about it.

IV. A POSSIBLE CONFUSION

But, someone will surely object, isn't it a part of Christian doctrine that God allows the death of any person who dies? Does anyone die when God wills that that person live? So when a person dies, on Christian theology, isn't it the will of God that that person die? In what sense, then, could Teresa be united with God in will if she grieved over her father's death? How could she be united with God, as she explains she wants to be, if her will is frustrated in what God's will accepts or commands?

The position presupposed by the questions of this putative objector, in my view, rests on too simple an understanding of God's will and union with God's will.

To see why, assume that at death Teresa's father is united with God in heaven. Then the death which unites Teresa's father permanently with God has the opposite effect for Teresa: at least for the time being, it deprives Teresa of her father's presence and so keeps her from union with him, at least for the rest of Teresa's earthly life. For this reason, on the Christian doctrine Teresa accepts, love's desire for union with the beloved cannot be fulfilled in the same way for Teresa as for God. If Teresa's will is united with God's will in desiring union with a beloved person, then Teresa's will must also be frustrated at the very event, her father's dying, which fulfils God's will with respect to this desire.

Something analogous can be said about the other desire of love, for the good of the beloved. If Teresa desires the good of her father, she can only desire what her own mind sees as that good; but her mind's ability to see the good is obviously much smaller than God's. To the extent to which Teresa's will is united with God's will in desiring the good of the beloved, then Teresa will also desire for the beloved person things different from those desired by God, in virtue of Teresa's differing ability to see the good for the beloved person.

It is easy to become confused here because the phrase "the good" can be used either attributively or referentially.[22] In this context, "the good of the beloved" can be used either to refer to particular things which are conducive to the beloved's well-being; or it can be used opaquely, to refer to anything whatever, under the description *the good of the beloved*. A mother who is baffled by the quarrels among her adult children and clueless about how to bring about a just peace for them may say, despairingly, "I just want the good for everybody". She is then using the phrase "the good" attributively, with no idea of how to use it referentially.

If Teresa were tranquil over any affliction which happens to her father, because she thinks that in this tranquillity her will is united to God's will and that she is therefore willing the good for her father,[23] "the good" in this thought of hers is being used attributively, to designate *whatever* God thinks is good. But this cannot be the way "the good" is used in any thought of God's, without relativizing the good entirely to God's will. If we eschew such relativism, then it is not the case that anything God desires is good just because God

desires it. And so it is also not true that God desires as the good of a beloved person *whatever* it is that God desires for her. When God desires the good for someone, then, God must desire it by desiring particular things as good for that person. Consequently, to say that God desires the good for a person is to use "the good" referentially.

For this reason, when, in an effort to will what God wills, Teresa desires *whatever* happens to her father as the good for her father, she thereby actually *fails* to will what God wills. To be united with God in willing the good requires willing for the beloved particular things which are in fact the good for the beloved, and doing so requires recognizing those things which constitute that good.

At the death of Mao Tse-tung, one of the groups competing for power was called "the Whatever Faction," because the members of that group were committed to maintaining as true, and compulsory for all Chinese to believe, anything Mao said, whatever it was.[24] In trying to desire whatever happens as good because God wills it, a person is as it were trying to be part of a Whatever Faction for God. She is trying to maintain as good anything that happens, whatever it is, on the grounds that it is what God wills. By contrast, in his great lament over the death of his brother, Bernard of Clairvaux is willing to affirm both his passionate grief over the loss of his brother and his acceptance of God's allowing that death. Bernard says, "Shall I find fault with [God's] judgment because I wince from the pain?";[25] "I have no wish to repudiate the decrees of God, nor do I question that judgment by which each of us has received his due ...."[26] Bernard grieves over this particular death as a bad thing, even while he accepts that God's allowing this bad thing is a good thing.

Understanding the subtle but important difference in attitude between Teresa and Bernard on this score helps to elucidate the otherwise peculiar part of the book of Job in which God rebukes Job's comforters because they did not say of God the thing which is right, unlike God's servant Job, who did. What the comforters had said was chat God is justified in allowing Job's suffering. Job, on the other hand, had complained bitterly that his suffering is unjust and that God should not have allowed it to happen. How is it that, in the story, God affirms Job's position and repudiates that of the comforters? The answer lies in seeing that the comforters took Job's suffering to be good just because, in their view. Job's suffering was willed by God. In effect, then, the comforters were (and wanted to be) part of the Whatever Faction of God. Job, by contrast, was intransigent in his refusal to be partisan in this way. And so, on the apparently paradoxical view of the book of Job, in opposing God, Job is more allied with God's will than are the comforters, who were taking God's part. That is why when in the story God comes to adjudicate, he sides with Job, who had opposed him, and not with the comforters, who were trying to be his partisans.

The apparent paradox here can be resolved by the scholastic distinction between God's antecedent and consequent will. On this distinction, whatever happens in the world happens only because it is in accordance with God's will, but that will is God's *consequent* will. God's consequent will, however, is to be distinguished from his antecedent will; and many of the things which happen in the world are not in accordance with God's *antecedent* will. Roughly put, God's *antecedent* will is what God would have willed if things in the world had been up to God alone. God's *consequent* will is what God in fact will, given what he knows that his creatures will. God's consequent will is his will for the greatest good available in the circumstances which are generated through creaturely free will.

To try to be in accord with God's will by taking as acceptable, as unworthy of sorrow, everything that happens is to confuse the consequent will of God with the antecedent will. It is to accept as intrinsically good even those things which God wills as good only secundum quid, that is, as the best available in the circumstances. But God does not will as intrinsically good everything he wills; what he wills in his consequent will, what is the best available in the circumstances, might be only the lesser of evils, not the intrinsically good.

And so to accept as good whatever happens on the grounds that it is God's will is the wrong way to try to be united with God's will. One can desire as

intrinsically good what one sees for oneself is good in the circumstances, or one can desire[27] as intrinsically good whatever happens, on the grounds that it is God's will. But only the former desire can be in accordance with God's will, given that God's consequent will is not the same as his antecedent will. For the same reasons, only the former desire is conductive to union with God. Although it appears paradoxical, then, the closest a human person may be able to come, in this life, to uniting her will with God's will may include her willing things (say, that a beloved person not die) which are opposed to God's (consequent) will.

It is also important to see in this connection that, in principle, there cannot be any competition between the love of God and the love of other persons. On the contrary, if one does not love one's neighbour, then one does not love God either. That is because to love God is to desire union with him; and union with God requires being united in will with him. But a person who does not love another, his father or brother, for example, cannot be united in will with a God who does love these people. So, in being tranquil and unmoved in the face of the death of a beloved father or mother, a person is not more united with God, or more in harmony with God's will, but less.

V. DENYING ONESELF

Something also needs to be said in this connection about the Christian doctrine mandating denial of the self. This much understanding of the two different ways in which one can try to will what God wills shows that there are also two correspondingly different interpretations of that doctrine.

Cassian and others who hold the stern-minded attitude manifest one such understanding. A person who shares Cassian's attitude will attempt to deny his self by, in effect, refusing to let his own mind and his own will exercise their characteristic functions. That is because a person who attempts to see as good whatever happens, on the grounds that whatever happens is willed by God, is trying to suppress, or trying to fail to acquire, his own understanding of the good. And a person who attempts to will as good whatever happens, on the same grounds, is trying to suppress the desires his own will forms, or trying not to acquire the desires his will would have formed if he were not in the grip of the stern-minded attitude. To attempt to deny the self in the stern-minded way is thus to try not to have a self at all. A woman who says sincerely to her father, "I want only what you want," and "whatever you think is good is good in my view, too," is a woman who is trying to be at one with her father by having no self of her own.

On the other hand, it is possible to let one's own faculties of intellect and will have their normal functioning and still deny oneself. This is a stance with which we are all familiar from our experiences of ordinary, daily life. Consider, for example, a mother with the stomach flu who creeps out of bed to care for her baby who also has the flu. When she leaves her bed to tend the baby, she is preferring to meet the baby's needs rather than her own. That is, she desires to stay in bed, but she also desires that the baby's needs take precedence over her own needs and desires. In her desire about the rank-ordering of desires, she does not cease to desire to stay in bed. She still has that desire; she just acts counter to it. This is to deny the self by first having a self to deny. Unlike the no-self position, this position is compatible with sorrow, and tears, for the things lost in the desires denied.

On reflection, it is clear that, contrary to first appearances, the no-self position is actually incompatible with the Christian injunction of self-denial. That is because one cannot crucify a self one does not have. To crucify one's self is to have desires and to be willing to act counter to them. An adherent to the Whatever Faction of God cannot deny his self, however, because he has constructed his desires in such away that, whatever he wills, he does not will counter to his own desires. A person who is a partisan of the no-self position has a first-order desire for whatever it may be that is God's will, and he attempts to have no first-order desires which are in conflict with whatever it may be that is God's will. That is why (unlike the real Teresa, who was full of very human emotions) such a

person would not weep if her father died. In theory, at any rate, whatever happens to her is in accordance with her first-order will and is therefore not a source of sorrow to her. In virtue of the fact that she has tried to extirpate from herself all desires except the one desire for whatever it may be that is God's will, such a person has no desires which are frustrated by whatever happens, as long as she herself remains committed to willing whatever God wills.[28]

The self-crucifying denier of the self, by contrast, has first-order desires for things his own intellect finds good, so that he is vulnerable to grief in the frustration of those desires. But he prefers his grief and frustration to the violation of God's will. In this sense, he also wills that God's will be done. His second-order desire is that God's desires take precedence over his own. When Christ says, "not my will but yours be done," he is not expressing the no-self position, because he is admitting that he has desires in conflict with God's desires. On the other hand, in virtue of preferring his pain to the violation of God's will, he is also willing that God's desires take precedence over his. This is the sense, then, in which he is willing that God's will be done.

VI. THE DESIRES OF THE HEART AND THE FLOURISHING OF A PERSON

So, for all these reasons, the stern-minded attitude is to be repudiated. Whatever its antiquity and ancestry, such influential thinkers as Bernard and Aquinas do not accept it. More importantly, it is an unpalatable position, even from the point of view of an ascetically minded Christianity. It underlies the repellent and lamentable mind-set exemplified in Cassian's story, and it is incompatible with the love of one's neighbour and consequently also with love of God. There are things worth desiring other than the intrinsically valuable things necessary for human flourishing, and the desires for these things should not be suppressed or stamped out. On the contrary, as Cassian's story makes plain, the attempt to extirpate any desires of the heart does not lead to human excellence, as Cassian thought it did, but to a kind of inhumanity willing to murder one's own child in the service of a confused and reprehensible attempt at self-denial.

There is an apparent paradox here, however. As I introduced the phrase, the desires of the heart are desires which are central to a person's web of desires but whose objects have the value they do for her because of her desire for them, not because of their connection to general human flourishing. On the face of it, then, losing the objects of such desires or giving up those desires themselves is compatible with general human flourishing for that person. But the rejection of the stern-minded attitude seems to imply that a person's flourishing requires that he have desires of the heart and that he strive to have what he desires. Consequently, it also seems to imply that it is essential to a person's flourishing that he have desires of the heart. But, then, if the desires of the heart are required for his flourishing, it seems that the objects of those desires are as well. And so it seems to follow, paradoxically, that it is essential to human flourishing that a person desire and seek to have things at least some of which are not necessary to human flourishing.

In recent work, Harry Frankfurt has argued that it is useful for a person to have final ends.[29] The central idea of his argument is the thought that a person with no final ends at all will have a life which lacks flourishing. And so final ends *are* useful as a means to an end, namely, human flourishing. The apparently paradoxical claim about the desires of the heart can be understood analogously. Human beings are constructed in such a way that they naturally set their hearts on things in addition to and different from intrinsically valuable things essential to general human flourishing. That is why confining a person's desires just to human flourishing has something inhuman about it. A person's flourishing therefore also requires that he care about and seek to have things besides those that are intrinsically valuable components of or means to human flourishing.[30] On Frankfurt's view, having a desire for something which is not a means to anything else is a means to a person's flourishing.

On the view I have argued for here, having a desire for things which are not essential to flourishing and seeking to have those things is also necessary as a means to flourishing.

And so, although no particular thing valued as a desire of the heart is essential to a person's flourishing, human flourishing is not possible in the absence of the desires of the heart.

VII. CONCLUSION

For all these reasons, we can safely leave the objections of the stern-minded attitude to one side. It therefore remains the case that justification is also needed for suffering stemming from unfulfilled or frustrated desires of the heart. For this reason, theodicies which focus just on one or another variety of general human flourishing as the morally sufficient reason for God's allowing evil are, at best, incomplete. Even if we give a theodicy such as Hick's or Swinburne's everything it wants as regards the relation between suffering and flourishing, however flourishing is understood in their theodicies, there remains the problem of suffering stemming from the loss of the desires of one's heart.

Take the story of Job, for example. For the sake of argument, let it be the case, as Saadiah Gaon appears to hold in his excellent and impressive commentary, that Job's suffering is necessary to his ennobling and purification, morally acceptable as a means to these things, and outweighed by them, in the sense that (on some objective measure) Job's ennobling and purification are a greater good than his suffering is an evil. Even if this were entirely so, and even if it were right that ennobling and purification constituted consummate human flourishing, something more would be needed for theodicy in Job's case. Job might care about his children at least as much as about his own ennobling and purification; and he might be heartbroken at the loss of his children, even with the benefit to him of his ennobling and purification. Something also needs to be said about the moral justification for God's allowing such heartbreak.

Someone might object that if the benefit to Job really is connected to his suffering in the way I have just described, then nothing more is needed for theodicy, because the good given to Job through his suffering defeats the suffering. But this is to accord no value to the desires of Job's heart. It is, in effect, to say with regard to Job a much sterner version of what the loving but exasperated father said to his daughter: It is not reasonable to weep about these things. But, as I have been at pains to show, disregarding or downplaying the desires of the heart is itself unreasonable. Suffering is a function of what we care about, and we care not only about human flourishing; we care also about the things on which we have set our hearts. The suffering stemming from the loss of the heart's desires also needs to be redeemed. The benefit which outweighs the suffering for Job, as Saadiah Gaon sees it, outweighs that suffering only on the scale of values which measures the intrinsic worth of things essential to human flourishing in general. It does not outweigh it on the scale which measures things that have the value they do for a particular person only because he has set his heart on them.

That this is so helps to explain why so many people feel uneasy or disappointed at attempted solutions to the problem of evil which focus on some global good (for humanity in general—the significant use of free will, for example—as a morally sufficient reason for God to allow suffering. If a person's own flourishing is not sufficient to justify God in allowing her to be heartbroken, then, a fortiori, some component of or contribution to the flourishing of the human species considered as a whole cannot do so either.

And so the desires of the heart also need to be considered in connection with the problem of evil. For my part, I think it is possible to find a way to develop traditional theodicies to include satisfactory consideration of the problem posed by the desires of the heart;[31] but, clearly, that complicated and challenging task lies outside the scope of this paper.

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NOTES

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1. There is a large, contentious philosophical literature on the nature of human flourishing or well-being, and it is not part of my purpose to try to engage that literature here. For my purposes in this paper, I will understand flourishing to consist in just those things necessary in a person's life for that person's life to be admirable and meaningful.
2. Saadiah Gaon 1948: 246–7.
3. Hick 1966. For Hick's defence of his solutions against objections, see, for example, Hick 1968a: 539–46, and Hick 1968b: 591–602.
4. See Swinburne 1998.
5. In Adams 1999, Marilyn Adams makes a distinction which is at least related to the distinction I am after here. She says, "the value of a person's life may be assessed from the inside (in relation to that person's own goals, ideals, and choices) and from the outside (in relation to the aims, tastes, values, and preferences of others)… My notion is that for a person's life to be a great good to him/her on the whole, the external point of view (even if it is God's) is not sufficient" (p. 145).
6. The expression "the desire of the heart" is also ambiguous. It can mean either a particular kind of desire or else the thing which is desired in that way. When we say, "the desire of his heart was to be a great musician," the expression refers to a desire; when we say, "In losing her, he lost the desire of his heart," the expression refers to the thing desired. I will not try to sort out this ambiguity here; I will simply trust to the context to disambiguate the expression.
7. Ps. 37: 4–5.

8. Except for conceptions of flourishing which make flourishing identical to the satisfaction of desires, but equating flourishing just with desire satisfaction is problematic enough that it can be left to one side here.
9. Vanier 1998: 158–9.
10. Hull 1991: 205–6.
11. Elsewhere I consider the complication of cases in which an apparently appropriate heart's desire is such that its fulfilment would undermine the flourishing of the person who has it. So, for example, the great English poet John Milton apparently had a heart's desire to be an administrator in the Puritan government of his time; but his government work kept him from writing poetry. All his greatest poetry was written after the fail of the Puritan regime. There are also cases in which a person sets his heart on what he himself takes to be essential to his flourishing, when in fact he is mistaken on this score. Viktor Klemperer supposed that his flourishing was dependent on his writing a great study of eighteenth-century French literature, and he describes his own sense of the blight of his life in consequence of his inability to write a great book in his stunningly excellent diaries, published now to rave reviews. For consideration of complicated cases such as these, see my *Wandering in Darkness: Narrative and the Problem of Suffering* (Oxford, forthcoming).
12. For a persuasive statement of a case for such a view, see Adams 1998.
13. Cassian 1999: 55–6.
14. Teresa of Avila 1979: 98, 99, 100.
15. *Confessions* IX.12.
16. Stump 2006.
17. Cited in Astell 1990: 126.
18. Cited in Astell 1990: 130.
19. Cited in Astell 1990: 133.
20. *Super Evangelium S.Ioannis Lectura,* John 12: 24–5, Lectio IV.7, 1643–1644.
21. *Super Evangelium S.Ioannis Lectura,* John 14: 27–31, Lectio VIII.l, 1966.
22. "The commander of the armed forces" is used referentially when it refers to the particular person who is the President; it is used attributively when it refers to anyone who holds the office of commander without reference to a particular person who in fact currently holds the office.
23. It is important to put the point in terms of what *happens* to her father, rather than in terms of any state or condition of her father, since there are certainly things her father might do which cause Teresa a grief she would approve of having.
24. The official formula was "Whatever policy Chairman Mao decided upon, we shall resolutely defend; whatever directives Chairman Mao issued, we shall steadfastly obey." See MacFarquhar 1991: 372
25. Cited in Astell 1990: 133.
26. Cited in Astell 1990: 130.
27. Or try to accept—a distinction manifested by Teresa's own description of herself.
28. The last clause is a necessary caveat because, presumably, even an adherent to the position would be distressed at finding sin in himself (and maybe even at finding sin in others), since sin cannot be considered in accordance with God's will.
29. Frankfurt 1998.
30. In this respect, the desires of the heart are to human flourishing what accidents are to a primary substance. Any particular accident is not necessary to a substance, but it is necessary to a substance that it have accidents. Analogously, no particular desire of the heart is necessary for a person's flourishing, but it is necessary for her flourishing that she have desires of die heart.
31. I argue for this claim in detail in my *Wandering in Darkness. Narrative and the Problem of Suffering* (Oxford, forthcoming).

IV.C.5

Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God

MARILYN McCORD ADAMS

Marilyn McCord Adams (1943–) is a research professor of philosophy at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. She has held positions in philosophy and theology at Oxford University, Yale University, and the University of California, Los Angeles, and has written extensively on topics at the intersection of both disciplines. In this article, Adams argues that standard responses to the problem of evil fall short in their ability to deal with "horrendous evil." She then argues that God could defeat such evils only by somehow "integrating participation in horrendous evils into a person's relationship with God."

1. INTRODUCTION

Over the past thirty years, analytic philosophers of religion have defined "the problem of evil" in terms of the prima-facie difficulty in consistently maintaining

(1) God exists, and is omnipotent, omniscient, and perfectly good

and

(2) Evil exists.

In a crisp and classic article, "Evil and Omnipotence,"[1] J. L. Mackie emphasized that the problem is not that (1) and (2) are logically inconsistent by themselves, but that they together with quasi-logical rules formulating attribute-analyses—such as

(P1) A perfectly good being would always eliminate evil so far as it could,

and

(P2) There are *no limits* to what an omnipotent being can do—

constitute an inconsistent premiss-set. He added, of course, that the inconsistency might be removed by substituting alternative and perhaps more subtle analyses, but cautioned that such replacements of (P1) and (P2) would save "ordinary theism" from his charge of positive irrationality, only if true to its "essential requirements."[2]

In an earlier paper, "Problems of Evil: More Advice to Christian Philosophers,"[3] I underscored Mackie's point and took it a step further. In debates about whether the argument from evil can establish the irrationality of religious belief, care must be taken, both by the atheologians who deploy it and by the believers who defend against it, to ensure that the operative attribute-analyses accurately reflect that religion's understanding of divine power and goodness. It does the atheologian no good to argue for the falsity of Christianity on the ground that the existence of an omnipotent, omniscient, pleasure-maximizer is incompossible with a

Marilyn McCord Adams, 'Horrendous Evils and The Goodness of God', first published in *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, Supplementary Vol. 63 (1989), pp. 297–310, with revisions and additional notes from the revised version in The Problem of Evil, ed. Robert Merrihew Adams and Marilyn McCord Adams (Oxford University Press, 1990), pp. © The Aristotelian Society 1989. Reprinted by permission of the Aristotelian Society and Oxford University Press.

world such as ours, because Christians never believed God was a pleasure-maximizer anyway. But equally, the truth of Christianity would be inadequately defended by the observation that an omnipotent, omniscient egoist could have created a world with suffering creatures, because Christians insist that God loves other (created) persons than Himself. The extension of "evil" in (2) is likewise important. Since Mackie and his successors are out to show that "the several parts of the *essential* theological doctrine are inconsistent with *one another*,"[4] they can accomplish their aim only if they circumscribe the extension of "evil" as their religious opponents do. By the same token, it is not enough for Christian philosophers to explain how the power, knowledge, and goodness of God could coexist with some evils or other; a full account must exhibit the compossibility of divine perfection with evils in the amounts and of the kinds found in the actual world (and evaluated as such by Christian standards).

The moral of my earlier story might be summarized thus: where the internal coherence of a system of religious beliefs is at stake, successful arguments for its inconsistency must draw on premisses (explicitly, or implicitly) internal to that system or obviously acceptable to its adherents; likewise for successful rebuttals or explanations of consistency. The thrust of my argument is to push both sides of the debate towards more detailed attention to and subtle understanding of the religious system in question.

As a Christian philosopher, I want to focus in this paper on the problem for the truth of Christianity raised by what I shall call "horrendous" evils. Although our world is riddled with them, the biblical record punctuated by them, and one of them—namely, the passion of Christ; according to Christian belief, the judicial murder of God by the people of God—is memorialized by the Church on its most solemn holiday (Good Friday) and in its central sacrament (the Eucharist), the problem of horrendous evils is largely skirted by standard treatments for the good reason that they are intractable by them. After showing why, I will draw on other Christian materials to sketch ways of meeting this, the deepest of religious problems.

2. DEFINING THE CATEGORY

For present purposes, I define "horrendous evils" as "evils the participation in (the doing or suffering of) which gives one reason prima facie to doubt whether one's life could (given their inclusion in it) be a great good to one on the whole."[5] Such reasonable doubt arises because it is so difficult humanly to conceive how such evils could be overcome. Borrowing Chisholm's contrast between *balancing off* (which occurs when the opposing values of *mutually exclusive* parts of a whole partially or totally cancel each other out) and *defeat* (which cannot occur by the mere addition to the whole of a new part of opposing value, but involves some "organic unity" among the values of parts and wholes, as when the positive aesthetic value of a whole painting defeats the ugliness of a small colour patch),[6] horrendous evils seem prima facie, not only to balance off but to engulf the positive value of a participant's life. Nevertheless, that very horrendous proportion, by which they threaten to rob a person's life of positive meaning, cries out not only to be engulfed, but to be made meaningful through positive and decisive defeat.

I understand this criterion to be objective, but relative to individuals. The example of habitual complainers, who know to make the worst of a good situation, shows individuals not to be incorrigible experts on what ills would defeat the positive value of their lives. Nevertheless, nature and experience endow people with different strengths; one bears easily what crushes another. And a major consideration in determining whether an individual's life is/has been a great good to him/her on the whole, is invariably and appropriately how it has seemed to him/her.[7]

I offer the following list of paradigmatic horrors: the rape of a woman and axing off of her arms, psychophysical torture whose ultimate goal is the disintegration of personality, betrayal of one's

deepest loyalties, cannibalizing one's own offspring, child abuse of the sort described by Ivan Karamazov, child pornography, parental incest, slow death by starvation, participation in the Nazi death camps, the explosion of nuclear bombs over populated areas, having to choose which of one's children shall live and which be executed by terrorists, being the accidental and/or unwitting agent of the disfigurement or death of those one loves best. I regard these as *paradigmatic*, because I believe most people would find in the doing or suffering of them prima-facie reason to doubt the positive meaning of their lives.[8] Christian belief counts the crucifixion of Christ another: on the one hand, death by crucifixion seemed to defeat Jesus' Messianic vocation; for according to Jewish law, death by hanging from a tree made its victim ritually accursed, definitively excluded from the compass of God's people, *a fortiori* disqualified from being the Messiah. On the other hand, it represented the defeat of its perpetrators' leadership vocations, as those who were to prepare the people of God for the Messiah's coming, killed and ritually accursed the true Messiah, according to later theological understanding, God Himself.

3. THE IMPOTENCE OF STANDARD SOLUTIONS

For better and worse, the by now standard strategies for "solving" the problem of evil are powerless in the face of horrendous evils.

3.1. Seeking the Reason-Why

In his model article "Hume on Evil,"[9] Pike takes up Mackie's challenge, arguing that (P1) fails to reflect ordinary moral intuitions (more to the point, I would add, Christian beliefs), and traces the abiding sense of trouble to the hunch that an omnipotent, omniscient being could have no reason compatible with perfect goodness for permitting (bringing about) evils, because all legitimate excuses arise from ignorance or weakness. Solutions to the problem of evil have thus been sought in the form of counter-examples to this latter claim, i.e. logically possible reasons-why that would excuse even an omnipotent, omniscient God! The putative logically possible reasons offered have tended to be *generic* and *global*: generic in so far as some *general* reason is sought to cover all sorts of evils; global in so far as they seize upon some feature of the world as a whole. For example, philosophers have alleged that the desire to make a world with one of the following properties—"the best of all possible worlds,"[10] "a world more perfect than which is impossible," "a world exhibiting a perfect balance of retributive justice,"[11] "a world with as favorable a balance of (created) moral good over moral evil as God can weakly actualize"[12]—would constitute a reason compatible with perfect goodness for God's creating a world with evils in the amounts and of the kinds found in the actual world. Moreover, such general reasons are presented as so powerful as to do away with any need to catalogue types of evils one by one, and examine God's reason for permitting each in particular. Plantinga explicitly hopes that the problem of horrendous evils can thus be solved without being squarely confronted.[13]

3.2. The Insufficiency of Global Defeat

A pair of distinctions is in order here: (i) between two dimensions of divine goodness in relation to creation—namely, "producer of global goods" and "goodness to" or "love of individual created persons"; and (ii) between the overbalance/defeat of evil by good on the global scale, and the overbalance/ defeat of evil by good within the context of an individual person's life.[14] Correspondingly, we may separate two problems of evil parallel to the two sorts of goodness mentioned in (i).

In effect, generic and global approaches are directed to the first problem: they defend divine goodness along the first (global) dimension by suggesting logically possible strategies for the global defeat of evils. But establishing God's excellence as a producer of global goods does not automatically solve the second problem, especially in a world containing horrendous evils. For God cannot be said to

be good or loving to any created persons the positive meaning of whose lives He allows to be engulfed in and/or defeated by evils—that is, individuals within whose lives horrendous evils remain undefeated. Yet, the only way unsupplemented global and generic approaches could have to explain the latter, would be by applying their general reasons-why to particular cases of horrendous suffering.

Unfortunately, such an exercise fails to give satisfaction. Suppose for the sake of argument that horrendous evil could be included in maximally perfect world orders; its being partially constitutive of such an order would assign it that generic and global positive meaning. But would knowledge of such a fact defeat for a mother the prima-facie reason provided by her cannibalism of her own infant to wish that she had never been born? Again, the aim of perfect retributive balance confers meaning on evils imposed. But would knowledge that the torturer was being tortured give the victim who broke down and turned traitor under pressure any more reason to think his/her life worth while? Would it not merely multiply reasons for the torturer to doubt that his/her life could turn out to be a good to him/her on the whole? Could the truck-driver who accidentally runs over his beloved child find consolation in the idea that this middle-known[15] but unintended side-effect was part of the price God accepted for a world with the best balance of moral good over moral evil he could get?

Not only does the application to horrors of such generic and global reasons for divine permission of evils fail to solve the second problem of evil; it makes it worse by adding *generic prima-facie* reasons to doubt whether human life would be a great good to individual human beings in possible worlds where such divine motives were operative. For, taken in isolation and made to bear the weight of the whole explanation, such reasons-why draw a picture of divine indifference or even hostility to the human plight. Would the fact that God permitted horrors because they were constitutive means to His end of global perfection, or that He tolerated them because He could obtain that global end anyway, make the participant's life more tolerable, more worth living for him/her? Given radical human vulnerability to horrendous evils, the ease with which humans participate in them, whether as victim or perpetrator, would not the thought that God visits horrors on anyone who caused them, simply because he/she deserves it, provide one more reason to expect human life to be a nightmare?

Those willing to split the two problems of evil apart might adopt a divide-and-conquer strategy, by simply denying divine goodness along the second dimension. For example, many Christians do not believe that God will ensure an overwhelmingly good life to each and every person He creates. Some say the decisive defeat of evil with good is promised only within the lives of the obedient, who enter by the narrow gate. Some speculate that the elect may be few. Many recognize that the sufferings of this present life are as nothing compared to the hell of eternal torment, designed to defeat goodness with horrors within the lives of the damned.

Such a road can be consistently travelled only at the heavy toll of admitting that human life in worlds such as ours is a bad bet. Imagine (adapting Rawls's device) persons in a pre-original position, considering possible worlds containing managers of differing power, wisdom, and character, and subjects of varying fates. The question they are to answer about each world is whether they would willingly enter it as a human being, from behind a veil of ignorance as to which position they would occupy. Reason would, I submit, dictate a negative verdict for worlds whose omniscient and omnipotent manager permits ante-mortem horrors that remain undefeated within the context of the human participant's life; *a fortiori*, for worlds in which some or most humans suffer eternal torment.

3.3. Inaccessible Reasons

So far, I have argued that generic and global solutions are at best incomplete: however well their account of divine motivating reasons deals with the first problem of evil, the attempt to extend it to the second fails by making it worse. This verdict might seem prima facie tolerable to standard generic and global approaches and indicative of only a

minor modification in their strategy: let the above-mentioned generic and global reasons cover divine permission of non-horrendous evils, and find other *reasons* compatible with perfect goodness *why* even an omnipotent, omniscient God would permit horrors.

In my judgement, such an approach is hopeless. As Plantinga[16] points out, where horrendous evils are concerned, not only do we not know God's *actual* reason for permitting them; we cannot even *conceive* of any plausible candidate sort of reason consistent with worthwhile lives for human participants in them.

4. THE HOW OF GOD'S VICTORY

Up to now, my discussion has given the reader cause to wonder whose side I am on anyway. For I have insisted, with rebels like Ivan Karamazov and John Stuart Mill, on spotlighting the problem horrendous evils pose. Yet, I have signalled my preference for a version of Christianity that insists on both dimensions of divine goodness, and maintains not only (*a*) that God will be good enough to created persons to make human life a good bet, but also (*b*) that each created person will have a life that is a great good to him/her on the whole. My critique of standard approaches to the problem of evil thus seems to reinforce atheologian Mackie's verdict of "positive irrationality" for such a religious position.

4.1. Whys Versus Hows

The inaccessibility of reasons-why seems especially decisive. For surely an all-wise and all-powerful God, who loved each created person enough (*a*) to defeat any experienced horrors within the context of the participant's life, and (*b*) to give each created person a life that is a great good to him/her on the whole, would not permit such persons to suffer horrors for no reason.[17] Does not our inability even to conceive of plausible candidate reasons suffice to make belief in such a God positively irrational in a world containing horrors? In my judgement, it does not.

To be sure, motivating reasons come in several varieties relative to our conceptual grasp: There are (i) reasons of the sort we can readily understand when we are informed of them (e.g. the mother who permits her child to undergo painful heart surgery because it is the only humanly possible way to save its life). Moreover, there are (ii) reasons we would be cognitively, emotionally, and spiritually equipped to grasp if only we had a larger memory or wider attention span (analogy: I may be able to memorize small town street plans; memorizing the road networks of the entire country is a task requiring more of the same, in the way that proving Gödel's theorem is not). Some generic and global approaches insinuate that divine permission of evils has motivating reasons of this sort. Finally, there are (iii) reasons that we are cognitively, emotionally, and/or spiritually too immature to fathom (the way a two-year-old child is incapable of understanding its mother's reasons for permitting the surgery). I agree with Plantinga that our ignorance of divine reasons for permitting horrendous evils is not of types (i) or (ii), but of type (iii).

Nevertheless, if there are varieties of ignorance, there are also varieties of reassurance.[18] The two-year-old heart patient is convinced of its mother's love, not by her cognitively inaccessible reasons, but by her intimate care and presence through its painful experience. The story of Job suggests something similar is true with human participation in horrendous suffering: God does not give Job His reasons-why, and implies that Job isn't smart enough to grasp them; rather Job is lectured on the extent of divine power, and sees God's goodness face to face! Likewise, I suggest, to exhibit the logical compossibility of both dimensions of divine goodness with horrendous suffering, it is not necessary to find logically possible reasons *why* God might permit them. It is enough to show *how* God can be good enough to created persons despite their participation in horrors—by defeating them within the context of the individual's life and by giving that individual a life that is a great good to him/her on the whole.

4.2. What Sort of Valuables?

In my opinion, the reasonableness of Christianity can be maintained in the face of horrendous evils only by drawing on resources of religious value theory. For one way for God to be *good to* created persons is by relating them appropriately to relevant and great goods. But philosophical and religious theories differ importantly on what valuables they admit into their ontology. Some maintain that "what you see is what you get," but nevertheless admit a wide range of valuables, from sensory pleasures, the beauty of nature and cultural artefacts, the joys of creativity, to loving personal intimacy. Others posit a transcendent good (e.g. the Form of the Good in Platonism, or God, the Supremely Valuable Object, in Christianity). In the spirit of Ivan Karamazov, I am convinced that the depth of horrific evil cannot be accurately estimated without recognizing it to be incommensurate with any package of merely non-transcendent goods and so unable to be balanced off, much less defeated, thereby.

Where the *internal* coherence of Christianity is the issue, however, it is fair to appeal to its own store of valuables. From a Christian point of view God is a being a greater than which cannot be conceived, a good incommensurate with both created goods and temporal evils. Likewise, the good of beatific, face-to-face intimacy with God is simply incommensurate with any merely non-transcendent goods or ills a person might experience, Thus, the good of beatific face-to-face intimacy with God would *engulf* (in a sense analogous to Chisholmian balancing off) even the horrendous evils humans experience in this present life here below, and overcome any prima-facie reasons the individual had to doubt whether his/her life would or could be worth living.

4.3. Personal Meaning, Horrors Defeated

Engulfing personal horrors within the context of the participant's life would vouchsafe to that individual a life that was a great good to him/her on the whole. I am still inclined to think it would guarantee that immeasurable divine goodness to any person thus benefited. But there is good theological reason for Christians to believe that God would go further, beyond engulfment to defeat. For it is the nature of persons to look for meaning, both in their lives and in the world. Divine respect for and commitment to created personhood would drive God to make all those sufferings which threaten to destroy the positive meaning of a person's life meaningful through positive defeat.[19]

How could God do it? So far as I can see, only by integrating participation in horrendous evils into a person's relationship with God. Possible dimensions of integration are charted by Christian soteriology. I pause here to sketch three:[20] (i) First, because God in Christ participated in horrendous evil through His passion and death, human experience of horrors can be a means of *identifying* with Christ, either through *sympathetic* identification (in which each person suffers his/her own pains, but their similarity enables each to know what it is like for the other) or through *mystical* identification (in which the created person is supposed literally to experience a share of Christ's pain[21]). (ii) Julian of Norwich's description of heavenly welcome suggests the possible defeat of horrendous evil through divine gratitude. According to Julian, before the elect have a chance to thank God for all He has done for them, God will say, "Thank you for all your suffering, the suffering of your youth." She says that the creature's experience of divine gratitude will bring such full and unending joy as could not be merited by the whole sea of human pain and suffering throughout the ages.[22] (iii) A third idea identifies temporal suffering itself with a vision into the inner life of God, and can be developed several ways. Perhaps, contrary to medieval theology, God is not impassible, but rather has matched capacities for joy and for suffering. Perhaps, as the Heidelberg catechism suggests, God responds to human sin and the sufferings of Christ with an agony beyond human conception.[23] Alternatively, the inner life of God may be, strictly speaking and in and of itself, beyond both joy and sorrow. But, just as (according to Rudolf Otto) humans experience divine presence now as *tremendum* (with deep

dread and anxiety), now as *fascinans* (with ineffable attraction), so perhaps our deepest suffering as much as our highest joys may themselves be direct visions into the inner life of God, imperfect but somehow less obscure in proportion to their intensity. And if a face-to-face vision of God is a good for humans incommensurate with any non-transcendent goods or ills, so any vision of God (including horrendous suffering) would have a good aspect in so far as it is a vision of God (even if it has an evil aspect in so far as it is horrendous suffering). For the most part, horrors are not recognized as experiences of God (any more than the city slicker recognizes his visual image of a brown patch as a vision of Beulah the cow in the distance). But, Christian mysticism might claim, at least from the post-mortem perspective of the beatific vision, such sufferings will be seen for what they were, and retrospectively no one will wish away any intimate encounters with God from his/her life-history in this world. The created person's experience of the beatific vision together with his/her knowledge that intimate divine presence stretched back over his/her ante-mortem life and reached down into the depths of his/her worst suffering, would provide retrospective comfort independent of comprehension of the reasons-why akin to the two-year-old's assurance of its mother's love. Taking this third approach. Christians would not need to commit themselves about what in any event we do not know: namely, whether we will (like the two-year-old) ever grow up enough to understand the reasons why God permits our participation in horrendous evils. For by contrast with the best of earthly mothers, such divine intimacy is an incommensurate good and would cancel out for the creature any need to know why.

5. CONCLUSION

The worst evils demand to be defeated by the best goods. Horrendous evils can be overcome only by the goodness of God. Relative to human nature, participation in horrendous evils and loving intimacy with God are alike disproportionate: for the former threatens to engulf the good in an individual human life with evil, while the latter guarantees the reverse engulfment of evil by good. Relative to one another, there is also disproportion, because the good that God *is*, and intimate relationship with Him, is incommensurate with created goods and evils alike. Because intimacy with God so outscales relations (good or bad) with any creatures, integration into the human person's relationship with God confers significant meaning and positive value even on horrendous suffering. This result coheres with basic Christian intuition: that the powers of darkness are stronger than humans, but they are no match for God!

Standard generic and global solutions have for the most part tried to operate within the territory common to believer and unbeliever, within the confines of religion-neutral value theory. Many discussions reflect the hope that substitute attribute-analyses, candidate reasons-why, and/or defeaters could issue out of values shared by believers and unbelievers alike. And some virtually make this a requirement on an adequate solution. Mackie knew better how to distinguish the many charges that may be levelled against religion. Just as philosophers may or may not find the existence of God plausible, so they may be variously attracted or repelled by Christian values of grace and redemptive sacrifice. But agreement on truth-value is not necessary to consensus on internal consistency. My contention has been that it is not only legitimate, but, given horrendous evils, necessary for Christians to dip into their richer store of valuables to exhibit the consistency of (1) and (2).[24] I would go one step further: assuming the pragmatic and/or moral (I would prefer to say, broadly speaking, religious) importance of believing that (one's own) human life is worth living, the ability of Christianity to exhibit how this could be so despite human vulnerability to horrendous evil, constitutes a pragmatic/moral/religious consideration in its favour, relative to value schemes that do not.

To me, the most troublesome weakness in what I have said lies in the area of conceptual under-development. The contention that God

suffered in Christ or that one person can experience another's pain requires detailed analysis and articulation in metaphysics and philosophy of mind. I have shouldered some of this burden elsewhere,[25] but its full discharge is well beyond the scope of this paper.

NOTES

1. J. L. Mackie, "Evil and Omnipotence," *Mind*, 64 (1955) [Chapter 1 in this collection]; repr. in Nelson Pike (ed.), *God and Evil* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1964), 46–60.
2. Ibid. 47 [pp. 26–7, 37 above].
3. Marilyn McCord Adams, "Problems of Evil: More Advice to Christian Philosophers," *Faith and Philosophy* (Apr. 1988), 121–43.
4. Mackie, "Evil and Omnipotence," pp. 46–7 [p. 25 above], (emphasis mind).
5. Stewart Sutherland (in his comment "Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God—II," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, suppl. vol. 63 (1989), 311–23; esp. 311) takes my criterion to be somehow "first-person." This was not my intention. My definition may be made more explicit as follows: an evil *e* is horrendous if and only if participation in *e* by person *p* gives everyone prima-facie reason to doubt whether *p*'s life can, given *p*'s participation in *e*, be a great good to *p* on the whole.
6. Roderick Chisholm, "The Defeat of Good and Evil" [Chapter III in this collection].
7. Cf. Malcolm's astonishment at Wittgenstein's dying exclamation that he had had a wonderful life, *Ludwig Wittgenstein: A Memoir* (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), 100.
8. Once again, more explicitly, most people would agree that a person *p*'s doing or suffering of them constitutes prima-facic reason to doubt whether *p*'s life can be, given such participation, a great good to *p* on the whole.
9. "Hume on Evil," *Philosophical Review*, 72 (1963), 180–97 [Chapter II in this collection]; reprinted in Pike (ed.), *God and Evil*, p. 88 [pp. 40–1 above].
10. Following Leibniz, Pike draws on this feature as part of what I have called his Epistemic Defence ("Problems of Evil: More Advice to Christian Philosophers," pp. 124–5).
11. Augustine, *On Free Choice of Will*, iii. 93–102, implies that there is a maximum value for created worlds, and a plurality of worlds that meet it. All of these contain rational free creatures; evils are foreseen but unintended side-effects of their creation. No matter what they choose, however, God can order their choices into a maximally perfect universe by establishing an order of retributive justice.
12. Plantinga takes this line in numerous discussions, in the course of answering Mackie's objection to the Free Will Defence, that God should have made sinless free creatures. Plantinga insists that, given incompatibilist freedom in creatures, God cannot strongly actualize any world He wants. It is logically possible that a world with evils in the amounts and of the kinds found in this world is the best that He could do, Plantinga argues, given His aim of getting some moral goodness in the world.
13. Alvin Plantinga, "Self-Profile," in James E. Tomberlin and Peter van Inwagcn (eds.). *Profiles: Alvin Plantinga* (Dordrecht, Boston, Mass., and Lancaster, Pa.: Reidel, 1985), 38.
14. I owe the second of these distinctions to a remark by Keith De Rose in our Fall 1987 seminar on the problem of evil at UCLA.
15. Middle knowledge, or knowledge of what is "in between" the actual and the possible, is the sort of knowledge of what a free creature *would do* in every situation in which that creature could possibly find himself. Following Luis de Molina and Francisco Suarez, Alvin Plantinga ascribes such knowledge to God, prior in the order of explanation to God's decision about which free creatures to actualize (in *The Nature of Necessity* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), pp. 164–93 [Chapter V in this collection]). Robert Merrihew Adams challenges this idea in his article "Middle Knowledge and the Problem of Evil," *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 14 (1977) [Chapter VI in this collection]; repr. in *The Virtue of*

Faith (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 77–93.

16. Alvin Plantinga, "Self-Profile," pp. 34–5.
17. This point was made by William Fitzpatrick in our Fall 1987 seminar on the problem of evil at UCLA.
18. Contrary to what Sutherland suggests ("Horrendous Evils," pp. 314–15), so far as the compossibility problem is concerned, I intend no illicit shift from reason to emotion. My point is that intimacy with a loving other is a good, participation in which can defeat evils, and so provide everyone with reason to think a person's life can be a great good to his/her on the whole, despite his/her participation in evils.
19. Note, once again, contrary to what Sutherland suggests ("Horrendous Evils," pp. 321–3) "horrendous evil *e* is defeated" entails *none* of the following propositions: "*e* was not horrendous," "*e* was not unjust," "*e* was not so bad after all." Nor does my suggestion that even horrendous evils can be defeated by a great enough (because incommensurate and uncreated) good, in any way impugn the reliability of our moral intuitions about injustice, cold-bloodedness, or horror. The judgement that participation in *e* constitutes prima-facie reason to believe that *p*'s life is ruined, stands and remains a daunting measure of *e*'s horror.
20. In my paper "Redemptive Suffering: A Christian Solution to the Problem of Evil," in Robert Audi and William J. Wainwright (eds.). *Rationality, Religious Belief, and Moral Commitment: New Essays in Philosophy of Religion* (Cornell University Pres., 1986), 248–67, I sketch how horrendous suffering can be meaningful by being made a vehicle of divine redemption for victim, perpetrator, and onlooker, and thus an occasion of the victim's collaboration with God. In "Separation and Reversal in Luke-Acts," in Thomas Morris (ed.). *Philosophy and the Christian Faith* (Notre Dame, Ind.: Notre Dame University Press, 1988), 92–117, I attempted to chart the redemptive plot-line whereby horrendous sufferings are made meaningful by being woven into the divine redemptive plot. My considered opinion is that such collaboration would be too strenuous for the human condition were it not to be supplemented by a more explicit and beatific divine intimacy.
21. For example, Julian of Norwich tells us that she prayed for and received the latter (*Revelations of Divine Love*, ch. 17). Mother Theresa of Calcutta seems to construe Matthew 25: 31–46 to mean that the poorest and the least *are* Christ, and that their sufferings *are* Christ's (Malcolm Muggeridge, *Something Beautiful for God* (New York; Harper & Row, 1960), 72–5).
22. *Revelations of Divine Love*, ch. 14. I am grateful to Houston Smit for recognizing this scenario of Julian's as a case of Chisholmian defeat.
23. Cf. Plantinga, "Self-Profile," p. 36.
24. I develop this point at some length in "Problems of Evil: More Advice to Christian Philosophers," pp. 127–35.
25. For example in "The Metaphysics of the Incarnation in Some Fourteenth Century Franciscans," in William A. Frank and Girard J. Etzkorn (eds.), *Essays Honoring Allan B. Walter* (St. Bonaventure, NY: The Franciscan Institute, 1985), 21–57.
26. In the development of these ideas, I am indebted to the members of our Fall 1987 seminar on the problem of evil at UCLA—especially to Robert Merrihew Adams (its co-leader) and to Keith De Rose, William Fitzpatrick, and Houston Smit. I am also grateful to the Very Rcvd. Jon Hart Olson for many conversations in mystical theology.

IV.C.6

Suffering as Religious Experience

LAURA WADDELL EKSTROM

Laura Waddell Ekstrom is a professor of philosophy at the College of William and Mary, specializing primarily in ethics and agency theory. In this article, Ekstrom argues that some instances of suffering might reasonably be viewed as religious experiences that serve as a means of intimacy with God. Thus, whereas atheologians typically take suffering as evidence against the existence of God, Ekstrom argues that it might in fact be a route to knowledge of God.

INTRODUCTION

Works of literature, accounts of human history, and the events of everyday life confront us directly with the reality of pain and suffering. Some of us of a melancholy (some might say morbid) disposition are overcome with worry over this reality. Lighthearted neighbors and friends perplex us. How do they carry on so, trimming their yards and enjoying the weather, all the while maintaining faith in a perfect and provident Lord of the universe? Is it out of callousness, shallowness, blessedness, or wisdom? Have they any dark nights of the soul or anguish over the cries and shed blood of their fellow creatures? The worry leads some of us to academic study of the problem of evil. But our answers are incomplete and fail fully to satisfy. O God, where are you through the violent violation of a woman? Why tarry when a child falls feverish and is ripped from life too soon? Why still your hand through war, betrayal, and pain?

Yet through our own suffering, confusion and bitterness may take a startling turn. Job's heartrending cries of injustice against the Almighty become the breathtaking utterance, "My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you."[1] In his suffering, Job reports, he has met God. God has shown himself, made himself known to the sufferer. The philosopher Nicholas Wolterstorff gives something of a similar account in his report of a vision of God. As we strain to discern an explanation for divine permission of suffering, "instead of hearing an answer," Wolterstorff writes, "we catch sight of God himself scraped and torn." He attests: "Through the prism of my tears I have seen a suffering God."[2] God is seen, God is known, in suffering.

The aim of this paper is to explore the idea of suffering as a kind of religious experience. It is argued by David Hume, William Rowe, and Paul Draper, among others, that pain and suffering constitute evidence against the existence of God.[3] But perhaps at least some such instances of pain and suffering are, rather, avenues to knowledge of God. Many individuals, Wolterstorff and Job among them, report that the times during which they have suffered the most deeply are the occasions of the most vivid of whatever glimpses they have been given into the character of God. The experiences are marked, that is, by intimacy with the divine. Is not precisely this the mark of (at least one important type of) religious experience? And is not suffering as a means to intimacy with God exactly what one

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would expect of a God who, on Christian scripture and tradition, took on human form and suffered along with and for the world?[4]

Understanding some instances of human suffering as means to intimacy with the divine makes available a line of partial theodicy distinct from the traditional soul-making, punishment, and free will theodicies. I call it the *divine intimacy theodicy*. The theodicy is suggested to an extent in the work of such contemporary philosophers as Marilyn Adams, Nicholas Wolterstorff, and Eleonore Stump, as well as in the writings of many Christian mystics of the medieval and later periods, including, for instance, Therese of Lisieux (1873–1897).[5] Why would the divine agent permit instances of evil? Perhaps a reply applicable to some instances of personal suffering is this: in order to provide occasions in which we can perceive God, understand him to some degree, know him, even meet him directly. In this essay I explore the plausibility of this line of thought.[6]

THE NATURE OF RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE

Religious experience is variously characterized. Rudolf Otto (1869–1937) describes it as experience in which the soul is "held speechless, trembles inwardly to the farthest fiber of its being," as it faces something so forceful and overwhelming that one feels oneself to be "dust and ashes as against majesty." The experience is one of "fear and trembling" but also of "wonderfulness and rapture."[7] The Christian mystic Teresa of Avila (1515–1582) reports an experience in which the mystic is

> conscious of having been most delectably wounded…. [The soul] complains to its Spouse with words of love, and even cries aloud, being unable to help itself, for it realizes that he is present but will not manifest himself in such a way as to allow it to enjoy him, and this is a great grief, though a sweet and delectable one…. So powerful is the effect of this upon the soul that it becomes consumed with desire, yet cannot think what to ask, so clearly conscious is it of the presence of God.[8]

John of the Cross (1542–1591) describes experience in which the understanding of the soul "is now moved and informed by … the supernatural light of God, and has been changed into the divine, for its understanding and that of God are now both one."[9]

One way of understanding religious experience is on analogy with sensory experience of the physical world. One might say that religious experience is experience of the divine by way of some perceptual faculties, perhaps including a special spiritual faculty or a *sensus divinitatus*. So as not to beg any questions concerning the veridicality of the experience, religious experience might be defined more cautiously as experience that the agent *takes to be* of the divine: experience perceived by the perceiver as acquaintance or intimacy with God. William Alston, for instance, understands religious experience as "(putative) direct awareness of God."[10]

I propose to understand the category of religious experience rather broadly. I consider the term "religious experience" to apply appropriately to at least the following three types of experience. First, a religious experience may be an experience in which it seems to one that one perceives God. Examples include a vision of divinity, a sense of God's presence during prayer or worship, and a feeling of God's nearness and comfort. Such experiences are regularly had by some theists. But an atheist may have them as well, as in Paul's experience on the road to Damascus.

Second, the category of religious experience includes experiences *like* those of God — experiences of the same sort as God's own experiences. In the Christian tradition, we could describe religious experience of the second sort as experience like that of one of the three persons comprising God. Or perhaps, so as not to beg any questions, we should describe the second type of religious experience as experience like what God would experience were God to exist with a nature as depicted by Christian scripture and tradition.

Third, an experience counts as a religious experience if it brings to consciousness the issue of

God's nature and existence and makes vivid one's own attitude regarding this issue. Religious experiences of the third sort may include, for example, experience showing us ugly, horrifying or frightening aspects of the world; experience of our own capacity for evil; and experience of our frailty. Such experiences tend to bring to mind questions concerning the existence of God, as well as questions concerning the goodness, power, and knowledge of God. Religious experiences of the third type also include experiences carrying a sense of awe or wonder, such as witnessing the birth of a child or feeling moved by the beauty of a natural scene: the vista from a mountaintop or a seashore, for example.

Each of these types of experience has a legitimate claim to being religious in character. Consider an atheist who was raised in a religious family. She might sensibly describe her observations of pervasive poverty and disease during a visit to India as a *religious experience:* the experience raised vividly for her the problem of evil and occasioned her realization that she had become an atheist. A theist's sense of the majestic presence of God during worship is religious experience of a different (the first) sort: it is experience in which one is putatively aware of God. Further, insofar as it makes sense to describe experience like an eagle's (say, soaring above the rooftops) as *avian experience*, and insofar as it makes sense to describe experiences of running, jumping, and playing with toys *childhood experience*, so too there seems room for counting experiences similar to those of the divine being—if there is any—*religious experience*.

WHY COUNT SUFFERING AS RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE?

Is it plausible to suppose that some instances of suffering qualify as religious experiences as characterized above? Testimonial evidence supports the claim that instances of suffering are sometimes instances of religious experience of the first type: experience in which it seems to the perceiver that he or she is aware of the presence of God. Consider, as one example, the divine vision recounted by Julian of Norwich in the midst of suffering a severe illness for which she had received last rites: "At once I saw the red blood trickling down under the garland, hot, fresh, and plentiful, just as it did at the time of his passion when the crown of thorns was pressed on to the blessed head of God-and-Man…. And I had a strong, deep, conviction that it was he himself,"[11] She reports of the divine being: "I saw that he is to us everything which is good and comforting for our help. He is our clothing, who wraps and enfolds us for love, embraces us and shelters us, surrounds us for his love."[12] Many individuals in sorrow and pain have reported a vision of the divine or a feeling of God's nearness and comfort in their distress.

It is likewise reasonable to consider some occasions of suffering as religious experiences of the third type: experiences that vividly raise fundamental religious questions and illuminate one's commitments regarding them. One's becoming the victim of a crime, for instance, or suffering a debilitating physical injury, commonly brings to one's mind the question of God's existence and nature. The experience of hardship is often a sort of testing experience in which one "shows one's true colors," demonstrating one's deepest commitments. Suffering is a religious experience of the third sort in driving us to seek God or in causing doubt, reinforcing unbelief, or in generating questions concerning God's nature and existence.

I would like to focus more attention on the notion that some instances of suffering qualify as religious experience of the second type: experiences *like* those of God.

Suppose that, as on traditional Christian doctrine, God created persons in order for them to love and to be intimate with him and to glorify him forever. Suppose that persons were once in a state of intimacy with God, but that we rebelled by choice, with the consequence that we suffer physical and emotional pain, as well as the spiritual pain of being out of harmony with the Creator. Suppose that God enacted a plan for reestablishing our harmony with him involving his taking on human form and suffering rejection, torture, and execution.

From the perspective of one who adopts this account, some human suffering may be viewed, in

fact, as a kind of privilege, in that it allows us to share in some of the experiences of God and thus gives us a window into understanding his nature. Some instances of suffering are avenues for intimacy, oneness, with God. One cannot love what one does not know, and one means of knowing someone is to have experience like hers. Naturally we feel affinity toward and grow to understand and to cherish other persons with experiences similar to our own. These include educational, career, and family experiences, but also experiences of illness and adversity. A person whose experiences are quite different from one's own is difficult for one to come deeply to understand and fully to appreciate. Shared experiences facilitate dialogue in providing something in common about which to converse, and they make possible understanding that is beyond words, communicated perhaps with understanding looks or gestures. The parent of an ill newborn knows something about the other parents in the emergency room without their exchanging any words. Lovers become intimate through sharing experiences. Victims of a similar sort of oppression or injustice understand each other in a way that outsiders to their experience cannot.

For the Christian, then, instances of suffering can be occasions for identification with the person of Jesus Christ. Intimacy with Christ gained through suffering provides deeper appreciation of his passion.[13] I understand the notion of *identification with Christ* in a sympathetic rather than a mystical sense: the claim is not that the sufferer bears Christ's *actual* sufferings, as, first, it is unclear what the point of that bearing would be and, second, the mystical view would seem to require quite peculiar views concerning pain. Rather, I mean to suggest that the sufferer may sympathetically identify with Christ in sharing similar experience, as any other two persons identify with each other in the loose sense that they connect with, appreciate, or understand each other better when they share experiences of the same type or similar types.

Several objections immediately arise. The first is that this aspect of the theodicy is so thoroughgoingly Christian. Since I accept the truth of orthodox Christian doctrine, this objection is from my perspective otiose. But to widen the appeal of the theodicy, we can set aside reference to the person of Christ and understand suffering as experience like that of God, like that of the divine being, if we join Wolterstorff and others in affirming, against tradition, that God is not impassible but is, rather, a God who suffers. Suppose, for instance, that God grieves over human sin. Then in feeling deep sorrow over the neglect and abuse of children, and in having regret and disapproval over the poverty and arrogance in our world, a person may have experience *like* God's and so may have a glimpse into the divine nature. An individual's own sorrow and suffering may, then, be a means to understanding and having intimacy with the divine being.

DIVINE PASSIBILITY

On the traditional conception of the divine nature, God is not affected by anything and so cannot suffer.[14] The doctrine of impassibility is defended primarily by appeal to philosophical considerations, including reflection on the natures of perfection, immutability, and transcendence. But the doctrine of divine impassibility has been recently criticized by a number of philosophers, including Alvin Plantinga, Charles Hartshore, Charles Taliaferro, Kelly James Clark, Nicholas Wolterstorff, and Richard Swinburne. Like Wolterstorff's avowal of a suffering God, Plantinga, for instance, affirms the existence of a God who "enters into and shares our suffering." Plantinga writes: "Some theologians claim that God cannot suffer. I believe they are wrong. God's capacity for suffering, I believe, is proportional to his greatness; it exceeds our capacity for suffering in the same measure as his capacity for knowledge exceeds ours."[15]

Of the considerations in favor of rejecting divine impassibility, the most salient from my perspective are the scriptural evidence and the natures of goodness and love. Many biblical passages depict God as experiencing emotions that entail suffering. Consider the following: "The LORD was grieved that he had made man on the earth, and his heart

was filled with pain" (Gen. 6:6). "I have seen these people, the LORD said to Moses, and they are a stiff-necked people. Now leave me alone so that my anger may burn against them and that I may destroy them" (Exod. 32:9–10). The writer of Psalm 78 describes how the Israelites "grieved [God] … they vexed the Holy One of Israel" (41–42) and speaks of God's "wrath, indignation and hostility" (49). Consider, as well: "Praise be to the Lord, to God our Savior, who daily bears our burdens" (Ps. 68:19).

Impassibilists dismiss such passages as mere anthropomorphism. Commenting on Genesis 6:6, for example, John Calvin writes:

> Since we cannot comprehend [God] as he is, it is necessary that, for our sake, he should, in a certain sense, transform himself… . Certainly God is not sorrowful or sad; but remains forever like himself in his celestial and happy repose; yet because it could not otherwise be known how great is God's hatred and detestation of sin, therefore the spirit accommodates himself to our capacity… . God was so offended by the atrocious wickedness of men, [he speaks] as if they had wounded his heart with mortal grief.[16]

According to Calvin, God permits biblical writers to use figures of speech about himself in accommodation to humanity's limited capacities of understanding. Given interpretive differences, the impassibility issue cannot be settled, of course, simply by citing biblical material. Nonetheless, a passibilist conception of God, it must be admitted, fits most naturally with the scriptural account of God's activities and involvement with human beings. The impassibilist must explain away or reinterpret numerous passages that, on their face, suggest that God is affected by and suffers over his creation.

On the traditional conception of the divine agent, God is not only omnipotent and omniscient, but also wholly good and perfectly loving. A number of philosophers, including Wolterstorff and Taliaferro, have registered their rejection of the Greek-influenced medieval conception of divine love as non-suffering benevolence. The argument is that apathy, unperturbed emotional indifference to the plight of humanity, is incompatible with God's love of humanity.

Here is why the incompatibility claim seems right. Suppose that we understand love, rather uncontroversially, as consisting in or at least essentially involving concern for the well-being or flourishing of a beloved object. This understanding of love applies equally to love of a cause or of an ideal or of a person, but I am concerned particularly with love of persons. In his recent work on love, Harry Frankfurt adds that the lover's concern for the beloved is disinterested, in the sense that the good of the beloved is desired by the lover for its own sake rather than for the sake of promoting any other interests.[17] Frankfurt emphasizes that lovers are not merely concerned for the interests of their beloveds; further, they *identify* the interests of the beloveds as their own.[18] And he argues that if the lover "comes to believe that his beloved is not flourishing, then it is unavoidable that this causes him harm."[19] Lack of flourishing in the beloved, by the nature of love, causes harm in the lover.

Of course, it could be claimed that this account applies only to instances of human love and not to divine love. But the move appears *ad hoc*. If love of someone consists in or essentially involves concern for her well-being, then it involves valuing, or having concerned approval for, her flourishing and disvaluing, or having concerned disapproval for, her harm. To say that I love my daughter, yet that I experience no sorrow, grief, or passion of any kind at her pain or disgrace, stretches the concept of love beyond comprehensibility. Furthermore, since one can love something only insofar as one is acquainted with it, it would seem that God cannot love us fully without knowing us fully. But our being fully known requires acquaintance on the part of the knower with our suffering and with the evil in our world.[20] Thus, reflection on the nature of love supports the conception of a God who suffers.

Further support for the passibility of God comes from the consideration of the nature of goodness. A morally good being grieves over evil. In a recent book offering an extended defense of

the traditional doctrine of divine impassibility,[21] Richard Creel argues in part that it serves no *purpose* to attribute suffering to God, as God may act out of love and justice without being sorrowful. But to the contrary, we question the goodness of an agent who acts correctly towards victims of crime or disease, yet wholly without sorrow or empathy for the persons served. Passibilism, Creel argues, makes God worthy of our pity rather than our worship. But a great moral character, one worthy of worship, shows itself great in part by its sorrow, what it sorrows over and to what degree. Noble sorrow at witnessing a tragic occurrence is a good. Hence it would seem that God's goodness and love include sorrow, as well as joy, over the world. This sorrow is arguably not a defect, but a strength or an asset, a part of being supremely good.

Taliaferro understands divine sorrow as "concerned disapproval." "God disapproves of our cruelty and malice," he writes, "God cares about our failures, and this concerned disapproval may rightly be counted as an instance of sorrow."[22] Consider, for instance, Miriam's rape. Taliaferro writes: "Part of what it means to be sorrowful here is that you do disapprove of it, the harming of someone who matters to you, and you disapprove of this profoundly. Any tenable notion of the goodness of the God of Christian theism must include the supposition that God exercises profound, concerned disapproval of creaturely ills."[23] It does seem reasonable to suppose that the God who is love, the God who is perfectly good, is deeply concerned for persons and suffers profound sorrow over their sins and afflictions. It is facile to presume oneself too sophisticated to go in for such supposed "sentimentalism." Proponents of the divine impassibility doctrine must defend it further against substantive religious and moral reasons for concluding that God suffers.

OBJECTIONS: PATHOLOGY, CRUELTY, AND INEFFICACY

In this section, I consider four central objections to a divine intimacy theodicy. The first, which I will address only briefly, comes from the direction of one unconvinced of the passibility of God. I have suggested that there is reason to think that God does suffer, provided by scripture and by reflection on the natures of goodness and love. But should the considerations in favor of the attribute of impassibility prove in the end more powerful, the divine intimacy theodicy is not thereby defeated. If suffering cannot be religious experience in the sense of being experience like that of God himself, it can qualify still as religious experience of the first and third sorts, and thus it can be justified as a means to intimacy with the divine. Furthermore, should traditional impassibilism survive recent attacks. Christian theism can yet make sense of suffering as experience shared with the person of Jesus Christ and so can count some occasions of suffering as avenues to intimacy with God through sympathetic identification with Christ.

A second and potentially more damaging objection is this: To view suffering as religious experience is evidence of a personality disturbance or psychological disorder. That is, it seems to indicate not right thinking but pathology that a person would glory in suffering or see spiritual dimensions to pain. The objection gains force from considering the physical conditions of the lives of some Christian mystics of the medieval and later periods who viewed suffering in such a manner. For instance, the Cistercian nun Beatrice of Nazareth (1200–1268), the author of *The Seven Manners of Love*, is reported to have deprived herself of food, worn uncomfortable garments, scourged herself, and slept on thorns.[24] Other religious figures may strike us as melodramatic and distressingly passive in their welcoming attitudes toward suffering. Consider the remarks of Therese of Lisieux concerning the onset of symptoms of the tuberculosis that took her life at the age of twenty-four:

> Oh! how sweet this memory really is! After remaining at the Tomb until midnight, I returned to our cell, but I had scarcely laid my head upon the pillow when I felt something like a bubbling stream mounting to my lips. I didn't know what

> it was, but I thought that perhaps I was going to die and my soul was flooded with joy. However, as our lamp was extinguished, I told myself I would have to wait until the morning to be certain of my good fortune, for it seemed to me that it was blood I had coughed up. The morning was not long in coming; upon awakening, I thought immediately of the joyful thing that I had to learn, and so I went over to the window. I was able to see that I was not mistaken. Ah! my soul was filled with a great consolation; I was interiorly persuaded that Jesus, on the anniversary of his own death, wanted to have me hear his first call. It was like a sweet and distant murmur that announced the Bridegroom's arrival.[25]

Therese welcomes the blood in her cough as the answer to her prayer that God consume her with his love, that God carry her to him quickly, and that she be allowed to share in the suffering of Christ. She declares in her "Act of Oblation to Merciful Love":

> I thank you, O my God! for all the graces you have granted me, especially the grace of making me pass through the crucible of suffering. It is with joy I shall contemplate you on the last day carrying the scepter of your cross. Since you deigned to give me a share in this very precious cross, I hope in heaven to resemble you and to see shining in my glorified body the sacred stigmata of your passion.[26]

In light of such passages, it may strike one as at best wishful thinking and, worse, indicative of a psychiatric condition, to believe that God is with one or is providing one intimacy with himself through suffering.

But of course those who report experience of supernatural phenomena are notoriously subject to the charge of being delusional. And certainly adopting the proposed partial theodicy need not lead one to self-mutilation or to other eccentric or damaging behaviors. The view under consideration is perfectly consistent with a mandate to *alleviate* suffering so far as possible and with a mandate not to self-impose pain. Furthermore, which views indicate spiritual insight and which indicate a condition in need of medical or psychological treatment is a matter of opinion. As it stands, the objection from pathology amounts to no more than the claim that it seems to the objector that the proposed view is crazy or, in other words, false. Without any further positive reasons to doubt the sanity of the proponent of the divine intimacy theodicy, other than that she believes the view, the objection is dismissible.

The objector might respond by pointing to such factors as social isolation, inadequate sleep, poor nutrition, and lack of medical care in the lives of some religious mystics. These circumstances, it may be argued, indicate that the view of suffering as religious experience is pathological and not reasonable. Yet surely these considerations are inconclusive. Recall C. D. Broad's remark that a person "might need to be slightly 'cracked' in order to have some peep-holes into the super-sensible world."[27] Difficult living conditions might in fact facilitate spiritual insight. Furthermore, a charge of insanity against every adherent to a divine intimacy theodicy is grandiose.

A third objection is an objection from cruelty. Why would a loving God create such a cruel way of our getting to know him? Why would suffering as a *means* to knowing God be preferable to direct divine self-revelation? Since permitting suffering is a cruel way of fostering intimacy, the objection goes, the perfect being would not be justified in this permission and so the account of suffering as religious experience fails as a partial theodicy.

It is surely troubling to conceive of God as declaring to created beings in a tone of sinister delight, "Suffer, and then I will let you know me," as if enduring a crucible of suffering were a passkey. But this image inaccurately reflects the divine intimacy theodicy. A perfect being does not, of course, delight over suffering, but rather causes or allows it when it is necessary to bringing about a greater good or preventing a worse evil.

And the suggestion I am exploring is that, perhaps, some occasions of suffering are necessary for certain individuals' coming to love of and intimacy with God. The objector may counter that some persons experience God in moments of great joy and beauty. Yet this may be true while it is also true that other persons' paths to God are paths through suffering. And it may be that the good thereby achieved could not be achieved in any other way: namely, the profound good of appreciation for and intimacy with a loving and suffering God.

The objector might be troubled with the question of why God would not simply show himself at all times, to everyone. Here the right line of response may be that for God to directly, constantly, and obviously manifest his presence would be coercive.[28] Perhaps God's remaining somewhat hidden protects our freedom, preserving our independence of thought and action. The rationale behind divine hiddenness may be something like this: I (the divine agent) will not intervene in the natural course of events to prevent your difficulties and your suffering, in part because perhaps then you will appreciate the ways in which I have loved and provided for you all along; perhaps you will freely come to recognize that acting wholly by your own lights is unsuccessful and that you need my help; perhaps you will be rid of some of your arrogance and will recognize your limitations. Suffering, that is, may be for some persons the most effective non-coercive means to achieving the end of love of and intimacy with God. Additionally, it may be that it is impossible fully to know God without personally experiencing suffering, because God himself suffers. If God is passible in emotion, then there is something that a person could not know about God if she did not suffer, one aspect of God's being that would remain entirely mysterious.

The fourth and final objection I will consider is this: a common reaction to suffering is not a sense of intimacy with the divine but rather confusion and rejection of God's existence. Suffering is easily interpreted as evidence that God does not exist or does not care about the sufferer. Hence, many cases of suffering, particularly those of non-theists, cannot plausibly be construed as religious experience.

In response, first, the divine intimacy theodicy is not designed to apply to all cases of suffering. Second, from the fact that some persons reject the existence of God on the basis of suffering, it does not follow that some occasions of suffering do not provide an *opportunity* for intimacy with God. We can choose, it seems, the manner in which we respond to suffering, including which types of attitudes we adopt in the midst of it. The thesis at issue is not that meaning *is* always found in suffering by everyone who suffers, but rather that a certain kind of meaning *can* be found in suffering, through divine intimacy.

Suffering might be religious experience without the sufferer recognizing it as such. This claim seems unproblematic, since a person can have an experience of a certain type without ever recognizing it as an experience of that type. Consider the following examples. First, suppose that Keith thinks that he is devising a novel line of reasoning. But in fact he is remembering a conversation in which someone else recounted a certain line of thought. Keith is having a memory experience, but he does not, and need not ever, recognize it as such. Second, suppose that Sandra begins thinking about chance and providence. Although she need not ever recognize the experience as such, she may be having a telepathic experience of the thoughts of Peter, who is across the room. Third, imagine a husband who begins to have indigestion, headaches, and back pain during the pregnancy of his wife. He consults his doctor, who finds his symptoms mysterious. He is, perhaps, having an empathic experience without realizing it. The concept of a religious experience, unrecognized as such, appears cogent.

CONCLUSION

A full justificatory account of suffering may be unattainable for us. I have simply sketched here and begun to explore the suggestion that one justifying reason for certain instances of suffering is that those occasions constitute religious experiences. Some cases of suffering may be viewed as kinds of

experience that can bring a person closer to God, such that the good either in or resulting from them is intimacy with the divine agent.

The account of suffering as religious experience may have use not only as a partial theodicy, but also as a method for the theist for dealing with the existential problem of evil. That is, one way of enduring unchangeable occasions of pain and suffering may be to adopt an attitude of acceptance and, oddly, enjoyment in identifying with God. Consider how this might work, in particular, for a Christian theist. One in the midst of dealing with a deep betrayal of loyalty, for instance, might call to mind the thought, "As I have been rejected, Christ was rejected even by his close friend, Peter," and take comfort in the sympathetic identification. Likewise, although perhaps Christ never experienced precisely the particular physical pain from which one suffers, the sufferer is in part able to appreciate something about the person of Christ that perhaps not all others fully can: the sacrifice of his passion.[29]

NOTES

1. Job 42:5.
2. Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Lament for a Son* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1987), pp. 80–81.
3. David Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, ed. Richard Popkin (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1980); William Rowe, "The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 16 (1979): 335–41; Paul Draper, "Pain and Pleasure: An Evidential Problem for Theists," *Noûs* 23 (1989).
4. According to orthodox Christian tradition, the person of Jesus Christ suffered for us, yet God the Father is not capable of suffering.
5. Marilyn McCord Adams, "Redemptive Suffering: A Christian Solution to the Problem of Evil," *in Rationality, Religious Belief, and Moral Commitment*, ed. Robert Audi and William J. Wainwright (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1986), and "Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, supplementary vol. 63 (1989), pp. 297–310; Wolterstorff, *Lament for a Son*, and "Suffering Love," in *Philosophy and the Christian Faith*, ed. Thomas V. Morris (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988); Eleonore Stump, *Faith and the Problem of Evil: The Stob Lectures, 1998–99* (Grand Rapids: The Stob Lectures Endowment, 1999), and "The Mirror of Evil," in *God and the Philosophers*, ed. Thomas V. Morris (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 235–47, arid "The Problem of Evil," *Faith and Philosophy* 2:4 (1985): 392–418.
6. The divine intimacy theodicy most likely has some measure of plausibility only when applied to human suffering and not to the suffering of non-human animals. Nonetheless, the matter is open in the absence of conclusive information concerning the capacities of members of other species.
7. Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy* (London: Oxford University Press, 1936), pp. 17–26, 31–33.
8. *The Interior Castle*, trans. and ed. E. Allison Peers (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday Image, 1961), pp. 135–36.
9. *The Living Flame of Love*, trans. and ed. E. Allison Peers (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday Image, 1962), p. 78.
10. William Alston, *Perceiving God: The Epistemology of Religious Experience* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1991), p. 35.
11. Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love* (New York: Penguin Books, 1984), p. 66.
12. Julian of Norwich, Long Text 5, quoted in *Enduring Grace*: *Living Portraits of Seven Women Mystics* (New York: HarperCollins, 1993), p. 88.
13. Marilyn McCord Adams similarly suggests that instances of suffering, even horrendous ones, might be made *meaningful* by being integrated into the sufferer's relationship with God through identification with Christ, understood either as sympathetic identification (in which each person suffers her own pain, enabling her to understand something of Christ's suffering) or as mystical

identification (in which the human sufferer literally experiences a share of Christ's pain). Alternately, Adams suggests, meaningfulness may derive from suffering serving as a vision into the inner life of God, either because God is not impassible, or because the sheer intensity of the experience gives one a glimpse of what it is like to be beyond joy and sorrow. She proposes, as well, that sufferings might be made meaningful through defeat by divine gratitude which, when expressed by God in the afterlife, gives one full and unending joy. "Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, supplementary vol. 63 (1989), pp. 297–310; reprinted in *The Problem of Evil*, ed. Marilyn McCord Adams and Robert Merrihew Adams (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), pp. 209–21.

14. The Westminster Confession of Faith (II.1) states: "There is but one … true God, who is infinite in being and perfection, a most pure spirit, invisible, without body, parts, or passions…."
15. "Self-Profile," in *Alvin Plantinga*, ed. James E. Tomberlin and Peter van Inwagen (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1985), p. 36.
16. *Calvin's Commentaries*, vol. 1, trans, and ed. John Owen (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979), p. 249.
17. Harry Frankfurt, "On Caring," in *Necessity, Volition, and Love* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 165.
18. Frankfurt, "On Caring," p. 168.
19. Frankfurt, "On Caring," p. 170.
20. Cf. Nicholas Wolterstorff, "Suffering Love," in *Philosophy and the Christian Faith*, ed. Thomas V. Morris (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), p. 223.
21. Richard E. Creel, *Divine Impassibility* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).
22. Charles Taliaferro, "The Passibility of God," *Religious Studies*, vol. 25: 220.
23. Taliaferro, "Passibility," p. 220.
24. *Women Mystics in Medieval Europe*, ed. Emilie Zum Brunn and Georgette Epiney-Burgard, trans. Sheila Hughes (New York: Paragon House, 1989), p. 72.
25. *Story of a Soul: The Autobiography of St. Therese of Lisieux*, trans. John Clarke O.C.D. (Washington, D.C.: ICS Publications, 1996), pp. 210–11.
26. *Story of a Soul*, p. 277.
27. C. D. Broad, "Arguments for the Existence of God. II," *Journal of Theological Studies* 40 (1939): 164.
28. Michael J. Murray, "Coercion and the Hiddenness of God," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 30 (1993): 27–38.
29. I am grateful to Michael Murray and Kelly James Clark for comments on an earlier version of this essay.

PART V



Miracles

WHAT ARE MIRACLES, and are they possible? Should miracles necessarily be defined as violations of the laws of nature? The idea that miracles are natural law violations has been disputed on the basis of the contention that in the Bible, which is the witness to the most significant alleged miracles in the Judeo-Christian tradition, there is no concept of nature as a closed system of law. For the biblical writers, miracles signify simply an "extraordinary coincidence of a beneficial nature."[1] This view is proposed by R. F. Holland in his article "The Miraculous," in which the following story is illustrative:

> A child riding his toy motor-car strays on to an unguarded railway crossing near his house and a wheel of his car gets stuck down the side of one of the rails. An express train is due to pass with the signals in its favour and a curve in the track makes it impossible for the driver to stop his train in time to avoid any obstruction he might encounter on the crossing. The mother coming out of the house to look for her child sees him on the crossing and hears the train approaching. She runs forward shouting and waving. The little boy remains seated in his car looking downward engrossed in the task of pedaling it free. The brakes of the train are applied and it comes to rest a few feet from the child. The mother thanks God for the miracle; which she never ceases to think of as such, although, as she in due course learns, there was nothing supernatural about the manner in which the brakes of the train came to be applied. The driver had fainted, for a reason that had nothing to do with the presence of the child on the line, and the brakes were applied automatically as his hand ceased to exert pressure on the control lever. He fainted on this particular afternoon because his blood pressure had risen after an exceptionally heavy lunch during which he had quarreled with a colleague, and the change in blood pressure caused a clot of blood to be dislodged and circulate. He fainted at the time when he did on the afternoon in question because this was the time at which the coagulation in his blood stream reached the brain.[2]

Is this a miracle, or not? It is if we define miracles in Fuller's biblical sense. It is not if we define them as violations of laws of nature. We can certainly understand the woman's feeling on the matter, and perhaps in some mysterious way God had "allowed" nature to run its course so that the little boy would be saved. Perhaps we need not be overly exclusionary but say that if there is a God, each sense is valid: the *weaker* sense of an extraordinary coincidence and the *stronger* sense of a violation of the laws of nature. Nonetheless, what is philosophically interesting as well as controversial with regard to miracles is the stronger sense, that of a violation of the laws of nature by a divine force. It is this sense of miracles that we consider in this part of our work.

The most celebrated article ever written on miracles is by David Hume. In section 10 of *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, he set forth an argument against belief in miracles that provoked a lively response in his day and has continued to be the subject of vigorous dispute up to the present day. Let us analyze it briefly.

Hume begins his attack on miracles by appealing to the biases of his Scottish Presbyterian readers. He tells of a marvelous proof that Dr. Tillotson has devised against the Roman Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation, the doctrine that the body and blood of Christ are present in Holy Communion. Tillotson argues that because the evidence of the senses is of the highest rank and because it is evident that it must diminish in passing through the original witnesses to their disciples, the doctrine of transubstantiation is always contrary to the rules of reasoning and opposed to our sense experience. Thus:

1. Our evidence for the truth of transubstantiation is weaker than the sensory evidence we have against it. (Even for the apostles this was the case, and their testimony must diminish in authority in passing from them to their disciples.)
2. We are never warranted in believing a proposition on the basis of weaker evidence when stronger evidence supports the denial of that proposition.
3. Therefore, we are not warranted in believing in transubstantiation. (Even if the doctrine of transubstantiation were clearly revealed in the Scriptures, it would be against the rule of reason to give our assent to it.)

No doubt Hume's Protestant readers were delighted with such a sound refutation of the doctrine of transubstantiation. But the mischievous Hume now turns the knife on his readers. A wise person always proportions one's belief to the evidence, he goes on. One has an enormous amount of evidence for the laws of nature, so that any testimony to the contrary is to be seriously doubted. Although miracles, as violations of the laws of nature, are not logically impossible, we are never justified in believing in one. The skeleton of the argument contained in the reading goes something like this:

1. One ought to proportion one's belief to the evidence.
2. Experience is generally better evidence than testimony (if for no other reason than that valid testimony is based on another's sense experience).

3. Therefore, when there is a conflict between experience and testimony, one ought to believe according to experience.
4. Miracles are contrary to experience. That is, experience testifies strongly to the fact that miracles never occur, laws of nature are never violated.
5. Therefore, we are never justified in believing in miracles, but we are justified in believing in the naturalness of all events.

Because we have enormous evidence in favor of the uniformity of nature, every miracle report must be weighed against that preponderance and be found wanting. But what if we believe that we personally have beheld a miracle? Aren't we in that case justified in believing that a miracle has occurred? No, for given the principle of induction (that every time we pursue an event *far enough,* we discover it to have a natural cause), we are still not justified in believing the event to be a miracle. Rather we ought to look further (*far enough*) until we discover the natural cause. The only exception to this rule (or "proof" against miracles) would be if it would be even more miraculous for a miracle not to have occurred: "That no testimony is sufficient to establish a miracle, unless the testimony be of such a kind, that its falsehood would be more marvelous, than the fact, which it endeavors to establish; and even in that case there is a mutual destruction of argument, and the superior only gives us an assurance suitable to that degree of force, which remains, after deducting the inferior." The best we can hope for is an agnostic standoff in the matter.

But the criteria that would have to be fulfilled would be that (1) a sufficient number of witnesses of (2) good sense and education and (3) integrity and reputation would have to testify to (4) a public performance of the incident. Hume offers several putative examples of such cases and argues that the criteria are really not fulfilled in any of them.

In our second reading, Peter van Inwagen attacks Hume's argument. Hume's argument, as we have seen, rests in part on the idea that miracles are the sorts of things that run significantly contrary to our experience. But, van Inwagen argues, it's hard to see what this idea really amounts to. Thus, he writes:

> It is very hard indeed to find a sense in which experience testifies in any direct or immediate sense that events of some sort never happen—or in which stories of events of some sort are contrary to experience. If direct, immediate experience testifies to anything (truly or falsely) its testimony seems to be essentially "positive": it testifies that events of certain sorts *do* happen.

Failing to find any other sense of "contrary to experience" that could drive Hume's argument, van Inwagen concludes that Hume's argument is a failure.

Our third reading is "Miracles and Testimony" by the late J. L. Mackie of Oxford University, a man who loved Hume and exemplified his thought. In this revised Humean account of miracles, Mackie argues that the evidence for miracles will never in practice be very great. The argument is epistemological, not ontological. That is, whereas miracles may be logically possible (and may indeed

have occurred), we are never justified in believing in one. The concept of a miracle is a coherent one; but, Mackie argues, the *double* burden of showing both that the event took place *and* that it violated the laws of nature will be extremely hard to lift, for "whatever tends to show that it would have been a violation of natural law tends for that very reason to make it most unlikely that it actually happened." Correspondingly, the deniers of miracles have two strategies of defense. They may argue that the event took place but wasn't a violation of a law of nature (the event simply followed an unknown law of nature); or they can admit that if the event had happened, it would indeed have been a violation of a law of nature, but for that reason, "there is a very strong presumption against its having happened, which it is most unlikely that any testimony will be able to outweigh."

In our fourth reading, however, Richard Swinburne argues that, as a matter of fact, there is fairly strong evidence in support of the occurrence of at least one miracle—namely, the resurrection of Jesus. Swinburne notes several problems with Hume's argument, the most significant of which (on his view) is Hume's failure to attend to the way in which "background assumptions" help to determine what is and is not reasonable for us to believe. If it is unlikely, given your background assumptions, that there is a God or any other being who could work miracles, then it will be harder for you reasonably to believe that a miracle has occurred. But if, on the other hand, your background evidence makes it likely that there is a God who could work miracles, and if you have reason, furthermore, to think that this God would have good reason to work some particular miracle for which you have testimonial and other historical evidence, then it might well be very reasonable for you to believe that such a miracle has occurred. According to Swinburne, such is the case with the resurrection of Jesus.

Finally, in "Hyperspace and Christianity," Hud Hudson challenges the familiar objection that belief in miracles "conflicts with our modern worldview" by arguing that belief in hyperspace—a view that comports quite well with our modern scientific worldview—helps us to see how a wide variety of Biblical miracles could have occurred.

NOTES

1. R. H. Fuller *Interpreting the Miracle* (London, 1968), 8.
2. *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 2 (1965).

V.1

Against Miracles

DAVID HUME

A short biographical sketch of David Hume precedes selection II.C.2. The following selection argues that we are virtually never justified in believing that a miracle has occurred.

PART I

There is, in Dr. Tillotson's writings, an argument against the *real presence*, which is as concise, and elegant, and strong as any argument can possibly be supposed against a doctrine, so little worthy of a serious refutation. It is acknowledged on all hands, says that learned prelate, that the authority, either of the scripture or of tradition, is founded merely in the testimony of the apostles, who were eye-witnesses to those miracles of our Saviour, by which he proved his divine mission. Our evidence, then, for the truth of the *Christian* religion is less than the evidence for the truth of our senses; because, even in the first authors of our religion, it was no greater; and it is evident it must diminish in passing from them to their disciples; nor can any one rest such confidence in their testimony, as in the immediate object of his senses. But a weaker evidence can never destroy a stronger; and therefore, were the doctrine of the real presence ever so clearly revealed in scripture, it were directly contrary to the rules of just reasoning to give our assent to it. It contradicts sense, though both the scripture and tradition, on which it is supposed to be built, carry not such evidence with them as sense; when they are considered merely as external evidences, and are not brought home to every one's breast, by the immediate operation of the Holy Spirit.

Nothing is so convenient as a decisive argument of this kind, which must at least *silence* the most arrogant bigotry and superstition, and free us from their impertinent solicitations. I flatter myself, that I have discovered an argument of a like nature, which, if just, will, with the wise and learned, be an everlasting check to all kinds of superstitious delusion, and consequently, will be useful as long as the world endures. For so long, I presume, will the accounts of miracles and prodigies be found in all history, sacred and profane.

Though experience be our only guide in reasoning concerning matters of fact; it must be acknowledged, that this guide is not altogether infallible, but in some cases is apt to lead us into errors. One, who in our climate, should expect better weather in any week of June than in one of December, would reason justly, and conformably to experience; but it is certain, that he may happen, in the event, to find himself mistaken. However, we may observe, that, in such a case, he would have no cause to complain of experience; because it commonly informs us beforehand of the uncertainty, by that contrariety of events, which we may learn from a diligent observation. All effects follow not with like certainty from their supposed causes. Some events are found, in all countries and all ages, to have been constantly conjoined together: Others are found to have been more variable, and sometimes to

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disappoint our expectations; so that, in our reasonings concerning matter of fact, there are all imaginable degrees of assurance, from the highest certainty to the lowest species of moral evidence.

A wise man, therefore, proportions his belief to the evidence. In such conclusions as are founded on an infallible experience, he expects the event with the last degree of assurance, and regards his past experience as a full *proof* of the future existence of that event. In other cases, he proceeds with more caution: He weighs the opposite experiments: He considers which side is supported by the greater number of experiments: to that side he inclines, with doubt and hesitation; and when at last he fixes his judgement, the evidence exceeds not what we properly call *probability*. All probability, then, supposes an opposition of experiments and observations, where the one side is found to overbalance the other, and to produce a degree of evidence, proportioned to the superiority. A hundred instances or experiments on one side, and fifty on another, afford a doubtful expectation of any event; though a hundred uniform experiments, with only one that is contradictory, reasonably beget a pretty strong degree of assurance. In all cases, we must balance the opposite experiments, where they are opposite, and deduct the smaller number from the greater, in order to know the exact force of the superior evidence.

To apply these principles to a particular instance; we may observe, that there is no species of reasoning more common, more useful, and even necessary to human life, than that which is derived from the testimony of men, and the reports of eye-witnesses and spectators. This species of reasoning, perhaps, one may deny to be founded on the relation of cause and effect. I shall not dispute about a word. It will be sufficient to observe that our assurance in any argument of this kind is derived from no other principle than our observation of the veracity of human testimony, and of the usual conformity of facts to the reports of witnesses. It being a general maxim, that no objects have any discoverable connexion together, and that all the inferences, which we can draw from one to another, are founded merely on our experience of their constant and regular conjunction; it is evident, that we ought not to make an exception to this maxim in favour of human testimony, whose connexion with any event seems, in itself, as little necessary as any other. Were not the memory tenacious to a certain degree; had not men commonly an inclination to truth and a principle of probity; were they not sensible to shame, when detected in a falsehood: Were not these, I say, discovered by *experience* to be qualities, inherent in human nature, we should never repose the least confidence in human testimony. A man delirious, or noted for falsehood and villany, has no manner of authority with us.

And as the evidence, derived from witnesses and human testimony, is founded on past experience, so it varies with the experience, and is regarded either as a *proof* or a *probability,* according to the conjunction between any particular kind of report and any kind of object has been found to be constant or variable. There are a number of circumstances to be taken into consideration in all judgements of this kind; and the ultimate standard, by which we determine all disputes, that may arise concerning them, is always derived from experience and observation. Where this experience is not entirely uniform on any side, it is attended with an unavoidable contrariety in our judgements, and with the same opposition and mutual destruction of argument as in every other kind of evidence. We frequently hesitate concerning the reports of others. We balance the opposite circumstances, which cause any doubt or uncertainty; and when we discover a superiority on any side, we incline to it; but still with a diminution of assurance, in proportion to the force of its antagonist.

This contrariety of evidence, in the present case, may be derived from several different causes; from the opposition of contrary testimony; from the character or number of the witnesses; from the manner of their delivering their testimony; or from the union of all these circumstances. We entertain a suspicion concerning any matter of fact, when the witnesses contradict each other; when they are but few, or of a doubtful character; when they have an interest in what they affirm; when they deliver their testimony with hesitation, or on the contrary, with too violent asseverations. There are many other

particulars of the same kind, which may diminish or destroy the force of any argument, derived from human testimony.

Suppose, for instance, that the fact, which the testimony endeavors to establish, partakes of the extraordinary and the marvelous; in that case, the evidence, resulting from the testimony, admits of a diminution, greater or less, in proportion as the fact is more or less unusual. The reason why we place any credit in witnesses and historians, is not derived from any *connexion*, which we perceive *a priori*, between testimony and reality, but because we are accustomed to find a conformity between them. But when the fact attested is such a one as has seldom fallen under our observation, here is a contest of two opposite experiences; of which the one destroys the other, as far as its force goes, and the superior can only operate on the mind by the force, which remains. The very same principle of experience, which gives us a certain degree of assurance in the testimony of witnesses, gives us also, in this case, another degree of assurance against the fact, which they endeavour to establish; from which contradiction there necessarily arises a counterpoise, and mutual destruction of belief and authority.

I should not believe such a story were it told me by Cato, was a proverbial saying in Rome, even during the lifetime of that philosophical patriot. The incredibility of a fact, it was allowed, might invalidate so great an authority.

The Indian prince, who refused to believe the first relations concerning the effects of frost, reasoned justly; and it naturally required very strong testimony to engage his assent to facts, that arose from a state of nature, with which he was unacquainted, and which bore so little analogy to those events, of which we had had constant and uniform experience. Though they were not contrary to his experience, they were not conformable to it.

But in order to increase the probability against the testimony of witnesses, let us suppose, that the fact, which they affirm, instead of being only marvelous, is really miraculous; and suppose also, that the testimony considered apart and in itself, amounts to an entire proof; in that case, there is proof against proof, of which the strongest must prevail, but still with a diminution of its force, in proportion to that of its antagonist.

A miracle is a violation of the laws of nature; and as a firm and unalterable experience has established these laws, the proof against a miracle, from the very nature of the fact, is as entire as any argument from experience can possibly be imagined. Why is it more than probable, that all men must die; that lead cannot, of itself, remain suspended in the air; that fire consumes wood, and is extinguished by water; unless it be, that these events are found agreeable to the laws of nature, and there is required a violation of these laws, or in other words, a miracle to prevent them? Nothing is esteemed a miracle, if it ever happen in the common course of nature. It is no miracle that a man, seemingly in good health, should die on a sudden: because such a kind of death, though more unusual than any other, has yet been frequently observed to happen. But it is a miracle, that a dead man should come to life; because that has never been observed in any age or country. There must, therefore, be a uniform experience against every miraculous event, otherwise the event would not merit that appellation. And as a uniform experience amounts to a proof, there is here a direct and full *proof,* from the nature of the fact, against the existence of any miracle; nor can such a proof be destroyed, or the miracle rendered credible, but by an opposite proof, which is superior.[1]

The plain consequence is (and it is a general maxim worthy of our attention), "That no testimony is sufficient to establish a miracle, unless the testimony be of such a kind, that its falsehood would be more miraculous, than the fact, which it endeavours to establish; and even in that case there is a mutual destruction of arguments, and the superior only gives us an assurance suitable to that degree of force, which remains, after deducting the inferior." When anyone tells me, that he saw a dead man restored to life, I immediately consider with myself, whether it be more probable, that this person should either deceive or be deceived, or that the fact, which he relates, should really have happened. I weigh the

one miracle against the other; and according to the superiority, which I discover, I pronounce my decision, and always reject the greater miracle. If the falsehood of his testimony would be more miraculous, than the event which he relates; then, and not till then, can he pretend to command my belief or opinion.

PART II

In the foregoing reasoning we have supposed, that the testimony, upon which a miracle is founded, may possibly amount to an entire proof, and that the falsehood of that testimony would be a real prodigy: But it is easy to show, that we have been a great deal too liberal in our concession, and that there never was a miraculous event established on so full an evidence.

For *first*, there is not to be found, in all history, any miracle attested by a sufficient number of men, of such unquestioned good-sense, education, and learning, as to secure us against all delusion in themselves; of such undoubted integrity, as to place them beyond all suspicion of any design to deceive others; of such credit and reputation in the eyes of mankind, as to have a great deal to lose in case of their being detected in any falsehood; and at the same time, attesting facts performed in such a public manner and in so celebrated a part of the world, as to render the detection unavoidable. All which circumstances are requisite to give us a full assurance in the testimony of men.

Secondly. We may observe in human nature a principle which, if strictly examined, will be found to diminish extremely the assurance, which we might, from human testimony, have, in any kind of prodigy. The maxim, by which we commonly conduct ourselves in our reasonings, is, that the objects, of which we have no experience, resemble those, of which we have; that what we have found to be most usual is always most probable; and that where there is an opposition of arguments, we ought to give the preference to such as are founded on the greatest number of past observations. But though, in proceeding by this rule, we readily reject any fact which is unusual and incredible in an ordinary degree; yet in advancing farther, the mind observes not always the same rule; but when anything is affirmed utterly absurd and miraculous, it rather the more readily admits of such a fact, upon account of that very circumstance, which ought to destroy all its authority. The passion of *surprise* and *wonder*, arising from miracles, being an agreeable emotion, gives a sensible tendency towards the belief of those events, from which it is derived. And this goes so far, that even those who cannot enjoy this pleasure immediately, nor can believe those miraculous events, of which they are informed, yet love to partake of the satisfaction at second-hand or by rebound, and place a pride and delight in exciting the admiration of others.

With what greediness are the miraculous accounts of travellers received, their descriptions of sea and land monsters, their relations of wonderful adventures, strange men, and uncouth manners? But if the spirit of religion join itself to the love of wonder, there is an end of common sense; and human testimony, in these circumstances, loses all pretensions to authority. A religionist may be an enthusiast, and imagine he sees what has no reality: he may know his narrative to be false, and yet persevere in it, with the best intensions in the world, for the sake of promoting so holy a cause: or even where this delusion has not place, vanity, excited by so strong a temptation, operates on him more powerfully than on the rest of mankind in any other circumstances; and self-interest with equal force. His auditors may not have, and commonly have not, sufficient judgement to canvass his evidence: what judgement they have, they renounce by principle, in these sublime and mysterious subjects: or if they were ever so willing to employ it, passion and a heated imagination disturb the regularity of its operations. Their credulity increases his impudence: and his impudence overpowers their credulity.

Eloquence, when at its highest pitch, leaves little room for reason or reflection; but addressing itself entirely to the fancy or the affections, captivates the willing hearers, and subdues their

understanding. Happily, this pitch it seldom attains. But what a Tully or a Demosthenes could scarcely effect over a Roman or Athenian audience, every *Capuchin*, every itinerant or stationary teacher can perform over the generality of mankind, and in a higher degree, by touching such gross and vulgar passions.

The many instances of forged miracles, and prophecies, and supernatural events, which, in all ages, have either been detected by contrary evidence, or which detect themselves by their absurdity, prove sufficiently the strong propensity of mankind to the extraordinary and the marvellous, and ought reasonably to beget a suspicion against all relations of this kind. This is our natural way of thinking, even with regard to the most common and most credible events. For instance: There is no kind of report which rises so easily, and spreads so quickly, especially in country places and provincial towns, as those concerning marriages; insomuch that two young persons of equal condition never see each other twice, but the whole neighborhood immediately join them together. The pleasure of telling a piece of news so interesting, of propagating it, and of being the first reporters of it, spreads the intelligence. And this is so well known, that no man of sense gives attention to these reports, till he find them confirmed by some greater evidence. Do not the same passions, and others still stronger, incline the generality of mankind to believe and report, with the greatest vehemence and assurance, all religious miracles.

Thirdly. It forms a strong presumption against all supernatural and miraculous relations, that they are observed chiefly to abound among ignorant and barbarous nations; or if a civilized people has ever given admission to any of them, that people will be found to have received them from ignorant and barbarous ancestors, who transmitted them with that inviolable sanction and authority, which always attend received opinions. When we peruse the first histories of all nations, we are apt to imagine ourselves transported into some new world; where the whole frame of nature is disjointed, and every element performs its operations in a different manner, from what it does at present. Battles, revolutions, pestilence, famine and death, are never the effect of those natural causes, which we experience. Prodigies, omens, oracles, judgements, quite obscure the few natural events, that are intermingled with them. But as the former grow thinner every page, in proportion as we advance nearer the enlightened ages, we soon learn, that there is nothing mysterious or supernatural in the case, but that all proceeds from the usual propensity of mankind towards the marvellous, and that, though this inclination may at intervals receive a check from sense and learning, it can never be thoroughly extirpated from human nature.

It is strange, a judicious reader is apt to say, upon the perusal of these wonderful historians, *that such prodigious events never happen in our days*. But it is nothing strange, I hope, that men should lie in all ages. You must surely have seen instances enough of that frailty. You have yourself heard many such marvellous relations started, which, being treated with scorn by all the wise and judicious, have at last been abandoned even by the vulgar. Be assured, that those renowned lies, which have spread and flourished to such a monstrous height, arose from like beginnings; but being sown in a more proper soil, shot up at last into prodigies almost equal to those which they relate.…

I may add as a *fourth* reason, which diminishes the authority of prodigies, that there is no testimony for any, even those which have not been expressly detected, that is not opposed by an infinite number of witnesses; so that not only the miracle destroys the credit of testimony, but the testimony destroys itself. To make this the better understood, let us consider, that, in matters of religion, whatever is different is contrary; and that it is impossible the religions of ancient Rome, of Turkey, of Siam, and of China should, all of them, be established on any solid foundation. Every miracle, therefore, pretended to have been wrought in any of these religions (and all of them abound in miracles), as its direct scope is to establish the particular system to which it is attributed; so has it the same force, though more indirectly, to overthrow every other system. In destroying a rival system, it likewise destroys the credit of those miracles, on

which that system was established; so that all the prodigies of different religions are to be regarded as contrary facts, and the evidences of these prodigies, whether weak or strong, as opposite to each other. According to this method of reasoning, when we believe any miracle of Mahomet or his successors, we have for our warrant the testimony of a few barbarous Arabians: And on the other hand, we are to regard the authority of Titus Livius, Plutarch, Tacitus, and, in short, of all the authors and witnesses, Grecian, Chinese, and Roman Catholic, who have related any miracle in their particular religion; I say, we are to regard their testimony in the same light as if they had mentioned that Mahometan miracle, and had in express terms contradicted it, with the same certainty as they have for the miracle they relate. This argument may appear over subtile and refined; but is not in reality different from the reasoning of a judge, who supposes, that the credit of two witnesses, maintaining a crime against any one, is destroyed by the testimony of two others, who affirm him to have been two hundred leagues distant, at the same instant when the crime is said to have been committed.…

There is also a memorable story related by Cardinal de Retz, which may well deserve our consideration. When that intriguing politician fled into Spain, to avoid the persecution of his enemies, he passed through Saragossa, the capital of Arragon, where he was shown, in the cathedral, a man, who had served seven years as a doorkeeper, and was well known to every body in town, that had ever paid his devotions at that church. He had been seen, for so long a time, wanting a leg; but recovered that limb by the rubbing of holy oil upon the stump; and the cardinal assures us that he saw him with two legs. This miracle was vouched by all the canons of the church; and the whole company in town were appealed to for a confirmation of the fact; whom the cardinal found, by their zealous devotion, to be thorough believers of the miracle. Here the relater was also contemporary to the supposed prodigy, of an incredulous and libertine character, as well as of great genius; the miracle of so *singular* a nature as could scarcely admit of a counterfeit, and the witnesses very numerous, and all of them, in a manner, spectators of the fact, to which they gave their testimony. And what adds mightily to the force of the evidence, and may double our surprise on this occasion, is, that the cardinal himself, who relates the story, seems not to give any credit to it, and consequently cannot be suspected of any concurrence in the holy fraud. He considered justly, that it was not requisite, in order to reject a fact of this nature, to be able accurately to disprove the testimony, and to trace its falsehood, through all the circumstances of knavery and credulity which produced it. He knew, that, as this was commonly altogether impossible at any small distance of time and place; so was it extremely difficult, even where one was immediately present by reason of the bigotry, ignorance, cunning, and roguery of a great part of mankind. He therefore concluded, like a just reasoner, that such an evidence carried falsehood upon the very face of it, and that a miracle, supported by any human testimony, was more properly a subject of derision than of argument.

There surely never was a greater number of miracles ascribed to one person, than those, which were lately said to have been wrought in France upon the tomb of Abbe Paris, the famous Jansenist, with whose sanctity the people were so long deluded. The curing of the sick, giving hearing to the deaf, and sight to the blind, were everywhere talked of as the usual effects of that holy sepulchre. But what is more extraordinary; many of the miracles were immediately proved upon the spot, before judges of unquestioned integrity, attested by witnesses of credit and distinction, in a learned age, and on the most eminent theatre that is now in the world. Nor is this all: a relation of them was published and dispersed every where; nor were the *Jesuits*, though a learned body, supported by the civil magistrate, and determined enemies to those opinions, in whose favour the miracles were said to have been wrought, ever able distinctly to refute or detect them. Where shall we find such a number of circumstances, agreeing to the corroboration of one fact? And what have we to oppose to such a cloud of witnesses, but the absolute impossibility or miraculous

nature of the events, which they relate? And this surely, in the eyes of all reasonable people, will alone be regarded as a sufficient refutation.

Is the consequence just, because some human testimony has the utmost force and authority in some cases, when it relates the battle of Philippi or Pharsalia for instance; that therefore all kinds of testimony must, in all cases, have equal force and authority? Suppose that the Caesarean and Pompeian factions had, each of them, claimed the victory in these battles, and that the historians of each party had uniformly ascribed the advantage to their own side; how could mankind, at this distance, have been able to determine between them? The contrariety is equally strong between the miracles related by Herodotus or Plutarch, and those delivered by Mariana, Bede, or any monkish historian.

The wise lend a very academic faith to every report which favours the passion of the reporter; whether it magnifies his country, his family, or himself, or in any other way strikes in with his natural inclinations and propensities. But what greater temptation than to appear a missionary, a prophet, an ambassador from heaven? Who would not encounter many dangers and difficulties, in order to attain so sublime a character? Or if, by the help of vanity and a heated imagination, a man has first made a convert of himself, and entered seriously into the delusion; who ever scruples to make use of pious frauds, in support of so holy and meritorious a cause?

The smallest spark may here kindle into the greatest flame; because the materials are always prepared for it. The *avidum genus auricularum*, the gazing populace, receive greedily, without examination, whatever sooths superstition, and promotes wonder.

How many stories of this nature have, in all ages, been detected and exploded in their infancy? How many more have been celebrated for a time, and have afterwards sunk into neglect and oblivion? Where such reports, therefore, fly about, the solution of the phenomenon is obvious; and we judge in conformity to regular experience and observation, when we account for it by the known and natural principles of credulity and delusion. And shall we, rather than have a recourse to so natural a solution, allow of a miraculous violation of the most established laws of nature?

I need not mention the difficulty of detecting a falsehood in any private or even public history, at the place, where it is said to happen; much more when the scene is removed to ever so small a distance. Even a court of judicature, with all the authority, accuracy, and judgement, which they can employ, find themselves often at a loss to distinguish between truth and falsehood in the most recent actions. But the matter never comes to any issue, if trusted to the common method of altercations and debate and flying rumours; especially when men's passions have taken part on either side.

In the infancy of new religions, the wise and learned commonly esteem the matter too inconsiderable to deserve their attention or regard. And when afterwards they would willingly detect the cheat, in order to undeceive the deluded multitude, the season is now past, and the records and witnesses, which might clear up the matter, have perished beyond recovery.

No means of detection remain, but those which must be drawn from the very testimony itself of the reporters: and these, though always sufficient with the judicious and knowing, are commonly too fine to fall under the comprehension of the vulgar.

Upon the whole, then, it appears, that no testimony for any kind of miracle has ever amounted to a probability, much less to a proof; and that, even supposing it amounted to a proof, it would be opposed by another proof; derived from the very nature of the fact, which it would endeavour to establish. It is experience only, which gives authority to human testimony; and it is the same experience, which assures us of the laws of nature. When, therefore, these two kinds of experience are contrary, we have nothing to do but subtract the one from the other, and embrace an opinion, either on one side or the other, with that assurance which arises from the remainder. But according to the principle here

explained, this subtraction, with regard to all popular religions, amounts to an entire annihilation; and therefore we may establish it as a maxim, that no human testimony can have such force as to prove a miracle, and make it a just foundation for any such system of religion.

I beg the limitations here made may be remarked, when I say, that a miracle can never be proved, so as to be the foundation of a system of religion. For I own, that otherwise, there may possibly be miracles, or violations of the usual course of nature, of such a kind as to admit of proof from human testimony; though, perhaps, it will be impossible to find any such in all the records of history. Thus, suppose, all authors, in all languages, agree, that, from the first of January 1600, there was a total darkness over the whole earth for eight days: suppose that the tradition of this extraordinary event is still strong and lively among the people: that all travellers, who return from foreign countries, bring us accounts of the same tradition, without the least variation or contradiction: it is evident, that our present philosophers, instead of doubting the fact, ought to receive it as certain, and ought to search for the causes whence it might be derived. The decay, corruption, and dissolution of nature, is an event rendered probable by so many analogies, that any phenomenon, which seems to have a tendency towards that catastrophe, comes within the reach of human testimony, if that testimony be very extensive and uniform.

But suppose, that all the historians who treat of England, should agree, that, on the first of January 1600, Queen Elizabeth died; that both before and after her death she was seen by her physicians and the whole court, as is usual with persons of her rank; that her successor was acknowledged and proclaimed by the parliament; and that, after being interred a month, she again appeared, resumed the throne, and governed England for three years: I must confess that I should be surprised at the concurrence of so many odd circumstances, but should not have the least inclination to believe so miraculous an event. I should not doubt of her pretended death, and of those other public circumstances that followed it: I should only assert it to have been pretended, and that it neither was, nor possibly could be real. You would in vain object to me the difficulty, and almost impossibility of deceiving the world in an affair of such consequence; the wisdom and solid judgement of that renowned queen; with the little or no advantage which she could reap from so poor an artifice: All this might astonish me; but I would still reply, that the knavery and folly of men are such common phenomena, that I should rather believe the most extraordinary events to arise from their concurrence, than admit of so signal a violation of the laws of nature.

But should this miracle be ascribed to any new system of religion; men, in all ages, have been so much imposed on by ridiculous stories of that kind, that this very circumstance would be a full proof of a cheat, and sufficient, with all men of sense, not only to make them reject the fact, but even reject it without farther examination. Though the Being to whom the miracle is ascribed, be, in this case, Almighty, it does not, upon that account, become a whit more probable; since it is impossible for us to know the attributes or actions of such a Being, otherwise than from the experience which we have of his productions, in the usual course of nature. This still reduces us to past observation, and obliges us to compare the instances of the violation of truth in the testimony of men, with those of the violation of the laws of nature by miracles, in order to judge which of them is most likely and probable. As the violations of truth are more common in the testimony concerning religious miracles, than in that concerning any other matter of fact; this must diminish very much the authority of the former testimony, and make us form a general resolution, never to lend any attention to it, with whatever specious pretence it may be covered.

Lord Bacon seems to have embraced the same principles of reasoning. "We ought," says he, "to make a collection or particular history of all monsters and prodigious births or productions, and in a word of every thing new, rare, and extraordinary in nature. But this must be done with the most severe scrutiny, lest we depart from truth. Above

all, every relation must be considered as suspicious, which depends in any degree upon religion, as the prodigies of Livy: And no less so, every thing that is to be found in the writers of natural magic or alchemy, or such authors, who seem, all of them, to have an unconquerable appetite for falsehood and fable."

I am the better pleased with the method of reasoning here delivered, as I think it may serve to confound those dangerous friends or disguised enemies to the *Christian Religion*, who have undertaken to defend it by the principles of human reason. Our most holy religion is founded on *Faith*, not on reason; and it is a sure method of exposing it to put it to such a trial as it is, by no means, fitted to endure. To make this more evident, let us examine those miracles, related in scripture; and not to lose ourselves in too wide a field, let us confine ourselves to such as we find in the *Pentateuch*, which we shall examine, according to the principles of those pretended Christians, not as the word or testimony of God himself, but as the production of a mere human writer and historian. Here then we are first to consider a book, presented to us by a barbarous and ignorant people, written in an age when they were still more barbarous, and in all probability long after the facts which it relates, corroborated by no concurring testimony, and resembling those fabulous accounts, which every nation gives of its origin. Upon reading this book, we find it full of prodigies and miracles. It gives an account of a state of the world and of human nature entirely different from the present: Of our fall from that state: Of the age of man, extended to near a thousand years: Of the destruction of the world by a deluge: Of the arbitrary choice of one people, as the favorites of heaven; and that people the countrymen of the author: Of their deliverance from bondage by prodigies the most astonishing imaginable: I desire any one to lay his hand upon his heart, and after a serious consideration declare, whether he thinks that the falsehood of such a book, supported by such a testimony, would be more extraordinary and miraculous than all the miracles it relates; which is, however, necessary to make it be received, according to the measures of probability above established.

What we have said of miracles may be applied, without any variation, to prophecies; and indeed, all prophecies are real miracles, and as such only, can be admitted as proofs of any revelation. If it did not exceed the capacity of human nature to foretell future events, it would be absurd to employ any prophecy as an argument for a divine mission or authority from heaven. So that, upon the whole, we may conclude, that the *Christian Religion* not only was at first attended with miracles, but even at this day cannot be believed by any reasonable person without one. Mere reason is insufficient to convince us of its veracity: And whoever is moved by *Faith* to assent to it, is conscious of a continued miracle in his own person, which subverts all the principles of his understanding, and gives him a determination to believe what is most contrary to custom and experience.

NOTE

1. Sometimes an event may not, *in itself*, seem to be contrary to the laws of nature, and yet, if it were real, it might, by reason of some circumstances, be denominated a miracle; because, in *fact* it is contrary to these laws. Thus if a person, claiming a divine authority, should command a sick person to be well, a healthful man to fall down dead, the clouds to pour rain, the winds to blow, in short, should order many natural events, which immediately follow upon his command; these might justly be esteemed miracles, because they are really, in this case, contrary to the laws of nature. For if any suspicion remain, that the event and command concurred by accident, there is no miracle and no transgression of the laws of nature. If this suspicion be removed, there is evidently a miracle, and a transgression of these laws; because nothing can be more contrary to nature than that the voice or

command of a man should have such an influence. A miracle may be accurately defined, a *transgression of a law of nature by a particular volition of the Deity, or by the interposition of some invisible agent*. A miracle may either be discoverable by men or not. This alters not its nature and essence. The raising of a house or ship into the air is a visible miracle. The raising of a feather, when the wind wants ever so little of a force requisite for that purpose, is as real a miracle, though not so sensible with regard to us.

V.2

Of 'Of Miracles'

PETER VAN INWAGEN

Peter van Inwagen is professor of philosophy at the University of Notre Dame and is one of the leading figures in contemporary metaphysics and philosophy of religion. In this article, he attacks Hume's argument against miracles. Hume's argument rests in part on the idea that miracles are the sorts of things that run significantly contrary to our experience. But, according to van Inwagen, there is no clear sense in which experience rules out events of any particular sort. Failing to find any other sense of "contrary to experience" that could drive Hume's argument, van Inwagen concludes that the argument is a failure.

In the first and briefer part of this essay, my concerns are ontological. I shall explain what a miracle *is* (or would be if there were any). In the second part, my concerns are epistemological: I shall discuss and attempt to refute Hume's argument for the conclusion that it is unreasonable to believe any historical report that would count as a report of a miracle.

THE ONTOLOGY OF MIRACLES

The account of "miracles" that I shall present here is a summary of the account I presented in "The Place of Chance in a World Sustained by God."[1] (It is, I believe, entirely consistent with Hume's "official" definition of "miracle": "a transgression of a law of nature by a particular volition of the Deity, or by the interposition of some invisible agent." And, I believe, it will not weaken Hume's argument for the conclusion that it would be unreasonable to accept any report of an alleged "miracle" if, in evaluating his argument, we understand the word in the sense I supply in the present section.)

Let us suppose that the physical world is made up of certain fundamental building blocks or units, certain tiny physical things without proper parts. I shall call them elementary particles. Elementary particles are sorted into kinds by their causal powers

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(e.g., rest, mass, and charge). It will simplify my account of miracles if I make the assumption (false, of course, at least in our present state of knowledge) that there is only one type of elementary particle. Each particle is continuously sustained in existence by God: At each instant, he supplies it with existence and the causal powers it then has. The motions over the interval t_1-t_2 of the particles that compose the world are determined (insofar as they are determined) entirely by their distribution at t_1 and the causal powers they have at each instant in t_1–t_2. (Here we make a second simplifying assumption: that the propagation of causal influence is instantaneous.)

God always, *or almost always*, supplies each particle with the same causal powers. But he may, *very rarely*, supply *just a few* particles—"just a few" in comparison with the number of all the particles there are—with different causal powers from the powers they normally have. If he momentarily supplies some of the particles in a certain small region of space with powers different from their normal powers, the particles in that region will follow trajectories different from the trajectories they would have followed if he had continued to supply them with their normal powers. Here is a preliminary definition of "miracle": The early stages of any such "divergence" constitute a miracle. (The later stages of a divergence will be classified as "consequences of a miracle" and not "parts of a miracle.")

Now a qualification and refinement of this definition. A proposition will be called a law of nature in a possible world x if it is a contingent proposition that is true in every world y in which particles *always* have the causal powers that they *always or almost always* have in x. If some particles in the world x do sometimes have "unusual" powers, some of the propositions that are laws in x may be false propositions in x. (If x is a deterministic world, this must be so.) If a proposition p is both a law of nature in x and false in x, it will be said to be violated in x; it will be violated by the behavior of those particles that (owing to their or their neighbors' unusual causal powers) follow trajectories inconsistent with the truth of p.

If a world is indeterministic, some events that are miracles according to our preliminary definition may not involve violations of laws. If the laws of a world allow A to be followed either by B or by C, and if God temporarily changes the causal powers of certain particles in such a way as to determine that A be followed by B, the consequent occurrence of B will be a miracle by our preliminary definition but will not be a violation of the laws of the world in which it occurs. In "The Place of Chance in a World Sustained by God," my topic was Providence, and it suited my purposes to have a definition of "miracle" that had this feature. In the present essay, however, I wish to conform my usage (more or less) to Hume's. I shall, therefore, understand "miracle" to imply "violation of the laws of nature." God performs a miracle, then, if he momentarily supplies certain particles with unusual causal powers and the consequent divergence of the trajectories of those (and no doubt some other) particles from the courses they would have followed is a violation of the laws of nature. (Of course, a violation of one law will in most cases be a violation of many, since if two propositions are laws, so is their conjunction.) The miracle is the early stages of the divergence.

HUME'S ARGUMENT

In this section, I shall present and attempt to refute the central argument of "Of Miracles."[2] More exactly, the argument I shall present and attempt to refute is my own reconstruction of the central argument of "Of Miracles." I believe that there are, in Hume's presentation of his argument, certain infelicities that arise from his imprecise use of terminology, and my reconstruction is designed to remove them. To subject one's reconstruction of a philosopher's argument to criticisms of one's own devising is a somewhat dubious procedure, and it is dubious on two grounds: First, one's "improvements" may be ones that the author of the original argument would reject, and, worse, they may introduce defects into the argument that were not present in the

original. I think, however, that the points I shall make against the reconstructed argument would apply to the original even if Hume would have emphatically rejected my modifications of his argument and even if these modifications introduced errors that were not present in the original.

What, exactly, is the conclusion of the central argument of "Of Miracles"? It is a commonplace that Hume's conclusion is not ontological: He does not claim to show that there are no miracles. His conclusion is epistemological. But it is not that one should not believe that there are miracles. It is not so general as that. It has to do with the attitude one should take toward any (supposed, putative) report of a miracle one might encounter. It is something like this: If one hears a report of a miracle, one should not believe it (or one should believe it only in very special circumstances, circumstances so special that no one has in fact ever been in them). But this formulation of Hume's conclusion raises two important questions. First, what counts as a "report of a miracle"? Secondly, does "one should not believe it" mean "one should reject it" or "one should refrain from accepting it"—or perhaps some third thing?

Let us say that a report of a miracle (or a miracle-report) is any narrative, presented as historical or factual, such that (a) it does not follow logically from that narrative that a miracle has occurred, and (b) if the narrative were true, the only reasonable conclusion would be that at least one of the events it recounted was a miracle.[3] The following story

> Jill was about to cross Sixth Avenue in New York when, all in an instant, she was miraculously translated to Sydney,

does not satisfy the terms of this definition, since it follows logically from the story that a miracle has occurred.[4] Here, by way of contrast, are two stories that—whatever other features they may have—do not logically entail that a miracle has occurred:

> Jill was about to cross Sixth Avenue in New York when, without any sensation of motion, she suddenly found herself in Sydney.[5]

> And when he got into the boat his disciples followed him. And behold there arose a great storm on the sea, so that the boat was being swamped by the waves; but he was asleep. And they went and woke him, saying, "Save us, Lord, for we are perishing." And he said to them, "Why are you afraid, O men of little faith?" Then he rose and he rebuked the wind and the sea, and there was a great calm. And the men marveled, saying, "What manner of man is this that even the wind and the wave obey him?" (Matt. 8:23–27).[6]

Whether either of these two stories satisfies condition (b) in our definition of "miracle-report"—and thereby qualifies as a miracle-report—is an epistemological question: Given that the story was true, would the only reasonable conclusion be that one of the events recounted in the story was a miracle?[7] It would be possible to argue, some no doubt have argued, that one should never believe of any story (unless it logically entails the occurrence of a miracle) that if that story is true, some of the events it recounts were miracles. One should rather believe (the argument might continue) that if the story is true, there is *some* explanation of the events it relates that is consistent with the laws of nature and this explanation is the correct explanation. (It is not hard to provide gestures at such explanations. Take the story of the stilling of the storm. This story could be embedded in a logically consistent science fiction novel according to which Christianity was "founded" by extraterrestrial beings as an adjunct to a project involving the manipulation of human history; it might be that, in the novel, all the "miracles" related in the New Testament actually happened—at least as far as appearances went—but were the products of an advanced technology rather than true miracles.)

I shall not attempt to answer the (intrinsically very interesting) question whether there in fact are any stories that satisfy the terms of the above definition of "miracle-report," for the cogency of Hume's argument does not depend on what the right answer to this question is. His conclusion is

that one should react in a certain way to any miracle-report one encounters, and his reasoning can be evaluated independently of the question whether anyone ever does encounter any miracle-reports.

But what *does* Hume say about how one should react to a miracle-report? Is his position simply that one should *not* believe the report, or is it that one should *disbelieve* (not believe *and* believe the denial of) the report—or is it some third thing? I do not think that Hume is clear or entirely consistent about the matter, but I believe that the best way to state his conclusion is this: One should *dismiss* any miracle-report one encounters. The concept of dismissal may be spelled out as follows: One dismisses a report—an allegedly historical narrative—if one either disbelieves it or (does not believe it and) assigns it a very low probability.[8] (How low? Well, let's say very low—a probability of the sort that we describe in ordinary speech by phrases like "of insignificant probability" and "no real possibility.")

We shall need one more definition before we turn to Hume's argument for this conclusion. Let us say that a proposition is a *contravention of one's experience* (for short, a contravention) if the truth of that proposition is contrary to one's experience.[9] ("Contravention"—this may be true of "miracle-report" as well—is obviously a person-and-time-relative concept: A proposition may be a contravention of one person's experience and not of another's—or a proposition may be a contravention of a person's experience at one time and not at another. I shall, however, generally speak of contraventions and miracle-reports *sans phrase* and leave it to the reader to fill in the necessary qualifications about person-and-time relativity. And I shall speak of various propositions as "contrary to experience" without bothering to specify whose experience they are contrary to.) Contraventions, moreover, come in "sizes": p is a larger or greater contravention than q if, although q is contrary to experience, p is "even more contrary to experience" than q.[10] (At this point it should be evident, if it was not already, that I am presenting a reconstruction of Hume's argument, for Hume speaks of "greater" and "lesser" *miracles*, and he employs no term that corresponds to my "contravention.") If I tell my friends that on a recent trip from Boston to Los Angeles my 1973 Cadillac averaged sixty miles to the gallon, what I tell them will no doubt be a contravention. If Calvin tells his mother that the jammy handprints on the new sofa were put there not by himself but by an evil Calvin doppelgänger constructed by beings from Arcturus, that will also be a contravention, and perhaps there is some intuitive sense in which it is a larger contravention than the one I have asserted. An *historical narrative* will be called a contravention if its propositional content is a contravention.

I will now present Hume's argument, or my reconstruction of it. The argument has three premises, two epistemological premises and one "historical" premise. The first epistemological premise is:

E1. Any miracle-report must necessarily be a contravention and, in fact, a very *large* contravention.[11] (If a story is a miracle-report for some audience, it will also be a contravention for that audience. If a story is not a contravention, it will not qualify as a miracle-report. Suppose, for example, that we hear the story of Jill's sudden translation from New York to Sydney. It may or may not be reasonable for us to classify this as a miracle-report, but if the proposition that people sometimes find themselves suddenly on the other side of the earth is not contrary to experience, a necessary condition for classifying the story as a miracle-report will be absent. There are, moreover, stories that are contraventions but not large enough contraventions to qualify as miracle-reports. If I am told that Sally, who was hitherto entirely ignorant of French, spoke perfect French after spending three months in France, that story would be a contravention but no doubt not one that is large enough to qualify as a miracle-report. And how large a contravention must a miracle report be? One way to answer this question would be to specify some story that is a large enough contravention by just about anyone's reckoning to be a miracle-report and say, "At least as large as that." I think that the following story will do

for this purpose: Let us suppose that we have heard a report of a shaman in Peru who has, it is alleged, restored several incontestably long-dead people to life. Suppose we are willing to agree that this story is "more contrary to experience" than the story of Sally's remarkably quick mastery of French. Then, according to the criterion I have proposed, the story of Sally is not a large enough contravention to be a miracle-report.

We should note that it does not follow from the proposed criterion that just any story that is as large a contravention as the "shaman" story *is* a miracle-report. Indeed, it does not follow from anything we have said that the "shaman" story itself is a miracle-report. And if someone maintained that Calvin's story of the origin of the jammy handprints was as large a contravention as the "shaman" story, despite the fact that Calvin's story was not a miracle-report and the "shaman" story was, that person would have said nothing inconsistent with the proposed criterion. Let us say that any contravention that is at least as large as the "shaman" story is *very large*.)

The second epistemological premise requires a little stage-setting. Let us say that two narratives are (historically) independent if neither is derived from the other. Two narratives will be said to support each other if they are independent and "tell the same story"—(purport to) describe events that are the same or at least very similar. ("Similarity" is to include the elements "cast of characters" and "place and time.") Hume's second epistemological premise is

E2. One should dismiss any very large contravention one encounters unless one knows that one of the following two conditions holds:

(a) if the very large contravention is unhistorical—if it is not a reasonably accurate description of events that actually happened—its existence is itself a contravention and a larger contravention than its truth would be

(b) it is one of two or more mutually supporting narratives such that if they are unhistorical, their (collective) existence is a contravention and a larger contravention than their truth (i.e., the truth of their common propositional content) would be.

(Suppose that X tells me that Jimmy Carter is a tool of malign extraterrestrial beings. And suppose no one else has told me that. X's statement is a very large contravention[12] and should therefore be dismissed—unless X's telling me falsely that Carter is a tool of malign extraterrestrial beings is a contravention and a larger contravention than his being a tool of malign extraterrestrial beings would be. Or suppose that shortly after X has told me that Carter is a tool of malign extraterrestrial beings, Y tells me the same thing. And suppose I am somehow satisfied that X's statement and Y's statement are historically independent. I should dismiss what they have told me—unless the existence of two independent false allegations that Carter is a tool of malign extraterrestrial beings is a contravention and a larger contravention than his being a tool of malign extraterrestrial beings would be.)

Here, finally, is Hume's "historical" premise:

H. Although it may be possible to imagine a miracle-report that satisfies one or the other of the conditions set out in E2, no miracle-report known to history satisfies either; indeed, all known narratives that anyone might be inclined to classify as miracle-reports (such as the Gospel story of the stilling of the storm) fall far short of satisfying either of them.

I will make a few remarks about E2 and H and then proceed to argue against E1. I shall, in discussing Hume's views, write as if he were familiar with the vocabulary and distinctions of the present essay. I believe that this anachronism could be eliminated from my argument, although only at the cost of a great deal of circumlocution.

Hume wrote in an era when photography and sound recordings had not yet been invented—in an era when almost the only evidence as to what had occurred in the past was human testimony. No doubt if he were writing today, he would want to emend E2 to take account of "nontestimonial" evidence about the past. But any such emendation of E2 would affect

no point of principle, and the question of its proper formulation need not detain us.

It is evident that Hume believed that clause (a) in E2 could not possibly be satisfied, for (such is human credulity and epistemic frailty) the proposition that a given person has made a false statement about the past could not possibly be a "very large" contravention. Hume's position was, therefore, that the only possibility of a case in which a very large contravention should not be dismissed would be of this sort: It was one of two or more historically independent contraventions with essentially the same propositional content. It is, however, unclear whether Hume thought that even a very large number of mutually supporting false statements about the past could constitute a "very large" contravention. In introducing the important "eight-day darkness" example ("Thus, suppose, all authors, in all languages, agree, that, from the first of January 1600, there was a total darkness over the whole earth for eight days.…"), he says, "For I own, that otherwise [i.e., if we imagine testimony much more extensive and uniform than the testimony to the supposed miracles foundational to Christianity and its rivals], there may possibly be miracles, or violations of the usual course of nature, of such a kind as to admit of proof from human testimony, though, perhaps, it will be impossible to find any such in all the records of history." Although Hume uses the word "miracle" here, he goes on to say that although philosophers of his own day, if they had available to them the testimony he imagines, ought to grant the historicity of the eight-day darkness (in fact, they should "receive it as certain"), they should proceed to "search for the causes whence it might be derived"—and hence they should presumably *not* regard the darkness as a miracle as the term is "accurately defined" ("A transgression of a law of nature by a particular volition of the Deity, or by the interposition of some invisible agent") but only in the loose and much weaker sense he has supplied: as a violation of the usual course of nature. He then argues that various (unspecified) analogies with known events suggest that a universal eight-day darkness "comes within the reach of human testimony, if that testimony be very extensive and uniform." And this statement implies that other imaginable events might not come within the reach of any testimony, however extensive and uniform. This argument is immediately followed by an example of such an imaginable event: the death and "resurrection" of Elizabeth I. It seems likely, therefore, that Hume would maintain that no imaginable human testimony could be such that its falsity would be what we are calling a very large contravention. And from this and our two epistemological premises, it follows that any imaginable miracle-report should be dismissed.

Even if I have not interpreted Hume correctly, however, even if, in his view, there are imaginable miracle-reports that should not be *dismissed*, it does not follow from this that any imaginable miracle-report should be *accepted*. (I do not believe that the story of King Alfred and the cakes is false—that is, I do not assent to the proposition that the story of King Alfred and the cakes is false. And I do not think that the probability of this story's being true is so low as to be insignificant. I therefore do not *dismiss* the story of Alfred and the cakes. But I certainly do not assent to the proposition that the story is *true*—and, in fact, I think it's very unlikely to be true.) And I think that it would certainly be Hume's position that none should be: Whether or not every imaginable miracle-report should be dismissed, no imaginable miracle-report should be accepted. No imaginable miracle-report should be accepted because a miracle-report, no matter what testimony might support it, is a very large contravention, and no testimonial evidence in favor of a very large contravention could be so good as to make it worthy of belief—even if it were possible for there to be testimonial evidence good enough to lead the judicious reasoner not to dismiss it. (In the most favorable possible case, there would be, as Hume says, "a mutual destruction of arguments.") And, of course, if we leave the realm of the merely imaginable and turn to the actual and historical, it is clear—this is the import of our "historical" premise—that Hume believes that all actual miracle-reports should be dismissed.[13]

Is Hume's argument, as I have reconstructed it, cogent? I think not. My defense of this judgment

begins with an examination of E1, the premise that any miracle-report must be a very large contravention. That is, for any story about the past one might hear, one should refuse to make the following judgment about it:

> If that story is true, then some of the events it relates involve violations of the laws of nature,

unless one is also willing to make the following judgment:

> That story is contrary to my experience—and *as* contrary to my experience as the "shaman" story.

In order to evaluate this premise, we must turn to a question we have so far glossed over. What is it for a story to be "contrary to one's experience"? Hume generally writes as if the following were true: A story is contrary to one's experience if that story involves something's having the property F and the property G and one has observed many things having the property F and has observed that all of them had the complement of G. For example, on this account, a story about a man's returning from the dead is contrary to my experience owing simply to the fact that I have known of a very large number of people who have died and all of them have the property "not having returned from the dead." But this account of what it is for a story to be contrary to one's experience is useless for Hume's purposes, since it will classify far too many stories as contrary to one's experience. Suppose for example, that I know of many visits that Tom has made to his mother over the past ten years; it is all but inevitable that if I hear a detailed account of his latest visit to her, this account will ascribe to this visit some property that all of the others lacked. And this will be true even if we do not "count" the *date* of the latest visit as a relevant property. It may, for example, be that the story I have been told of his latest visit includes the information that he arrived on her doorstep at 3:21 P.M. and that the comprehensive diary I have for some reason kept of his earlier visits reveals that on all the other occasions on which he has visited her he arrived at some other time. No doubt we could play a lengthy game of "counterexample and revision" with the above account of what it is for a story to be contrary to experience. But I do not know of any way of "improving" this account that will enable it to avoid consequences like the following: The first reports of someone's making a solo flight across the Atlantic or running a four-minute mile or reaching the summit of Mount Everest were contrary to the experience of those who heard them.

But might Hume not reply that these consequences are acceptable? Might he not argue that such reports would indeed be a *bit* contrary to the experience of those who heard them? Might he not go on to say, "But it would be *more* contrary to the experience of those who heard them if all the reports of these events were false, and that is why it was proper for those who heard the reports to believe them"? Perhaps so. But how, then, are we to understand the relevant notion of *degree* of contrariety? If I hear on Monday that Lindbergh has flown across the Atlantic without a copilot and on Tuesday that a rival has flown across the Atlantic without an aircraft, on what basis am I to judge that the second story is more contrary to my experience (is a larger contravention) than the first? My experience tells me that all previous transatlantic flights have involved an aircraft of some sort, but it also tells me that all previous transatlantic flights have involved two or more pilots. There simply do not seem to be any materials in the "property-complement" account of a story's being contrary to experience from which to construct an account of the concept of one story's being "more contrary to experience" than another is.

Let us consider an actual example (at least I believe it to be actual, although, unfortunately, I no longer remember where I heard or read it) of someone's applying the "property-complement" account of this concept. Thomas Jefferson was once told that in a museum in Cambridge (Massachusetts) there was exhibited a stone that had fallen from the sky. Jefferson declined to believe this story on the ground that although he had never known a stone to fall from the sky, he had often known a Yankee parson—the staff of Harvard College in

those days comprised Congregational ministers—to prevaricate. (He had observed the sky on many occasions, and on each of those occasions, it had the property "not being the source of a falling stone"; he had observed many Yankee parsons making assertions, and on many of these occasions, the assertions had the property "being a lie." He concluded that stones falling from the sky were contrary to his experience and lying Yankee parsons were not.) Now even if Jefferson's statement about his experience of the New England clergy was something of an exaggeration, he was no doubt telling the truth when he said he had never known a stone to fall from the sky. But there were many, many things he had "never known" that he wouldn't have been disinclined to believe reports of, even reports from Yankee parsons. If he thought the story unlikely on the basis of his experience, it cannot have been simply because such a thing had never happened in his experience. If the story was indeed "contrary to his experience," it cannot have been simply because events of the type related in the story were not included in the totality of his experience to date. This observation might lead us to conclude that the "property-complement" account of an event's being contrary to experience must be replaced by some other account.

Was there *any* sense in which the story Jefferson was told was contrary to his experience? Well, suppose that Jefferson had fallen asleep like Rip van Winkle and had slept till the existence and nature of meteors was common knowledge. Suppose that, on awakening, he was given an encyclopedia article on the subject to read and had afterward received the testimony of several eminent (Virginian) astronomers that what the article said was true. Would he have been in a position to complain that his eighteenth-century experience was misleading—that it had somehow "told" him that stones never fell from the sky when stones in fact sometimes *do* fall from the sky? Certainly not. No doubt Descartes was wrong in holding that the testimony of experience was never false, but it does not seem to have testified falsely to Jefferson on this point. Experience may have testified to some persons at some points in history that the earth is at the center of the universe or that maggots are spontaneously generated in dung, but it had never testified to anyone that stones do not fall from the sky (or, for most people, that they do—not "directly," not otherwise than via the testimony of other people; for most people, "direct" experience has had nothing to say about whether stones fall from the sky). Although experience may have testified that if stones ever fall from the sky, their doing so is a very uncommon event, it has not testified that stones never fall from the sky.

It is very hard indeed to find a sense in which experience testifies in any direct or immediate sense that events of some sort never happen—or in which stories of events of some sort are contrary to experience. If direct, immediate experience testifies to anything (truly or falsely) its testimony seems to be essentially "positive": It testifies that events of certain sorts *do* happen. One might of course point out that it is *reasonable* to *believe* of events of various sorts that events of those sorts never happen, and that the reasonableness of such beliefs must ultimately be based on experience. Having made this observation, one might propose an account of what it is for a story to be "contrary to experience" that is based on what it is reasonable to believe. It would go something like this: A story is contrary to one's experience if that story involves the occurrence of events of sorts such that given one's experience at the time one hears the story, it is reasonable for one to believe that events of those sorts never happen—or perhaps that it is highly improbable that such events ever happen (or, more simply, a story is contrary to one's experience if, given one's experience at the time one hears the story, it is reasonable for one to believe that the story is false or is highly improbable). And one might go on to spell out the concept "more contrary to one's experience" in terms of its being more unreasonable to believe one proposition than another. (One might say that p is more contrary to one's experience than q just in the case that although what it is reasonable to believe, on the basis of one's experience, is that p and q are both false, one should also believe that if one or the other of them is, after all, true, it is q. Thus, or so I would judge, Calvin's story about

the handprints on the sofa is "more contrary to experience" than my story about the mileage my Cadillac got, and the "shaman" story is "more contrary to experience" than the story of Sally's quick mastery of French.)

I think, however, that it is reasonably clear that this is not what Hume means by "contrary to experience" and "more contrary to experience." Whatever he means by these phrases and the related phrases he uses, he means something much more concrete, much more immediate than this. For Hume, if one judges that a story of a man's rising from the dead is "contrary to one's experience," the experience that the story is contrary to is one's experience of the dead's staying dead, not the totality of one's experience of the world to date. But at least in my view, what it is now *reasonable for me to believe* about men's rising from the dead must be based on pretty nearly the whole of my experience to date (e.g., those experiences that are relevant to the truth or falsity of the principles of thermodynamics and the truth or falsity of judgments about the historical reliability of the New Testament and the authority of the Church). In any case, if this is what "contrary to experience" and "more contrary to experience" mean, there seems to me to be no very compelling reason for anyone to accept E1.

It may be reasonable to believe that if the Matthean story of the stilling of the storm is historical, then a miracle, a violation of the laws of nature, occurred. I certainly think that this would be the reasonable conclusion to draw from the truth of the story. But I do not think that this story is, by the terms of the definition we are considering, at least as contrary to experience as the "shaman" story is. In fact, I think that the Matthean story is *true* (and, of course, I think I am being reasonable in thinking that it is true), and I think that anyone who heard and believed the "shaman" story and whose experience of the world was otherwise like mine would be very unreasonable indeed. I am not trying to convince you, the reader, that these epistemological judgments are correct. I am saying only that nowhere in "Of Miracles" do I find any reason to suppose they are not correct. Hume's argument, after all, is of this general form: *Because* certain propositions are contrary to experience—*very* contrary to experience—it is unreasonable to accept them. And it is, to say the least, very hard to see how an argument of this form could be cogent if "contrary to experience" *means* "unreasonable to believe."

I can think of no other plausible sense that can be given to the phrase "contrary to experience." I conclude, provisionally, that Hume's argument is a failure, owing to the fact that there is no sense that can be given to "contrary to experience" such that E1 is compelling when "contrary to experience" is interpreted in that sense. It should be noted that I do not claim to have shown that anyone is ever justified in believing a miracle-report. Indeed, I do not even claim to have addressed this question. It is perfectly consistent with everything I have said to suppose that anyone who believed any story that could conceivably count as a miracle-report (such as the Matthean story of the stilling of the storm) would be wholly unreasonable. I claim to have shown only that the argument of "Of Miracles" (as I understand the argument) does not establish either this conclusion or any other negative conclusion about the reasonableness of accepting miracle-reports.

NOTES

1. Included in Thomas V. Morris, ed., *Divine and Human Action: Essays in the Metaphysics of Theism* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1988), pp. 211–235. Reprinted in Peter van Inwagen, *God, Knowledge, and Mystery: Essays in Philosophical Theology* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1995), pp. 42–65.

2. "Of Miracles" is section X of *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*. There are numerous editions of the *Enquiry*. I have used the Open Court edition (La Salle, Ill.: 1907 and 1966), which, according to the publisher's preface is "an unannotated reprint … made from the second volume of the posthumous edition of

1777." No editor is given on the title page, but the preface notes that the editing was done by one Thomas J. McCormack. Because there are numerous editions of the *Enquiry* (and, of course, "Of Miracles" appears in whole or in part in scores of anthologies) and because "Of Miracles" is very short, I have not provided page citations for the very few direct quotations I have made.

3. The idea behind (b) is as follows. If two people consider the narrative, and one of them says, "If that story is true, at least one of the events it recounts was a miracle," and the other says, "Even if that story is true in every detail, there is some purely natural explanation for every event it recounts," the first speaker is being reasonable and the second unreasonable. Note that if the second speaker is indeed unreasonable, he nevertheless does not contradict himself, since by (a) it does not follow logically from the story that a miracle has occurred.

4. The purpose of clause (a) of the definition is to rule out of consideration as "miracle-reports" narratives that would satisfy clause (b) *only* because the narrative logically entailed that a miracle had occurred. Here are two examples of such narratives: "Last week Sally witnessed a miracle" and "A feather rose when the resultant of all the natural forces acting on it fell short by an insensible amount of the force requisite for that purpose."

5. It does not follow from our definition of "miracle-report" that if a miracle-report is true, the people whose deeds and experiences are related in that report should believe that they have witnessed or been involved in a miracle. Consider the story of Jill's translation to Sydney (the second version, the version in which the translation is not described as miraculous). Suppose that we who hear the story should conclude that if the story is true, it recounts a miracle. (It follows from this supposition that the story is a miracle-report.) And suppose that the story *is* true. It does not follow that *Jill* should conclude from her experience that a miracle has happened. We know that if the story is true, Jill was translated instantaneously to Sydney. But it is not evident that Jill knows (or that she will presently come to know) that she has been translated instantaneously to Sydney—or even that it would be reasonable for her to believe that she has been. Perhaps she should believe that she is still in New York but dreaming or mad or that she was never in New York in the first place.

6. To continue the theme of the previous note: It may or may not be true that we should believe that if the events related in this story really happened, at least one of them was a miracle. But if this is what we should believe, it does not follow that if these events really happened, those who witnessed them should have regarded at least one of them as a miracle. For one thing, it is extremely doubtful whether anyone in the first century A.D. possessed the concept expressed by the modern word "miracle."

7. It will simplify the statement of our argument if in applying this definition we assume that "miracle" and "violation of a law of nature" are interchangeable. The equation of "miracle" and "violation" would be objectionable if my purpose were to defend the thesis that it was sometimes reasonable to believe that a miracle had occurred. This would be objectionable because it might be reasonable to believe that an event of type X had occurred and reasonable to believe that the occurrence of an event of type X required the violation of a law of nature, but *not* reasonable to believe that the "transgression of a law of nature" required by the occurrence of X was a consequence of a "particular volition of the Deity." My purpose, however, is to show that Hume's argument does not establish its conclusion, and not that this conclusion is false. And Hume's conclusion is (roughly) that it is unreasonable to believe any report of an event that would require a violation of a law—*whatever* the reason for that violation might be.

8. In my view, the two disjuncts of the definiens are independent: One can disbelieve something without assigning it a low probability (if in no other way, by assigning it no probability at all), and one can assign something a low probability without disbelieving it. A lot of people will want to say that these contentions represent a confused picture of the relation between belief and probability (I am thinking primarily of those who think that belief comes in degrees and that probabilities are measures of these degrees, a conception of the nature of belief and its relation to probability that I reject), but since nothing of substance in this essay turns on the thesis that the two disjuncts of the definiens are independent, I shall not defend it.

9. We shall later discuss the possible meanings of the phrase "contrary to one's experience." For the

moment, let us simply assume that we understand this phrase.

10. As we did with the phrase "contrary to experience," let us for the present simply assume that we understand the phrase "even more contrary to experience." We shall later try to decide what it might mean.
11. As our examples show, not all contraventions are miracle-reports. Hume calls the stories that we are calling miracle-reports "miraculous." Contraventions that do not qualify as miraculous he calls "extraordinary" or "prodigies" or "marvelous."
12. Or so I shall assume for the sake of the example. Anyone who would deny this—that is, anyone who would regard the shaman story as a greater contravention than Carter's being a tool of malign extraterrestrial beings—may change the example.
13. Even the "memorable story related by Cardinal de Retz" and the accounts of those miracles "which were lately said to have been wrought in France upon the tomb of Abbe Paris...." "And what have we [Hume asks after telling these two stories] to oppose to such a cloud of witnesses, but the absolute impossibility or miraculous nature of the events, which they relate." It is, incidentally, very hard to reconcile Hume's description of the testimony recorded in these two stories with a statement he had made a few pages before:

> For ... there is not to be found in all history, any miracle attested by a sufficient number of men, of such unquestioned good-sense, education, and learning, as to secure us against all delusion in themselves; of such undoubted integrity, as to place them beyond all suspicion of any design to deceive others; of such credit and reputation in the eyes of mankind, as to have a great deal to lose in case of their being detected in any falsehood; and at the same time, attesting facts performed in such a public manner and in so celebrated a part of the world, as to render the detection unavoidable....
>
> I suspect that what Hume means is that we cannot imagine evidence that would establish the persons who have reported some event as so reliable that it is logically impossible for that evidence to exist and those persons to have given a false report.

V.3

Miracles and Testimony

J. L. MACKIE

A biographical sketch of J. L. Mackie appears before selection IV.B.1. In the present article he argues that the evidence for miracles will never in practice be very great. The argument is epistemological, not ontological.

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(A) INTRODUCTION

Traditional theism, as defined in the Introduction, does not explicitly include any contrast between the natural and the supernatural. Yet there is a familiar, if vague and undeveloped, notion of the natural world in contrast with which the theistic doctrines stand out as asserting a supernatural reality. The question whether and how there can be evidence for what, if real, would be supernatural is therefore one of central significance. Besides, explicit assertions about supernatural occurrences, about miracles or divine interventions which have disrupted the natural course of events, are common in nearly all religions: alleged miracles are often cited to validate religious claims. Christianity, for example, has its share of these. In the life of Christ we have the virgin birth, the turning of water into wine, Christ's walking on the water, his healing of the sick, his raising of Lazarus from the dead, and, of course, the resurrection. The Roman Catholic church will not recognize anyone as a saint unless it is convinced that at least two miracles have been performed by the supposed saint, either in his or her life or after death.

The usual purpose of stories about miracles is to establish the authority of the particular figures who perform them or are associated with them, but of course these stories, with their intended interpretation, presuppose such more general religious doctrines as that of the existence of a god. We can, therefore, recognize, as one of the supports of traditional theism, an argument from miracles: that is, an argument whose main premiss is that such and such remarkable events have occurred, and whose conclusion is that a god of the traditional sort both exists and intervenes, from time to time, in the ordinary world.…

[Here follows a brief exposition of Hume's essay "Of Miracles".]

(B) HUME'S ARGUMENT—DISCUSSION

What Hume has been expounding are the principles for the rational acceptance of testimony, the rules that ought to govern our believing or not believing what we are told. But the rules that govern people's actual acceptance of testimony are very different. We are fairly good at detecting dishonesty, insincerity, and lack of conviction, and we readily reject what we are told by someone who betrays these defects. But we are strongly inclined simply to accept, without question, statements that are obviously assured and sincere. As Hume would say, a firm association of ideas links someone else's saying, with honest conviction, that *p*, and its being the case that *p*, and we pass automatically from the perception of the one to belief in the other. Or, as he might also have said, there is an intellectual sympathy by which we tend automatically to share what we find to be someone else's belief, analogous to sympathy in the original sense, the tendency to share what we see to be someone else's feelings. And in general this is a useful tendency. People's beliefs about ordinary matters are right, or nearly right, more often than they are wildly wrong, so that intellectual sympathy enables fairly correct information to be passed on more smoothly than it could be if we were habitually cautious and constantly checked testimony against the principles for its rational acceptance. But what is thus generally useful can sometimes be misleading, and miracle reports are a special case where we need to restrain our instinctive acceptance of honest statements, and go back to the basic rational principles which determine whether a statement is really reliable or not. Even where we are cautious, and hesitate to accept what we are told—for example by a witness in a legal case—we often do not go beyond the question "How intrinsically reliable is this witness?", or, in detail, "Does he seem to be honest? Does he have a motive for misleading us? Is he the sort of person who might tell plausible lies? Or is he the sort of person who, in the circumstances, might have made a mistake?" If we are satisfied on all these scores, we are inclined to believe what the witness says, without weighing very seriously the question "How intrinsically improbable is what he has told us?" But, as Hume insists, this further question is highly relevant. His general approach to the

problem of when to accept testimony is certainly sound.

Hume's case against miracles is an epistemological argument: it does not try to show that miracles never do happen or never could happen, but only that we never have good reasons for believing that they have happened. It must be clearly distinguished from the suggestion that the very concept of a miracle is incoherent. That suggestion might be spelled out as follows. A miracle is, by definition, a violation of a law of nature, and a law of nature is, by definition, a regularity—or the statement of a regularity—about what happens, about the way the world works; consequently, if some event actually occurs, no regularity which its occurrence infringes (or, no regularity-statement which it falsifies) can really be a law of nature; so this event, however unusual or surprising, cannot after all be a miracle. The two definitions together entail that whatever happens is not a miracle, that is, that miracles never happen. This, be it noted, is not Hume's argument. If it were correct, it would make Hume's argument unnecessary. Before we discuss Hume's case, then, we should consider whether there is a coherent concept of a miracle which would not thus rule out the occurrence of miracles *a priori*.

If miracles are to serve their traditional function of giving spectacular support to religious claims—whether general theistic claims, or the authority of some specific religion or some particular sect or individual teacher—the concept must not be so weakened that anything at all unusual or remarkable counts as a miracle. We must keep in the definition the notion of a violation of natural law. But then, if it is to be even possible that a miracle should occur, we must modify the definition given above of a law of nature. What we want to do is to contrast the order of nature with a possible divine or supernatural intervention. The laws of nature, we must say, describe the ways in which the world—including, of course, human beings—works when left to itself, when not interfered with. A miracle occurs when the world is not left to itself, when something distinct from the natural order as a whole intrudes into it.

This notion of ways in which the world works is coherent and by no means obscure. We know how to discover causal laws, relying on a principle of the uniformity of the course of nature—essentially the assumption that there are some laws to be found—in conjunction with suitable observations and experiments, typically varieties of controlled experiment whose underlying logic is that of Mill's "method of difference." Within the laws so established, we can further mark off basic laws of working from derived laws which hold only in a particular context or contingently upon the way in which something is put together. It will be a derived law that a particular clock, or clocks of a particular sort, run at such a speed, and this will hold only in certain conditions of temperature, and so on; but this law will be derived from more basic ones which describe the regular behaviour of certain kinds of material, in view of the way in which the clock is put together, and these more basic laws of materials may in turn be derived from yet more basic laws about sub-atomic particles, in view of the ways in which those materials are made up of such particles. In so far as we advance towards a knowledge of such a system of basic and derived laws, we are acquiring an understanding of ways in which the world works. As well as what we should ordinarily call causal laws, which typically concern interactions, there are similar laws with regard to the ways in which certain kinds of things simply persist through time, and certain sorts of continuous process just go on. These too, and in particular the more basic laws of these sorts, help to constitute the ways in which the world works. Thus there are several kinds of basic "laws of working." For our present purpose, however, it is not essential that we should even be approaching an understanding of how the world works; it is enough that we have the concept of such basic laws of working, that we know in principle what it would be to discover them. Once we have this concept, we have moved beyond the definition of laws of nature merely as (statements of) what always happens. We can see how, using this concept and using the assumption that there are some such basic laws of working to be found, we can

hope to determine what the actual laws of working are by reference to a restricted range of experiments and observations. This opens up the possibility that we might determine that something *is* a basic law of working of natural objects, and yet also, independently, find that it was occasionally violated. An occasional violation does not in itself necessarily overthrow the independently established conclusion that this is a law of working.

Equally, there is no obscurity in the notion of intervention. Even in the natural world we have a clear understanding of how there can be for a time a closed system, in which everything that happens results from factors within that system in accordance with its laws of working, but how then something may intrude from outside it, bringing about changes that the system would not have produced of its own accord, so that things go on after this intrusion differently from how they would have gone on if the system had remained closed. All we need do, then, is to regard the whole natural world as being, for most of the time, such a closed system; we can then think of a supernatural intervention as something that intrudes into that system from outside the natural world as a whole.

If the laws by which the natural world works are deterministic, then the notion of a violation of them is quite clear-cut: such a violation would be an event which, given that the world was a closed system working in accordance with these laws, and given some actual earlier complete state of the world, simply could not have happened at all. Its occurrence would then be clear proof that either the supposed laws were not the real laws of working, or the earlier state was not as it was supposed to have been, or else the system was not closed after all. But if the basic laws of working are statistical or probabilistic, the notion of a violation of them is less precise. If something happens which, given those statistical laws and some earlier complete state of the world, is extremely improbable—in the sense of physical probability: that is, something such that there is a strong propensity or tendency for it not to happen—we still cannot say firmly that the laws have been violated: laws of this sort explicitly allow that what is extremely improbable may occasionally come about. Indeed it is highly probable (both physically and epistemically) that some events, each of which is very improbable, will occur at rare intervals. If tosses of a coin were governed by a statistical law that gave a 50 per cent propensity to heads at each toss, a continuous run of ten heads would be a highly improbable occurrence; but it would be highly probable that there would be some such runs in a sequence of a million tosses. Nevertheless, we can still use the contrast between the way of working of the natural world as a whole, considered as a normally closed system, and an intervention or intrusion into it. This contrast does not disappear or become unintelligible merely because we lack decisive tests for its application. We can still define a miracle as an event which would not have happened in the course of nature, and which came about only through a supernatural intrusion. The difficulty is merely that we cannot now say with certainty, simply by reference to the relevant laws and some antecedent situation, that a certain event would not have happened in the course of nature, and therefore must be such an intrusion. But we may still be able to say that it is very probable this is now an epistemic probability —that it would not have happened naturally, and so is likely to be such an intrusion. For if the laws made it physically improbable that it would come about, this tends to make it epistemically improbable that it did come about through those laws, if there is any other way in which it could have come about and which is not equally improbable or more improbable. In practice the difficulty mentioned is not much of an extra difficulty. For even where we believe there to be deterministic laws and an earlier situation which together would have made an occurrence actually impossible in the course of nature, it is from our point of view at best epistemically very probable, not certain, that those are the laws and that that was the relevant antecedent situation.

Consequently, whether the laws of nature are deterministic or statistical, we can give a coherent definition of a miracle as a supernatural intrusion

into the normally closed system that works in accordance with those laws, and in either case we can identify conceivable occurrences, and alleged occurrences, which if they were to occur, or have occurred, could be believed with high probability, though not known with certainty, to satisfy that definition.

However, the full concept of a miracle requires that the intrusion should be purposive, that it should fulfill the intention of a god or other supernatural being. This connection cannot be sustained by any ordinary causal theory; it presupposes a power to fulfil intentions directly, without physical means, which is highly dubious; so this requirement for a miracle will be particularly hard to confirm. On the other hand it is worth noting that successful prophecy could be regarded as a form of miracle for which there could in principle be good evidence. If someone is reliably recorded as having prophesied at t_1 an event at t_2 which could not be predicted at t_1 on any natural grounds, and the event occurs at t_2, then at any later time t_3 we can assess the evidence for the claims both that the prophecy was made at t_1 and that its accuracy cannot be explained either causally (for example, on the ground that it brought about its own fulfilment) or as accidental, and hence that it was probably miraculous.

There is, then, a coherent concept of miracles. Their possibility is not ruled out *a priori*, by definition. So we must consider whether Hume's argument shows that we never have good reason for believing that any have occurred.

Hume's general principle for the evaluation of testimony, that we have to weigh the unlikelihood of the event reported against the unlikelihood that the witness is mistaken or dishonest, is substantially correct. It is a corollary of the still more general principle of accepting whatever hypothesis gives the best overall explanation of all the available and relevant evidence. But some riders are necessary. First, the likelihood or unlikelihood, the epistemic probability or improbability, is always relative to some body of information, and may change if additional information comes in. Consequently, any specific decision in accordance with Hume's principle must be provisional. Secondly, it is one thing to decide which of the rival hypotheses in the field at any time should be provisionally accepted in the light of the evidence then available; but it is quite another to estimate the weight of this evidence, to say how well supported this favoured hypothesis is, and whether it is likely that its claims will be undermined either by additional information or by the suggesting of further alternative hypotheses. What is clearly the best-supported view of some matter at the moment may still be very insecure, and quite likely to be overthrown by some further considerations. For example, if a public opinion poll is the only evidence we have about the result of a coming election, this evidence may point, perhaps decisively, to one result rather than another; yet if the poll has reached only a small sample of the electorate, or if it was taken some time before the voting day, it will not be very reliable. There is a dimension of reliability over and above that of epistemic probability relative to the available evidence. Thirdly, Hume's description of what gives support to a prediction, or in general to a judgement about an unobserved case that would fall under some generalization, is very unsatisfactory. He seems to say that if *all* so far observed *A*s have been *B*s, then this amounts to a "proof" that some unobserved *A* will be (or is, or was) a *B*, whereas if some observed *A*s have been *B*s, but some have not, there is only a "probability" that an unobserved *A* will be a *B* (pp. 110–12). This mixes up the reasoning to a generalization with the reasoning *from* a generalization to a particular case. It is true that the premises "All *A*s are *B*s" and "This is an *A*" constitute a proof of the conclusion "This is a *B*," whereas the premisses "*x* per cent of *A*s are *B*s" and "This is an *A*" yield—if there is no other relevant information—a probability of *x* per cent that this is a *B*: they *probabilify* the conclusion to this degree, or, as we can say, the probability of the conclusion "This is a *B*" relative to that evidence is *x* per cent. But the inductive argument from the observation "All so far observed *A*s have been *B*s" to the generalization "All *A*s are *B*s" is far from secure, and it would be most misleading to call this a proof, and therefore misleading also to describe as a proof the whole line

of inference from "All so far observed *A*s have been *B*s" to the conclusion "This as yet unobserved *A* is a *B*." Similarly, the inductive argument from "*x* per cent of observed *A*s have been *B*s" to the statistical generalization "*x* per cent of *A*s are *B*s" is far from secure, so that we cannot say that "*x* percent of observed *A*s have been *B*s" even probabilifies to the degree *x* per cent the conclusion "This as yet unobserved *A* is a *B*." A good deal of other information and background knowledge is needed, in either case, before the generalization, whether universal or statistical, is at all well supported, and hence before the stage is properly set for either proof or probabilification about an as yet unobserved *A*. It is harder than Hume allows here to arrive at well-supported generalizations of either sort about how the world works.

These various qualifications together entail that what has been widely and reasonably thought to be a law of nature may not be one, perhaps in ways that are highly relevant to some supposed miracles. Our present understanding of psychosomatic illness, for example, shows that it is not contrary to the laws of nature that someone who for years has seemed, to himself as well as to others, to be paralysed should rapidly regain the use of his limbs. On the other hand, we can still be pretty confident that it is contrary to the laws of nature that a human being whose heart has stopped beating for forty-eight hours in ordinary circumstances—that is, without any special life-support systems—should come back to life, or that what is literally water should without addition or replacement turn into what is literally good-quality wine.

However, any problems there may be about establishing laws of nature are neutral between the parties to the present debate, Hume's followers and those who believe in miracles; for both these parties need the notion of a well-established law of nature. The miracle advocate needs it in order to be able to say that the alleged occurrence is a miracle, a violation of natural law by supernatural intervention, no less than Hume needs it for his argument against believing that this event has actually taken place.

It is therefore not enough for the defender of a miracle to cast doubt (as he well might) on the certainty of our knowledge of the law of nature that seems to have been violated. For he must himself say that this *is* a law of nature: otherwise the reported event will not be miraculous. That is, he must in effect *concede* to Hume that the antecedent improbability of this event is as high as it could be, hence that, apart from the testimony, we have the strongest possible grounds for believing that the alleged event did not occur. This event must, by the miracle advocate's own admission, be contrary to a genuine, not merely a supposed, law of nature, and therefore maximally improbable. It is this maximal improbability that the weight of the testimony would have to overcome.

One further improvement is needed in Hume's theory of testimony. It is well known that the agreement of two (or more) *independent* witnesses constitutes very powerful evidence. Two independent witnesses are more than twice as good as each of them on his own. The reason for this is plain. If just one witness says that *p*, one explanation of this would be that it was the case that *p* and that he has observed this, remembered it, and is now making an honest report; but there are many alternative explanations, for example that he observed something else which he mistook for its being that *p*, or is misremembering what he observed, or is telling a lie. But if two witnesses who can be shown to be quite independent of one another both say that *p*, while again one explanation is that each of them has observed this and remembered it and is reporting honestly, the alternative explanations are not now so easy. They face the question "How has there come about this *agreement* in their reports, if it was not the case that *p*? How have the witnesses managed to misobserve to the same effect, or to misremember in the same way, or to hit upon the same lie?" It is difficult for even a single liar to keep on telling a *consistent* false story; it is much harder for two or more liars to do so. Of course if there is any collusion between the witnesses, or if either has been influenced, directly or indirectly, by the other, or if both stories have a common source,

this question is easily answered. That is why the independence of the witnesses is so important. This principle of the improbability of coincident error has two vital bearings upon the problem of miracles. On the one hand, it means that a certain sort of testimony can be more powerful evidence than Hume's discussion would suggest. On the other, it means that where we seem to have a plurality of reports, it is essential to check carefully whether they really are independent of one another; the difficulty of meeting this requirement would be an important supplement to the points made in Part II of Hume's essay. Not only in remote and barbarous times, but also in recent ones, we are usually justified in suspecting that what look like distinct reports of a remarkable occurrence arise from different strands of a single tradition between which there has already been communication.

We can now put together the various parts of our argument. Where there is some plausible testimony about the occurrence of what would appear to be a miracle, those who accept this as a miracle have the double burden of showing both that the event took place and that it violated the laws of nature. But it will be very hard to sustain this double burden. For whatever tends to show that it would have been a violation of natural law tends for that very reason to make it most unlikely that it actually happened. Correspondingly, those who deny the occurrence of a miracle have two alternative lines of defense. One is to say that the event may have occurred, but in accordance with the laws of nature. Perhaps there were unknown circumstances that made it possible; or perhaps what were thought to be the relevant laws of nature are not strictly laws; there may be as yet unknown kinds of natural causation through which this event might have come about. The other is to say that this event would indeed have violated natural law, but that for this very reason there is a very strong presumption against its having happened, which it is most unlikely that any testimony will be able to outweigh. Usually one of these defenses will be stronger than the other. For many supposedly miraculous cures, the former will be quite a likely sort of explanation, but for such feats as the bringing back to life of those who are really dead the latter will be more likely. But the *fork*, the disjunction of these two sorts of explanation, is as a whole a very powerful reply to any claim that a miracle has been performed.

However, we should distinguish two different contexts in which an alleged miracle might be discussed. One possible context would be where the parties in debate already both accept some general theistic doctrines, and the point at issue is whether a miracle has occurred which would enhance the authority of a specific sect or teacher. In this context supernatural intervention, though *prima facie* unlikely on any particular occasion, is, generally speaking, on the cards: it is not altogether outside the range of reasonable expectation for these parties. Since they agree that there is an omnipotent deity, or at any rate one or more powerful supernatural beings, they cannot find it absurd to suppose that such a being will occasionally interfere with the course of nature, and this *may* be one of these occasions. For example, if one were already a theist and a Christian, it would not be unreasonable to weigh seriously the evidence of alleged miracles as some indication whether the Jansenists or the Jesuits enjoyed more of the favour of the Almighty. But it is a very different matter if the context is that of fundamental debate about the truth of theism itself. Here one party to the debate is initially at least agnostic, and does not yet concede that there is a supernatural power at all. From this point of view the intrinsic improbability of a genuine miracle, as defined above, is very great, and one or other of the alternative explanations in our fork will always be much more likely—that is, either that the alleged event is not miraculous, or that it did not occur, that the testimony is faulty in some way.

This entails that it is pretty well impossible that reported miracles should provide a worthwhile argument for theism addressed to those who are initially inclined to atheism or even to agnosticism. Such reports can form no significant part of what, following Aquinas, we might call a *Summa contra*

Gentiles, or what, following Descartes, we could describe as being addressed to infidels. Not only are such reports unable to carry any rational conviction on their own, but also they are unable even to contribute independently to the kind of accumulation or battery of arguments referred to in the Introduction. To this extent Hume is right, despite the inaccuracies we have found in his statement of the case.

One further point may be worth making. Occurrences are sometimes claimed to be literally, and not merely metaphorically, miracles, that is, to be genuine supernatural interventions into the natural order, which are not even *prima facie* violations of natural law, but at most rather unusual and unexpected, but very welcome. Thus the combination of weather conditions which facilitated the escape of the British army from Dunkirk in 1940, making the Luftwaffe less than usually effective but making it easy for ships of all sizes to cross the Channel, is sometimes called a miracle. However, even if we accepted theism, and could plausibly assume that a benevolent deity would have favoured the British rather than the Germans in 1940, this explanation would still be far less probable than that which treats it as a mere meteorological coincidence: such weather conditions can occur in the ordinary course of events. Here, even in the context of a debate among those who already accept theistic doctrines, the interpretation of the event as a miracle is much weaker than the rival natural explanation. *A fortiori*, instances of this sort are utterly without force in the context of fundamental debate about theism itself.

There is, however, a possibility which Hume's argument seems to ignore—though, as we shall see, he did not completely ignore it. The argument has been directed against the acceptance of miracles on testimony; but what, it may be objected, if one is not reduced to reliance on testimony, but has observed a miracle for oneself? Surprisingly, perhaps, this possibility does not make very much difference. The first of the above-mentioned lines of defence is still available; maybe the unexpected event that one has oneself observed did indeed occur, but in accordance with the laws of nature. Either the relevant circumstances or the operative laws were not what one has supposed them to be. But at least a part of the other line of defence is also available. Though one is not now relying literally on another witness or other witnesses, we speak not inappropriately of the evidence of our senses, and what one takes to be an observation of one's own is open to questions of the same sort as is the report of some other person. I may have misobserved what took place, as anyone knows who has even been fooled by a conjurer or "magician," and, though this is somewhat less likely, I may be misremembering or deceiving myself after an interval of time. And of course the corroboration of one or more independent witnesses would bring in again the testimony of others which it was the point of this objection to do without. Nevertheless, anyone who is fortunate enough to have carefully observed and carefully recorded, for himself, an apparently miraculous occurrence is no doubt rationally justified in taking it very seriously; but even here it will be in order to entertain the possibility of an alternative natural explanation.

As I said, Hume does not completely ignore this possibility. The Christian religion, he says, cannot at this day be believed by any reasonable person without a miracle. "Mere reason is insufficient to convince us of its veracity: And whoever is moved by *Faith* to assent to it, is conscious of a continued miracle in his own person, which subverts all the principles of his understanding …" (p. 131). But of course this is only a joke. What the believer is conscious of in his own person, though it may be a mode of thinking that goes against "custom and experience," and so is contrary to the ordinary rational principles of the understanding is not, as an occurrence, a violation of natural law. Rather it is all too easy to explain immediately by the automatic communication of beliefs between persons and the familiar psychological processes of wish fulfillment, and ultimately by what Hume himself was later to call "the natural history of religion."

V.4

Evidence for the Resurrection

RICHARD SWINBURNE

A biographical sketch of Richard Swinburne precedes selection II.C.3. In the following article, Swinburne defends the conclusion that there is fairly strong evidence in support of the occurrence of at least one miracle: the resurrection of Jesus. In the course of defending this conclusion, he provides a critical assessment of Hume's argument against miracles.

In assessing what happened on some particular occasion in the past, we have to take into account both detailed historical evidence and general background evidence. The detailed historical evidence may be of three kinds: our own personal (apparent) memories, the testimony of witnesses, and physical traces. The general background evidence will be evidence of what normally happens. This may be free-standing (some generalization about cases similar to that under investigation, confirmed solely by observing such cases) or a consequence of some deeper theory, confirmed by observations over a wide range of cases, some of them rather unlike the case under investigation.

Let me illustrate with a detective example. A detective investigating a safe robbery may himself have a relevant memory. By a "memory" I mean what should be called, more strictly, an "apparent personal memory," one which seems to the subject to be a genuine memory of having done something or having perceived something. The detective may have thought that he saw Jones robbing the safe. More likely, there may be other witnesses who report that they saw Jones robbing the safe. And there will often be physical traces—fingerprints on the safe or money stashed away in Jones's garage. The detective's own apparent memories or the testimony of witnesses may, more likely, be not of seeing the safe being robbed but of other events which in turn provide evidence of who robbed the safe.

That memories and testimony are to be trusted—that is, that they make it probable that what they report occurred—in the absence of counter-evidence, are a priori principles. You might think that memory is to be trusted only if independently confirmed. But what could confirm a memory except another memory, or some generalization about how the world works, itself confirmed by memories of it working on various occasions? You might say that no one memory is to be trusted until confirmed by another. But think how little knowledge we would have if we really thought thus. A memory would only be trustworthy if we simultaneously had another memory (for example, of what someone else said that he saw) confirming the first memory. We don't think that, and we must draw the consequences of our secular thinking: that memory as such, all memory, is to be trusted in the absence of positive counter-evidence that is

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untrustworthy—for example, that it concerns an occasion on which the subject was drunk, or concerns a matter on which he tends to misobserve, or that there is strong independent evidence that what the subject reports did not happen. That positive counter-evidence will come ultimately from other memories (or the testimony of others—see below) which clash with the given memory and are stronger or more numerous.

The principle of testimony, that we should believe what others tell us that they have done or perceived—in the absence of counter-evidence—is also a priori. Clearly most of our beliefs about the world are based on what others claim to have perceived—beliefs about geography and history and science and everything else beyond immediate experience are thus based. We do not normally check that informants are reliable witnesses before accepting their reports. And we *could* not do so because we form our beliefs about what they are saying, the meaning of the claims which they are making, on the assumption that other people normally tell the truth. We can see this by considering how an anthropologist comes to learn the language of a native tribe. He listens to what the natives say, and observes correlations between what they say and how things are; for example he finds that on the day before a festival natives often say "*p*" but that they do not say "*p*" at any other time. If he takes this as evidence that "*p*" means "there will be a festival tomorrow," he must already be assuming that normally natives tell the truth. What applies to the anthropologist applies to a child learning his first language or additions to it. When people point to a colour and say "This is green," the child believes that "green" is the name of that colour—because he has already made (implicitly) the assumption that people normally tell the truth. The assumption itself cannot be tested—because if it is up for test whether people normally tell the truth, then we would have to see whether there are correlations between the propositions people utter and how things are—yet we should not know what proposition they were uttering (that is, what they meant by their sentence) unless we had already made the assumption up for test.

But again there can be positive evidence that certain witnesses, or witnesses positioned in certain circumstances, or a particular testimony by a particular witness, are unreliable. But the evidence will have force only on the assumption that most other witnesses are trustworthy. We can show that Smith is an utterly untrustworthy witness on certain matters only if we can trust the combined testimony of other witnesses about what happened. Conjoint testimony can defeat single testimony.

That physical traces are evidence of this or that is, however, an a posteriori matter. That fingerprints of the same pattern as those of Jones are (strong) evidence that Jones put his fingers where the prints are, follows from the theory that fingers leave prints uniquely characteristic of their owner, established in the last century on the basis of a very wide range of evidence. This evidence itself is available to us by the testimony (written or oral) of those who have studied it. That a particular piece of physical evidence, *a*, shows what it does, *b*, is something to be established inductively (that is, as something entailed or rendered probable by a theory which is itself rendered probable by other pieces of evidence). We need to show that *a* would probably not have occurred unless *b* occurred; and that will be so only if *a* would probably not have occurred unless *b*, or a cause of *b*, had caused *a*. And to show that, you need a theory of what causes what. Such a theory is to be accepted in so far as it is a simple theory rendering probable the occurrence of many observed data which there would otherwise be no reason to expect.

The observed data in the fingerprint example are a very large random sample of "fingerprints" (identified as such by their shape), many of which have been seen being caused by fingers (and none of which can be attributed with any significant probability to any cause other than fingers), each fingerprint uniquely correlating one to one with the fingers of a different human being. The theory of unique fingerprints is a simple theory leading us to expect these observations which we would not otherwise expect, and has the consequence that Jones's fingerprint is evidence of Jones having put his fingers where the fingerprint is found. But this

connection is established a posteriori on the basis of trusting what witnesses say about their observations of the large random sample.

Apparent memories, testimony, and physical traces will often be evidence of certain other things, which in turn are evidence of the matter of interest to us—say, that Jones robbed the safe. Here the above pattern of inductive inference will again be evident. Two witnesses may report that Jones was in the neighbourhood of the robbery at the time it was committed; another one may report that a little later Jones boasted about having won the Lottery, and had a lot of money to spend (and Lottery officials witness that he did not win the Lottery). The traces may include fingerprints on the safe and the discovery of much of the stolen money in a garage of which he possessed the key. And so on. A theory immediately suggests itself which leads us to expect all these data, when the combination of all the data together would be otherwise unexpected—namely, that Jones robbed the safe. And the theory is a simple one—that one person caused all these effects. Another theory which would also lead us to expect the data with equal probability would be that the fingerprints were planted by Smith, the goods stolen by Robinson, who dropped them, and Brown picked them up and hid them in the garage of which, coincidentally, Jones had the key; and so on, to deal with the other data. But the latter theory is not supported by the data, because it is complicated—and the former theory is simple.

All the detailed "historical" data considered so far are causal evidence in the sense that the event reported by our hypothesis, if true, would (in part) have caused those data (or would have been caused by a cause of those data). Thus if Jones had robbed the safe, he would have caused the fingerprints to be on the safe. But now background evidence enters in. The background evidence is not, in the sense delineated, causal evidence, but evidence from a wide area supporting a theory or theories about what normally happens. It shows how likely it is on other grounds that an event of the kind alleged could have occurred. In our example it will include evidence of Jones's behaviour on other occasions, supporting a theory of his character, from which it would follow that he is or is not the sort of person who normally robs safes.

All these kinds of evidence are relevant to determining whether some historical event occurred, and need to be weighed against each other; and the most interesting clashes of evidence, for our purposes, occur when detailed historical evidence points to something which background evidence suggests is most unlikely to have occurred. Consider the sixteenth-century Danish astronomer Tycho Brahe making observations of comets and measuring their angular distance from various stars at different hours of the night. The background evidence in the form of all that had ever been observed in the heavens, and especially the movements of the sun and moon and planets relative to Earth and relative to the "fixed stars," supported the Aristotelio–Ptolemaic astronomy which held that the heavenly regions beyond the moon were occupied by crystalline spheres in which there were no changes, and which carried sun, moon, and planets around the Earth. Now it followed from Tycho's observations that comets changed their apparent positions relative to the stars and planets during the year in such a way that if they existed in the heavenly regions, and the Aristotelio–Ptolemaic theory were true, they would be passing through the crystalline spheres—which would of course be impossible. But if comets are sublunary phenomena, they should show a diurnal parallax: that is, as the Earth (or the outer heavenly sphere of the stars) rotates daily, they should change their position during the course of the night relative to the background of the stars. Tycho Brahe in the sixteenth century had very accurate apparatus by which he could have detected any diurnal parallax. He observed the absence of such a parallax. The detailed historical observations supported the theory that any given comet was a body moving far beyond the moon's orbit.[1] In the situation of a clash between the historical evidence and the theory supported by background evidence, it must be the case either that the background theory is false or that the historical evidence is misleading. In any such clash, we must weigh the two types

of evidence against each other, and it may not always be clear where the balance lies, although often it may. In the example which I have just discussed it was of course the background theory which was at fault, and eventually (whether or not that was evident at the time) it became evident that the balance of evidence was against the background theory.

In his discussion of miracles, Hume was concerned with just such a clash. He understood by a miracle "a transgression of a law of nature by a particular volition of the Deity, or by the interposition of some invisible agent."[2] Here we are concerned with a situation where the background evidence supports a theory, not just about what normally happens (most of the time, on the whole) and so is not all that powerful as evidence of what happened on the given occasion, but rather with a situation where the background evidence powerfully supports a theory about what laws of nature make (almost) inevitable. I write "almost," for if we are to have a coherent notion of a "transgression" or "violation" of a law of nature, we cannot understand a law of nature as a law determining what inevitably happens. For in that case there could not be a "violation" of a law of nature, since a "violation" implies an event contrary to what follows from the operation of a law. An event contrary to what is predicted by a purported law would only show the purported law to be no real law. If a purported law of gravity rules out levitation, and a levitation occurs, then the purported law can be no true law. To make the notion of a violation coherent, we must amend our understanding of "law of nature" along such lines as the following. We should understand by a law of nature a principle which determines what often happens, and by a fundamental law a principle which determines what happens, when what happens is determined by law at all. Derivative laws (such as Kepler's laws of planetary motion) determine what happens in certain regions for certain periods of time, subject to non-interference by other laws or powers beyond law. Derivative laws are consequences of fundamental laws, which operate always and everywhere and without exceptions (no other law prevents their operation)—when what happens is determined by law. A violation of a law of nature is then to be understood as an event contrary to the predictions of a fundamental law of nature (or very improbable given that law). Such laws thus determine what happens (either of physical necessity or, if they are indeterminate laws, with physical probability) inevitably—in so far as laws operate at all. But they may be violated by something which has the power to set aside the principles governing the natural behaviour of things. An understanding of a law of nature of this qualified kind is not merely compatible with anything scientists wish to claim, but, more than that, is required, once you allow the possibility of laws of nature (for example, those of quantum theory) which determine what happens only with physical probability, and not necessity, and so you allow the possible occurrence of the physically improbable.

Hume would, I think, have been satisfied with such an amended understanding of a law of nature, because he did not wish to rule out the notion of a miracle as logically impossible. What he did claim was in effect (to fill out his words a little) that to be justified in claiming some generalization to be a fundamental law of nature, we need to show that it operates without exception in a wide range of cases. That evidence will be evidence that it holds in the case in question. If the historical evidence suggests that some event occurred contrary to a fundamental law, we have at best a standoff: we cannot say what happened, certainly not with enough certainty to provide "a just foundation for any … system of religion."[3] And the normal situation, Hume considers, is that the background evidence, in the form of evidence of the universal conformity to the purported law in many different areas investigated, will outweigh the historical evidence, and so show that what happened accorded with a law of nature, and so was no miracle.

Hume's discussion suffers from one minor deficiency, one medium-sized deficiency, and one major one. The minor one is that the only kind of historical evidence of which he takes account is testimony. He doesn't consider what someone who thinks that he himself has seen a miracle ought to

believe. Nor does he consider the possibility of physical traces—for example, X-rays of the internal state of someone before and after a purported healing (whose status as X-rays taken at the time and of the patient is evidenced by many witnesses and much theory). But the addition of these important kinds of historical evidence would not affect the shape of Hume's argument. Far more important is the point that Hume seems to regard the situation as static. We have a certain number of witnesses, and their testimony has a certain limited force against the background evidence, and that's that. But that need not be the situation at all. Evidence can mount up both for the background theory and for the reliability of the detailed historical evidence. Evidence could mount up not merely that people do not pass from the kind of state recorded by the earlier X-ray to the kind of state recorded by the later one, but that it is contrary to some well-established biochemical theory they should. Evidence could also mount in favour of a healing having occurred. True, there could not be an indefinite increase in the number of physical traces and witnesses in favour of a healing; but what could mount up indefinitely is evidence in favour of the reliability of X-rays of the kind in question (and of the reliability of the witnesses who testified to their status). Evidence could mount up that X-ray pictures are, interpreted in a certain way, never misleading, and hence that the two pictures show how things were. And evidence could mount up that certain witnesses or certain kinds of witnesses (for example, those testifying to events of great importance to them, where affirming the event could lead to their execution) are reliable. And when the evidence on both sides does mount up, the situation—given the logical possibility of miracles—would be not a stand-off, but evidence both that the purported law is a law and that there has been a unique exception to its operation.

But Hume's worst mistake was to suppose that the only relevant background theory to be established from wider experience was a scientific theory about what are the laws of nature. But any theory showing whether laws of nature are ultimate or whether they depend on something higher for their operation is crucially relevant. If there is no God, then the laws of nature are the ultimate determinants of what happens. But if there is a God, then whether and for how long and under what circumstances laws of nature operate depend on God. Any evidence that there is a God, and, in particular, evidence that there is a God of a kind who might be expected to intervene occasionally in the natural order will be evidence leading us to expect occasional violations of laws of nature. And any evidence that God might be expected to intervene in a certain way will be evidence supporting historical evidence that he has done so. To take a human analogy, suppose we have background evidence supporting a theory about some human person that he behaves normally in highly regular ways —Kant, say, going for a walk at totally predictable times through the streets of Königsberg (so that citizens could set their watches by his walk). Then suppose that there is historical evidence of many witnesses that on one day his walk was half an hour late, and other witnesses reported that he delayed because he visited a sick friend first. We might at this point have a stand-off. But suppose that we have other evidence strongly supporting a theory that Kant was a compassionate friend; then we might expect him to change his otherwise inflexible habits to respond to a friend's sickness. The total background evidence supports the historical evidence that on the occasion in question the regularity was broken.

So what of the core physical element of the resurrection understood in the traditional sense: of Jesus being dead for thirty-six hours, coming to life again in his crucified body (in which he then had superhuman powers—for example, to appear and disappear)? Of course, the resurrection is traditionally supposed to have a cosmic significance which goes infinitely far beyond this core physical element. The Jesus who died and is risen is Jesus Christ, Messiah and the Word of God, the second Person of the Trinity. His resurrection constitutes God the Father's acceptance of the sacrifice of Christ on the cross for the sins of the world, and the initiation of a process of redeeming humanity and nature in respects both physical and spiritual. But the resurrection has this cosmic significance, it is traditionally supposed, only because of its physical

core. The Word of God is risen from the dead only because the human Jesus is risen from the dead (only *qua* human can the Word rise); a human can only be resurrected fully if he is resurrected in an embodied state (for although, I believe, we can exist without bodies, bodies make for the fullness of human existence—such is the traditional Christian and Jewish view), and although he could have risen in an embodied state with a totally new body, resurrection of a changed old body would manifest "resurrection," as opposed to mere coming to life again, most eminently. The Father accepts the sacrifice of Christ by bringing to life what has been sacrificed; thereby he proclaims that suffering and death have been overcome. To initiate the redemption of humanity and of the natural order, he needs to bring to life a previously damaged body, not only a soul. And he gives his signature of approval to the teaching and sacrifice of Christ by doing an act which God alone can do—of interfering in the operation of the natural laws by which he controls the universe. For the coming to life again of a body dead for thirty-six hours is undoubtedly a violation of natural laws, and if brought about by an agent, requires God's action. The core physical element in the resurrection of Jesus has for these reasons been supposed to be a very important element in the Christian tradition. So what detailed historical evidence is there for the physical core?

There are no apparent memories of having seen it happen, and no currently available physical traces. But there is the testimony of witnesses—of an indirect character. There is the testimony of witnesses (the writers of the various books of the New Testament) to the testimony of other witnesses. It looks as though St Paul, St Luke, and the rest purport to tell us what they have been told, both by witnesses who purported to see the tomb empty and by witnesses who purported to have met the risen Jesus. (There are those who deny that the main New Testament writers claim to report the testimony of direct witnesses of the resurrection events; but time requires me to leave that issue to others. It certainly does look initially as if that is their claim, and so I shall assume.) Let us call the New Testament writers the indirect witnesses, and their informants the direct witnesses. The principles of credulity and testimony require us to believe the indirect witnesses, and so in turn the direct witnesses. No doubt the testimony of one witness about what another witness claimed to have happened is not as strong evidence about what happened as is more direct testimony; but any diminution of trustworthiness by indirectness is compensated by quantity. In this case there are several indirect witnesses, and two at least of them claim to have heard their news from more than one direct witness.[4] In such circumstances positive counter-evidence is needed for not believing the news. The most obvious such counter-evidence of a historical kind in this case is discrepancy in the detailed testimony: and there is certainly some of that. (For a small example, consider the clash between Luke 24:50, which implies that the ascension occurred on the same day as the resurrection, and Acts 1:3, which states that it occurred forty days later.) Discrepancies in the details require explaining by the witnesses being deceitful, bad observers, careless reporters, or people whose testimony is not intended to be taken in a fully literal sense; and any such explanation casts some measure of doubt on other details of their testimony, and to some extent (dependent on the kind of explanation given) on the whole testimony. But evidence can only fail to render a hypothesis probable if it renders probable instead the disjunction of all alternative hypotheses. And if none of these has any great probability, the original hypothesis must retain its overall probability—which is only a more careful and precise way of putting Sherlock Holmes's famous remark: "When you have eliminated the impossible, whatever remains, *however improbable*, must be the truth."[5]

Alternative hypotheses will need to explain both why false testimony was given and also the absence of any positive testimony in their own favour—for example, testimony of having seen the dead body of Jesus after the first Easter Day.[6] But they may have evidence best explained by them, including, perhaps, the absence of certain evidence which one would expect if the traditional account is correct—for example, the failure of St Mark's Gospel to proceed beyond 16:8. However, when all that is taken account of, I can only

say that alternative hypotheses have always seemed to me to give far less satisfactory accounts of the historical evidence than does the traditional account—in the sense of leading us to expect the evidence we find with much smaller probabilities. Those who think that the total evidence is against the traditional account do so because they think the background evidence makes a resurrection very improbable. There is, in my view, so much testimony to the main outlines of the traditional account that if this event was of a kind which we might expect to happen, one licensed by our overall background theory, we would have no problem whatever in accepting the main point of that testimony. If it were testimony to Jesus having woken from sleep, rather than to Jesus having risen from the dead, there would be no problem (despite the discrepancies of detail) in accepting it.

The problem arises because the (physical core of) resurrection is supposed to be contrary to laws of nature—and, as I suggested earlier, rightly so. Although we are far from clear about what are the laws of biology and their consequences, in comparison with our clarity about some of the consequences of the laws of physics, it seems to me pretty clear that resurrection of the traditional kind is ruled out by the laws of biology very well established by a whole range of background evidence. So if the laws of nature are the ultimate determinants of what happens, there is at least a stand-off, and maybe not even that. True, we could multiply evidence about the reliability of the witnesses or kinds of witnesses with whom we are concerned. The witnesses include some whose life was in danger if they testified to the resurrection and (plausibly) some whose religious upbringing would not have led them to expect that a crucified rabbi would rise again. And if the evidence became immensely strong that people of that kind could never have testified to the resurrection unless they believed it to have occurred after having checked the matter out thoroughly, then maybe the detailed historical evidence would be so strong, despite the fact that such a resurrection would have been a violation of natural laws, that Jesus had risen that the balance of probability would favour the latter, which would then constitute a miracle.

I am, of course, not an expert on the New Testament, but my own limited acquaintance with it suggests that that is not our situation. There is a significant balance of detailed historical evidence in favour of the resurrection, but it is not strong enough to equal the very strong force of the background evidence—if the latter is construed only as evidence of what are the laws of nature. But in my view that is not the right way to construe the background evidence. My belief is that there is a lot of evidence for the existence of God—a being essentially omnipotent, omniscient, and perfectly free. This evidence is the evidence of the existence of a complex physical universe, the (almost invariable) conformity of material bodies to natural laws, the evolution of animals and humans (souls connected to bodies), the providential ordering of the world in various ways, and the widespread phenomenon of religious experience (in the form of people seeming to be aware of the presence of God). In my view these phenomena are best explained by the causal agency of a God (with the properties stated), and hence provide good inductive evidence for his existence; they make it more probable than not. I have argued this case at length elsewhere,[7] and cannot do so here. But suppose that I am right. It would then follow that the laws of nature depend for their operation from moment to moment on God, who, in virtue of his omnipotence, can suspend them as and when he chooses. But what reason would he have for doing so?

In general, God has good reason to conserve the laws of nature. For by so doing he creates a beautiful universe, a dance of moving material bodies; and only by doing so can he give to us embodied creatures power over nature and power to learn how to extend our powers. For embodiedness involves having under our control the chunk of matter which is our body, and being able to influence the world only by moving it. But only if there are regular laws governing how material bodies behave, which we can come to know, can we come to know which bodily movements to make to produce which results. Only

regularities in the behaviour of air will enable me to communicate with you by sound, and only regularities in the behaviour of bricks will enable me to construct a building. And by studying such regularities we can learn to extend the range of our powers—by learning the laws of electromagnetism, we can learn to communicate with distant persons by radio, and so on.

In any household, secure rules give control to those under them. If children know that if they do this, they will be punished, and if they do that, they will be rewarded, that gives them control over their future—which a parent who acted on whim would prevent them from having. But a parent whose every interaction with his children was governed by rules and who never yielded to a plea to bend a rule would cease to be a loving person with whom the child interacted. And the same would be true of a God who never responded to prayer by acting in non-rule-governed ways or by breaking his own rules. Despite all the advantages of the predictable, God would wish to interact with his children—and that means doing things at their request which he would not otherwise do, and responding in non-automatic ways to what they have done—very occasionally. And he would want to show them things directly, not only through a book of nature which he had written in advance.

All this provides reason for God responding to the particular requests and needs of individuals in ways which manifest his presence only to them. But it also provides reason for God to respond to a common need of the human race. There are, I suggest, a number of reasons for God to intervene in a big way in human history and show that he has done so, some of them being reasons for intervening by himself becoming incarnate as a human. The first reason is to make available an atonement for human sin. When humans have badly abused the good life which he has given them, and so wronged him and each other, God will naturally seek to do something about it. He will want us to take our sin seriously, not just ignore it; and so he will want us to make reparation. But we have corrupted each other, and have no serious commitment to making reparation at all, let alone the means wherewith to make it; for we owe so much to God anyway in gratitude for all the good life he has given us. So just as a human parent may provide a child who cannot pay for the damage he has caused with the means to make reparation, so God may provide for humans a human life which they can offer back to him as the life they ought to have led—a human life, which being the life of God, was not the life of one created voluntarily by God who would owe a great debt to God anyway. So God has the reason of providing atonement to intervene personally in the course of human history by becoming incarnate as a human and living so generously as to be prepared to be killed for his teaching (a not unlikely consequence of totally honest and challenging teaching in many a society). But if we are to join in offering a sacrifice, we have to know which sacrifice to offer, for many human lives which might seem to be holy on the outside may not be. God needs not merely to accept the sacrifice, but to show us that he has done so. You accept an offer by taking it over, using it, and making it fruitful. What more obvious way of doing this than by bringing to life the human killed for living a holy life?

Other reasons for God to become incarnate are to identify with us by sharing the hardships of life needed for our perfection, to show us what a good thing humanity is, and that he regards us as friends and not as servants. Also, we need teaching. Reason may show us with some degree of probability that there is a God, and it may teach us some basic moral truths. But we need to know so much more in order to live and worship in the right way. The teaching will need to include teaching that a certain human life was the life of God incarnate; for if we are ignorant that God has become incarnate, we cannot utilize the benefits of divine incarnation. The teaching will need to be handed on to new generations and cultures, and so, whether in oral or written form, it will need to be entrusted to a community, a church, which can interpret it.[8] But how are we to know that a church's teaching about a certain human being is the teaching of God about God incarnate? God must authenticate it, put his signature on the original teaching and the community which resulted from it. Only God who keeps the laws of nature operative can set them aside, and

if they are set aside in such a way as to vindicate the life and teaching of a human whose outer life was holy, and forward the teaching of a church which teaches that the incarnate one was God, that indeed is God's signature. So God has abundant reason to intervene in human history to cause a human being to rise from the dead—not just any human, but a human who had lived (outwardly) a certain sort of sacrificial life and proclaimed deep and plausibly true news from God and was killed for doing so.

Now if there is a God of the kind which, in my view, arguments from the vast range of natural phenomena mentioned strongly support, that God, being omnipotent, has, as I mentioned earlier, the power to bring about anything coherently describable, including a resurrection of the cited kind. God is an intentional agent; he performs actions because he has a reason for doing them—that is, he believes that they serve some good. We too do actions because we believe that they serve some good. But we humans are subject to desires, inclinations which lead us to do actions less than the best. If we were freed from those inclinations, nothing but reason would motivate us to act; we would therefore always act for what we believed the best, or equal best. God, as a perfectly free being, is subject to no desires of the stated kind; he will act for what he believes to be the best or equal best, and, being omniscient, will have true beliefs about what is the best or equal best. It may be, however, that there is no best or equal best; that God often has an infinite range of mutually incompatible actions open to him at any time, each better than some other, but no best. In that case God will do a good action (that is, one in favour of doing which there is a balance of reasons), but not the best. I have sketched a case for supposing that among the good actions open to him are to effect an incarnation leading to a likely death followed by a resurrection, and so for supposing that his goodness would lead him to bring about a resurrection. It is always possible that at every time some other incompatible action would always be as good or better. But at any rate my arguments indicate that a resurrection is the sort of thing which there is significant probability that a God might bring about.

I have not argued here my case for the existence of God; nor have I done more than sketch the case for supposing that if there is a God, he might well be expected to intervene in recorded and historically evidenceable human history in this sort of way. My main point is that we need that sort of background theory well supported by evidence if our evidence overall is to give a significant overall probability to the resurrection. Given that theory, we still require detailed historical evidence of a prophet who lived a holy life, proclaimed that he was the chosen of God and was offering his life for the sins of the world, and proclaimed that he was God himself—or at any rate that his church proclaimed this to be the implication of his teaching. But we don't require too much detailed historical evidence, in view of the background evidence that such an event might well be expected, in order to make it probable that the event occurred, and so rational to believe that it did.

If such a background theory as I have described were much less well supported, or a rival theory (for example, that there is no God and that the laws of nature are ultimate) were well supported, then we would need much more detailed historical evidence in favour of the resurrection to make our belief in it rational. New Testament scholars sometimes boast that they enquire into their subject-matter without introducing any theological presuppositions. If they mean that they investigate without taking into account any background theory, then they misdescribe their enterprise. This simply can't be done. An infinite number of theories are such that they lead you to expect the historical evidence with equal probability—be they theories of invisible visitors from outer space or of the powers of sacred mushrooms. No scholar could decide between these theories on mere historical evidence alone; he must take into account wider evidence (including a priori considerations of simplicity) for supposing such theories to be true or false. What is worrying is that New Testament scholars seem to think that they can do without background theories. But if a theological theory (that there is a God who has certain properties) is well established, that must be taken into account. And even if we could reach some conclusion

without taking into account 95 per cent of the relevant evidence (which includes the existence of a universe, its conformity to scientific laws, etc.), we would be highly irrational if we tried to do so. Knowledge is a web, and when some event—if it occurred—would have cosmic significance, the threads of the web stretch to the ends of the cosmos.

I should make clear that in saying that we have evidence supporting a certain background theory, I do not mean that the Jews of the first century AD, or even highly secularized humans today, do in fact expect a sacrificing Messiah, or even could normally be expected to expect such a Messiah, if they had not been familiar with the Christian tradition. I mean that evidence for the existence of God (of a certain kind) is publicly available and supports that theory (by objective criteria of evidential support), and that this theory of the divine nature has the implications which I have drawn out about what we might expect to find in history. But we humans may be too stupid or sinful to see the strength of the evidential support or the implications of the theory until familiarity with the Christian tradition draws this whole line of reasoning to our attention. Yet the fact that it needs a causal stimulus to make us aware of the force of certain evidence does not cast any doubt on the strength of that evidence. Inspector Lestrade and the bumbling police of Victorian Scotland Yard often saw everything which Sherlock Holmes saw. But they could not see its inductive implications, what it made probable. It needed Sherlock Holmes to suggest a theory to account for the data; and once they heard his theory, then they came to see that the background evidence and historical evidence supported that theory. But the evidential relations were there, whether or not they saw them. We may need the Christian tradition of the divine nature and of what a being with that nature might be expected to do (for example, as worked out in St Athanasius' *De Incarnatione* and St Anselm's *Cur Deus Homo*)—that is, an available theory—before we can see that the evidence supports that theory well. But it does support it very well, and the detailed historical evidence for the resurrection also gives it a modest amount of support. The other participants in this conference will assess the latter amount of support in far more detail and with far more competence than I can. But as one with a mere amateur's interest in New Testament scholarship, I can only say that my own belief is that the historical evidence is quite strong enough, given the background evidence, to make it considerably more probable than not that Jesus Christ rose from the dead on the first Easter Day.

APPENDIX: SUNDAY

I wish to illustrate my account of how evidence for the resurrection should be assessed by bringing into the picture some detailed historical evidence which is very seldom mentioned in this connection.[9] This is the evidence that there was a universal early Christian custom of celebrating the Eucharist on a Sunday, which is in turn to be explained most simply by a very early belief (within much less than a decade of the crucifixion) of many of the original Christian community, including the eleven, that Christ had risen on a particular day. This, in its turn, could only be explained in a simple way by the fact that particular witnesses remembered (apparently) that they had seen either the empty tomb or the risen Jesus on the first Easter Day. I add this further detailed historical evidence to the evidence more normally adduced in this connection as data showing that these were indeed the apparent memories of many of the original community, including the eleven, about events which had happened a very short time beforehand, and thus to be believed in the absence of counter-evidence.

Acts 20:7 is from one of the "we" passages in Acts, and so probably reflects the author's participation in the events that occurred. It records for a "first day of the week" the breaking of bread—κλᾶναἄρτον was the expression used by St Paul (I Cor.) and the Synoptists for what Jesus did at the Last Supper,[10] and was always used later as a description of the common Christian meal which included the Eucharist. I Corinthians 16:1–2 suggests that the first day had an important place in the Christian calendar, and Revelation I:10 suggests that the "Lord's day" (ἡ κυριακὴ ἡμέρα) has

central theological significance.[11] The Sunday Eucharist was not a custom merely of Pauline churches. All references in early literature to when the Eucharist was celebrated refer to a weekly Sunday celebration—see the *Didache* (n. 14) and Justin's *First Apology* (nn. 65–7). Eusebius records of one of the two groups of Ebionites (a Jewish Christian sect who separated from mainstream Christianity in the reign of Trajan) that they "celebrate the Lord's days very much like us in commemoration of his resurrection."[12] A group so dedicated to Jewish discipline would not have preserved the custom of Sunday worship if they had regarded it as of non-Palestinian origin. Christians left Jerusalem to found Christian churches in many other parts of the Near East within the first Christian decade. They carried with them not merely a body of doctrine, but a practice of worship. If the practice of celebrating the Eucharist on Sunday had arisen subsequently to the foundation of these churches, one would expect to find some in which the Eucharist was celebrated on some other day (for example, on the day of the original Last Supper—probably a Thursday, and certainly not a Sunday, or annually rather than weekly). No such are known. There is no plausible origin of the sacredness of Sunday from outside Christianity.[13] There is only one simple explanation: the Eucharist was celebrated on a Sunday from the first years of Christianity because Christians believed that the central Christian event of the resurrection occurred on a Sunday. Yet such early practice would have included that of some of the eleven themselves, and so could only go with a belief of theirs that they had seen either the empty tomb or the risen Jesus on the first Easter Day. This practice gives powerful support to the New Testament witness to the latter.

But a further interesting question then arises: who in those very early days decided that the Eucharist was to be celebrated on a Sunday? One obvious explanation is that some very early gathering of apostles decided, in view of what they believed to have happened on a Sunday, that Sunday would be the most appropriate day on which to hold regular worship in the form in which Jesus instituted it at the Last Supper. But we find no hint in the New Testament of such a decision being taken,[14] analogous to the reported decisions of the apostles about the conditions under which Gentiles were to be admitted to the Church.

The New Testament contains quite a number of hints in favour of a different answer to the "who decided?" question. A number of the resurrection appearances of Jesus to disciples together are associated with a meal at which Jesus presided or was present (on particular occasions—Mark 16:14; Luke 24:30, 35; 24:43; John 21:13—and in general—Acts 10:41).[15] The descriptions of these occasions have associated with them the Eucharistic phrases which St Paul and St Luke recorded in their accounts of the institution in I Corinthians II and Luke 22—Luke 24:30 and 35 speak of Jesus "breaking bread" and being "known" in the "breaking of the bread." Luke 24:43 speaks of Jesus "taking" (λαβών—see I Cor. II:23) the fish; John 21:13 speaks of Jesus "taking" the bread and "giving" (δίδωσιν—see Luke 22:19) it to his disciples, and "in a like way" (ὁμοίως—see Luke 22:20, ὡσαύτως) the fish. Although only the additional chapter of the Fourth Gospel mentions a meal, the author of the main body of the Fourth Gospel was unwilling to record the Eucharistic details of the Last Supper, although the wealth of Eucharistic references earlier in the Gospel shows his clear knowledge of them.[16] (St John's unwillingness[17] to record the details of the original Last Supper may be attributed to various reasons, including his awareness that his Christian readers would already know the details of the rite by heart, his desire that non-Christians should not be given details which would allow them to parody the sacred rite (*disciplina arcani*), and consequently his preference for telling a story which showed the "true meaning" of the Eucharist.) Hence it is not to be expected that he would mention a Sunday meal of Eucharistic character explicitly. But note that the two appearances which St John records, to the disciples as a group, are both Sunday appearances.

St Matthew's account of post-resurrection events, of course, does not include even the hint of a meal, but there is some reason to think that even he was aware of a post-resurrection Eucharist. The three Synoptic Gospels and I Corinthians contain accounts of the institution at the Last Supper in words so similar

to each other that it is reasonable to suppose that they were used at subsequent celebrations. The three Gospels all include among the words of Jesus that he will not "drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when [he] drinks it anew" in the kingdom of God. These words would not have been preserved as part of Eucharistic celebration unless some common meaning or other was attached to them by the Christian communities which used them. Now the Lucan tradition mentioned earlier records that Jesus did eat and drink (Acts 10:41) with the disciples after the resurrection (and I have given reasons for thinking of such meals as Eucharists). Hence Luke must have thought of those as occasions when Jesus drank again of the fruit of the vine.[18] So the post-resurrection meals must be what the phrase "anew in the kingdom of God" was seen by St Luke as referring to. And plausibly, therefore, St Matthew also saw his similar phrase as referring to a post-resurrection meal (and, since the "vow of abstinence" was made in a Eucharistic context, to a Eucharist). All this suggests an explanation of the universality of the tradition of Sunday celebration—not merely in the belief that Jesus rose on a Sunday, but in the belief of the apostles that they had joined with Jesus in post-resurrection Eucharists which he commanded them to continue on Sundays.[19] By previous arguments, these memory beliefs must be taken as true—especially in virtue of the fact that they are the beliefs of many about what happened on a public occasion—in the absence of strong counter-evidence.

A further important piece of evidence that the source of the tradition is Jesus himself is that St Paul lists instructions on how to celebrate the Eucharist as among the things which he "received from the Lord" (I Cor. II:23)—that is, as part of a body of central teaching believed (*c.* 55) to have come via an oral tradition from the mouth of Jesus himself.[20] It would be very odd if such detailed instructions came with no hint as to when the Eucharist should be celebrated. What detailed instructions as to how to celebrate a rite were ever laid down or handed on without some indication of when the rite should be performed? Yet there is no record in the accounts of the Last Supper of such an instruction being given then. And if Jesus had given that instruction only at the Last Supper, that would only have made sense to the disciples if he had also told them that he would rise again on Sunday—and in that case they would certainly have checked out the tomb on that day and not have celebrated on a Sunday unless they had found it empty. But if the instruction did come from the mouth of Jesus himself, I suggest that a post-resurrection instruction is more plausible.

So there is some reason to suppose that the universal custom of Sunday Eucharist derives from the post-resurrection practice and command of Jesus himself, and thereby contributes further evidence of the resurrection. But whichever detailed account of the early origin of the Sunday Eucharist be accepted, it constitutes one further piece of evidence either that witnesses found the tomb empty on the first Easter Sunday, or that witnesses believed that they had seen and probably eaten and drunk with Jesus on or shortly after that day, and hence is further evidence for the resurrection itself.

NOTES

1. For this story, see e.g. S. Sambursky, *The Physical World of the Greeks* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1956), 218–20; and T. S. Kuhn, *The Copernican Revolution* (New York: Random House, 1957), 206–9.
2. D. Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, 1777 edn., ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge, 2nd edn. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1902), 115n. I.
3. D. Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, 127.
4. See Luke 1:2 and Gal. 1:18–19.
5. A. C. Doyle, *The Sign of Four, The Complete Sherlock Holmes*, 1 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1930), III.
6. A. C. Doyle, "Silver Blaze," in *The Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes* (London: George Newnes, 1894), 24:

"Is there any other point to which you would wish to draw my attention?"
"To the curious incident of the dog in the night-time."
"The dog did nothing in the night-time."
"That was the curious incident," remarked Sherlock Holmes.

7. Richard Swinburne, *The Existence of God* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1979).
8. For a fuller justification of the claims that God has reasons of these various kinds to intervene in human history, especially by himself becoming incarnate, and a further consideration of what kind of evidence additional to a resurrection would show that he had done so, see my *Responsibility and Atonement* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1989), ch. 10; *Revelation* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1992), pt. ii; and *The Christian God* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994), 216–23. These passages include some argument for supposing that we might expect such an incarnation only once in human history.
9. Much of this appendix consists in rearranging the evidence assembled in W. Rordorf's *Sunday* (London: SCM, 1968), ch. 4, on the origin of the Christian Sunday, into the form of evidence for the resurrection. I am most grateful to Christopher Rowland for his valuable criticism of an earlier draft of this appendix. Note that I am not concerned with the issue of when or why Sunday became the Christian Sabbath, only with the origin of the custom of celebrating the Eucharist on Sunday.
10. The other uses of κλᾶν ἄρτον in the NT (e.g. Acts 2:46) are also all plausibly taken as referring to a Eucharist, with the exception of Acts 27:35.
11. For argument that the "Lord's day" is Sunday, and not Easter Day, see R. J. Bauckham, "The Lord's Day," in D. A. Carson (ed.), *From Sabbath to Lord's Day* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1982), 230–2.
12. Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, III. 27.
13. See Rordorf, *Sunday*, 180–93.
14. Mark 16:9; the opening verse of the new ending of St Mark's Gospel sees this phrase as capturing a central part of the Christian message.
15. O. Cullmann (*Essays on the Lord's Supper* (London: Lutterworth, 1958), 11–12) understands Acts 1:4 as speaking of Jesus "being assembled together" with his apostles, συναλιζόμενος, as "taking salt" with them, and so referring to a meal.
16. e.g. John 6:51b, "The bread which I will give is my flesh for the life of the world," surely alludes to the Eucharistic words.
17. John 13:2.
18. The vast majority of commentators interpret Jesus as vowing to abstain from the fruit of the vine until some final, more distant establishment of his kingdom. But whatever Jesus may have meant by his words, it is hard to suppose that St Luke could have so understood them unless he also supposed that no wine was drunk by Jesus on any of the occasions when Jesus ate and drank after his resurrection. But it is not plausible to claim that St Luke did suppose that—wine was an ordinary enough drink, and was above all to be drunk on an occasion of a new meal with old friends; further, I have given some reason to suppose that he thought of some of these meals as Eucharists.
19. It is true that if there had been one formal Eucharist at which all eleven disciples were present on the first Easter evening, most of the Gospels would inevitably have mentioned it. (See the objection in Bauckham, "The Lord's Day," 235.) But that is reason only for supposing that the first post-resurrection Eucharists did not involve all the disciples, and were occasions somewhat unexpected for their participants—both points made in the Gospels (e.g. John explicitly mentions the absence of Thomas on the evening of Easter Sunday).
20. The suggestion that St Paul understood "received from the Lord" as describing the contents of a private vision is not plausible; there would have been no universal detailed conformity of Christian communities to Eucharistic practice without that practice having roots earlier and stronger than a Pauline vision. That what were received were in effect instructions for subsequent celebration is made clear by v. 26.

V.5

Hyperspace and Christianity

HUD HUDSON

Hud Hudson is professor of philosophy at Western Washington University and works primarily in the areas of metaphysics and the history of modern philosophy. He is the author of A Materialist Metaphysics of the Human Person *(2001) and* The Metaphysics of Hyperspace *(2005), from which the final reading in this section is taken. In this selection, Hudson argues that, contrary to a fairly widespread and familiar allegation, belief in a wide variety of biblical miracles is fully consistent with our modern scientific worldview.*

that ye, being rooted, and grounded in love, May be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; And to know the love of Christ.

EPHESIANS 3: 17–19, KJV

1. THE AIM OF THESE REFLECTIONS

Every once in a while one encounters a particularly aggressive brand of atheism that mistakes some amorphous thing called "our modern worldview" for an invulnerable fortress, sets up residence there, and then launches volleys from the apparent safety of its walls against various Christian doctrines and themes. Some of these offensives are sophisticated and challenging, some are not, and some appear to be more sophisticated and challenging than they are.[1] I aim to disarm certain kinds of criticism that I believe fall into this third camp. Here is the central form of the kind of argument I wish to target.

Recipe for the rejection of Christian belief that p

1. Christians believe that *p*.
2. *p* is inconsistent with our modern worldview.
3. If a proposition is inconsistent with our modern worldview, then we have justifying reasons to believe that the proposition is false.
4. Hence, we have justifying reasons to believe that Christian belief that *p* is false.

A note on the premises. Premise (1) is ambiguous: it may be read (i) "Christians (*qua* Christians) believe that *p*" or (ii) "Christians (as a group) believe that *p*." On reading (i) the idea is that belief that *p* is partially constitutive of being Christian—that one cannot qualify as Christian without it. (For what it's worth, on that interpretation I suspect that there are remarkably few substitutions for "*p*" that generate truths. But I'm not at all interested here in entering the debate on the minimal belief conditions for being Christian, and I shall set this interpretation aside). On reading (ii) the idea is that whether or not belief that *p* is partially constitutive of being Christian, *p* is—as a matter of fact—held by Christians. (Of course, if

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"held by Christians" means held by *all* Christians, then once again there will be precious few substitutions for "*p*" that will generate truths, and most of those that do will be mundane and not connected to traditional Christian doctrines, attitudes, and practices in very significant ways. I suspect, however, that "held by Christians" is better taken to mean that it is held by a sizeable number (if not a majority) of Christians, that it has the force of some recognizable tradition behind it, and that it has clear and direct relations to well-established Christian doctrines, attitudes, and practices.[2]) Even without settling on the elusive referent of "our modern worldview" (which has obvious bearing on the appropriateness of classifying the reasons as justifying), premise (3) is very contentious indeed. I would have thought that the disturbingly frequent pieces in *The New York Times* containing some version of the sentence, "Well, it's time to rewrite the textbooks, since after the last half-century of confident but mistaken consensus, the scientists at one of our leading universities have finally discovered the real story about …," would have inspired a bit more modesty than I have witnessed when watching premise (3) pressed into service. I do not, however, wish to quarrel with the extension of "our modern worldview" or take issue with what I take to be its cavalier and overworked invocation. Rather, I'll let premise (3) slide and instead direct my critical remarks at a variety of instances of premise (2). Accordingly, one of my two primary aims in this chapter is to undermine a handful of popular representatives of the recipe for the rejection of Christian belief that *p* that I suspect have been far more influential than they deserve.

My other primary aim in this chapter is to transform at least some of these efforts to discredit certain fashionable anti-Christian arguments into positive reasons for Christians to take the hypothesis of hyperspace seriously. In other words, I will suggest that not only does the Christian have something to say in response to certain accusations of having beliefs inconsistent with our modern worldview, but, depending on the available alternatives, that those responses may also provide reasonable grounds for endorsing the hypothesis of hyperspace by way of inference to the best explanation.

2. A BRIEF REMARK ON HEAVEN AND HELL

A respectable number of Christian theists will tell you that they believe in Heaven, and a respectable (but perhaps somewhat smaller) number will tell you that they also believe in Hell. The primary reason for the difference in number concerns moral problems endangering the hypothesis of Hell that do not have counterparts (or else have less pressing counterparts) to threaten the hypothesis of Heaven. I am here interested in a nonmoral issue, however. Consider this brief quiz: are "Heaven" and "Hell" referring expressions? If no—stop; you are finished with the quiz. If yes—do they refer? If no—stop; you are finished with the quiz. If yes—what is the ontological category of their referents?

Christians who get to the third question in this quiz are liable to give very different answers, among which you will find (i) special regions (i.e., special places or perhaps special places at particular times); (ii) a plurality of substances and events that occupy special regions; (iii) certain events or states of affairs—namely, the instantiations of certain states of mind; and (iv) certain events or states of affairs—namely, the instantiations of certain relations between minds. We are all familiar with the standard image of living out our days poised between Heaven (some sacred and distant place "up there") and Hell (some dreaded and distant place "down there"), where wonderful and terrible events transpire—whether now or in a day soon to come. We are likewise familiar with the occasional practice of using an expression indiscriminately to refer both to a region and to its occupants, as with the terms "the universe" or "the Arctic Circle." These remarks, then, illustrate options (i) and (ii) above—both of which, we might note, are committed to there being genuine regions that themselves serve as the

referents of the expressions or else as the receptacles for the referents of the expressions. Options (iii) and (iv) can appear to circumvent any commitment to the alleged special regions, by contrast. On options (iii) and (iv), the only straightforward commitment is to minds—and to the extent that one is willing to go idealist or dualist about creaturely persons, this carries an additional commitment only to times.

While I take something take option (i) or (ii) to be the traditional notion, it is common to hear option (iii) or (iv) brought in as a replacement conception designed to avoid pesky questions about just *where* these distant and curious regions are to be found, just how many miles they are from New York, and whether the right spaceship might take us on a visit to Heaven or might be launched on a rescue mission to Hell. Instead, the idea is that (for instance) Hell is a state of mind involving a kind of nonspatial separation from God—option (iii)—or (for instance) Heaven is a relation through which some minds enjoy a beatific vision or a mystical union with God—option (iv). And once again, if these persons are disembodied minds, the relevant states and relations may be instantiated now and forevermore without being instantiated at some particular place. Enough introduction; I have first a minor problem, then an observation, and finally a suggestion to explore.

A minor problem: I take human persons to be material objects. There are (I believe) excellent reasons to do so, both on philosophical grounds and also (perhaps surprisingly) on the grounds that such a metaphysics best conforms to the beliefs, attitudes, and practices that I take to be constitutive of Christianity…. Accordingly, I reject the idealist or dualist strategy above that would avoid all commitment to special places. On the metaphysics that I think is required by options (iii) and (iv), the straightforward commitment to human minds doubles as a commitment to certain material objects—and to the extent that one endorses the occupancy account of material objects (as I do), this carries an additional commitment to places, as well. Moreover, given the Christian doctrine of the general resurrection and its very heavy emphasis on an embodied afterlife for human persons, whether or not human bodies are absent from the world to come makes little difference to the need for locations for those equipped with glorious and imperishable bodies to be so embodied (see Bynum 1995 and my 2001*a*: ch. 7). Perhaps it is worth noting, however, that even if a commitment to places were to be thus reestablished, the pesky questions above can still be sidestepped, for there is no requirement that the places in question have current mysterious locations, or are removed at some unfathomable distance, or are unfamiliar in any way—just that they be capable of housing bodies that are enjoying certain distinctive states or bodies that are joined in special relations with one another.

An observation: The attractiveness of demoting Heaven and Hell from their traditional conceptions as places to a mere manner of referring to states or relations depends (I suspect) in large part on painting the new conception as an acceptable enough substitute and as a way to avoid the embarrassment that can be elicited when the incredulous atheist asks why we don't converse with the blessed when our hot-air balloons take us into the clouds, why we don't spy any harp-players when jetting from the East to the West coast, and why the Hubble telescope has yet to photograph any pearly gates. Or, more seriously, when she asks just what sort of miraculous transport is supposed to carry the saved on an intergalactic voyage to their new and eternal home. These inquiries can seem especially awkward in a setting where the received opinion is that the large-scale structure of our universe is very well understood and in which we have fairly impressive access to a rather sizeable local chunk of it. No longer are we inclined to think it compelling to say that, for all anyone knows, the kingdom of Heaven sits proudly in the sky just beyond the reach of our perceptual faculties, or that the tormented suffer in Hell somewhere in the depths below our feet. In fact, retreating from such pointed questions has generated a rather deflationary conception of Heaven in contemporary Christianity. It is easy to feel, though, that we have lost sight of something magnificent when our poor and paltry modern substitute is held up and compared to St Augustine's vision of a realm in which we shall

be lovingly reunited with one another clothed in new and glorified bodies, or to the blissful and brilliant kingdom of light championed by medieval scholasticism, or to the Elysian Fields likeness of the Renaissance conception, or to the unbounded opportunities for social interaction and celebration with the saints in the models from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Yet, despite the discomfiture of it all, participation in the direction-laden talk of Heaven and Hell is very easy to fall into and remarkably well entrenched. The presupposition of location can be found *everywhere*—from speculative angelology and demonology to both Old and New Testaments, to the creeds, to the pulpit, to conversations at the dinner table. Angels fall from, and ministers climb Jacob's ladder to Heaven, the rich man looks at Abraham and Lazarus across the great chasm that separates Paradise from Hell, and The Apostles' Creed reports Christ himself descending into Hell. I do not mean to suggest that these well-known traditions and scriptural passages cannot be glossed without commitment to Heaven and Hell as genuine locations, but I do mean to bring to the reader's mind the first few entries on an impressive list of examples of the common presumption of Heaven and Hell as places.

A suggestion: As I see it, there is no pressing need to capitulate or to attempt to avoid embarrassment by replacing the tradition of regarding Heaven and Hell as genuine locations with confused and apologetic talk of states and relations.[3] Where are these curious regions to be found, and how many miles are they from New York? Perhaps they are arbitrarily close both to New York and to the spot on which you are currently standing in the directions ana and kata; compare a two-space of milk-slices and honey-slices that could be hovering just millimeters above Flatland. Why don't we take a spaceship for a blissful vacation in Heaven or on a bold and daring rescue mission to Hell? Perhaps because our modes of transportation are confined to the directions of our three-space prison; whereas we can travel up, down, left, right, forth, and back, no spaceship can take us ana or kata. Why does no astronaut glimpse the host of Heaven when orbiting the Earth, and why does no rig-worker drill into the bowels of Hell when searching for oil? Perhaps because those simply aren't the directions that can take you to those sacred and terrible locations.

One can, of course, happily embrace the deflationary view if it seems best in the end. Significantly, though, the Christian can grant without a fuss the standard pronouncements of our modern worldview regarding the structure and inhabitants of our local corner of the galaxy, and he can even concede that certain traditional locations for Heaven and Hell are thereby forfeit, while still maintaining that Heaven and Hell are real places with genuine inhabitants (without being ridiculously small, unimaginably far away, or invisible realms magically co-located with the perceptible inhabitants of our everyday world). In fact, given the infinite opportunities for diversity in different subregions of hyperspace, even the most extravagant conceptions of the populations, environments, and hierarchies of Heaven and Hell could be back on the table for discussion, without fear of refutation from what our modern worldview has to say about our own little corner of our own three-space prison.

On an autobiographical note, I do not maintain the receptacle view of Heaven and Hell to be absolutely non-negotiable (but I am a bit hesitant about that). For the impressive number that do, I think that this might appear an attractive argument from Christianity to hyperspace. I will say, however, that I think it is pleasantly suggestive and one of a number of intriguing considerations that together begin to construct a case worthy of consideration. Here's another.

3. A BRIEF REMARK ON THE GARDEN OF EDEN

In the parting paragraph of his beautifully written and absorbing history of the Garden of Eden in myth and tradition, Jean Delumeau writes: "there is no possible way of reconciling, on the one hand,

what science tells us about the origin of the human race and, on the other, the earthly paradise of our holy cards and the position given to our first parents by Western theology" [*History of Paradise: The Garden of Eden in Myth and Tradition*, trans. Matthew O'Connell (New York: Continuum, 1995) p. 233]. And a little earlier

> the tragic theology of Western Christendom can be explained only by an exaggerated view of the beauties of the garden of Eden and the unparalleled advantages that God has granted to our first parents. But our age is now compelled to agree with Teilhard de Chardin that there is "not the least trace on the horizon, not the smallest scar, to mark the ruins of a golden age or our cutting off from a better world." (1995: 230)

Delumeau's "there is no possible way of reconciling" is, of course, too strong, and Chardin's "not the least trace" may be a correct enough estimation of the absence of revealing remains in our own three-space but could be a bit premature as a final verdict prior to examining horizons ana and kata. But first some history.

The modern inclination to regard tales of the Garden of Eden (i.e., Paradise, not Heaven) as charming and quaint allegory (and, one might add, to ridicule non-figurative interpretations) has early roots in prominent figures in the history of Christianity. Philo (in the first century), Origen (in the third century), and St Ephrem and St Gregory of Nyssa (both in the fourth century) all advocated a nonliteral interpretation of the story of the garden, its tree of life, its stunning variety of flora and fauna, and its remarkably well-behaved wildlife. Equally prominent early literalists can be found, however, with St Theophilus of Antioch (in the second century), St Irenaeus and St Hippolytus (both in the third century), and Bishop Epiphanius (in the fourth century) all arguing for the claims that Paradise was beneath the Heavens, its garden, trees, and rivers all material created things, and its genuine location eastward in Eden a historical reality.[4]

Throughout much of Christian history, its leading figures have tended toward realist over figurative readings of the garden passages in Genesis. Undoubtedly, much of this consensus can be traced to the qualified endorsement of Augustine and the heavy endorsement of Aquinas, with the bishop of Hippo and the Angelic Doctor both fully acknowledging the spiritual meaning of the story while firmly insisting on the materiality of the tree of life and on the corporeality of the rivers watering a spatially located garden. Notwithstanding such champions, traditional reasons for finding realism attractive have always been controversial. Nevertheless, they have been compelling to many. The justifications range from applying widely accepted principles about what factual lessons may be appropriately drawn from the different forms of narrative found in Scripture, to arguments to the [then] best explanations of the origin of species, to providing a temporary home for Enoch and Elijah—notable for being taken out of this world prior to their deaths (joined perhaps by the saints and martyrs), to furnishing a way for Christ to keep his promise to the good thief without thereby requiring a doctrine of immediate judgment and resurrection, to make a truth-teller out of Paul and his tale of a third heaven in 2 Corinthians, to reconcile various claims in Revelation with what was already well known about the world's inhabitants and laws, to serving as a place of rest without decay for the bodies of the departed (or at least certain of their parts) to lie in wait for the day of judgment and, hopefully, resurrection.

While running unopposed, as it were, generations of devoted, extravagant proponents of a historical Eden wrote flowery passages on the characteristics of the garden and fought bitter arguments about the spatio-temporal location of Paradise, passages and arguments that frequently contain *considerably* more detail than the available evidence might have warranted.[5] Despite these intricate and fascinating battles over geography and chronology, a commonly shared presumption among the combatants was that, wherever Eden was located, the sin of our predecessors had rendered it inaccessible to us—its paths now barred by a flaming sword and

cherubim charged with making its entrance impassable to all flesh. Interestingly, it was also supposedly protected from non-living trespassers, such as the rising waters of the alleged great flood of Genesis, which supposedly covered the Earth, yet could not destroy the garden on the often invoked grounds that its position was "too high" to be reached. Whether or not one has the slightest sympathy with the flood story, the widespread conviction that the location of the garden was somewhere near but removed from the Earth (in some direction or other which could not be traversed merely by rising from its surface) dovetails nicely with the suggestions that will appear below. Of course, agreement on the impassability doctrine would lead to a conviction that a certain kind of resolution to the dispute on location was simply unattainable—with cherubim on patrol, it's not as if the winning theory simply awaited verification by expedition.

Inevitably, however, the wild exuberance of the Middle Ages and the remarkable ingenuity of its realist representatives gave way to a sobering this-worldly orientation in the eighteenth century and to apologetic and more scientifically informed Christians who, feeling the pressure of the worldview of the times, were willing and even eager to retreat to a symbolic reading of the garden of Genesis. Unsurprisingly, a primary catalyst for this turn of mind in the history of Christian thought was buried in the fossil beds and in what they appeared to say about the age of the Earth, the absence of a great deluge, and the origin of species. Nonliteralism has prevailed.

Today any talk of a historical garden is quite likely to be met with a mixture of pity and condescension at best and with open and unreserved hostility at worst. For what it's worth, I suspect that such widespread contempt (which far outstrips the less common contempt for Christianity in general) depends in no small part on conflating a minimal thesis of a historical Garden of Eden—a privileged and sacred place that plays a unique role in the divine plan—with a number of other theses with which it has been historically entwined. Nonetheless, the claim that there was (and perhaps still is) a spatially located paradisiacal garden is radically distinct from the decisively refuted young Earth hypothesis, the seriously dubious tales of a world-wide flood, the unbiblical yet popular tradition that our forebears possessed preternatural gifts, the somewhat more plausible denial of evolutionary theory, and the doctrine of original sin and the Fall.[6] Moreover, minimal realism about the Garden is likewise separable from the fine details of the biblical narrative that purports to tell of a pair of historical individuals, of the naming of the animals, of an outdoor surgery, of the conversing with a snake, of the eating of forbidden fruit, of a sewing party, and of the expulsion from the Garden for transgressing its laws. Just to be clear, I do separate minimal realism about the Garden from this host of other hypotheses; in particular, I take the Adam and Eve story (in almost all of its details) to be mythical, although insofar as I believe the construction and preservation of that myth to have been conducted under the influence of the Holy Spirit, I take it to have special significance and to touch on topics of significance to all human persons (near and far, past and future). While admiring memorable devices such as talking snakes and luscious yet forbidden fruits, I take the primary function of the myth to be to document the occurrence of a historical event involving our ancestors—namely, their falling away from God and their separating themselves and their descendants from the divine presence by a path we cannot retrace by our own power. Whether this Fall was embodied in some special individual or pair of individuals, whether it was accompanied by a loss of preternatural gifts, whether it marked a sudden change in the biology or genetics of its participants, or in the environment in which they lived and died, or in the laws that governed that environment—are all questions on which I am more or less skeptical.

But whether there was (and perhaps still is) a Garden of Eden—a privileged and sacred *place* that plays a unique (and perhaps ongoing) role in the divine plan—is a question for whose affirmative answer I can work up much more sympathy. There are, of course, many many different ways to speculate (with wild abandon even) about how the hypothesis of hyperspace can make way for the

Garden. In fact, it takes very little creative reading of the many centuries of discussion of the characteristics of the Garden (informed by the hypothesis of hyperspace) to generate several satisfying "fits," especially when viewed against the variety of historical reasons speaking in favor of realism that were introduced above. I leave such entertaining speculations to the interested reader, who might begin by considering, for instance, questions regarding how the salient landmarks of the Garden could be spatially related to uncontested historical locations (e.g., earthly rivers that allegedly have their headwaters in Paradise), how it might be both spatially proximate, yet altogether unenterable without divine or angelic assistance, how the bodies of the dead might be so easily transported there to await resurrection, and how it might be ringed by fire barring all flesh without the least trace of haze to serve as a smoking gun revealing its presence. Or, to focus on a historically perplexing example, consider a mighty stumbling block for the Renaissance pastime of rediscovering the location of the Garden on Earth: given the assumptions then in play, the Garden must have been *magnificently* large in order to house the stunning variety of beasts and plants and water enough to supply four major rivers (cf. Delumeau *ibid*.: 172–4). In hyperspace, however, a garden can be as big as you please, as close as you want, and furnished in the most extravagant of ways.

Once again, on an autobiographical note, I do not maintain a minimal realism about the Garden to be absolutely non-negotiable. Again, though, for the minority that do, I would think that this might appear an attractive argument from Christianity to hyperspace. But, as before, I will say that I think it is pleasantly suggestive and one of a number of intriguing considerations that together begin to construct a case worthy of consideration. Here's another.

4. A BRIEF REMARK ON ANGELS AND DEMONS

As a self-professed non-expert, I marvel at the confidence and level of fine detail in the literature on angelology and demonology. To an outsider, this scholarly pursuit—of advancing beyond the meticulously discussed biblical texts (and apocrypha), sifting through the hundreds of redoubtable and uneven authorities found in apocalyptic, kabbalistic, Talmudic, Gnostic, patristic, and Merkabah texts and lore, and properly evaluating the influence of world literature, music, art, and a wealth of diverse and multi-layered rituals on our traditional beliefs and attitudes regarding angels and demons—seems a staggeringly difficult task.[7] Fortunately, though, I do not have to take sides on just which sources properly identify genuine angels and demons and on just which texts or customs properly reveal their activities. Instead, I will simply take up the far less daunting chore of rehearsing some of the commonly ascribed accomplishments of the angels:

> Angels perform a multiplicity of duties and tasks. Preeminently they serve God … They also carry out missions from God to man. But many serve man directly as guardians, counselors, guides, judges, interpreters, cooks, comforters, dragomen, matchmakers, and gravediggers. They are responsive to invocations when such invocations are properly formulated and the conditions are propitious. In occult lore angels are conjured up not only to help an invocant strengthen his faith, heal his afflictions, find lost articles, increase his worldly goods, and procure offspring, but also to circumvent and destroy an enemy. There are instances where an angel or troop of angels turned the tide of battle, abated storms, conveyed saints to Heaven, brought down plagues, fed hermits, helped plowmen, converted heathens. An angel multiplied the seed of Hagar, protected Lot, caused the destruction of Sodom, hardened Pharaoh's heart, rescued Daniel from the lions' den and Peter from prison. (G. Davidson *ibid*: p. xvii)

That's a representative list. For the purposes of the discussion below, let us note that the alleged

doings of the demons are similar enough (although unsurprisingly rather less admirable) as to not require separate cataloguing.

One overwhelmingly striking feature of the entries here is the presumption of embodiment and the attribution of causal control over many of the familiar material objects in our everyday world. Hence the challenge: *if* these marvelous entities are really gallivanting about impregnating women, wrestling men, and conveying various messages to frightened young girls—or (better yet) *if* they are paired up with us one-one, vigilantly hovering ever so near, guarding their charges, and watching our every move … then why don't the majority of us see and hear them? At least once in a while? Presumably even the most radiant and beautifully embodied things have definite shapes and locations. Just where is this vast horde of do-gooders camped? How do they travel to their appointed destinations with such apparently law-breaking speed and ease? With all that heavy lifting to do, how on earth do they continually manage to avoid reflecting light or making noises that would expose their hiding places?

As you no doubt anticipate from the preceding two sections, answers to these pointed questions are available from the plentiful resources of hyperspace. There are, of course, serious and troubling worries (both moral and metaphysical) about the existence and status of angels and demons that are worth confronting. There are, of course, serious and troubling questions about the authority (or lack thereof) of texts and traditions reporting their whereabouts and assignments that are also worth confronting. There are, of course, the impatient and contemptuous stares that the mere mention of angels and demons provokes in many educated folk in the twenty-first century. Still, these controversies need not, perhaps, be fueled by worries about literal locations or apparent hiddenness. Angels and demons, should they exist, can be embodied with perfectly determinate shapes and sizes, and they can be endowed with familiar causal powers to manipulate the material objects in our everyday environments, and they can be thoroughly subject to detection even by perceptual faculties as crude and insensitive as ours. Yet they can accomplish their merciful or awesome or sinister feats (as the case may be) while avoiding exposure—simply by carefully exploiting the opportunities afforded by movement in hyperspace.

One final time then, on an autobiographical note, I do not maintain this multi-dimensional route of escape from the pressing questions on the location and mysterious hiddenness of angels and demons to be absolutely non-negotiable. However, I do think that this might ground an argument from Christianity to hyperspace attractive to the sizeable group of Christians who profess belief in angels, demons, and their interactions with each other, the world, and ourselves. But, as before I say that I think it is pleasantly suggestive and one of a number of intriguing considerations that together begin to construct a case worthy of consideration.

5. NEW TESTAMENT MIRACLES

The four gospels of the New Testament tell a series of powerful and moving stories. Belief in the literal occurrence of many of the events relayed in these narratives is often taken to be partly constitutive of being Christian and to be at the very core of Christianity. I have neither the expertise nor the confidence to comment with much authority or at any great length on the passages and traditions which make an appearance below. (In fact, it takes only a brief trip to a modestly equipped library to teach the novice how frightfully much there is to learn on these topics and to replace any rash intention of making confident pronouncements with the less ambitious hope of advancing tentative hypotheses.) Nevertheless, I have selected three significant moments from the gospels that I would like to discuss in the hopes of paying off a promissory note offered in section 1 above.

As mentioned earlier, I'm not at all interested in entering the debate on the minimal belief conditions for being Christian, but I do think that the case to be made for the centrality to Christianity of

the alleged events discussed below is considerably stronger than is, say, the case for a historical Garden of Eden. Consequently, I suspect that a respectably large number of Christians take a straightforwardly literal line on the reporting of these alleged events. But this widespread literalism is precisely the source of a number of deeply influential instances of the recipe for rejection of Christian belief that *p* (i.e., of instances of the argument form that was the subject of a brief introduction in section 1 above). Since every one of the alleged events in question is frequently criticized as being at irreconcilable odds with our modern worldview, these beliefs are exactly the sort of target that certain fashionable arguments are so often thought to strike with lethal force. Once again, however, it seems to me that not only does the Christian have a way to block the charge of inconsistency with our modern worldview, but also that the very same responses that restore consistency may (depending on the available alternatives) provide reasonable grounds for endorsing the hypothesis of hyperspace by way of inference to the best explanation.

The Virgin Birth

The virgin birth of Jesus Christ is a view very widely endorsed by the councils and creeds and the early church fathers. There are, of course, a variety of interpretations of this traditional view. Perhaps the weakest of these takes as its point of departure the Annunciation (in Luke 1:26–8), in which Mary acknowledges her virginity to the angel Gabriel, but the account does not take a stand on her virginity beyond the beginning of her pregnancy. At the other end of the spectrum, perhaps the strongest of the interpretations maintains that Mary remained a virgin throughout her life. One central point of agreement, however, is that whereas Mary played a biological role (and a voluntary role) in bringing Jesus into the world (e.g., in supplying biological material for the body of Jesus and nutrition during his stages of prenatal development), tradition declares that Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit (as opposed to any human father). These details suffice as background for the objection.

The objection: no one can become pregnant in this fashion, and talk of such a supernatural origin is nothing more than a transparent thievery from pagan mythology. Every child knows that you can't put an object in a closed box without opening its lid or penetrating one of its surfaces, and Christians are in some serious trouble if their only way to explain Mary's pregnancy without threatening her virginity is to maintain that objects suddenly appear out of thin air in her womb or else pass into (and out of) her body without disrupting the integrity of its natural barriers.

A response: first, a quibble. Even if our modern worldview generally frowns upon fanciful tales of material things popping into existence out of thin air and of objects mysteriously moving through walls without disrupting the integrity of their surfaces, it is perhaps an exaggeration to insist that it is *inconsistent* with these events. Indeed, popular presentations of theoretical physics routinely make a grand show of announcing how surprising today's fashionable theories have (at long last) discovered the material world to be, and talk of discontinuous jumps or of objects doing something very much like materializing out of thin air serve as centerpieces in these explanations. But set that aside.

Consider a closed box in Flatland (it's just a square with an unbroken perimeter and an empty interior). You can't put a Flatland object in the box without opening its lid or penetrating one of its surfaces—unless, that is, you don't confine your movements to the two-dimensional space in which the square is found. With access to three dimensions, it's an easy matter to astonish the simple folk of Flatland by taking an object up, then moving it above the interior of the square, and finally moving it back down so that it rests safely in the square's interior. When the scientists of Flatland inspect the perimeter, they will find that the square's natural barriers are undisturbed and that the lid has remained locked throughout the process. There are, of course, other hypotheses available to the denizens of Flatland. Perhaps the object passes through the surface of the square without doing violence to it in the manner of two material objects that can co-locate without sharing parts and

without causally affecting one another in the process. Or perhaps the object underwent a discontinuous jump of location. The relevant point is not that a movement through three-space is the only available way to generate the outcome, but rather, that it is one available way that doesn't require the inhabitants of Flatland to take a stand on the physics of discontinuous motion or on the metaphysics of co-location or on anything at all bound up with their modern worldview.

Similarly, then, with access to four dimensions, even if the Holy Spirit (like Mary) had to make a material contribution to the conception of Jesus, it is an easy matter to take the relevant material object ana, then move it over the interior of Mary's womb, and finally move it back kata so that it rests safely in the womb's interior, without disturbing any natural barriers in the process. Once again, however, perhaps the conception of Jesus by the Holy Spirit required only the presence of material in Mary's womb (or certain changes in material already there) which did not have an empirical causal history extending outside her body. Or perhaps some material object was the subject of divinely directed discontinuous motion from outside to inside Mary's body. Or perhaps material penetrated Mary's body without loss of integrity to its surfaces by way of co-location. As before, though, the point is not that a movement through four-space is the only available way to generate the outcome, but rather that it is one available way not subject to immediate refutation by appeal to our modern worldview.

Three Miracles of Jesus: Water into Wine, the Feeding of the 5,000, Walking on Water

The gospels tell of a number of miracles allegedly performed by Jesus. Several of these alleged miracles have come under heavy fire, and those that profess them under heavy ridicule. I would like to develop some thoughts concerning New Testament miracles by focusing on three that often provoke especially harsh responses: (i) changing water into wine at the wedding at Cana (John 2:1–11) (ii) the feeding the 5,000 with five loaves and two fishes (Matt. 14:13–21; Mark 6:32–44; Luke 9:10–17; John 6:1–14) and (iii) walking on water in the Sea of Galilee (Matt. 14:22–33; Mark 6:45–52; John 6:15–21). The stories are so familiar that they need no retelling, as is also the case with regard to the most common objections confronting them. How, then, can the hypothesis of hyperspace be of service here?

With respect to the miracle of changing water into wine, allegedly, although the stone jars were filled with water, they poured wine. So where did the water go? Here are some rather intriguing hypotheses. First option: the water went nowhere at all, for a single substance was inside the jars throughout, which was first water and then wine. This option has its share of physical difficulties (e.g., the unpromising view that being water is a phase-form of a kind of stuff which has among its other potential phase-forms being wine). Second option: the water went nowhere at all, for whereas the water remained, the right ingredients were added to and properly mixed with the water already present to produce wine when poured. This option has its share of physical difficulties as well (even though one tradition of commentary of Jesus as magician speculates on the chemicals allegedly residing in the bottom of the jars which would return any gift of water with something approximating a rather poor-quality wine). Third option: the water stayed right where it was (i.e., confined to the partitions of the jar containing only water), and then the jars were emptied of wine (which was carefully hidden away in the other partitions of the jar all along). This would surely be an amusing party trick, but one supposes rather easily exposed and (given the circumstances of the wedding) rather hard to set the stage for at the outset. Fourth option: the water disappeared from the jars entirely, and was very quickly replaced with wine, which completely filled the cavity thereby vacated. Of course, the natural response to the fourth option is that it offends against our modern worldview; more than a hundred gallons of water doesn't up and vanish from six stone jars so quickly (or at least not without them getting smashed and other things getting

noticeably wet), and despite how nice it would be if it were otherwise, wine doesn't cooperatively appear and fill our empty containers from the inside out. Moreover, this natural response is a perfectly sensible response. Suppose, however, that the water is displaced ana, and that the wine is poured into the jars from wineskins lying kata. Then, although nothing in our own three-space gets wet, a hundred gallons or more may well be bathing some garden just inches away, and although no visible container empties its contents into the waiting jars, wineskins arbitrarily close to the cavities of the jars fill them to the brim without ever leaving their own locations outside our three-space. And all this transpires with no dry chemicals hidden within, or multiple partitions secreted away in, the jars.

With respect to the feeding of the 5,000, allegedly five loaves and two fishes fed a multitude (with several basketfuls left over). Where did the food come from? Well, presumably the pattern is becoming clear. Without magic or creation *ex nihilo*, a nearly empty basket can come to contain a previously undetected fish (which travels ana into the basket) and loaf (which travels kata into the basket). And provided that the nearby spaces are well stocked, the basket can prove hard to empty should it acquire its contents in this fashion.

With respect to Jesus' walking on water on the Sea of Galilee, allegedly Jesus walked on water over a considerable distance to reach his disciples, who were rowing a boat in the middle of the Sea in the middle of a storm in the middle of the night.

Objection: No he didn't.

A response: Let your thoughts drift once again to Flatland. Suppose that the polygons residing there are bound by something like gravity to the perimeters of enormous circles—their planets, so to speak. To pass one another, they have to either jump over or tunnel under one another. Moreover, the interior of these circles is occupied by analogues of soil and water (i.e., a kind of substance on which they can rest and move and another kind of substance in which they will sink towards the centerpoint of the circle and perish). Now one of these planets has the following feature: Flatland soil is found on all points of its perimeter with the exception of a small arc which features Flatland water (i.e., if the circle were a clock, only the region from 12:00 to 1:00 would be Flatland water, while the remainder would be Flatland soil). Any polygon wanting to travel from the point located at 11:59 to the point located at 1:01 either has a long journey ahead of him or else had better build a bridge. Bridges aren't impossible here. Dig up a skinny curved rock in the Flatland soil, keep it in front of you, stand it upright, let it fall across the Flatland water, and then scamper across to the other side. Of course, a proper bridge like that has to come from somewhere, has to have enough length to span the relevant gap, and has to be locatable by the Flatlanders on the other side of the arc awaiting your arrival, since it is extended in the space in which they reside. Finally, suppose that there just don't happen to be any rocks on this planet large enough to do the trick. Not all is lost, however, for with the assistance of a good-natured three-spacer a perfectly good bridge can be had; this benefactor need only take some two-dimensional object out of Flatland, turn it sideways, and reinsert it so that it extends above and below Flatland at right angles. The agreeable object will, of course, still intersect Flatland, but with only one of its one-dimensional cross-sections. Provided this cross-section is more like Flatland soil than Flatland water, that's all you need to bridge the gap. Curiously enough, even if the resulting bridge were merely a proper part of a much larger object, it might nevertheless be very hard for the Flatlanders on the other side of the gap to detect it, since (after all) it intersects the space in which they reside only on a curve. In fact, it would be natural enough to believe that a Flatlander approaching on this bridge was walking on Flatland water.

The relevant application should be straightforward enough. Take some well-chosen three-dimensional object (either from somewhere in our own three-space or from some neighboring three-space), turn it sideways (so to speak), reinsert it so that it intersects our three-space with only one of its two-dimensional cross-sections, position that cross-section so that it spans the Sea of Galilee, and then (provided that the cross-section is more like soil

than water) permit a three-spacer to walk across the bridge. Finally, when the structure has served its purpose, simply withdraw the original object and restore it to its original location—no remnants of the temporary bridge need remain. Curiously enough, even if this bridge is merely a proper part of even a monstrously big object, it may nevertheless be very hard for the three-spacers in the middle of the Sea in the middle of a storm in the middle of the night to detect it, since (after all) it intersects the space in which they reside only on a plane. In fact, it would be natural enough to believe that anyone traversing this bridge was walking on water.[8]

Intriguingly, several of the other allegedly physically impossible events recorded in the New Testament are susceptible to similar candidate explanations that take some detour or other through hyperspace. Perhaps the discussion initiated here can serve as a model for the interested reader to explore the extent to which many of the miracles attributed to Jesus can be defended when subjected to the all too familiar kinds of critique rehearsed above.

The Resurrection of Jesus and the Ascension

One of the most central claims in all Christianity is that, after his suffering, death, and entombment, Jesus Christ rose from the dead and appeared to friends and disciples a number of times before his ascension (Matt. 28; Mark 16; Luke 24; John 20). So central is this that a surprising number of Christians seem willing to let the entire case for their faith rest upon this one foundation.

Philosophical, scientific, and religious questions, objections, and replies concerning the possibility and mechanics of the resurrection of Jesus, its relation to the doctrine of the general resurrection, and its alleged role in our salvation and redemption are legion. Here, however, I am concerned with only a rather small corner of that complex debate.

One might suppose (as I do) that Jesus was embodied throughout the period between his death and ascension. Or one might suppose (as, I suspect, do most of those who are sympathetic to the doctrine at all) that Jesus was separated from his body at death and later reunited with his body before appearing to the women and his disciples. In either case, the body which is Jesus' body (either by identity or in virtue of its past- and future-oriented properties) was somewhere or other throughout the period between his death and ascension.[9] Or, if his body was not somewhere or other, then at least the parts that composed it at its death were still in relative proximity to one another, and those "particles arranged corpse-wise" were jointly somewhere or other throughout the period between his death and ascension. Although the view that Jesus acquired a numerically distinct body at his resurrection may seem to receive some support from the Lucan account (24:13–31), in which a risen Jesus walked with those who had known him without being recognized, this view seems wholly undercut by the claims that the resurrected body bore the wounds of the crucifixion and by the tradition of commentary on both the resurrection of Jesus and the general resurrection.

So a puzzling question presents itself to anyone who professes belief in the resurrection of Christ: exactly where was the body of Jesus during the supposed forty-day interval between his rising from the sepulcher and his ascension into Heaven witnessed by his disciples? Unsurprisingly, the question can quickly get even more puzzling, depending on one's further commitments, which may lead one to countenance even further restrictions on an acceptable answer. For example, one might note that the strips of linen and the burial cloth that John 20:3–9 describes as remaining on the floor of the tomb mean that the body had simply disappeared from its clothing as well as its tomb (as a way of arguing against the hypothesis that the body was stolen from its resting place by thieves, who presumably wouldn't have taken the time to disrobe it first). Or one might focus on a popular tradition found throughout Scripture and in The Apostles' Creed—that between his death and resurrection Jesus descended into Hell (interpreted as a genuine bodily change of location which permitted

Jesus to preach the message of redemption to some of the departed, as opposed to an interpretation merely emphasizing his hellish agony and suffering on the cross). Or one might take the description of Luke 24:31 at its word and maintain that the body of the risen Jesus could suddenly vanish from the sight of those seated at table with him. Or one might insist on the literalness of John 20:19 (and again of John 20:26) in which a risen Jesus abruptly appears in the midst of his disciples gathered together in a locked room without, the gospel writer intimates, entering through either a window or a door.

Understandably, to the extent that the gospel accounts of the resurrection are committed not only to the view that someone has risen from the dead, but also to the view that the risen man can apparently appear and disappear at will, they will have a tough time earning the respect of (or even a patient hearing from) those students of the modern worldview who have learned that medium-sized objects like human bodies simply don't behave like that. As before, though, the hypothesis of hyperspace can offer some protection from at least one form of criticism on this score.

To return one final time to the general theme of this chapter, then, let us acknowledge that a body moving ana or kata could leave its clothes or burial robes without taking them off, could vanish from a dinner table without a trace, and could appear in a locked room without passing through its windows, doors, or walls. In short, a body free to move in hyperspace could be positioned just inches away, yet remain undetectable for days on end, and could enter and leave our own three-space with exactly the ease and abruptness that is attributed to the risen Jesus.

A parting (tentative) comment: in the description of the ascension which opens the book of Acts (1:1–11), the disciples who have just seen Jesus disappear for the last time are informed that "this same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven." Accordingly, one who is already committed to the relevant New Testament claims and who finds the discussion in this chapter promising, not only as a defensive maneuver to combat one popular style of criticism, but also as a candidate for the best explanation of a phenomenon he or she thinks requires explanation, should not be at all surprised if (like the next revolution in physics) the Second Coming turns out to take a path through higher-dimensional geometry.

NOTES

1. Of course, there are particularly aggressive Christians, too, who unreflectively and without a principled game plan cite biblical passages torn from their original context in opposition to this or that well-established scientific view. Such behavior has its own share of unsophisticated and unchallenging illustrations, as well.
2. Fortunately, nothing I say here will require verdicts on what is or is not central to Christianity for even on what the vexed term "Christianity" means. One can pronounce on clear instances of being rich without first demarcating the line of separation between the rich and the poor. Similarly, one can recognize that the claims of the Virgin Birth and the resurrection of Christ are clear candidates for the kind of proposition I am here discussing, whereas the once common Christian presupposition of the geocentric theory of the heavens is not.
3. Or, once again, if there is, then it is grounded in moral rather than physical and metaphysical concerns.
4. For complete references and discussion of these and many more relevant texts, see Delumeau's *History of Paradise: The Garden of Eden in Myth and Tradition*, 1995, to which I am also indebted for the historical material in the following few paragraphs.
5. See especially Delumeau *ibid*.: ch. 9 for the history of debate on the timing of the events allegedly transpiring in the garden—down to the hour!

6. A quick note: I say "the somewhat more plausible denial of evolutionary theory" not to suggest that I believe that theory to be false, but simply to register that I think it is grossly oversold. The case to be made not for the verdict that it is incorrect but instead for the verdict that it is much less defensible than is commonly reported is really quite impressive….
7. For an inventory of and an introductory commentary on these sources, as well as for a taste of what they deliver, see Gustav Davidson's accessible and entertaining *A Dictionary of Angels* (New York: Free Press, 1971)—especially the introductory essay.
8. So why does Peter sink when he ventures out of the boat? It should be obvious that there is a variety of ways to respond (and that for present purposes it really doesn't matter which addition we tack on to the story). The only point being advanced here is that the perfectly reasonable thoughts backing the brief but apparently compelling objection reported above (e.g., that no man can stand unsupported on a surface of only water, that it is contrary to our understanding of the world that temporary bridges extending for miles can materialize and dematerialize without a trace, that the relative strengths of the fundamental forces don't go locally suspended from time to time, and so forth) need not be forfeited in order to provide a "just so" story that reconciles an allegedly offending report with the restrictions imposed by our modern worldview.
9. A quick acknowledgment: those who opt for the claim that Jesus (like other human persons) is identical to a material object have some explaining to do. One option is that being human is a phase sortal of certain persons who are embodied throughout their existence. Another option is that being material is not an essential property of those objects that exemplify it; in other words, one of the changes that certain things can survive is from material to non-material thing.

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PART VI



Death and Immortality

> Of all the many forms which natural religion has assumed none probably has exerted so deep and far-reaching an influence on human life as the belief in immortality and the worship of the dead; hence [a discussion] of this momentous creed and of the practical consequences which have been deduced from it can hardly fail to be at once instructive and impressive, whether we regard the record with complacency as a noble testimony to the aspiring genius of man, who claims to outlive the sun and the stars, or whether we view it with pity as a melancholy monument of fruitless labour and barren ingenuity expended in prying into that great mystery of which fools profess their knowledge and wise men confess their ignorance.
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> SIR JAMES FRAZIER, *THE BELIEF IN IMMORTALITY,* VOL. 1 (LONDON: MACMILLAN, 1913), VII–VIII.

IS THERE LIFE AFTER DEATH? Few questions have troubled humans as deeply as this one. Is this finite, short existence of three score and ten years all that we have? Or is there reason to hope for a blessed postmortem existence where love, justice, and peace, which we now experience in Fragmented forms, will unfold in all their fullness and enable human existence to find fulfillment? Are we merely mortal or blessedly immortal?

Anthropological studies reveal a widespread and ancient sense of immortality. Prehistoric societies buried their dead with food so that the deceased would not be hungry in the next life. Most cultures and religions have some version of a belief in another life, whether it be in the form of a resurrected body, a transmigrated soul, reincarnation, or an ancestral spirit present with the tribe.

Let us begin by understanding what we mean by immortality. Being immortal is not simply a matter of living on through our works or in the memories of our

loved ones. Rather, for our purposes, immortality involves freedom from death. To be immortal is to be the sort of being who will never undergo the permanent cessation of one's conscious existence.

For most people, death is the ultimate tragedy. It is the paramount evil, for it deprives us of all that we know and love on earth. Our fear of death is profound; we have a passionate longing to live again and to be with our loved ones. And yet there isn't a shred of direct empirical evidence that we shall live again. As far as we can tell scientifically, mental function is tied to brain function, so that when the latter comes permanently to an end, the former does as well. Some claim to have experienced the afterlife, but there are naturalistic explanations for such experiences and, in any case, their veridicality cannot be confirmed by empirical means.

Many have thought, however, that philosophical argument can shed light on the question of immortality. In the Western tradition three views have dominated, one denying life after death and two affirming it. The negative view, going back to the ancient Greek atomist philosophers Democritus and Leucippus, holds that we are identical with our bodies (including our brains), so that when the body dies, the self does as well. We may call this view materialist monism, because it does not allow for the possibility of a soul or spiritual self that can live without the body.

The positive views divide into dualist and monist theories of life after death. The dualist views separate the body from the soul or self of the agent and affirm that it is the soul or self that lives forever. This view was held by the pre-Socratic philosopher Pythagoras (570–500 BCE) and is developed by Plato (427–347 BCE). In modern philosophy it is represented by René Descartes (1596–1650). It is sometimes referred to as the Platonic-Cartesian view of immortality. These philosophers argue that we are essentially spiritual or mental beings and that our bodies are either unreal or not part of our essential selves. Death is merely the separation of our souls from our bodies, a sort of spiritual liberation.

Many in the dualist tradition maintain that the (typical) soul will be reincarnated several, perhaps many, times before attaining the final goal of permanent separation from the body. On this view—found in various strands of Pythagoreanism, Platonism, Buddhism, and Hinduism—embodiment is an undesirable state, and only those who lead the right sort of lifestyle have any hope of freeing themselves from the cycle of reincarnation. By way of contrast, Christian dualists deny reincarnation and maintain instead that the ultimate destination for the soul (after becoming disembodied at death) is to be re-embodied in one's *resurrected* earthly body. The difference between reincarnation and resurrection is just the difference between getting a brand new body (reincarnation) after death and getting one and the same body (resurrection). This is not to say, of course, that our bodies in the afterlife will have exactly the same properties—flaws, limitations, and so on—as our present earthly bodies. Indeed, according to the Christian tradition anyway, quite the opposite is the case: Our resurrected bodies will be greatly improved, or glorified. But the point is that the body you have in the afterlife will be the *same* body that you have now, despite its differences—much like your body after a successful diet or workout regimen is the same body you had before, albeit healthier, stronger, and in other respects better.

Although the Christian tradition has been predominantly dualistic, many Christians endorse a monistic view of immortality. This is the second of the two positive views on immortality just mentioned. On this view, either there is no soul or else the soul is not the sort of thing that can properly be said to "live" apart from the body. Either way, then, the afterlife can never be a disembodied life. Our hope for an afterlife is nothing other than a hope for our own resurrection—for the reconstitution or re-creation or miraculous resuscitation of our present earthly bodies (albeit, again, in an improved or glorified form).

We begin this section with a selection from Plato defending the view that the soul can exist apart from the body. Although Plato has many arguments for this thesis, one of the most famous is found in the *Phaedo,* it is included in our first reading. One section is worth quoting in full:

> When the soul employs the body in any inquiry, and makes use of sight, or hearing, or any other sense—for inquiry with the body must signify inquiry with the senses—she is dragged away by the body to the things which are impermanent, changing, and the soul wanders about blindly, and becomes confused and dizzy, like a drunken man, from dealing with things that are changing.... [But] when the soul investigates any question by herself, she goes away to the pure and eternal, and immortal and unchangeable, to which she is intrinsically related, and so she comes to be ever with it, as soon as she is by herself, and can be so; and then she rests from her wandering and dwells with it unchangingly, for she is related to what is unchanging. And is not this state of the soul called wisdom?*

The argument may be reconstructed as follows:

1. If a person's soul while in the body is capable of any activity independently of the body, then it can perform that activity in separation from the body (i.e., after death, surviving death).
2. In pure or metaphysical thinking (i.e., in contemplating the forms and their interrelationships), a person's soul performs an activity independently of the body. No observation is necessary for this investigation.
3. Therefore, a person's soul can engage in pure or metaphysical thinking in separation from the body. That is, it can and must survive death.

This is a positive argument for the existence of the soul. Unfortunately, the second premise is dubious, for it could be the case that the mind's activity is dependent on the brain. And it is precisely this latter claim that is defended by Bertrand Russell in the second reading in this section. According to Russell, there is no reason at all to believe in the immortality of the soul because all of the best empirical evidence points to the conclusion that a person's mental life comes to an end with the death of her brain.

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*_Phaedo_, 79 c–d, trans. Louis Pojman.

In our third reading, John Hick rejects the Platonic notion of an immortal and separable soul and urges instead a view according to which life after death requires the resurrection of the body, where resurrection is conceived as "God's re-creation or reconstitution of the human psychophysical individual." He briefly considers the question of what it would take to re-create a human body—that is, the question of what criteria have to be satisfied for a new body created at "resurrection time" to be the *same* body as the one that died—and then moves on to a discussion of what evidence we might have for believing in such an afterlife.

In our fourth reading, Jeffrey Olen devotes considerably more attention to questions about criteria of identity. He examines two views on the matter: the "memory criterion" and the "bodily criterion." According to the memory criterion, person A is the same person as person B if and only if A and B have the right sort of overlap in their memories and the right sort of continuity between their memories and other psychological states. For example, if B exists later than A, then B should remember a lot of what A remembers; furthermore, B should remember at least some of what A takes to be "present experience." There should also be some continuity among their goals, beliefs, desires, and other mental states. (This isn't to deny that goals, beliefs, and desires change over time. But the idea is that if B exists, say, a mere ten seconds later than A, and if B has beliefs, desires, goals, and memories virtually *none* of which overlap with A's, then B just isn't the same person as A.) Olen favors the psychological continuity criterion, and he argues furthermore in favor of the possibility of life after death. On his view, the mind is like computer software: Just as the same software can be transferred to different hardware, so too a mind can be transferred to a different brain (or other supporting medium). But to say that the mind can be transferred to a different medium is just to say that the mind can *change bodies*; and if it can change bodies, he contends, then the mind can survive the death of the body.

Finally, we close this section with an essay on the Hindu view of life, death, and reincarnation by Prasannatma Das.

VI.1

Immortality of the Soul

PLATO

Plato (c. 427–347 BCE) lived in Athens, was a student of Socrates, and is almost universally recognized as one of the most important philosophers who ever lived. Indeed, it

Reprinted from *Alcibiades I* and the *Phaedo*, translated by William Jowett (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1889).

has been remarked that the entire history of Western philosophy is but a footnote to Plato. The excerpts that comprise the following selection concern Plato's views about the soul. According to Plato, human beings are composed of two substances: body and soul. Of these, the true self is the soul, which lives on after the death of the body. All of Plato's writings are in the form of dialogues. In the first dialogue (from Alcibiades I) Socrates argues with Alcibiades about the true self. The second dialogue (from the Phaedo) takes place in prison, where Socrates awaits his execution. He is offered a way of escape but rejects it, arguing that it would be immoral to flee such a fate at this time and that he is certain of a better life after death.

FROM ALCIBIADES I

SOC. And is self-knowledge an easy thing, and was he to be lightly esteemed who inscribed the text on the temple at Delphi? Or is self-knowledge a difficult thing, which few are able to attain?

AL. At times, I fancy, Socrates, that anybody can know himself; at other times, the task appears to be very difficult.

SOC. But whether easy or difficult, Alcibiades, still there is no other way; knowing what we are, we shall know how to take care of ourselves, and if we are ignorant we shall not know.

AL. That is true.

SOC. Well, then, let us see in what way the self-existent can be discovered by us; that will give us a chance to discover our own existence, which without that we can never know.

AL. You say truly.

SOC. Come, now, I beseech you, tell me with whom you are conversing?—with whom but with me?

AL. Yes.

SOC. As I am with you?

AL. Yes.

SOC. That is to say, I, Socrates, am talking?

AL. Yes.

SOC. And I in talking use words?

AL. Certainly.

SOC. And talking and using words are, as you would say, the same?

AL. Very true.

SOC. And the user is not the same as the thing which he uses?

AL. What do you mean?

SOC. I will explain: the shoemaker, for example, uses a square tool, and a circular tool, and other tools for cutting?

AL. Yes.

SOC. But the tool is not the same as the cutter and user of the tool?

AL. Of course not.

SOC. And in the same way the instrument of the harper is to be distinguished from the harper himself?

AL. He is.

SOC. Now the question which I asked was whether you conceive the user to be always different from that which he uses?

AL. I do.

SOC. Then what shall we say of the shoemaker? Does he cut with his tools only or with his hands?

AL. With his hands as well.

SOC. He uses his hands too?

AL. Yes.

SOC. And does he use his eyes in cutting leather?

AL. He does.

SOC. And we admit that the user is not the same with the things which he uses?

AL. Yes.

SOC. Then the shoemaker and the harper are to be distinguished from the hands and feet which they use?

AL. That is clear.

SOC. And does not a man use the whole body?

AL. Certainly.

SOC. And that which uses is different from that which is used?

AL. True.

SOC. Then a man is not the same as his own body?

AL. That is the inference.

SOC. What is he, then?

AL. I cannot say.

SOC. Nay, you can say that he is the user of the body.

AL. Yes.

SOC. And the user of the body is the soul?

AL. Yes, the soul.

SOC. And the soul rules?

AL. Yes.

SOC. Let me make an assertion which will, I think, be universally admitted.

AL. What is that?

SOC. That man is one of three things.

AL. What are they?

SOC. Soul, body, or the union of the two.

AL. Certainly.

SOC. But did we not say that the actual ruling principle of the body is man?

AL. Yes, we did.

SOC. And does the body rule over itself?

AL. Certainly not.

SOC. It is subject, as we were saying?

AL. Yes.

SOC. Then that is not what we are seeking?

AL. It would seem not.

SOC. But may we say that the union of the two rules over the body, and consequently that this is man?

AL. Very likely.

SOC. The most unlikely of all things: for if one of the members is subject, the two united cannot possibly rule.

AL. True.

SOC. But since neither the body, nor the union of the two, is man, either man has no real existence, or the soul is man?

AL. Just so.

SOC. Would you have a more precise proof that the soul is man?

AL. No; I think that the proof is sufficient.

SOC. If the proof, although not quite precise, is fair, that is enough for us; more precise proof will be supplied when we have discovered that which we were led to omit, from a fear that the inquiry would be too much protracted.

AL. What was that?

SOC. What I meant, when I said that absolute existence must be first considered; but now, instead of absolute existence, we have been considering the nature of individual existence, and that may be sufficient; for surely there is nothing belonging to us which has more absolute existence than the soul?

AL. There is nothing.

SOC. Then we may truly conceive that you and I are conversing with one another, soul to soul?

AL. Very true.

SOC. And that is just what I was saying—that I, Socrates, am not arguing or talking with the face of Alcibiades, but with the real Alcibiades; and that is with his soul.

AL. True ….

FROM THE PHAEDO

SOCRATES: What again shall we say of the actual acquirement of knowledge?—is the body, if invited to share in the inquiry, a hinderer or a helper? I mean to say, have sight and hearing any truth in them? Are they not, as the poets are always telling us, inaccurate witnesses? and yet, if even they are inaccurate and indistinct, what is to be said of the other senses?—for you will allow that they are the best of them?

Certainly, he replied.

Then when does the soul attain truth?—for in attempting to consider anything in company with the body she is obviously deceived.

Yes, that is true.

Then must not existence be revealed to her in thought, if at all?

Yes.

And thought is best when the mind is gathered into herself and none of these things trouble her—neither sounds nor sights nor pain nor any pleasure,—when she has as little as possible to do with the body, and has no bodily sense or feeling, but is aspiring after being?

That is true.

And in this the philosopher dishonors the body; his soul runs away from the body and desires to be alone and by herself?

That is true.

Well, but there is another thing, Simmias: Is there or is there not an absolute justice?

Assuredly there is.

And an absolute beauty and absolute good?

Of course.

But did you ever behold any of them with your eyes?

Certainly not.

Or did you ever reach them with any other bodily sense? (and I speak not of these alone, but of absolute greatness, and health, and strength, and of the essence or true nature of everything). Has the reality of them ever been perceived by you through the bodily organs? or rather, is not the nearest approach to the knowledge of their several natures made by him who so orders his intellectual vision as to have the most exact conception of the essence of that which he considers?

Certainly.

And he attains to the knowledge of them in their highest purity who goes to each of them with the mind alone, not allowing when in the act of thought the intrusion or introduction of sight or any other sense in the company of reason, but with the very light of the mind in her clearness penetrates into the very light of truth in each; he has got rid, as far as he can, of eyes and ears and of the whole body, which he conceives of only as a disturbing element, hindering the soul from the acquisition of knowledge when in company with her—is not this the sort of man who, if ever man did, is likely to attain the knowledge of existence?

There is admirable truth in that, Socrates, replied Simmias.

And when they consider all this, must not true philosophers make a reflection, of which they will speak to one another in such words as these: We have found, they will say, a path of speculation which seems to bring us and the argument to the conclusion, that while we are in the body, and while the soul is mingled with this mass of evil our desire will not be satisfied, and our desire is of the truth. For the body is a source of endless trouble to us by reason of the mere requirement of food; and also is liable to diseases which overtake and impede us in the search after truth: and by filling us so full of loves, and lusts, and fears, and fancies, and idols, and every sort of folly, prevents our ever having, as people say, so much as a thought. From whence come wars, and fightings, and factions? whence but from the body and the lusts of the body? For wars are occasioned by the love of money, and money has to be acquired for the sake and in the service of the body; and in consequence of all these things the time which ought to be given to philosophy is lost. Moreover, if there is time and an inclination toward philosophy, yet the body introduces a turmoil and confusion and fear into the course of speculation, and hinders us from seeing the truth; and all experience shows that if we would have pure knowledge of anything we must be quit of the body, and the soul in herself must behold all things in themselves: then I suppose that we shall attain that which we desire, and of which we say that we are lovers, and that is wisdom; not while we live, but after death, as the argument shows; for if while in company with the body, the soul cannot have pure knowledge, one of two things seems to follow—either knowledge is not to be attained at all, or, if at all, after death. For then, and not till then, the soul will be in herself alone

and without the body. In this present life, I reckon that we make the nearest approach to knowledge when we have the least possible concern or interest in the body, and are not saturated with the bodily nature, but remain pure until the hour when God himself is pleased to release us. And then the foolishness of the body will be cleared away and we shall be pure and hold converse with other pure souls, and know of ourselves the clear light everywhere; and this is surely the light of truth. For no impure thing is allowed to approach the pure. These are the sort of words, Simmias, which the true lovers of wisdom cannot help saying to one another, and thinking. You will agree with me in that?

Certainly, Socrates.

But if this is true, O my friend, then there is great hope that, going whither I go, I shall there be satisfied with that which has been the chief concern of you and me in our past lives. And now that the hour of departure is appointed to me, this is the hope with which I depart, and not I only, but every man who believes that he has his mind purified.

Certainly, replied Simmias.

And what is purification but the separation of the soul from the body, as I was saying before; the habit of the soul gathering and collecting herself into herself, out of all the courses of the body; the dwelling in her own place alone, as in another life, so also in this, as far as she can; the release of the soul from the chains of the body?

Very true, he said.

And what is that which is termed death, but this very separation and release of the soul from the body?

To be sure, he said.

And the true philosophers, and they only, study and are eager to release the soul. Is not the separation and release of the soul from the body their especial study?

That is true.

And as I was saying at first, there would be a ridiculous contradiction in men studying to live as nearly as they can in a state of death, and yet repining when death comes.

Certainly.

Then Simmias, as the true philosophers are ever studying death, to them, of all men, death is the least terrible. Look at the matter in this way: how inconsistent of them to have been always enemies of the body, and wanting to have the soul alone, and when this is granted to them, to be trembling and repining; instead of rejoicing at their departing to that place where, when they arrive, they hope to gain that which in life they loved (and this was wisdom), and at the same time to be rid of the company of their enemy. Many a man has been willing to go to the world below in the hope of seeing there an earthly love, or wife, or son, and conversing with them. And will he who is a true lover of wisdom, and is persuaded in like manner that only in the world below he can worthily enjoy her, still repine at death? Will he not depart with joy? Surely, he will, my friend, if he be a true philosopher. For he will have a firm conviction that there only, and nowhere else, he can find wisdom in her purity. And if this be true, he would be very absurd, as I was saying, if he were to fear death.

SOCRATES: And were we not saying long ago that the soul when using the body as an instrument of perception, that is to say, when using the sense of sight or hearing or some other sense (for the meaning of perceiving through the body is perceiving through the senses),—were we not saying that the soul too is then dragged by the body into the region of the changeable, and wanders and is confused; the world spins round her, and she is like a drunkard when under their influence?

Very true.

But when returning into herself she reflects; then she passes into the realm of purity, and eternity, and immortality, and unchangeableness, which are her kindred, and with them she ever lives, when she is by herself and is not let or hindered; then she ceases from her erring ways, and being in communion with the unchanging is unchanging. And this state of the soul is called wisdom?

That is well and truly said, Socrates, he replied.

And to which class is the soul more nearly alike and akin, as far as may be inferred from this argument, as well as from the preceding one?

I think, Socrates, that, in the opinion of every one who follows the argument, the soul will be infinitely more like the unchangeable,—even the most stupid person will not deny that.

And the body is more like the changing?

Yes.

Yet once more consider the matter in this light: When the soul and the body are united, then nature orders the soul to rule and govern, and the body to obey and serve. Now which of these two functions is akin to the divine? and which to the mortal? Does not the divine appear to you to be that which naturally orders and rules, and the mortal that which is subject and servant?

True.

And which does the soul resemble?

The soul resembles the divine, and the body the mortal,—there can be no doubt of that, Socrates.

VI.2

The Finality of Death

BERTRAND RUSSELL

Bertrand Russell (1872–1970), once a student and tutor at Cambridge University, was one of the most significant philosophers and social critics of the twentieth century. In this short essay, Russell outlines some of the major objections to the idea of life after death. He argues that it is not reasonable to believe that our personality and memories will survive the destruction of our bodies. He claims that the inclination to believe in immortality comes form emotional factors, notably the fear of death.

Before we can profitably discuss whether we shall continue to exist after death, it is well to be clear as to the sense in which a man is the same person as he was yesterday. Philosophers used to think that there were definite substances, the soul and the body, that each lasted on from day to day, that a soul, once created, continued to exist throughout all future time, whereas a body ceased temporarily from death till the resurrection of the body.

The part of this doctrine which concerns the present life is pretty certainly false. The matter of the body is continually changing by processes of nutriment and wastage. Even if it were not, atoms in physics are no longer supposed to have continuous existence; there is no sense in saying: this is the same atom as the one that existed a few minutes ago. The continuity of a human body is a matter of appearance and behavior, not of substance.

From Bertrand Russell, *Why I Am Not a Christian* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1957), pp. 88–93. Copyright 1957 by George Allen & Unwin. Ltd; copyright renewed © 1985. Reprinted by permission of Simon & Schuster, Inc. and Taylor & Francis Books UK.

The same thing applies to the mind. We think and feel and act, but there is not, in addition to thoughts and feelings and actions, a bare entity, the mind or the soul, which does or suffers these occurrences. The mental continuity of a person is a continuity of habit and memory: there was yesterday one person whose feelings I can remember, and that person I regard as myself of yesterday; but, in fact, myself of yesterday was only certain mental occurrences which are now remembered and are regarded as part of the person who now recollects them. All that constitutes a person is a series of experiences connected by memory and by certain similarities of the sort we call habit.

If, therefore, we are to believe that a person survives death, we must believe that the memories and habits which constitute the person will continue to be exhibited in a new set of occurrences.

No one can prove that this will not happen. But it is easy to see that it is very unlikely. Our memories and habits are bound up with the structure of the brain, in much the same way in which a river is connected with the riverbed. The water in the river is always changing, but it keeps to the same course because previous rains have worn a channel. In like manner, previous events have worn a channel in the brain, and our thoughts flow along this channel. This is the cause of memory and mental habits. But the brain, as a structure, is dissolved at death, and memory therefore may be expected to be also dissolved. There is no more reason to think otherwise than to expect a river to persist in its old course after an earthquake has raised a mountain where a valley used to be.

All memory, and therefore (one may say) all minds, depend upon a property which is very noticeable in certain kinds of material structures but exists little if at all in other kinds. This is the property of forming habits as a result of frequent similar occurrences. For example: a bright light makes the pupils of the eyes contract; and if you repeatedly flash a light in a man's eyes and beat a gong at the same time, the gong alone will, in the end, cause his pupils to contract. This is a fact about the brain and nervous system—that is to say, about a certain material structure. It will be found that exactly similar facts explain our response to language and our use of it, our memories and the emotions they arouse, our moral or immoral habits of behavior, and indeed everything that constitutes our mental personality, except the part determined by heredity. The part determined by heredity is handed on to our posterity but cannot, in the individual, survive the disintegration of the body. Thus both the hereditary and the acquired parts of a personality are, so far as our experience goes, bound up with the characteristics of certain bodily structures. We all know that memory may be obliterated by an injury to the brain, that a virtuous person may be rendered vicious by encephalitis lethargica, and, that a clever child can be turned into an idiot by lack of iodine. In view of such familiar facts, it seems scarcely probable that the mind survives the total destruction of brain structure which occurs at death.

It is not rational arguments but emotions that cause belief in a future life.

The most important of these emotions is fear of death, which is instinctive and biologically useful. If we genuinely and wholeheartedly believed in the future life, we should cease completely to fear death. The effects would be curious, and probably such as most of us would deplore. But our human and subhuman ancestors have fought and exterminated their enemies throughout many geological ages and have profited by courage; it is therefore an advantage to the victors in the struggle for life to be able, on occasion, to overcome the natural fear of death. Among animals and savages, instinctive pugnacity suffices for this purpose; but at a certain stage of development, as the Mohammedans first proved, belief in Paradise has considerable military value as reinforcing natural pugnacity. We should therefore admit that militarists are wise in encouraging the belief in immortality, always supposing that this belief does not become so profound as to produce indifference to the affairs of the world.

Another emotion which encourages the belief in survival is admiration of the excellence of man. As the Bishop of Birmingham says, "His mind is a far finer instrument than anything that had appeared earlier—he knows right and wrong. He

can build Westminster Abbey. He can make an airplane. He can calculate the distance of the sun…. Shall, then, man at death perish utterly? Does that incomparable instrument, his mind, vanish when life ceases?"

The Bishop proceeds to argue that "the universe has been shaped and is governed by an intelligent purpose," and that it would have been unintelligent, having made man, to let him perish.

To this argument there are many answers. In the first place, it has been found, in the scientific investigation of nature, that the intrusion of moral or aesthetic values has always been an obstacle to discovery. It used to be thought that the heavenly bodies must move in circles because the circle is the most perfect curve, that species must be immutable because God would only create what was perfect and what therefore stood in no need of improvement, that it was useless to combat epidemics except by repentance because they were sent as a punishment for sin, and so on. It has been found, however, that, so far as we can discover, nature is indifferent to our values and can only be understood by ignoring our notions of good and bad. The Universe may have a purpose, but nothing that we know suggests that, if so, this purpose has any similarity to ours.

Nor is there in this anything surprising. Dr. Barnes tells us that man "knows right and wrong." But, in fact, as anthropology shows, men's views of right and wrong have varied to such an extent that no single item has been permanent. We cannot say, therefore, that man knows right and wrong, but only that some men do. Which men? Nietzsche argued in favor of an ethic profoundly different from Christ's, and some powerful governments have accepted his teaching. If knowledge of right and wrong is to be an argument for immortality, we must first settle whether to believe Christ or Nietzsche, and then argue that Christians are immortal, but Hitler and Mussolini are not, or vice versa. The decision will obviously be made on the battlefield, not in the study. Those who have the best poison gas will have the ethic of the future and will therefore be the immortal ones.

Our feelings and beliefs on the subject of good and evil are, like everything else about us, natural facts, developed in the struggle for existence and not having any divine or supernatural origin. In one of Aesop's fables, a lion is shown pictures of huntsmen catching lions and remarks that, if he had painted them, they would have shown lions catching huntsmen. Man, says Dr. Barnes, is a fine fellow because he can make airplanes. A little while ago there was a popular song about the cleverness of flies in walking upside down on the ceiling, with the chorus: "Could Lloyd George do it? Could Mr. Baldwin do it? Could Ramsay Mac do it? Why, no." On this basis a very telling argument could be constructed by a theologically-minded fly, which no doubt the other flies would find most convincing.

Moreover, it is only when we think abstractly that we have such a high opinion of man. Of men in the concrete, most of us think the vast majority very bad. Civilized states spend more than half their revenue on killing each other's citizens. Consider the long history of the activities inspired by moral fervor: human sacrifices, persecutions of heretics, witch-hunts, pogroms leading up to wholesale extermination by poison gases, which one at least of Dr. Barnes's episcopal colleagues must be supposed to favor, since he holds pacifism to be un-Christian. Are these abominations, and the ethical doctrines by which they are prompted, really evidence of an intelligent Creator? And can we really wish that the men who practiced them should live forever? The world in which we live can be understood as a result of muddle and accident; but if it is the outcome of deliberate purpose, the purpose must have been that of a fiend. For my part, I find accident a less painful and more plausible hypothesis.

VI.3

Immortality and Resurrection

JOHN HICK

A short biographical sketch of John Hick precedes selection IV.C.2. In the present article, Hick examines the Platonic notion of the immortality of the soul and argues that it is filled with problems. In its place he argues for the New Testament view of the re-creation of the psychophysical person, a holistic person who is body–soul in one. He then offers a thought experiment involving "John Smith" reappearances to show that re-creation is conceivable and worthy of rational belief. In the last part of this essay, Hick considers whether parapsychology can provide evidence for our survival of death.

THE IMMORTALITY OF THE SOUL

Some kind of distinction between physical body and immaterial or semimaterial soul seems to be as old as human culture; the existence of such a distinction is indicated by the manner of burial of the earliest human skeletons yet discovered. Anthropologists offer various conjectures about the origin of the distinction: perhaps it was first suggested by memories of dead persons, by dreams of them, by the sight of reflections of oneself in water and on other bright surfaces, or by meditation upon the significance of religious rites which grew up spontaneously in face of the fact of death.

It was Plato (428/7–348/7 B.C.), the philosopher who has most deeply and lastingly influenced western culture, who systematically developed the bodymind dichotomy and first attempted to prove the immortality of the soul.[1]

Plato argues that although the body belongs to the sensible world[2] and shares its changing and impermanent nature, the intellect is related to the unchanging realities of which we are aware when we think not of particular good things but of Goodness itself, not of specific just acts but of Justice itself, and of the other "universals" or eternal Ideas by participation in which physical things and events have their own specific characteristics. Being related to this higher and abiding realm rather than to the evanescent world of sense, the soul is immortal. Hence, one who devotes one's life to the contemplation of eternal realities rather than to the gratification of the fleeting desires of the body will find at death that whereas the body turns to dust, one's soul gravitates to the realm of the unchanging, there to live forever. Plato painted an awe-inspiring picture, of haunting beauty and persuasiveness, which has moved and elevated the minds of men and women in many different centuries and lands. Nevertheless, it is not today (as it was during the first centuries of the Christian era) the common philosophy of the West; and a demonstration of immortality which presupposes Plato's metaphysical system cannot claim to constitute a proof for a twentieth-century person.

Plato used the further argument that the only things that can suffer destruction are those which are composite, since to destroy something means to disintegrate it into its constituent parts. All material

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bodies are composite; the soul, however, is simple and therefore imperishable. This argument was adopted by Aquinas and became standard in Roman Catholic theology, as in the following passage from the Catholic philosopher Jacques Maritain:

> A spiritual soul cannot be corrupted, since it possesses no matter; it cannot be disintegrated, since it has no substantial parts; it cannot lose its individual unity, since it is self-subsisting, nor its internal energy, since it contains within itself all the sources of its energies. The human soul cannot die. Once it exists, it cannot disappear; it will necessarily exist for ever, endure without end. Thus, philosophic reason, put to work by a great metaphysician like Thomas Aquinas, is able to prove the immortality of the human soul in a demonstrative manner.[3]

This type of reasoning has been criticized on several grounds. Kant pointed out that although it is true that a simple substance cannot disintegrate, consciousness may nevertheless cease to exist through the diminution of its intensity to zero.[4] Modem psychology has also questioned the basic premise that the mind is a simple entity. It seems instead to be a structure of only relative unity, normally fairly stable and tightly integrated but capable under stress of various degrees of division and dissolution. This comment from psychology makes it clear that the assumption that the soul is a simple substance is not an empirical observation but a metaphysical theory. As such, it cannot provide the basis for a general proof of immortality.

The body–soul distinction, first formulated as a philosophical doctrine in ancient Greece, was baptized into Christianity, ran through the medieval period, and entered the modern world with the public status of a self-evident truth when it was redefined in the seventeenth century by Descartes. Since World War II, however, the Cartesian mind–matter dualism, having been taken for granted for many centuries, has been strongly criticized.[5] It is argued that the words that describe mental characteristics and operations—such as "intelligent," "thoughtful," "carefree," "happy," "calculating," and the like—apply in practice to types of human behavior and to behavioral dispositions. They refer to the empirical individual, the observable human being who is born and grows and acts and feels and dies, and not to the shadowy proceedings of a mysterious "ghost in the machine." An individual is thus very much what he or she appears to be—a creature of flesh and blood, who behaves and is capable of behaving in a characteristic range of ways—rather than a nonphysical soul incomprehensibly interacting with a physical body.

As a result of this development, much mid-twentieth-century philosophy has come to see the human being as in the biblical writings, not as an eternal soul temporarily attached to a mortal body, but as a form of finite, mortal, psychophysical life. Thus, the Old Testament scholar J. Pedersen said of the Hebrews that for them "the body is the soul in its outward form."[6] This way of thinking has led to quite a different conception of death from that found in Plato and the Neoplatonic strand in European thought.

THE RE-CREATION OF THE PSYCHOPHYSICAL PERSON

Only toward the end of the Old Testament period did afterlife beliefs come to have any real importance within Judaism. Previously, Hebrew religious insight had focused so fully upon God's covenant with the nation, as an organism that continued through the centuries while successive generations lived and died, that the thought of a divine purpose for the individual, a purpose transcending this present life, developed only when the breakdown of the nation as a political entity threw into prominence the individual and the question of personal destiny.

When a positive conviction arose of God's purpose holding each man and woman in being beyond the crisis of death, this conviction took the non-Platonic form of belief in the resurrection of the body. The religious difference between the Platonic belief in the immortality of the soul, and

the Judaic Christian belief in resurrection is that the latter postulates a special divine act of re-creation. This produces a sense of utter dependence upon God in the hour of death, a feeling that is in accordance with the biblical understanding of the human being as having been formed out of "the dust of the earth,"[7] a product (as we say today) of the slow evolution of life from its lowly beginnings in the primeval slime. Hence, in the Jewish and Christian conception, death is something real and fearful. It is not thought to be like walking from one room to another, or like taking off an old coat and putting on a new one. It means sheer unqualified extinction—passing out from the lighted circle of life into "death's dateless night." Only through the sovereign creative love of God can there be a new existence beyond the grave.

What does "the resurrection of the dead" mean? Saint Paul's discussion provides the basic Christian answer to this question.[8] His conception of the general resurrection (distinguished from the unique resurrection of Jesus) has nothing to do with the resuscitation of corpses in a cemetery. It concerns God's re-creation or reconstitution of the human psychophysical individual, not as the organism that has died but as a *soma pneumatikon*, a "spiritual body," inhabiting a spiritual world as the physical body inhabits our present material world.

A major problem confronting any such doctrine is that of providing criteria of personal identity to link the earthly life and the resurrection life. Paul does not specifically consider this question, but one may perhaps develop his thought along lines such as the following.[9]

Suppose, first, that someone—John Smith—living in the United States were suddenly and inexplicably to disappear before the eyes of his friends, and that at the same moment an exact replica of him were inexplicably to appear in India. The person who appears in India is exactly similar in both physical and mental characteristics to the person who disappeared in America. There is continuity of memory, complete similarity of bodily features including fingerprints, hair and eye coloration, and stomach contents, and also of beliefs, habits, emotions, and mental dispositions. Further, the "John Smith" replica thinks of himself as being the John Smith who disappeared in the United States. After all possible tests have been made and have proved positive, the factors leading his friends to accept "John Smith" as John Smith would surely prevail and would cause them to overlook even his mysterious transference from one continent to another, rather than treat "John Smith," with all of John Smith's memories and other characteristics, as someone other than John Smith.

Suppose, second, that our John Smith, instead of inexplicably disappearing, dies, but that at the moment of his death a "John Smith" replica, again complete with memories and all other characteristics, appears in India. Even with the corpse on our hands, we would, I think, still have to accept this "John Smith" as the John Smith who had died. We would just have to say that he had been miraculously re-created in another place.

Now suppose, third, that on John Smith's death the "John Smith" replica appears, not in India, but as a resurrection replica in a different world altogether, a resurrection world inhabited only by resurrected persons. This world occupies its own space distinct from that with which we are now familiar. That is to say, an object in the resurrection world is not situated at any distance or in any direction from the objects in our present world, although each object in either world is spatially related to every other object in the same world.

This supposition provides a model by which one may begin to conceive of the divine re-creation of the embodied human personality. In this model, the element of the strange and mysterious has been reduced to a minimum by following the view of some of the early Church Fathers that the resurrection body has the same shape as the physical body,[10] and ignoring Paul's own hint that it may be as unlike the physical body as a full grain of wheat differs from the wheat seed.[11]

What is the basis for this Judaic-Christian belief in the divine re-creation or reconstitution of the human personality after death? There is, of course, an argument from authority, in that life after death is taught throughout the New Testament (although very rarely in the Old Testament). More basically,

though, belief in the resurrection arises as a corollary of faith in the sovereign purpose of God, which is not restricted by death and which holds us in being beyond our natural mortality. In a similar vein it is argued that if it be the divine plan to create finite persons to exist in fellowship with God, then it contradicts both that intention and God's love for the human creatures if God allows men and women to pass out of existence when the divine purpose for them still remains largely unfulfilled.

It is this promised fulfillment of God's purpose for the individual, in which the full possibilities of human nature will be realized, that constitutes the "heaven" symbolized in the New Testament as a joyous banquet in which all and sundry rejoice together. As we saw when discussing the problem of evil, it is questionable whether any theodicy can succeed without drawing into itself this eschatological[12] faith in an eternal, and therefore infinite, good which thus outweighs all the pains and sorrows that have been endured on the way to it.

Balancing the idea of heaven in Christian tradition is the idea of hell. This, too, is relevant to the problem of theodicy. Just as the reconciling of God's goodness and power with the fact of evil requires that out of the travail of history there shall come in the end an eternal good for humanity, so likewise it would seem to preclude eternal human misery. The only kind of evil that is finally incompatible with God's unlimited power and love would be utterly pointless and wasted suffering, pain which is never redeemed and worked into the fulfilling of God's good purpose. Unending torment would constitute precisely such suffering; for being eternal, it could never lead to a good end beyond itself. Thus, hell as conceived by its enthusiasts, such as Augustine or Calvin, is a major part of the problem of evil! If hell is constructed as eternal torment, the theological motive behind the idea is directly at variance with the urge to seek a theodicy. However, it is by no means clear that the doctrine of eternal punishment can claim a secure New Testament basis.[13] If, on the other hand, "hell" means a continuation of the purgatorial suffering often experienced in this life, and leading eventually to the high good of heaven, it no longer stands in conflict with the needs of theodicy. Again, the idea of hell may be deliteralized and valued as a powerful and pregnant symbol of the grave responsibility inherent in our human freedom in relation to our Maker.

DOES PARAPSYCHOLOGY HELP?

The spiritualist movement claims that life after death has been proved by cases of communication between the living and the "dead." During the closing quarter of the nineteenth century and the decades of the present century this claim has been made the subject of careful and prolonged study by a number of responsible and competent persons.[14] This work, which may be approximately dated from the founding in London of the Society for Psychical Research in 1882, is known either by the name adopted by that society or, more commonly today, as parapsychology.

Approaching the subject from the standpoint of our interest in this chapter, we may initially divide the phenomena studied by the parapsychologist into two groups. There are those that involve no reference to the idea of a life after death, chief among these being psychokinesis (PK) and extrasensory perception (ESP) in its various forms (such as telepathy, clairvoyance, and precognition). There are also those phenomena that raise the question of personal survival after death, such as the apparitions and other sensory manifestations of dead persons and the "spirit messages" received through mediums. This division is, however, only of preliminary use, for ESP has emerged as a clue to the understanding of much that occurs in the second group. We shall begin with a brief outline of the reasons that have induced the majority of workers in this field to be willing to postulate so strange an occurrence as telepathy.

Telepathy is a name for the mysterious fact that sometimes a thought in the mind of one person

apparently causes a similar or associated thought to occur to someone else when there are no normal means of communication between them, and under circumstances such that mere coincidence seems to be excluded.

For example, one person may draw a series of pictures or diagrams on paper and somehow transmit an impression of these to someone else in another room who then draws recognizable reproductions of them. This might well be a coincidence in the case of a single successful reproduction; but can a series consist entirely of coincidences?

Experiments have been devised to measure the probability of chance coincidence in supposed cases of telepathy. In the simplest of these, cards printed in turn with five different symbols are used. A pack of fifty, consisting of ten bearing each symbol, is then thoroughly shuffled, and the sender concentrates on the cards one at a time while the receiver (who of course can see neither sender nor cards) tries to write down the correct order of symbols. This procedure is repeated, with constant reshuffling, hundreds or thousands of times. Since there are only five different symbols, a random guess would stand one chance in five of being correct. Consequently, on the assumption that only "chance" is operating, the receiver should be right in about 20 percent of his or her tries and wrong in about 80 percent; the longer the series, the closer should be the approach to this proportion. However, good telepathic subjects are right in a larger number of cases than can be reconciled with random guessing. The deviation from chance expectation can be converted mathematically into "odds against chance" (increasing as the proportion of hits is maintained over a longer and longer series of tries). In this way, odds of over a million to one have been recorded. J. B. Rhine (Duke University) has reported results showing "antichance" values ranging from seven (which equals odds against chance of 100,000 to one) to eighty-two (which converts the odds against chance to billions).[15] The work of both these researchers has been criticized, and a complex controversy surrounds them; on the other hand, other researchers have recorded similar results.[16] In the light of these reports, it is difficult to deny that some positive factor, and not merely "chance," is operating. "Telepathy" is simply a name for this unknown positive factor.

How does telepathy operate? Only negative conclusions seem to be justified to date. It can, for example, be said with reasonable certainty that telepathy does not consist of any kind of physical radiation analogous to radio waves. First, telepathy is not delayed or weakened in proportion to distance, as are all known forms of radiation; second, there is no organ in the brain or elsewhere that can plausibly be regarded as its sending or receiving center. Telepathy appears to be a purely mental occurrence.

It is not, however, a matter of transferring or transporting a thought out of one mind into another—if, indeed, such an idea makes sense at all. The telepathized thought does not leave the sender's consciousness in order to enter that of the receiver. What happens would be better described by saying that the sender's thought gives rise to a mental "echo" in the mind of the receiver. This "echo" occurs at the unconscious level, and consequently the version of it that rises into the receiver's consciousness may be only fragmentary and may be distorted or symbolized in various ways, as in dreams.

According to one theory that has been tentatively suggested to explain telepathy, our minds are separate and mutually insulated only at the conscious (and preconscious) level, but at the deepest level of the unconscious we are constantly influencing one another, and it is at this level that telepathy takes place.[17]

How is a telepathized thought directed to one particular receiver among so many? Apparently the thoughts are directed by some link of emotion or common interest. For example, two friends are sometimes telepathically aware of any grave crisis or shock experienced by the other, even though they are at opposite ends of the earth.

We shall turn now to the other branch of parapsychology, which has more obvious bearing upon our subject. The *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical*

Research contain a large number of carefully recorded and apparently satisfactorily attested cases of the appearance of the figure of someone who has recently died to living people (in rare instances to more than one at a time) who were, in many cases, at a distance and unaware of the death. The S.P.R. reports also establish beyond reasonable doubt that the minds that operate in the mediumistic trance, purporting to be spirits of the departed, sometimes give personal information that the medium could not have acquired by normal means, and at times even give information, later verified, that had not been known to any living person.[18]

On the other hand, physical happenings such as the "materializations" of spirit forms in a visible and tangible form, are much more doubtful. However, even if we discount the entire range of physical phenomena, it remains true that the best cases of trance utterance are impressive and puzzling, and taken at face value are indicative of survival and communication after death. If, through a medium, one talks with an intelligence that gives a coherent impression of being an intimately known friend who has died and who establishes identity by a wealth of private information and indefinable personal characteristics—as has occasionally happened—then we cannot dismiss without careful trial the theory that what is taking place is the return of a consciousness from the spirit world.

However, the advance of knowledge in the other branch of parapsychology, centering upon the study of extrasensory perception, has thrown unexpected light upon this apparent commerce with the departed, for it suggests that unconscious telepathic contact between the medium and his or her client is an important and possibly a sufficient explanatory factor. This was vividly illustrated by the experience of two women who decided to test the spirits by taking into their minds, over a period of weeks, the personality and atmosphere of an entirely imaginary character in an unpublished novel written by one of them. After thus filling their minds with the characteristics of this fictitious person, they went to a reputable medium, who proceeded to describe accurately their imaginary friend as a visitant from beyond the grave and to deliver appropriate messages from him.

An even more striking case is that of the "direct voice" medium (a medium in whose séances the voice of the communicating "spirit" is heard apparently speaking out of the air) who produced the spirit of one "Gordon Davis," who spoke in his own recognizable voice, displayed considerable knowledge about Gordon Davis, and remembered his death. This was extremely impressive until it was discovered that Gordon Davis was still alive; he was a real-estate agent and had been trying to sell a house at the time when the séance took place![19]

Such cases suggest that genuine mediums are simply persons of exceptional telepathic sensitiveness who unconsciously derive the "spirits" from their clients' minds.

In connection with "ghosts," in the sense of apparitions of the dead, it has been established that there can be "meaningful hallucinations," the source of which is almost certainly telepathic. To quote a classic and somewhat dramatic example: a woman sitting by a lake sees the figure of a man run toward the lake and throw himself in. A few days later a man commits suicide by throwing himself into this same lake. Presumably, the explanation of the vision is that the man's thought while he was contemplating suicide had been telepathically projected onto the scene via the woman's mind.[20]

In many of the cases recorded there is delayed action. The telepathically projected thought lingers in the recipient's unconscious mind until a suitable state of inattention to the outside world enables it to appear to the conscious mind in a dramatized form—for example, by a hallucinatory voice or vision—by means of the same mechanism that operates in dreams.

If phantoms of the living can be created by previously experienced thoughts and emotions of the person whom they represent, the parallel possibility arises that phantoms of the dead are caused by thoughts and emotions that were experienced by the person represented when he or she was alive. In other words, perhaps ghosts may be "psychic footprints," a kind of mental trace left behind by the

dead but not involving the presence or even the continued existence of those whom they represent.

RESUSCITATION CASES

Yet another range of phenomena that have recently attracted considerable interest consists of reports of the experiences of people who have been resuscitated after having been declared dead.[21] The periods during which they were apparently dead vary from a few seconds to twenty minutes or even more. These reports include the following elements, though not usually all on the same occasion: an initial loud noise; a sensation as of being drawn through a dark tunnel-like space; emergence into a "world" of light and beauty; meeting with relatives and friends who had died; encounter with a "being of light" of immense moral or spiritual impressiveness, who is assumed by Christians to be Christ and by others to be an angel or a deity; an extremely vivid and almost instantaneous visual review of one's life; approach to a border, sensed to be the final division between this life and the next; and being sent or drawn back to the earthly body. Generally, those who have had this kind of experience are reluctant to speak about such hard-to-describe and hard-to-believe phenomena, but characteristically their attitude toward death has changed and they now think of their own future death without fear or even with positive anticipation.

Prior to such visual and auditory sequences there is also often an "out-of-the-body" experience, a consciousness of floating above one's own body and seeing it lying in bed or on the ground or the operating table. There is a growing literature concerning such "out-of-the-body" experiences, whether at the time of death or during life.[22]

Whether or not the resuscitation cases give us reports of the experiences of people who have actually died, and thus provide information about a life to come, it is at present impossible to determine. Do these accounts describe the first phase of another life, or perhaps a transitional stage before the connection between mind and body is finally broken; or do they describe only the last flickers of dream activity before the brain finally loses oxygen? It is to be hoped that further research may find a way to settle this question.

All these considerations suggest the need for caution in assessing the findings of parapsychology.[23] However, this caution should lead to further investigations, not to a closing of the issues. In the meantime one should be careful not to confuse absence of knowledge with knowledge of absence.

NOTES

1. *Phaedo*.
2. The world known to us through our physical senses.
3. Jacques Maritain, *The Range of Reason* (London: Geoffrey Bles Ltd. and New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1953), p. 60.
4. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason, Transcendental Dialectic*, "Refutation of Mendelssohn's Proof of the Permanence of the Soul."
5. Gilbert Ryle's *The Concept of Mind* (London: Hutchinson & Co., Ltd., 1949, and New York: Barnes & Noble Books, 1975) is a classic statement of this critique.
6. J. Pedersen, *Israel* (London: Oxford University Press, 1926), I, 170.
7. Genesis 2:7; Psalm 103:14.
8. I Corinthians 15.
9. The following paragraphs are adapted, with permission, from a section of my article, "Theology and Verification," published in *Theology Today* (April 1960) and reprinted in *The Existence of God* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1964) and elsewhere. A fascinating recent argument for the personal identity of an original and his or her replica is offered by Derek Parfitt in *Reasons and Persons* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985).

10. For example, Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, Book II, Chap. 34, para. 1.
11. I Corinthians 15:37.
12. From the Greek *eschaton*, end.
13. The Greek word *aionios*, which is used in the New Testament and which is usually translated as "eternal" or "everlasting," can bear either this meaning or the more limited meaning of "for the aeon, or age."
14. The list of past presidents of the Society for Psychical Research includes the philosophers Henri Bergson, William James, Hans Driesch, Henry Sidgwick, F. C. S. Schiller, C. D. Broad, and H. H. Price; the psychologists William McDougall, Gardner Murphy, Franklin Prince, and R. H. Thouless; the physicists Sir William Crookes, Sir Oliver Lodge, Sir William Barrett, and Lord Rayleigh; and the classicist Gilbert Murray.
15. J. B. Rhine, *Extrasensory Perception* (Boston: Society for Psychical Research, 1935), Table XLIII, p. 162. See also Rhine, *New Frontiers of the Mind* (New York: Farrar and Rinehart, Inc., 1937) pp. 69f.
16. The most comprehensive up-to-date account of the evidence for ESP, together with competent discussions of its significance, is to be found in Benjamin Wolman, ed., *Handbook of Parapsychology* (New York: Van Nostrand, 1977). For the important Russian work see L. L. Vasiliev, *Experiments in Distant Influence* (previously *Experiments in Mental Suggestion*, 1963) (New York: E. O. Dutton, 1976).
17. Whateley Carington, *Telepathy* (London: Methuen, 1945), Chaps. 6–8. See also H. L. Edge, R. L. Morris, J. H. Rushand, and J. Palmer, *Foundations of Parapsychology* (London: Routledge, 1986).
18. A famous example is the Chaffin will case, recounted in many books, such as C. D. Broad, *Lectures on Psychical Research* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul and New York: Humanities Press, 1962), pp. 137–39. (This, incidentally, remains one of the best books on parapsychology.)
19. S. G. Soal, "A Report of Some Communications Received through Mrs. Blanche Cooper," Sec. 4, *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research*, XXXV, 560–89.
20. F. W. H. Myers, *Human Personality and Its Survival of Bodily Death* (London: Longmans, Green, & Co., 1903 and New York: Arno Press, 1975), I, 270–71. This is a classic work, still of great interest.
21. The recent wave of interest began with the publication in 1975 of Raymond Moody's *Life after Life* (Atlanta: Mockingbird Books), and has been fed by a growing number of other books, including Raymond Moody, *Reflections on Life after Life* (New York: Bantam Books, 1977); Karlis Otis and Erlendur Haraldsson, *At the Hour of Death* (New York: Avon Books, 1977); Maurice Rawlings, *Beyond Death's Door* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1978, and London: Sheldon Press, 1979).
22. For example, Sylvan Muldoon and Hereward Carrington, *The Phenomena of Astral Projection* (London: Rider, 1951); Robert Crookall, *The Study and Practice of Astral Projection* (London: Aquarian Press, 1961); Celia Green, *Out-of-the-Body Experiences* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1968); *Journeys Out of the Body* (New York: Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1971, and London: Souvenir Press, 1972); Benjamin Walker, *Beyond the Body* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974).
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VI.4

Personal Identity and Life After Death

JEFFREY OLEN

Jeffrey Olen (1946–) is a writer-philosopher who for many years taught philosophy at the University of Wisconsin at Stevens Point. In this essay he discusses the criteria of personal identity in order to determine what would have to survive our death if we were to be able to say that it is truly we who survive. Through some intriguing thought experiments, Olen builds a case for the possibility of survival. Olen has a functionalist view of personhood, believing that "the human brain is analogous to a computer." On this view, a given brain state is also a given mental state because it performs the appropriate function in the appropriate "program." Olen argues that just as different computers can run the same program, so too different brains (or other media) can "run" the same mind. So we can change bodies and therefore survive the death of our own body just as long as our personalities and memories are preserved intact.

It is Sunday night. After a long night of hard drinking, John Badger puts on his pajamas, lowers the heat in his Wisconsin home to fifty-five degrees and climbs into bed beneath two heavy blankets. Meanwhile, in Florida, Joe Everglade kisses his wife goodnight and goes to sleep.

The next morning, two very confused men wake up. One wakes up in Wisconsin, wondering where he is and why he is wearing pajamas, lying under two heavy blankets, yet shivering from the cold. He looks out the window and sees nothing but pine trees and snow. The room is totally unfamiliar. Where is his wife? How did he get to this cold, strange place? Why does he have such a terrible hangover? He tries to spring out of bed with his usual verve but feels an unaccustomed aching in his joints. Arthritis? He wanders unsurely through the house until he finds the bathroom. What he sees in the mirror causes him to spin around in sudden fear. But there is nobody behind him. Then the fear intensifies as he realizes that it was his reflection that had stared back at him. But it was the reflection of a man thirty years older than himself, with coarser features and a weather-beaten face.

In Florida, a man awakens with a young woman's arm around him. When she too awakens, she snuggles against him and wishes him good morning. "Who are you?" he asks. "What am I doing in your bed?" She just laughs, then tells him that he will have to hurry if he is going to get in his ten miles of jogging. From the bathroom she asks him about his coming day. None of the names or places she mentions connect with anything he can remember. He climbs out of bed, marveling at the ease with which he does so, and looks first out the window and then into the mirror over the dresser. The sun and swimming pool confound him. The handsome young man's reflection terrifies him.

Then the phone rings. The woman answers it. It is the man from Wisconsin. "What happened last night, Mary? How did I get here? How did I get to look this way?"

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"Who is this?" she asks.

"Don't you recognize my voice, Mary?" But he knew that the voice was not his own. "It's Joe."

"Joe who?"

"Your husband."

She hangs up, believing it to be a crank call. When she returns to the bedroom, the man in her husband's robe asks how he got there from Wisconsin, and why he looks as he does.

PERSONAL IDENTITY

What happened in the above story? Who woke up in Joe Everglade's bed? Who woke up in John Badger's? Which one is Marys's husband? Has Badger awakened with Everglade's memories and Everglade with Badger's? Or have Badger and Everglade somehow switched bodies? How are we to decide? What considerations are relevant?

To ask such questions is to raise the problem of *personal identity*. It is to ask what makes a person the same person he was the day before. It is to ask how we determine that we are dealing with the same person that we have dealt with in the past. It is to ask what constitutes personal identity over time. It is also to ask what we mean by the same person. And to answer this question, we must ask what we mean by the word "person."

Persons

In the previous chapter, we asked what a human being is. We asked what human beings are made of, what the nature of the human mind is, and whether human beings are part of nature or distinct from it.

To ask what a *person* is, however, is to ask a different question. Although we often use the terms "person" and "human being" interchangeably, they do not mean the same thing. If we do use them interchangeably, it is only because all the persons we know of are human beings, and because, as far as we know, whenever we are confronted with the same human being we are confronted with the same person.

But the notion of a human being is a *biological* notion. To identify something as a human being is to identify it as a member of *Homo sapiens*, a particular species of animal. It is a type of organism defined by certain physical characteristics.

The notion of a person, on the other hand, is not a biological one. Suppose, for instance, that we find life on another planet, and that this life is remarkably like our own. The creatures we discover communicate through a language as rich as our own, act according to moral principles, have a legal system, and engage in science and art. Suppose also that despite these cultural similarities, this form of life is biologically different from human life. In that case, these creatures would be persons, but not humans. Think, for example, of the alien in *E.T.* Since he is biologically different from us, he is not human. He is, however, a person.

What, then, is a person? Although philosophers disagree on this point, the following features are relatively noncontroversial.

First, a person is an intelligent, rational creature. Second, it is a creature capable of a peculiar sort of consciousness—self-consciousness. Third, it not only has beliefs, desires, and so forth, but it has beliefs about its beliefs, desires, and so forth. Fourth, it is a creature to which we ascribe moral responsibility. Persons are responsible for their actions in a way that other things are not. They are subject to moral praise and moral blame. Fifth, a person is a creature that we treat in certain ways. To treat something as a person is to treat it as a member of our own moral community. It is to grant it certain rights, both moral and legal. Sixth, a person is a creature capable of reciprocity. It is capable of treating us as members of the same moral community. Finally, a person is capable of verbal communication. It can communicate by means of a *language*, not just by barks, howls, and tail-wagging.

Since, as far as we know, only human beings meet the above conditions, only human beings are considered to be persons. But once we recognize that to be a person is not precisely the same thing that it is to be a human being, we also recognize that other creatures, such as the alien in *E.T.,* is also a person. We also recognize that perhaps not all

human beings are persons—human fetuses, for example, as some have argued. Certainly, in the American South before the end of the Civil War, slaves were not considered to be persons. We might also mention a remark of D'Artagnan, in Richard Lester's film version of *The Three Musketeers.* Posing as a French nobleman, he attempted to cross the English Channel with a companion. When a French official remarked that his pass was only for one person, D'Artagnan replied that he was only one person—his companion was a servant.

Moreover, once we recognize the distinction between human beings and persons, certain questions arise. Can one human being embody more than one person, either at the same time or successive times? In the example we introduced at the beginning of this chapter, has Badger's body become Everglade's and Everglade's Badger's? Can the person survive the death of the human being? Is there personal survival after the death of the body?

Concerning identity through time in general, two issues must be distinguished. First, we want to know how we can *tell* that something is the same thing we encountered previously. That is, we want to know what the *criteria* are for establishing identity through time. Second, we want to know what *makes* something the same thing it was previously. That is, we want to know what *constitutes* identity through time.

Although these issues are related, they are not the same, as the following example illustrates. We can *tell* that someone has a case of the flu by checking for certain symptoms, such as fever, lack of energy, and sore muscles. But having these symptoms does not *constitute* having a case of the flu. It is the presence of a flu virus—not the symptoms—that makes an illness a case of the flu.

We commonly use two criteria for establishing personal identity. The first is the *bodily criterion*, the second the *memory criterion*. How do we apply them?

We apply the bodily criterion in two ways. First, we go by physical resemblance. If I meet someone on the street who looks, walks, and sounds just like Mary, I assume that it is Mary. Since the body I see resembles Mary's body exactly, I assume that the person I see is Mary. But that method can sometimes fail us, as in the case of identical twins. In such cases, we can apply the bodily criterion in another way. If I can discover that there is a continuous line from one place and time to another that connects Mary's body to the body I now see, I can assume that I now see Mary. Suppose, for example, that Mary and I went to the beach together, and have been together all afternoon. In that case, I can say that the person I am now with is the person I began the day with.

There are, however, times when the bodily criterion is not available. If Mary and Jane are identical twins, and I run across one of them on the street, I may have to ask who it is. That is, I may have to rely on Mary's memory of who she is. And, if I want to make sure that I am not being fooled, I may ask a few questions. If Mary remembers things that I believe only Mary can remember, and if she remembers them as happening to *her*, and not to somebody else, then I can safely say that it really is Mary.

Generally, the bodily criterion and the memory criterion do not conflict, so we use whichever is more convenient. But what happens if they do conflict? That is what happened in our imagined story. According to the bodily criterion, each person awoke in his own bed, but with the memories of someone else. According to the memory criterion, each person awoke in the other's bed with the body of someone else. Which criterion should we take as decisive? Which is fundamental, the memory criterion or the bodily criterion?

The Constitution of Personal Identity

To ask the above questions is to ask what *constitutes* personal identity. What is it that makes me the same person I was yesterday? What makes the author of this book the same person as the baby born to Sam and Belle Olen in 1946? Answers to these questions will allow us to say which criterion is fundamental.

Perhaps the most widely discussed answer to our question comes from John Locke (1632–1704), whose discussion of the topic set the stage for all future discussions. According to Locke, the bodily criterion cannot be fundamental. Since the concept of a person is most importantly the concept of a

conscious being who can be held morally and legally responsible for past actions, it is *continuity of consciousness* that constitutes personal identity. The bodily criterion is fundamental for establishing sameness of *animal*, but not sameness of *person*.

Suppose, for instance, that John Badger had been a professional thief. If the person who awoke in Badger's bed could never remember any of Badger's life as his own, but had only Everglade's memories and personality traits, while the man who awoke in Everglade's bed remembered all of Badger's crimes as his own, would we be justified in jailing the man who awoke in Badger's bed while letting the man who awoke in Everglade's go free? Locke would say no. The person who awoke in Badger's bed was not Badger.

If we agree that it is sameness of consciousness that constitutes personal identity, we must then ask what constitutes sameness of consciousness. Some philosophers have felt that it is sameness of *mind*, where the mind is thought of as a continuing nonphysical substance. Although Locke did not deny that minds are nonphysical, he did not believe that sameness of nonphysical substance is the same thing as sameness of consciousness. If we can conceive of persons switching *physical* bodies, we can also conceive of persons switching *non*physical ones.

Then what does Locke take to be crucial for personal identity? *Memory*. It is my memory of the events of Jeffrey Olen's life as happening to me that makes me the person those events happened to. It is my memory of his experiences as *mine* that makes them mine.

Although Locke's answer seems at first glance a reasonable one, many philosophers have considered it inadequate. One reason for rejecting Locke's answer is that we don't remember everything that happened to us. If I don't remember anything that happened to me during a certain period, does that mean that whoever existed "in" my body then was not me? Hardly.

Another reason for rejecting Locke's answer is that memory is not always accurate. We often sincerely claim to remember things that never happened. There is a difference, then, between *genuine* memory and *apparent* memory. What marks this difference is the *truth* of the memory claim. If what I claim to remember is not true, it cannot be a case of genuine memory.

But that means that memory cannot constitute personal identity. If I claim to remember certain experiences as being my experiences, that does not make them mine, because my claim may be a case of apparent memory. If it is a case of genuine memory, that is because it is true that the remembered experiences are mine. But the memory does not *make* them mine. Rather, the fact that they are mine makes it a case of genuine memory. So Locke has the situation backward. But if memory does not constitute personal identity, what does?

Some philosophers have claimed that, regardless of Locke's views, it *must* be sameness of mind, where the mind is thought of as a continuing nonphysical entity. This entity can be thought of as the self. It is what makes us who we are. As long as the same self continues to exist, the same person continues to exist. The major problem with this answer is that it assumes the truth of mind-body dualism, a position we found good reason to reject in the previous chapter. But apart from that, there is another problem.

In one of the most famous passages in the history of philosophy, David Hume (1711–1776) argued that there is no such self—for reasons that have nothing to do with the rejection of dualism. No matter how hard we try, Hume said, we cannot discover such a self. Turning inward and examining our own consciousness, we find only individual experiences—thoughts, recollections, images, and the like. Try as we might, we cannot find a continuing self. In that case, we are justified in believing only that there are *experiences*—not that there is a continuing *experiencer*. Put another way, we have no reason to believe that there is anything persisting through time that underlies or unifies these experiences. There are just the experiences themselves.

But if we accept this view, and still require a continuing nonphysical entity for personal identity, we are forced to the conclusion that there is no such thing as personal identity. We are left, that is, with the position that the idea of a person existing through time is a mere fiction, however useful in daily life. And that is the position that Hume

took. Instead of persons, he said, there are merely "bundles of ideas."

Thus, the view that personal identity requires sameness of mind can easily lead to the view that there is no personal identity. Since this conclusion seems manifestly false, we shall have to look elsewhere? But where?

The Primacy of the Bodily Criterion

If neither memory nor sameness of mind constitutes personal identity, perhaps we should accept the view that sameness of *body* does. Perhaps it is really the bodily criterion that is fundamental.

If we reflect on the problem faced by Locke's theory because of the distinction between genuine and apparent memory, it is tempting to accept the primacy of the bodily criterion. Once again, a sincere memory claim may be either genuine memory or apparent memory. How can we tell whether the claim that a previous experience was mine is genuine memory? By determining whether I was in the right place in the right time to have it. And how can we determine that? By the bodily criterion. If my *body* was there, then I was there. But that means that the memory criterion must rest on the bodily criterion. Also, accepting the primacy of the bodily criterion gets us around Hume's problem. The self that persists through and has the experiences I call mine is my physical body.

This answer also has the advantage of being in keeping with materialism, a view accepted in the previous chapter. If human beings are purely physical, then persons must also be purely physical, whatever differences there may be between the notion of a person and the notion of a human being. But if persons are purely physical, what makes me the same person I was yesterday is no different in kind from what makes my typewriter the same typewriter it was yesterday. In both cases, we are dealing with a physical object existing through time. In the latter case, as long as we have the same physical materials (allowing for change of ribbon, change of keys, and the like) arranged in the same way, we have the same typewriter. So it is with persons. As long as we have the same physical materials (allowing for such changes as the replacement of cells) arranged in the same way, we have the same person.

Although this answer is a tempting one, it is not entirely satisfactory. Suppose that we could manage a brain transplant from one body to another. If we switched two brains, so that all the memories and personality traits of the persons involved were also switched, wouldn't we conclude that the persons, as well as their brains, had switched bodies? When such operations are performed in science-fiction stories, they are described this way.

But this possibility does not defeat the view that the bodily criterion is fundamental. It just forces us to hold that the bodily criterion must be applied to the brain, rather than the entire body. Personal identity then becomes a matter of brain identity. Same brain, same person. Unfortunately, even with this change, our answer does not seem satisfactory. Locke still seems somehow right. Let us see why.

Badger and Everglade Reconsidered

Returning to our tale of Badger and Everglade, we find that some troubling questions remain. If Mrs. Everglade continues to live with the man who awoke in her bed, might she not be committing adultery? Shouldn't she take in the man who awoke in Badger's bed? And, once again assuming that Badger was a professional thief, would justice really be served by jailing the man who awoke in his bed? However we answer these questions, one thing is certain—the two men would always feel that they had switched bodies. So, probably, would the people who knew them. Furthermore, whenever we read science-fiction stories describing such matters, we invariably accept them as stories of switched bodies. But if we accept the bodily criterion as fundamental, we are accepting the impossible, and the two men in our story, Mrs. Everglade, and their friends are mistaken in their beliefs. How, then, are we to answer our questions?

If we are unsure, it is because such questions become very tricky at this point. Their trickiness seems to rest on two points. First, cases like the Badger-Everglade case do not happen in this world. Although we are prepared to accept them in

science-fiction tales, we are totally unprepared to deal with them in real life.

Second, and this is a related point, we need some way of *explaining* such extraordinary occurrences. Unless we know how the memories of Badger and Everglade came to be reversed, we will be unable to decide the answers to our questions. In the movies, it is assumed that some nonphysical substance travels from one body to another, or that there has been a brain transplant of some sort. On these assumptions, we are of course willing to describe what happens as a change of body. This description seems to follow naturally from such explanations.

What explains what happened to Badger and Everglade? We can rule out change of nonphysical substance, because of what was said in the previous chapter and earlier in this chapter. If we explain what happened as the product of a brain switch, then the bodily criterion applied to the brain allows us to say that Badger and Everglade did awaken in each other's bed, and that Mrs. Everglade would be committing adultery should she live with the man who awoke in her bed.

Are there any other possible explanations? One that comes readily to mind is hypnotism. Suppose, then, that someone had hypnotized Badger and Everglade into believing that each was the other person. In that case, we should not say that there had been a body switch. Badger and Everglade awoke in their own beds, and a wave of the hypnotist's hand could demonstrate that to everyone concerned. Their memory claims are not genuine memories, but apparent ones.

But suppose it was not a case of hypnotism? What then? At this point, many people are stumped. What else could it be? The strong temptation is to say nothing. Without a brain transplant or hypnotism or something of the sort, the case is impossible.

Suppose that we accept this conclusion. If we do, we may say the following: The memory criterion and the bodily criterion cannot really conflict. If the memories are genuine, and not apparent, then whenever I remember certain experiences as being mine, it is possible to establish that the same brain is involved in the original experiences and the memory of them. Consequently, the memory criterion and the bodily criterion are equally fundamental. The memory criterion is fundamental in the sense that consciousness determines what part of the body is central to personal identity. Because sameness of consciousness requires sameness of brain, we ultimately must apply the bodily criterion to the brain. But the bodily criterion is also fundamental, because we assume that some physical object—the brain—must remain the same if the person is to remain the same.

The Memory Criterion Revisited

Although the answer given above is a tidy one, it may still seem unsatisfactory. Perhaps it is a cheap trick just to dismiss the Badger-Everglade case as mere fantasy and then ignore it. After all, if we can meaningfully describe such cases in books and films, don't we have to pay some attention to them? As long as we can imagine situations in which two persons can switch bodies without a brain transplant, don't we need a theory of personal identity to cover them?

Philosophers are divided on this point. Some think that a theory of personal identity has to account only for what can happen in this world, while others think it must account for whatever can happen in any conceivable world. Then again, some do not believe that there is any conceivable world in which two persons could change bodies without a brain switch, while there are others who are not sure that such things are impossible in the actual world.

Without trying to decide the matter, I can make the following suggestion for those who demand a theory of personal identity that does not rely on the assumption that genuine memory is tied to a particular brain.

In the previous chapter, I concluded that functionalism is the theory of mind most likely to be true. To have a mind, I said, is to embody a psychology. I also said that we don't merely move our bodies, but write poetry, caress the cheek of someone we love, and perform all sorts of human actions. I might have expressed this point by saying that we are not just human beings, but persons as well. What makes a human being a person? We are persons because we embody a psychology.

If that is true, then it may also be true that we are the persons we are because of the psychologies we embody. If it is a psychology that makes a human being a person, then it is a particular psychology that makes a particular human being a particular person. Sameness of psychology constitutes sameness of person. In that case, we can agree with this much of Locke's theory—it is continuity of consciousness that constitutes personal identity. But what is continuity of consciousness, if not memory?

An answer to this question is provided by the contemporary British philosopher Anthony Quinton. At any moment, we can isolate a number of mental states belonging to the same momentary consciousness. Right now, for instance, I am simultaneously aware of the sound and sight and feel of my typewriter, plus the feel and taste of my pipe, plus a variety of other things. Such *momentary* consciousnesses belong to a continuous series. Each one is linked to the one before it and the one following it by certain similarities and recollections. This series is my own *continuity* of consciousness, my own *stream* of consciousness. It is this stream of consciousness that makes me the same person I was yesterday.

If we accept Quinton's theory, we can then say that the memory criterion, not the bodily criterion, is fundamental. We can also say that, even if in this world continuity of consciousness requires sameness of brain, we can conceive of worlds in which it does not. To show this, let us offer another possible explanation of the Badger-Everglade situation.

Suppose a mad computer scientist has discovered a way to reprogram human beings. Suppose that he has found a way to make us the embodiment of any psychology he likes. Suppose further that he decided to experiment on Badger and Everglade, giving Badger Everglade's psychology and Everglade Badger's and that is why the events of our story occurred. With this explanation and the considerations of the previous paragraphs, we can conclude that Badger and Everglade did change bodies. By performing his experiment, the mad scientist has made it possible for a continuing stream of consciousness to pass from one body to another. He has, in effect, performed a body transplant….

Should we accept Quinton's theory? There seems to be no good reason not to. In fact, there are at least two good reasons for accepting it. First, it seems consistent with a functionalist theory of the mind. Second, it allows us to make sense of science fiction stories while we continue to believe that in the real world to be the same person we were yesterday is to have the same brain.

LIFE AFTER DEATH

Is it possible for the person to survive the death of the body? Is there a sense in which we can continue to live after our bodies have died? Can there be a personal life after death?

According to one popular conception of life after death, at the death of the body the soul leaves the body and travels to a realm known as heaven. Of course, this story must be taken as metaphorical. Does the soul literally leave the body? How? Out of the mouth? Ears? And how does it get to heaven? By turning left at Mars? Moreover, if the soul remains disembodied, how can it perceive anything? What does it use as sense organs? And if all souls remain disembodied, how can one soul recognize another? What is there to recognize?

As these questions might suggest, much of this popular story trades on a confusion. The soul is thought of as a translucent physical substance much like Casper the ghost, through which other objects can pass as they do through air or water. But if the soul is *really* nonphysical, it can be nothing like that.

If this story is not to be taken literally, is there some version of it that we can admit as a possibility? Is there also the possibility of personal survival through reincarnation as it is often understood—the re-embodiment of the person without memory of the former embodiment?

Materialism and the Disembodied Soul

So far, we have considered both the mind and the body as they relate to personal identity. Have we

neglected the soul? It may seem that we have, but philosophers who discuss the mind-body question and personal identity generally use the terms "mind" and "soul" interchangeably. Is the practice legitimate, or is it a confusion?

The practice seems to be thoroughly legitimate. If the soul is thought to be the crucial element of the person, it is difficult to see how it could be anything but the mind. If it is our character traits, personality, thoughts, likes and dislikes, memories, and continuity of experience that make us the persons we are, then they must belong to the soul. If they are taken to be crucial for one's personal identity, then it seems impossible to separate them from one's soul.

Moreover, people who accept some version of the popular conception of life after death noted above believe in certain continuities between earthly experiences and heavenly ones. In heaven, it is believed, we remember our earthly lives, we recognize friends and relatives, our personalities are like our earthly personalities, and we are judged by God for our actions on earth. But if we believe any of this, we must also believe that the soul cannot be separated from the mind.

If that is the case, it is difficult to accept the continued existence of a disembodied soul. Once we accept some form of materialism, we seem compelled to believe that the soul must be embodied. Does that rule out the possibility of any version of the popular story being true?

Some philosophers think that it does. Suppose, for instance, that the mind-brain identity theory is true. In that case, when the brain dies, so does the mind. Since the mind is the repository of memory and personality traits, it is identical with the soul. So when the brain dies, so does the soul.

This is a powerful argument, and it has convinced a number of people. On the other hand, it has also kept a number of people from accepting materialism of any sort. If it is felt that materialism and life after death are incompatible, and if one is firmly committed to the belief in life after death, then it is natural for one to reject materialism.

Is there a way of reconciling materialism and life after death? I think so.

Although it seems necessary that persons must be embodied, it does not seem necessary that the same person must be embodied by the same body. In our discussion of personal identity, we allowed that Badger and Everglade might have changed bodies, depending on our explanation of the story. Let us try a similar story.

Mary Brown is old and sick. She knows she will die within a couple of weeks. One morning she does die. At the same time, in some other world, a woman wakes up believing herself to be Mary. She looks around to find herself in a totally unfamiliar place. Someone is sitting next to her. This other woman looks exactly like Mary's mother, who died years earlier, and believes herself to be Mary's mother. Certainly, she knows everything about Mary that Mary's mother would know.

Before the woman believing herself to be Mary can speak, she notices some surprising things about herself. She no longer feels old or sick. Her pains are gone, and her mind is as sharp as ever. When she asks where she is, she is told heaven. She is also told that her husband, father, and numerous old friends are waiting to see her. All of them are indistinguishable from the persons they claim to be. Meanwhile, back on earth, Mary Brown is pronounced dead. Is this woman in "heaven" really Mary Brown? How could we possibly explain the phenomenon?

Suppose we put the story in a religious context. Earlier, we saw that one possible explanation of the Badger-Everglade case is that some mad computer scientist had reprogrammed the two so that each embodied the psychology of the other. Suppose we replace the mad scientist with God, and say that God had kept a body in heaven for the purpose of embodying Mary's psychology when she died, and that the person believing herself to be Mary is the new embodiment of Mary's psychology. Would this count as a genuine case of life after death?

If we accept the Badger-Everglade story, appropriately explained, as a case of two persons switching bodies, there seems no reason to deny that Mary has continued to live "in" another body. But even if we are unsure of the Badger-Everglade case, we can approach Mary Brown's this way. What is it that we

want to survive after death? Isn't it our memories, our consciousness of self, our personalities, our relations with others? What does it matter whether there is some nonphysical substance that survives? If that substance has no memories of a prior life, does not recognize the soul of others who were important in that earlier life, what comfort could such a continuing existence bring? In what sense would it be the survival of the *person*? How would it be significantly different from the return of the lifeless body to the soil?

If we assume that our story is a genuine case of personal survival of the death of the body, we may wonder about another point. Is it compatible with Christian belief? According to John Hick, a contemporary British philosopher who imagined a similar story, the answer is yes. In I Corinthians 15, Paul writes of the resurrection of the body—not of the physical body, but of some spiritual body. Although one can think of this spiritual body as a translucent ghost-like body that leaves the physical body at death, Hick offers another interpretation.

The human being, Hick says, becomes extinct at death. It is only through God's intervention that the spiritual body comes into existence. By the resurrection of this spiritual body, we are to understand a *recreation* or *reconstitution* of the person's body in heaven. But that is precisely what happened in our story.

Thus, a materialist view of the nature of human beings is not incompatible with the Christian view of life after death. Nor, for that matter, is it incompatible with the belief that the spiritual body is nonphysical. If we can make sense of the claim that there might be such things as nonphysical bodies, then there is no reason why a nonphysical body could not embody a psychology. Remember—according to functionalism, an abstract description such as a psychology is independent of any physical description. Just as we can play chess using almost anything as chess pieces, so can a psychology be embodied by almost anything, assuming that it is complex enough. So if there can be nonphysical bodies, there can be nonphysical persons. Of course, nothing said so far assures us that the Christian story—or any other story of life after death—is true. That is another matter….

Reincarnation

Much of what has been said so far does, however, rule out the possibility of reincarnation as commonly understood. If human beings are purely physical, then there is no nonphysical substance that is the person that can be reincarnated in another earthly body. Moreover, even if there were such a substance, it is difficult to see how its continued existence in another body could count as the reincarnation of a particular person, *if* there is no other continuity between the old life and the new one. Once again, personal survival requires some continuity of consciousness. It is not sameness of *stuff* that constitutes personal identity, but sameness of consciousness. This requirement is often overlooked by believers in reincarnation.

But suppose that there is some continuity of consciousness in reincarnation. Suppose that memories and the rest do continue in the next incarnation, but that they are not easily accessible. Suppose, that is, that the slate is not wiped completely clean, but that what is written on it is hard to recover. In that case, the passage of the soul into a new incarnation would count as personal survival *if* there were such a soul to begin with.

Assuming, again, that there is not, what can we say about the possibility of reincarnation? To conceive of such a possibility, we must conceive of some very complicated reprogramming by God or some mad scientist or whatever. I shall leave it to you to come up with such a story, but I shall say this much. There does not seem to be any good reason to think that any such story is remotely plausible, least of all true.

The Final Word?

In this chapter we looked at two closely related questions: What constitutes personal identity? And is it possible for a person to survive the death of her own body?

The answer to the second question depended on the first. If we had concluded that the basis of personal identity is sameness of body, then we would have been forced to conclude that life after

death is impossible. And there did seem to be good reason to come to these conclusions. How, we asked, could we assure that any memory claim is a case of genuine memory? Our answer was this. In the cases likely to confront us in our daily lives, we must establish some physical continuity between the person who had the original experience and the person who claims to remember it.

But the problem with this answer is that it is too limited. Because we can imagine cases like the Everglade-Badger example, and because our science-fiction tales and religious traditions offer stories of personal continuity without bodily continuity, we can say the following. Regardless of what happens in our daily lives, our concept of a person is a concept of something that does not seem tied to a particular body. Rather, our concept of a person seems to be tied to a particular stream of consciousness. If there is one continuing stream of consciousness over time, then there is one continuing person. Our question, then, was whether we can give a coherent account of continuity of consciousness from one body to another.

The answer was yes. Using the computer analogy of the functionalist, we can explain such continuity in terms of programming. If it is possible to "program" another brain to have the same psychology as the brain I now have, then it is possible for me to change bodies. And if it is possible for me to change bodies, then it is also possible for me to survive the death of my body.

VI.5

A Hindu Theory of Life, Death, and Reincarnation

PRASANNATMA DAS

When he wrote this article, Prasannatma Das was a young Hindu philosopher studying at the Krishna Temple in Vrindavan, India. In this essay he describes the basic Hindu view of karma—the doctrine that says the way we live in this life will determine our initial state in the next life—and reincarnation—the notion that the same person lives in a different body in future lives based on the idea of karma. Prasannatma Das appeals to the Bhagavad Gita, the most sacred of Hindu scriptures, for his exposition. Lord Krishna, the main speaker in that work, is viewed by Hindus as an avatar (manifestation) of God. You should be aware that, as with most major religions, there are many versions of Hinduism. This is one important Hindu version of the meaning of life and death, but not the only one. The term cosmogonal in the quotation from Thoreau refers to the origin of the world.

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A HINDU VIEW OF LIFE AND DEATH

In a previous age, there lived a wise king named Yudhisthira. Having been banished by an evil cousin, he and his four brothers were wandering in a forest. One day the youngest brother went to get water from a nearby lake. When, after a time, he did not come back, the next brother went. He did not come back either. Twice more this happened until finally Yudhisthira himself went. He came to the lake and was about to drink from it when suddenly a voice boomed forth, "Do not drink this water. I am the owner of this lake, and if you drink this water, you shall die like your brothers have before you!" Yudhisthira then saw the lifeless bodies of his brothers lying nearby. The voice continued. "You may drink of this water only on the condition that you answer my questions. If you answer them correctly, you and your brothers shall live. If you fail, then you too shall die."

The voice then presented a series of questions to the king, all of which he answered perfectly. One of these questions was, "Of all the amazing things in this world, what is the most amazing?" The king replied, "The most amazing thing is that although everyone sees his parents dying, and everything around him dying, still we live as though we will live forever. This is truly amazing."

It is indeed amazing that even in the face of inevitable death, few perceive the urgency of our predicament; however, in every culture and tradition there have been those thoughtful souls who have done so. Within the Hindu tradition many such seekers have found the teachings of Lord Krishna as presented in the *Bhagavad Gita* to be a source of knowledge and inspiration. Appearing as an episode in the great epic of ancient India, the *Mahabharata,* the *Bhagavad Gita* is one of the most profound theological dialogues known to man. Henry David Thoreau once said, "In the morning I bathe my intellect in the stupendous and cosmogonal philosophy of the *Bhagavad Gita*, in comparison with which our modern world and its literature seem puny and trivial."

The first message of Lord Krishna's teaching in the *Bhagavad Gita* is that we are not these bodies. The body is constantly changing; we once had the body of a small baby, then that of a child, of an adult, of an old person, and eventually the body will return to the dust from whence it came. Yet when we look in the mirror we think that this body is what we are.

But what are we really? Krishna explains that we are the eternal soul within the body and what we call death is merely the soul leaving one body and going elsewhere:

> Never was there a time when I did not exist, nor you, nor all these kings; nor in the future shall any of these cease to be.
>
> As the embodied soul continuously passes, in this body, from boyhood to youth to old age, the soul similarly passes into another body at the time of death. A sober person is not bewildered by such a change.
>
> For the soul there is neither birth nor death at any time. He has not come into being, does not come into being, and will not come into being. He is unborn, eternal, ever-existing, and primeval. He is not slain when the body is slain.
>
> As a person puts on new garments, giving up old and useless ones, the soul similarly accepts new material bodies, giving up old and useless ones. (2.12–13, 20, 22)

Krishna is explaining that we are not these bodies; we are the soul inside. I am not a twenty-year-old college student about to fail his philosophy course, but rather I am an eternal spirit-soul who, out of ignorance of his true nature, now identifies himself with the temporary forms of this world. When I enter a new body, I remain the same person.

For example, imagine a candle over which a series of filters are placed; the light appears to be changing according to the color of the filter obscuring it—blue, green, etc. But the original source of the light, the flame, is not changing, only the covering is. In the same way, the soul does not change, only the covering, the body, changes.

Sometimes at night we look up at the sky and see that the clouds are luminous. From the glowing

of the clouds we can understand that because the moon is behind them, the clouds themselves appear to be luminous. Similarly when examining this body we can infer the existence of the soul by its symptom consciousness, which pervades the body and gives it the appearance of being alive.

Another basic teaching of the *Bhagavad Gita* is the law of karma, which states that for every action there is a corresponding reaction, or "whatever goes around, comes around." Our situation in this life was caused by the activities and desires of our previous lives. Similarly our future existence—our body, education, amount of wealth, happiness and distress, etc., will be determined by how we live now. If we harm others then we must suffer in return, and if we do good then we correspondingly enjoy. Moreover, we are given a body which suits our consciousness. If, like an animal, a human spends his life eating, sleeping, mating, and defending, ignoring his higher capacities, then he may be placed into the body of an animal. At the time of death the consciousness we have cultivated during our life will carry us, the soul, to our next body. "Whatever state of being one remembers when he quits his body, that state he will attain without fail." (8.6)

The goal is not to come back to this world at all but to attain the supreme destination:

> From the highest planet in the material world down to the lowest, all are places of misery wherein repeated birth and death take place. But one who attains to My abode … never takes birth again. (8.16)

Death is perceived according to the quality of one's existence. The ignorant see death as something to be feared. They have material desires, and death will defeat them. Those who are seeking wisdom understand death as an impetus to live correctly, as a time when their knowledge will be put to test. The most amazing thing in this world is that although everyone knows they are going to die, they still act as though they will live forever. Imagine a person who has received an eviction notice—he must vacate his apartment in two weeks. If he promptly prepared for this, and found another place to go, he would not be in anxiety. Unfortunately, even though our eviction notice was given at the time of birth, very few take heed.

Krishna states:

> What is night for all living beings is the time of awakening for the self-controlled, and the time of awakening for all beings is the night for the introspective sage. (2.69)

There are different types of activities which have different values. There are pious activities which lead to taking birth in a situation of relative enjoyment, there are impious activities which lead to suffering and ignorance, and there are spiritual activities which lead one to God. Such spiritual activities are called *yoga*. (*yoga* does not mean Indian gymnastics but actually refers to the process of reuniting one's self with God.)

This yoga, or real religious life, is not just a passive activity, but is an active cultivation. If a farmer wants to harvest crops, he must begin working early in the season; plowing the fields, planting seeds, watering, weeding, etc. The fruits of his labor will manifest themselves at harvest time. Similarly, one who desires to attain to perfection must engage in a cultivation of the soul which will yield the harvest of spiritual perfection. When death comes, he will taste the fruit of his endeavor.

In this world there is nothing so sublime and pure as transcendental knowledge. Such knowledge is the mature fruit of all mysticism. One who has become accomplished in the practice of devotional service enjoys this knowledge within himself in due course of time. "That is the way of the spiritual and godly life, after attaining which a person is not bewildered. If one is in this situation even at the hour of death, one can enter into the kingdom of God." (4.38; 2.72)

Death will come. No situation in this world is permanent. All changes. Whether a table, a car, a human body, a civilization, or a mountain, everything comes into being, remains for some time, and then finally dwindles and disappears. What of this world can survive the passage of time? As Krishna says, "One who has been born is sure to die." (2.27) Of this there is no doubt.

Yet many people do not see the urgency of our situation. "Yes, I know one day I shall have to die;

but for now let me eat, drink, have fun, and get a big bank balance," they think. Dedicated to the pursuit of the temporary phenomena of this world, living a life of vanity, they die like ignorant animals without higher knowledge. They and their fantasies are put to ruin. Their valuable human form of life with its great potential of knowledge and self-realization is wasted.

On the other hand, a thoughtful person understands the reality of this world, and, like a student who knows he must pass a test before he can graduate, prepares himself. This process of preparation begins with inquiry. Who am I? When this body is finished, what happens to me? Why do I exist? How can I be happy? By nature the eternal soul is full of happiness and knowledge. But now that eternal, blissful, fully cognizant being is something like a fish out of water. The lost creature will not be happy until it is placed back into the water. Giving the fish a new car or expensive jewelry will not rectify its problem; it will not become happy in this way. So too, no degree of rearranging this material world will solve our problems; we will not be satisfied until we are back in the spiritual world. Thus a wise person is not interested in attaining any of the tempting but temporary offerings of this world, knowing that they have a beginning and an end. As the founder of Christianity pointed out, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and all these things will be added unto you" (Luke 12.31). Therefore, "The yogis, abandoning attachment, act … only for the sake of purification." (5.11). [Yogis are holy men. Ed.]

The sage is not interested in attaining temporary things like fame, adoration or distinction.

> An intelligent person does not take part in the sources of misery, which are done to contact with the material senses … such pleasures have a beginning and an end, and so the wise man does not delight in them. (5.22)

He does not mind leaving this world because he is not attached to it. Rather he is interested in things with real value. Krishna lists some qualities which a thoughtful person might cultivate:

> Humility; pridelessness; non-violence; tolerance; simplicity approaching a bona fide spiritual master; cleanliness; steadiness; self-control; the perception of the evil of birth, death, old age, and disease; detachment; freedom from entanglement with children, wife, home and the rest; even-mindedness amid pleasant and unpleasant events; constant and unalloyed devotion to Me; aspiring to live in a solitary place; detachment from the general mass of people; accepting the importance of self-realization; and philosophical search for the Absolute Truth…. (13.8–12)

A yogi has no desire to fulfill in this world. Thus he is not attached to it. Thus he does not mind leaving it. Thus he has no fear of death.

Since he has no personal desire in this world and has faith in God, he welcomes death in the same way that the kitten welcomes the jaws of the mother cat, whereas they are feared by the mouse. Krishna states:

> To those who are constantly devoted to serving Me with love, I give the understanding by which they can come back to Me.
>
> To show them special mercy, I, dwelling in their hearts, destroy with the shining lamp of knowledge the darkness born of ignorance. (10.10–11)

For those of us who are not enlightened beings, the fact that we must die can serve as an impetus to reach that higher transcendental state; what have we to lose? If we are wrong in our hopes, and death does indeed end all, then have we lost anything by our effort? And if our hopes are correct, then certainly we have all to gain.

A faithful man who is dedicated to transcendental knowledge and who subdues his senses is eligible to achieve such knowledge, and having achieved it he quickly attains the supreme spiritual peace.

When one is enlightened with the knowledge by which [ignorance] is destroyed, then his knowledge reveals everything, as the sun lights up everything in the daytime. (4.39, 5.16)

PART VII



Faith and Reason

One of the most important and widely discussed issues in the philosophy of religion is the relationship of faith to reason. Is religious belief rational? And if so, is that because we have something like evidence or proof for the religious claims that we believe? Or might our religious beliefs be rendered rational in some other way?

In this section, we focus on two key issues in the debate over faith and reason. The first question, which is taken up by the essays in Part A, is the question whether it is appropriate to hold religious beliefs, or to engage in religious practices, simply because we find it in our best interests to do so. According to Blaise Pascal, even if we don't yet have *evidence* for believing in God, we do have strong pragmatic, or practical, reason to believe in God. Though this by itself doesn't necessarily render belief in God rational, Pascal does think it gives us good reason to live as if there is a God and to try to cultivate belief in God. But is he right? Many are inclined to think that cultivating a belief simply because it is in our best interests to hold it is positively irrational. Indeed, some would say it is morally repugnant. Cultivating beliefs on important matters for reasons of self-interest rather than as a result of hard-nosed objective inquiry might seem grossly irresponsible; and when acting on those beliefs has serious consequences for others (as is often the case with religious belief) such irresponsibility might also seem terribly immoral. Just imagine how you would feel if you discovered that many of your surgeon's beliefs about surgery were cultivated not as a result of reading medical journals but rather because she discovered that she would feel better if she thought that it was sensible to follow this or that surgical procedure.

The second question is the question of how, if at all, religious belief might come to be rationally justified. Many suppose that in order for our religious beliefs to be rational, we would need to have *arguments* to support them. Suppose you have the experience of seeming to see a boat on a lake; and suppose that, on the basis of this experience, you form the belief that there is a boat on a lake in front of you. In this case, you have no argument for your belief. Your only

evidence is experiential. You haven't inferred that there is a boat on a lake in front of you from anything else you believe; you have simply formed it on the basis of an experience. But, of course, we don't at all think that *this* fact renders your belief unjustified. In fact, we think that most of our perceptual beliefs are prime examples of justified belief. Might the same be the case for religious belief? Might religious belief be rationally grounded in experience? If not, then what would it take for religious belief to be justified? These and related questions are taken up in Part B of this section.

VII.A. PRAGMATIC JUSTIFICATION OF RELIGIOUS BELIEF

THIS SECTION CONTAINS readings that deal with the practical reasonableness of religious belief. Even if we cannot find good evidence for religious beliefs, would it perhaps be in our interest to get ourselves to believe in these propositions anyway? And would such believing be morally permissible? In the first reading, "The Wager," the renowned French physicist and mathematician Blaise Pascal (1623–1662) argues that if we do a cost–benefit analysis of the matter, we find that it is eminently reasonable to take steps to put ourselves in a position to believe that God exists—and this regardless of whether we have good evidence for that belief.

The argument goes something like this: Regarding the proposition "God exists," reason is neutral. It can neither prove nor disprove the proposition. But we must wager. That is, we must live as if God exists or as if he does not exist—where living as if God exists involves acting as if theistic doctrines (and, for Pascal, specifically Christian doctrines) are true. Living as if God exists doesn't guarantee that belief will follow; but, on Pascal's view, it makes belief more likely. And since the benefits associated with belief promise to be infinite (and the loss equally infinite if we bet against God's existence and turn out to be wrong), we might set forth the possibilities shown in Table 7.1. There is some sacrifice of earthly pleasures involved in betting on God. But the fact is, no matter how enormous the *finite* gain associated with betting against God's existence, the mere possibility of *infinite* gain associated with betting in favor of God's existence will always make the latter preferable to the former. In short, we have a clear self-interested reason for betting on God.

TABLE 7.1

	God exists	**God does not exist**
Bet that God exists	A. Infinite gain with minimal finite loss	B. Overall finite loss in terms of sacrifice of earthly goods
Bet that God doesn't exist	C. Infinite loss with finite gain	D. Overall finite gain

Pascal is commonly understood as suggesting that we ought to *believe* in God (as opposed to simply living as if God exists in the hope or expectation that evidentially grounded belief will follow) because it is in our interests to do so. In the second reading, "The Ethics of Belief," the British philosopher W. K. Clifford (1845–1879) assembles reason's roadblocks to such pragmatic justifications for religious belief. Clifford argues that there is an ethics to belief that makes it immoral to believe something without sufficient evidence. Pragmatic justifications are not justifications at all but counterfeits of genuine justifications, which must always be based on evidence.

Clifford illustrates his thesis with the example of a shipowner who sends an emigrant ship to sea. He knows that the ship is old and not well built but fails to have the ship inspected. Dismissing from his mind all doubts about the vessel's seaworthiness, the owner trusts in Providence to care for his ship. He acquires a sincere and comfortable conviction in this way and collects his insurance money without a trace of guilt after the ship sinks and all the passengers drown. Clifford comments that although the shipowner sincerely believed that all was well with the ship, his sincerity in no way exculpates him because "he had no right to believe on such evidence as was before him." One has an obligation to get oneself in a position in which one will believe propositions only on sufficient evidence.

Some may object that the shipowner simply had an obligation to *act* in a certain way (viz., inspect the ship), not to *believe* in a certain way. Granted, the shipowner does have an obligation to inspect the ship; but the objection overlooks the function of believing in guiding action. "No man holding a strong belief on one side of a question, or even wishing to hold a belief on one side, can investigate it with such fairness and completeness as if he were really in doubt and unbiased; so that the existence of a belief not founded on fair inquiry unfits a man for the performance of this necessary duty." The general conclusion is that it is always wrong for anyone to believe anything on insufficient evidence.

The classic response to Clifford's ethics of belief is William James's "The Will to Believe" (1896), the last reading in this section. James argues that life would be greatly impoverished if we confined our beliefs to such a Scrooge-like epistemology as Clifford proposes. In everyday life, where the evidence for important propositions is often unclear, we must live by faith or cease to act at all. Although we may not make leaps of faith just anywhere, sometimes practical considerations force us to make decisions about propositions that do not have their truth value written on their faces.

In "The Sentiment of Rationality" (1879), James defines "faith" as follows: "a belief in something concerning which doubt is still theoretically possible: and as the test of belief is willingness to act, one may say that faith is the readiness to act in a cause the prosperous issue of which is not certified to us in advance." In "The Will to Believe" he argues on behalf of the rationality of believing, even with insufficient evidence, certain kinds of hypotheses—namely, those where the choice between the hypothesis and its denial is *live, momentous*, and *unavoidable*. For, he argues, to withhold belief on such momentous matters until sufficient evidence is forthcoming may, in the end, be too costly.

There is a good illustration of this notion of faith in "The Sentiment of Rationality." A mountain climber in the Alps finds himself in a position from which he can escape only by means of an enormous leap. If he tries to calculate the evidence, believing only on sufficient evidence, he will be paralyzed by emotions of fear and mistrust and hence will be lost. Without evidence that he is capable of performing this feat successfully, the climber would be better off getting himself to believe that he can and will make the leap. "In this case … the part of wisdom clearly is to believe what one desires; for the belief is one of the indispensable preliminary conditions of the realization of its object. *There are then cases where faith creates its own verification*." James claims that religion may be such an optional hypothesis for many people, and in this case one has the right to believe the better story rather than the worse. To do so, one must will to believe what the evidence alone is inadequate to support.

There are two questions, one descriptive and the other normative, that you should keep in mind when you are reading these essays. The first is whether it is possible to believe propositions at will. In what sense can we get ourselves to believe propositions that the evidence doesn't force upon us. Surely we can't believe that the world is flat or that two plus two equals five simply by willing to do so, but which propositions (if any) are subject to volitional influences? Is it, then, psychologically impossible to believe something simply because it is in our interests to do so? Does it involve self-deception? If we know that the primary cause for our belief in a religious proposition is our desire to believe, can we rationally continue to believe that proposition?

The second question involves the ethics of belief, stressed by Clifford. Supposing that we can get ourselves to believe or disbelieve propositions for self-interested reasons, is this morally permissible? What are the arguments for and against integrity of belief? Note too that Pascal, unlike James, does not seem to suppose that we have *direct* voluntary control over our beliefs. Pascal's advice, again, is to *cultivate* belief—to *act* as if you believe (e.g., by going to church, participating in Mass, taking holy water, etc.) in the hope and expectation that belief will naturally follow. James, on the other hand, seems to be defending the rationality of acquiring beliefs simply by fiat of the will.

VII.A.1

The Wager

BLAISE PASCAL

Blaise Pascal (1623–1662) was a renowned French physicist and mathematician. In 1654, at the age of 31, Pascal had an intense religious experience that completely changed his life. After this experience, he devoted himself to prayer and the study of Scripture, abandoned his mathematical and scientific endeavors, and set himself to the task of writing a defense of the Christian faith. The book was never finished, but the present selection is taken from Pascal's notes, compiled under the title Pensées. Here he argues that if we do a cost–benefit analysis of the matter, we find that it is eminently reasonable to take steps to put ourselves in a position to believe that God exists, regardless of whether we now have good evidence for that belief.

Infinite—nothing.—Our soul is cast into a body, where it finds number, time, dimension. Thereupon it reasons, and calls this nature, necessity, and can believe nothing else.

Unity joined to infinity adds nothing to it, no more than one foot to an infinite measure. The finite is annihilated in the presence of the infinite, and becomes a pure nothing. So our spirit before God, so our justice before divine justice. There is not so great disproportion between our justice and that of God, as between unity and infinity.

The justice of God must be vast like His compassion. Now, justice to the outcast is less vast, and ought less to offend our feelings than mercy towards the elect.

We know that there is an infinite, and are ignorant of its nature. As we know it to be false that numbers are finite, it is therefore true that there is an infinity in number. But we do not know what it is. It is false that it is even, it is false that it is odd; for the addition of a unit can make no change in its nature. Yet it is a number, and every number is odd or even (this is certainly true of every finite number). So we may well know that there is a God without knowing what He is. Is there not one substantial truth, seeing there are so many things which are not the truth itself?

We know then the existence and nature of the finite, because we also are finite and have extension. We know the existence of the infinite, and are ignorant of its nature, because it has extension like us, but not limits like us. But we know neither the existence nor the nature of God, because He has neither extension nor limits.

But by faith we know His existence; in glory we shall know His nature. Now, I have already shown that we may well know the existence of a thing, without knowing its nature.

Let us now speak according to natural lights.

If there is a God, He is infinitely incomprehensible, since, having neither parts nor limits, He has no affinity to us. We are then incapable of knowing either what He is or if He is. This being so, who will dare to undertake the decision of the question? Not we, who have no affinity to Him.

Who then will blame Christians for not being able to give a reason for their belief, since they

Reprinted from Blaise Pascal, *Thoughts*, translated by W. F. Trotter (New York: Collier & Son, 1910).

profess a religion for which they cannot give a reason? They declare, in expounding it to the world, that it is a foolishness, *stultitiam*; and then you complain that they do not prove it! If they proved it, they would not keep their words; it is in lacking proofs, that they are not lacking in sense. "Yes, but although this excuses those who offer it as such, and takes away from them the blame of putting it forward without reason, it does not excuse those who receive it." Let us then examine this point, and say, "God is, or He is not." But to which side shall we incline? Reason can decide nothing here. There is an infinite chasm which separates us. A game is being played at the extremity of this infinite distance where heads or tails will turn up. What will you wager? According to reason, you can do neither the one thing nor the other, according to reason, you can defend neither of the propositions.

Do not then reprove for error those who have made a choice; for you know nothing about it. "No, but I blame them for having made, not this choice, but a choice; for again both he who chooses heads and he who chooses tails are equally at fault, they are both in the wrong. The true course is not to wager at all."

—Yes; but you must wager. It is not optional. You are embarked. Which will you choose then; let us see. Since you must choose, let us see which interests you least. You have two things to lose, the true and the good; and two things to stake, your reason and your will, your knowledge and your happiness; and your nature has two things to shun, error and misery. Your reason is no more shocked in choosing one rather than the other, since you must of necessity choose. This is one point settled. But your happiness? Let us weigh the gain and the loss in wagering that God is. Let us estimate these two chances. If you gain, you gain all; if you lose, you lose nothing. Wager them without hesitation that He is.—"That is very fine. Yes, I must wager; but I may perhaps wager too much."—Let us see.

Since there is an equal risk of gain and of loss, if you had only to gain two lives, instead of one, you might still wager. But if there were three lives to gain, you would have to play (since you are under the necessity of playing), and you would be imprudent, when you are forced to play, not to chance your life to gain three at a game where there is an equal risk of loss and gain. But there is an eternity of life and happiness. And this being so, if there were an infinity of chances, of which one only would be for you, you would still be right in wagering one to win two, and you would act stupidly, being obliged to play, by refusing to stake one life against three at a game in which out of an infinity of an infinitely happy life to gain. But there is here an infinity of an infinitely happy life to gain a chance of gain against a finite number of chances of loss, and what you stake is infinite. It is all divided; wherever the infinite is and there is not an infinity of chances of loss against that of gain, there is no time to hesitate, you must give all. And thus, when one is forced to play, he must renounce reason to preserve his life, rather than risk it for infinite gain, as likely to happen as the loss of nothingness.

For it is no use to say it is uncertain if we will gain, and it is certain that we risk, and that the infinite distance between the *certainty* of what is staked and the *uncertainty* of what will be gained, equals the finite good which is certainly staked against the uncertain infinite. It is not so, as every player stakes a certainty to gain an uncertainty, and yet he stakes a finite certainty to gain a finite uncertainty, without transgressing against reason. There is not an infinite distance between the certainty staked and the uncertainty of the gain; that is untrue. In truth, there is an infinity between the certainty of gain and the certainty of loss. But the uncertainty of the gain is proportioned to the certainty of the stake according to the proportion of the chances of gain and loss. Hence it comes that, if there are as many risks on one side as on the other, the course is to play even; and then the certainty of the stake is equal to the uncertainty of the gain, so far is it from the fact that there is an infinite distance between them. And so our proposition is of infinite force, when there is the finite to stake in a game where there are equal risks of gain and loss, and the infinite to gain. This is demonstrable; and if men are capable of any truths, this is one.

VII.A.2

The Ethics of Belief

W. K. CLIFFORD

W. K. Clifford (1845–1879) was a British philosopher and mathematician. The selection that follows is perhaps his best known and most widely discussed philosophical essay. Clifford argues that there is an ethics to belief that makes it always wrong for anyone to believe anything on insufficient evidence. Pragmatic justifications are not justifications at all but counterfeits of genuine justifications, which must always be based on evidence.

A shipowner was about to send to sea an emigrant ship. He knew that she was old, and not over-well built at the first; that she had seen many seas and climes, and often had needed repairs. Doubts had been suggested to him that possibly she was not seaworthy. These doubts preyed upon his mind and made him unhappy; he thought that perhaps he ought to have her thoroughly overhauled and refitted, even though this should put him to great expense. Before the ship sailed, however, he succeeded in overcoming these melancholy reflections. He said to himself that she had gone safely through so many voyages and weathered so many storms that it was idle to suppose she would not come safely home from this trip also. He would put his trust in Providence, which could hardly fail to protect all these unhappy families that were leaving their fatherland to seek for better times elsewhere. He would dismiss from his mind all ungenerous suspicions about the honesty of builders and contractors. In such ways he acquired a sincere and comfortable conviction that his vessel was thoroughly safe and seaworthy; he watched her departure with a light heart, and benevolent wishes for the success of the exiles in their strange new home that was to be; and he got his insurance money when she went down in midocean and told no tales.

What shall we say of him? Surely this, that he was verily guilty of the death of those men. It is admitted that he did sincerely believe in the soundness of his ship; but the sincerity of his conviction can in no wise to help him, because he had no right to believe on such evidence as was before him. He had acquired his belief not by honestly earning it in patient investigation, but by stifling his doubts. And although in the end he may have felt so sure about it that he could not think otherwise, yet inasmuch as he had knowingly and willingly worked himself into that frame of mind, he must be held responsible for it.

Let us alter the case a little, and suppose that the ship was not unsound after all; that she made her voyage safely, and many others after it. Will that diminish the guilt of her owner? Not one jot. When an action is once done, it is right or wrong forever; no accidental failure of its good or evil fruits can possibly alter that. The man would not have been innocent, he would only have been not found out. The question of right or wrong has to do with the origin of his belief, not the matter of it; not what it was, but how he got it; not whether

Reprinted from W. K. Clifford, *Lecturers and Essays* (London: Macmillan, 1879).

it turned out to be true or false, but whether he had a right to believe on such evidence as was before him.

There was once an island in which some of the inhabitants professed a religion teaching neither the doctrine of original sin nor that of eternal punishment. A suspicion got abroad that the professors of this religion had made use of unfair means to get their doctrines taught to children. They were accused of wresting the laws of their country in such a way as to remove children from the care of their natural and legal guardians; and even of stealing them away and keeping them concealed from their friends and relations. A certain number of men formed themselves into a society for the purpose of agitating the public about this matter. They published grave accusations against individual citizens of the highest position and character, and did all in their power to injure those citizens in the exercise of their professions. So great was the noise they made, that a Commission was appointed to investigate the facts; but after the Commission had carefully inquired into all the evidence that could be got, it appeared that the accused were innocent. Not only had they been accused on insufficient evidence, but the evidence of their innocence was such as the agitators might easily have obtained, if they had attempted a fair inquiry. After these disclosures the inhabitants of that country looked upon the members of the agitating society, not only as persons whose judgment was to be distrusted, but also as no longer to be counted honorable men. For although they had sincerely and conscientiously believed in the charges they had made, yet they had no right to believe on such evidence as was before them. Their sincere convictions, instead of being honestly earned by patient inquiring, were stolen by listening to the voice of prejudice and passion.

Let us vary this case also, and suppose, other things remaining as before, that a still more accurate investigation proved the accused to have been really guilty. Would this make any difference in the guilt of the accusers? Clearly not; the question is not whether their belief was true or false, but whether they entertained it on wrong grounds. They would no doubt say, "Now you see that we were right after all; next time perhaps you will believe us." And they might be believed, but they would not thereby become honorable men. They would not be innocent, they would only be not found out. Every one of them, if he chose to examine himself *in foro conscientiae*, would know that he had acquired and nourished a belief, when he had no right to believe on such evidence as was before him; and therein he would know that he had done a wrong thing.

It may be said, however, that in both of these supposed cases it is not the belief which is judged to be wrong, but the action following upon it. The shipowner might say, "I am perfectly certain that my ship is sound, but still I feel it my duty to have her examined, before trusting the lives of so many people to her." And it might be said to the agitator, "However convinced you were of the justice of your cause and the truth of your convictions, you ought not to have made a public attack upon any man's character until you had examined the evidence on both sides with the utmost patience and care."

In the first place, let us admit that, so far as it goes, this view of the case is right and necessary; right, because even when a man's belief is so fixed that he cannot think otherwise, he still has a choice in regard to the action suggested by it, and so cannot escape the duty of investigating on the ground of the strength of his convictions; and necessary, because those who are not yet capable of controlling their feelings and thoughts must have a plain rule dealing with overt acts.

But this being premised as necessary, it becomes clear that it is not sufficient, and that our previous judgment is required to supplement it. For it is not possible so to sever the belief from the action it suggests as to condemn the one without condemning the other. No man holding a strong belief on one side of a question, or even wishing to hold a belief on one side, can investigate it with such fairness and completeness as if he were really in doubt and unbiased; so that the existence of a belief not founded on fair inquiry unfits a man for the performance of this necessary duty.

Nor is that truly a belief at all which has not some influence upon the actions of him who holds it.

He who truly believes that which prompts him to an action has looked upon the action to lust after it, he has committed it already in his heart. If a belief is not realized immediately in open deeds, it is stored up for the guidance of the future. It goes to make a part of that aggregate of beliefs which is the link between sensation and action at every moment of all our lives, and which is so organized and compacted together that no part of it can be isolated from the rest, but every new addition modifies the structure of the whole. No real belief, however trifling and fragmentary it may seem, is ever truly insignificant; it prepares us to receive more of its like, confirms those which resembled it before, and weakens others; and so gradually it lays a stealthy train in our inmost thoughts, which may some day explode into overt action, and leave its stamp upon our character forever.

And no one man's belief is in any case a private matter which concerns himself alone. Our lives are guided by that general conception of the course of things which has been created by society for social purposes. Our words, our phrases, our forms and processes and modes of thought are common property, fashioned and perfected from age to age; an heirloom which every succeeding generation inherits as a precious deposit and a sacred trust to be handed on to the next one, not unchanged but enlarged and purified, with some clear marks of its proper handiwork. Into this, for good or ill, is woven every belief of every man who has speech of his fellows. An awful privilege, and an awful responsibility, that we should help to create the world in which posterity will live.

In the two supposed cases which have been considered, it has been judged wrong to believe on insufficient evidence, or to nourish belief by suppressing doubts and avoiding investigation. The reason of this judgment is not far to seek: it is that in both these cases the belief held by one man was of great importance to other men. But for as much as no belief held by one man, however seemingly trivial the belief, and however obscure the believer, is ever actually insignificant or without its effect on the fate of mankind, we have no choice but to extend our judgment to all cases of belief whatever. Belief, that sacred faculty which prompts the decisions of our will, and knits into harmonious working all the compacted energies of our being, is ours not for ourselves, but for humanity. It is rightly used on truths which have been established by long experience and waiting toil, and which have stood in the fierce light of free and fearless questioning. Then it helps to bind men together, and to strengthen and direct their common action. It is desecrated when given to unproved and unquestioned statements, for the solace and private pleasure of the believer; to add a tinsel splendor to the plain straight road of our life and display a bright mirage beyond it; or even to drown the common sorrows of our kind by a self-deception which allows them not only to cast down, but also to degrade us. Whoso would deserve well of his fellows in this matter will guard the purity of this belief with a very fanaticism of jealous care, lest at any time it should rest on an unworthy object, and catch a stain which can never be wiped away.

It is not only the leader of men, statesman, philosopher or poet, that owes this bounden duty to mankind. Every rustic who delivers in the village alehouse his slow, infrequent sentences, may help to kill or keep alive the fatal superstitions which clog his race. Every hard-worked wife of an artisan may transmit to her children beliefs which shall knit society together, or rend it in pieces. No simplicity of mind, no obscurity of station, can escape the universal duty of questioning all that we believe.

It is true that this duty is a hard one, and the doubt which comes out of it is often a very bitter thing. It leaves us bare and powerless where we thought that we were safe and strong. To know all about anything is to know how to deal with it under all circumstances. We feel much happier and more secure when we think we know precisely what to do, no matter what happens, than when we have lost our way and do not know where to turn. And if we have supposed ourselves to know all about anything, and to be capable of doing what is fit in regard to it, we naturally do not like to find that we are really ignorant and powerless, that we have to begin again at the beginning, and try to learn what the thing is and how it is to be dealt with—if indeed anything can be learned about it. It is the sense of power attached to a sense of

knowledge that makes men desirous of believing, and afraid of doubting.

This sense of power is the highest and best of pleasures when the belief on which it is founded is a true belief, and has been fairly earned by investigation. For then we may justly feel that it is common property, and holds good for others as well as for ourselves. Then we may be glad, not that I have learned secrets by which I am safer and stronger, but that we men have got mastery over more of the world; and we shall be strong, not for ourselves, but in the name of Man and in his strength. But if the belief has been accepted on insufficient evidence, the pleasure is a stolen one. Not only does it deceive ourselves by giving us a sense of power which we do not really possess, but it is sinful, because it is stolen in defiance of our duty to mankind. That duty is to guard ourselves from such beliefs as from a pestilence, which may shortly master our own body and then spread to the rest of the town. What would be thought of one who, for the sake of a sweet fruit, should deliberately run the risk of bringing a plague upon his family and his neighbors?

And, as in other such cases, it is not the risk only which has to be considered; for a bad action is always bad at the time when it is done, no matter what happens afterwards. Every time we let ourselves believe for unworthy reasons, we weaken our powers of self-control, of doubting, of judicially and fairly weighing evidence. We all suffer severely enough from the maintenance and support of false beliefs and the fatally wrong actions which they lead to, and the evil born when one such belief is entertained is great and wide. But a greater and wider evil arises when the credulous character is maintained and supported, when a habit of believing for unworthy reasons is fostered and made permanent. If I steal money from any person, there may be no harm done by the mere transfer of possession; he may not feel the loss, or it may prevent him from using the money badly. But I cannot help doing this great wrong towards Man, that I make myself dishonest. What hurts society is not that it should lose its property, but that it should become a den of thieves; for then it must cease to be society. This is why we ought not to do evil that good may come; for at any rate this great evil has come, that we have done evil and are made wicked thereby. In like manner, if I let myself believe anything on insufficient evidence, there may be no great harm done by the mere belief; it may be true after all, or I may never have occasion to exhibit it in outward acts. But I cannot help doing this great wrong toward Man, that I make myself credulous. The danger to society is not merely that it should believe wrong things, though that is great enough; but that it should become credulous, and lose the habit of testing things and inquiring into them; for then it must sink back into savagery.

The harm which is done by credulity in a man is not confined to the fostering of a credulous character in others, and consequent support of false beliefs. Habitual want of care about what I believe leads to habitual want of care in others about the truth of what is told to me. Men speak the truth to one another when each reveres the truth in his own mind and in the other's mind; but how shall my friend revere the truth in my mind when I myself am careless about it, when I believe things because I want to believe them, and because they are comforting and pleasant? Will he not learn to cry, "Peace," to me, when there is no peace? By such a course I shall surround myself with a thick atmosphere of falsehood and fraud, and in that must live. It may matter little to me, in my closed castle of sweet illusions and darling lies; but it matters much to Man that I have made my neighbors ready to deceive. The credulous man is father to the liar and the cheat; he lives in the bosom of this his family, and it is no marvel if he should become even as they are. So closely are our duties knit together, that whoso shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.

To sum up: it is wrong always, everywhere and for anyone, to believe anything upon insufficient evidence.

If a man, holding a belief which he was taught in childhood or persuaded of afterwards, keeps down and pushes away any doubts which arise about it in his mind, purposely avoids the reading of books and the company of men that call in question or discuss it, and regards as impious those questions which cannot easily be asked without

disturbing it—the life of that man is one long sin against mankind.

If this judgment seems harsh when applied to those simple souls who have never known better, who have been brought up from the cradle with a horror of doubt, and taught that their eternal welfare depends on what they believe, then it leads to the very serious question, Who hath made Israel to sin? …

Inquiry into the evidence of a doctrine is not to be made once for all, and then taken as finally settled. It is never lawful to stifle a doubt; for either it can be honestly answered by means of the inquiry already made, or else it proves that the inquiry was not complete.

"But," says one, "I am a busy man; I have no time for the long course of study which would be necessary to make me in any degree a competent judge of certain questions, or even able to understand the nature of the arguments." Then he should have no time to believe….

VII.A.3

The Will to Believe

WILLIAM JAMES

William James (1842–1910) was a philosopher and psychologist, the elder brother of novelist Henry James, and one of the central figures in the American pragmatist school of philosophy. Among his more important works are The Varieties of Religious Experience *(1902),* Pragmatism *(1907), and* The Meaning of Truth *(1909). In the present essay James argues, against W. K. Clifford, that sometimes practical considerations force us to make decisions on propositions for which we do not yet and, indeed, may never have sufficient evidence.*

I

Let us give the name of hypothesis to anything that may be proposed to our belief; and just as the electricians speak of live and dead wires, let us speak of any hypothesis as either *live* or *dead*. A live hypothesis is one which appeals as a real possibility to him to whom it is proposed. If I ask you to believe in the Mahdi, the notion makes no electric connection with your nature—it refuses to scintillate with any credibility at all. As an hypothesis it is completely dead. To an Arab, however (even if he be not one of the Mahdi's followers), the hypothesis is among the mind's possibilities: It is alive. This shows that deadness and liveness in an hypothesis are not intrinsic properties, but relations to the individual thinker. They are measured by his willingness to act. The maximum of liveness in an hypothesis means willingness to act irrevocably. Practically, that means belief; but there is some believing tendency wherever there is willingness to act at all.

Reprinted from William James, *The Will to Believe* (New York: Longmans Green & Co., 1897).

Next, let us call the decision between two hypotheses an option. Options may be of several kinds. They maybe first, *living* or *dead*; secondly, *forced* or *avoidable*; thirdly, *momentous* or *trivial*; and for our purposes we may call an option a *genuine* option when it is of a forced, living, and momentous kind.

1. A living option is one in which both hypotheses are live ones. If I say to you: "Be a theosophist or be a Mohammedan," it is probably a dead option, because for you neither hypothesis is likely to be alive. But if I say: "Be an agnostic or be a Christian," it is otherwise: trained as you are, each hypothesis makes some appeal, however small, to your belief.
2. Next, if I say to you: "Choose between going out with your umbrella or without it," I do not offer you a genuine option, for it is not forced. You can easily avoid it by not going out at all. Similarly, if I say, "Either love me or hate me," "Either call my theory true or call it false," your option is avoidable. You may remain indifferent to me, neither loving nor hating, and you may decline to offer any judgment as to my theory. But if I say, "Either accept this truth or go without it," I put on you a forced option, for there is no standing place outside of the alternative. Every dilemma based on a complete logical disjunction, with no possibility of not choosing, is an option of this forced kind.
3. Finally, if I were Dr. Nansen and proposed to you to join my North Pole expedition, your option would be momentous; for this would probably be your similar opportunity, and your choice now would either exclude you from the North Pole sort of immortality altogether or put at least the chance of it into your hands. He who refuses to embrace a unique opportunity loses the prize as surely as if he tried and failed. Per contra, the option is trivial when the opportunity is not unique, when the stake is insignificant, or when the decision is reversible if it later proves unwise. Such trivial options abound in the scientific life. A chemist finds an hypothesis live enough to spend a year in its verification: he believes in it to that extent. But if his experiments prove inconclusive either way, he is quit for his loss of time, no vital harm being done.

It will facilitate our discussion if we keep all these distinctions well in mind.

II

The next matter to consider is the actual psychology of human opinion. When we look at certain facts, it seems as if our passional and volitional nature lay at the root of all our convictions. When we look at others, it seems as if they could do nothing when the intellect had once said its say. Let us take the latter facts up first.

Does it not seem preposterous on the very face of it to talk of our opinions being modifiable at will? Can our will either help or hinder our intellect in its perceptions of truth? Can we, by just willing it, believe that Abraham Lincoln's existence is a myth, and that the portraits of him in *McClure's Magazine* are all of some one else? Can we, by any effort of our will, or by any strength of wish that it were true, believe ourselves well and about when we are roaring with rheumatism in bed, or feel certain that the sum of the two one-dollar bills in our pocket must be a hundred dollars? We can say any of these things, but we are absolutely impotent to believe them; and of just such things is the whole fabric of the truths that we do believe in made up—matters of fact, immediate or remote, as Hume said, and relations between ideas, which are either there or not there for us if we see them so, and which if not there cannot be put there by any action of our own.

In Pascal's *Thoughts* there is a celebrated passage known in literature as Pascal's Wager. In it he tries to force us into Christianity by reasoning as if our concern with truth resembled our concern with the stakes in a game of chance. Translated freely his words are these: You must either believe or not believe that God is—which will you do? Your

human reason cannot say. A game is going on between you and the nature of things which at the day of judgment will bring out either heads or tails. Weigh what your gains and your losses would be if you should stake all you have on heads, or God's existence: if you win in such case you gain eternal beatitude; if you lose, you lose nothing at all. If there were an infinity of chances and only one for God in this wager, still you ought to stake your all on God; for though you surely risk a finite loss by this procedure, any finite loss is reasonable, even a certain one is reasonable, if there is but the possibility of infinite gain. Go then, and take holy water, and have masses said: belief will come and stupefy your scruples.... Why should you not? At bottom, what have you to lose?

You probably feel that when religious faith expresses itself thus, in the language of the gaming-table, it is put to its last trumps. Surely Pascal's own personal belief in masses and holy water had far other springs; and this celebrated page of his is but an argument for others, a last desperate snatch at a weapon against the hardness of the unbelieving heart. We feel that a faith in masses and holy water adopted wilfully after such a mechanical calculation would lack the inner soul of faith's reality; and if we were ourselves in the place of the Deity, we should probably take particular pleasure in cutting off believers of this pattern from their infinite reward. It is evident that unless there be some preexisting tendency to believe in masses and holy water, the option offered to the will by Pascal is not a living option. Certainly no Turk ever took to masses and holy water on its account and even to us Protestants these means of salvation seem such foregone impossibilities that Pascal's logic, invoked for them specifically, leaves us unmoved. As well might the Mahdi write to us saying, "I am the Expected One whom God has created in his effulgence. You shall be infinitely happy if you confess me; otherwise you shall be cut off from the light of the sun. Weigh, then, your infinite gain if I am genuine against your finite sacrifice if I am not!" His logic would be that of Pascal; but he would vainly use it on us, for the hypothesis he offers us is dead. No tendency to act on it exists in us to any degree.

The talk of believing by our volition seems, then from one point of view, simply silly. From another point of view it is worse than silly, it is vile. When one turns to the magnificent edifice of the physical sciences, and sees how it was reared; what thousands of disinterested moral lives of men lie buried in its mere foundations; what patience and postponement, what choking down of preference, what submission to the icy laws of outer fact are wrought into its very stones and mortar; how absolutely impersonal it stands in its vast augustness—then how besotted and contemptible seems every little sentimentalist who comes blowing his voluntary smoke-wreaths, and pretending to decide things from out of his private dream! Can we wonder if those bred in the rugged and manly school of science should feel like spewing such subjectivism out of their mouths? The whole system of loyalties which grow up in the schools of science go dead against its toleration; so that it is only natural that those who have caught the scientific fever should pass over to the opposite extreme, and write sometimes as if the incorruptibly truthful intellect ought positively to prefer bitterness and unacceptableness to the heart in its cup.

It fortifies my soul to know
That though I perish, truth is so

sings Clough, while Huxley exclaims: "My only consolation lies in the reflection that, however bad our posterity may become, so far as they hold by the plain rule of not pretending to believe what they have no reason to believe, because it may be to their advantage so to pretend [the word "pretend" is surely here redundant], they will not have reached the lowest depths of immorality." And that delicious *enfant terrible* Clifford writes: "Belief is desecrated when given to unproved and unquestioned statements for the solace and private pleasure of the believer.... Whoso would deserve well of his fellows in this matter will guard the purity of his belief with a very fanaticism of jealous care, lest at any time it should rest on an unworthy object, and catch a stain which can never be wiped away.... If [a] belief has been accepted on insufficient evidence [even though the belief be true, as Clifford on the

same page explains] the pleasure is a stolen one.... It is sinful because it is stolen in defiance of our duty to mankind. That duty is to guard ourselves from such beliefs as from a pestilence which may shortly master our own body and then spread to the rest of the town.... It is wrong always, everywhere, and for every one, to believe anything upon insufficient evidence."

III

All this strikes one as healthy, even when expressed, as by Clifford, with somewhat too much of robustious pathos in the voice. Free will and simple wishing do seem, in the matter of our credences, to be only fifth wheels to the coach. Yet if any one should thereupon assume that intellectual insight is what remains after wish and will and sentimental preference have taken wing, or that pure reason is what then settles our opinions, he would fly quite as directly in the teeth of the facts.

It is only our already dead hypotheses that our willing nature is unable to bring to life again. But what has made them dead for us is for the most part a previous action of our willing nature of an antagonistic kind. When I say "willing nature," I do not mean only such deliberate volitions as may have set up habits of belief that we cannot now escape from—I mean all such factors of belief as fear and hope, prejudice and passion, imitation and partisanship, the circumpressure of our caste and set. As a matter of fact we find ourselves believing, we hardly know how or why. Mr. Balfour gives the name of "authority" to all those influences, born of the intellectual climate, that make hypotheses possible or impossible for us, alive or dead. Here in this room, we all of us believe in molecules and the conservation of energy, in democracy and necessary progress, in Protestant Christianity and the duty of fighting for "the doctrine of the immortal Monroe," all for no reasons worthy of the name. We see into these matters with no more inner clearness, and probably with much less, than any disbeliever in them might possess. His unconventionality would probably have some grounds to show for its conclusions; but for us, not insight, but the *prestige* of the opinions, is what makes the spark shoot from them and light up our sleeping magazines of faith. Our reason is quite satisfied, in nine hundred and ninety-nine cases out of every thousand of us, if it can find a few arguments that will do to recite in case our credulity is criticized by some one else. Our faith is faith in some one else's faith, and in the greatest matters this is the most the case. Our belief in truth itself, for instance, that there is a truth, and that our minds and it are made for each other,—what is it but a passionate affirmation of desire, in which our social system backs us up? We want to have a truth; we want to believe that our experiments and studies and discussions must put us in a continually better and better position towards it; and on this line we agree to fight out our thinking lives. But if a pyrrhonistic sceptic asks *us how we know* all this, can our logic find a reply? No! certainly it cannot. It is just one volition against another,—we willing to go in for life upon a trust or assumption which he, for his part, does not care to make.

As a rule we disbelieve all facts and theories for which we have no use. Clifford's cosmic emotions find no use for Christian feelings. Huxley belabors the bishops because there is no use for sacerdotalism in his scheme of life. Newman, on the contrary, goes over to Romanism, and finds all sorts of reasons good for staying there, because a priestly system is for him an organic need and delight. Why do so few "scientists" even look at the evidence for telepathy, so called? Because they think, as a leading biologist, now dead, once said to me, that even if such a thing were true, scientists ought to band together to keep it suppressed and concealed. It would undo the uniformity of Nature and all sorts of other things without which scientists cannot carry on their pursuits. But if this very man had been shown something which as a scientist he might *do* with telepathy, he might not only have examined the evidence, but even have found it good enough.

This very law which the logicians would impose upon us—if I may give the name of logicians to those who would rule out our willing

nature here—is based on nothing but their own natural wish to exclude all elements for which they, in their professional quality of logicians, can find no use.

Evidently, then, our non-intellectual nature does influence our convictions. There are passional tendencies and volitions which run before and others which come after belief, and it is only the latter that are too late for the fair; and they are not too late when the previous passional work has been already in their own direction. Pascal's argument, instead of being powerless, then seems a regular clincher, and is the last stroke needed to make our faith in masses and holy water complete. The state of things is evidently far from simple; and pure insight and logic, whatever they might do ideally, are not the only things that really do produce our creeds.

IV

Our next duty, having recognized this mixed up state of affairs, is to ask whether it be simply reprehensible and pathological, or whether, on the contrary, we must treat it as a normal element in making up our minds. The thesis I defend is, briefly stated, this: *Our passional nature not only lawfully may, but must, decide an option between propositions, whenever it is a genuine option that cannot by its nature be decided on intellectual grounds; for to say, under such circumstances, "Do not decide, but leave the question open," is itself a passional decision—just like deciding yes or no—and is attended with the same risk of losing the truth….*

VII

One more point, small but important, and our preliminaries are done. There are two ways of looking at our duty in the matter of opinion—ways entirely different, and yet ways about whose difference the theory of knowledge seems hitherto to have shown very little concern. *We must know the truth; and we must avoid error*—these are our first and great commandments as would-be knowers; but they are not two ways of stating an identical commandment, they are two separable laws. Although it may indeed happen that when we believe the truth A, we escape as an incidental consequence from believing the falsehood B, it hardly ever happens that by merely disbelieving B we necessarily believe A. We may in escaping B fall into believing other falsehoods, C or D, just as bad as B; or we may escape B by not believing anything at all, not even A.

Believe truth! Shun error!—these, we see, are two materially different laws; and by choosing between them we may end by coloring differently our whole intellectual life. We may regard the chase for truth as paramount, and the avoidance of error as secondary; or we may, on the other hand, treat the avoidance of error as more imperative, and let truth take its chance. Clifford, in the instructive passage which I have quoted, exhorts us to the latter course. Believe nothing, he tells us, keep your mind in suspense forever, rather than by closing it on insufficient evidence incur the awful risk of believing lies. You, on the other hand, may think that the risk of being in error is a very small matter when compared with the blessings of real knowledge, and be ready to be duped many times in your investigation rather than postpone indefinitely the chance of guessing true. I myself find it impossible to go with Clifford. We must remember that these feelings of our duty about either truth or error are in any case only expressions of our passional life. Biologically considered, our minds are as ready to grind out falsehood as veracity, and he who says, "Better go without belief forever than believe a lie!" merely shows his own preponderant private horror of becoming a dupe. He may be critical of many of his desires and fears, but this fear he slavishly obeys. He cannot imagine any one questioning its binding force. For my own part, I have also a horror of being duped; but I can believe that worse things than being duped may happen to a man in this world; so Clifford's exhortation has to my ears a thoroughly fantastic sound. It is like a general

informing his soldiers that it is better to keep out of battle forever than to risk a single wound. Not so are victories either over enemies or over nature gained. Our errors are surely not such awfully solemn things. In a world where we are so certain to incur them in spite of all our caution, a certain lightness of heart seems healthier than this excessive nervousness on their behalf. At any rate, it seems the fittest thing for the empiricist philosopher.

VIII

And now, after all this introduction, let us go straight at our question. I have said, and now repeat it, that not only as a matter of fact do we find our passional nature influencing us in our opinions, but that there are some options between opinions in which this influence must be regarded both as an inevitable and as a lawful determinant of our choice.

I fear here that some of you my hearers will begin to scent danger, and lend an inhospitable ear. Two first steps of passion you have indeed had to admit as necessary—we must think so as to avoid dupery, and we must think so as to gain truth; but the surest path to those ideal consummations, you will probably consider, is from now onwards to take no further passional step.

Well, of course, I agree as far as the facts will allow. Wherever the option between losing truth and gaining it is not momentous, we can throw the chance of *gaining truth* away, and at any rate save ourselves from any chance of *believing falsehood*, by not making up our minds at all till objective evidence has come. In scientific questions, this is almost always the case; and even in human affairs in general, the need of acting is seldom so urgent that a false belief to act on is better than no belief at all. Law courts, indeed, have to decide on the best evidence attainable for the moment, because a judge's duty is to make law as well as to ascertain it, and (as a learned judge once said to me) few cases are worth spending much time over: the great thing is to have them decided on *any* acceptable principle, and got out of the way. But in our dealings with objective nature we obviously are recorders, not makers, of the truth; and decisions for the mere sake of deciding promptly and getting on to the next business would be wholly out of place. Throughout the breadth of physical nature facts are what they are quite independently of us, and seldom is there any such hurry about them that the risks of being duped by believing a premature theory need be faced. The questions here are always trivial options, the hypotheses are hardly living (at any rate not living for us spectators), the choice between believing truth or falsehood is seldom forced. The attitude of sceptical balance is therefore the absolutely wise one if we would escape mistakes. What difference, indeed, does it make to most of us whether we have or have not a theory of the Röntgen rays, whether we believe or not in mind-stuff, or have a conviction about the causality of conscious states? It makes no difference. Such options are not forced on us. On every account it is better not to make them, but still keep weighing reasons *pro et contra* with an indifferent hand.

I speak, of course, here of the purely judging mind. For purposes of discovery such indifference is to be less highly recommended, and science would be far less advanced than she is if the passionate desires of individuals to get their own faiths confirmed had been kept out of the game. See for example the sagacity which Spencer and Weismann now display. On the other hand, if you want an absolute duffer in an investigation, you must, after all, take the man who has no interest whatever in its results: he is the warranted incapable, the positive fool. The most useful investigator, because the most sensitive observer, is always he whose eager interest in one side of the question is balanced by an equally keen nervousness lest he become deceived.[1] Science has organized this nervousness into a regular *technique*, her so-called method of verification; and she has fallen so deeply in love with the method that one may even say she has ceased to care for truth by itself at all. It is only truth as technically verified that interests her. The truth of truths might come in merely affirmative form, and she would decline to touch it. Such truth as that, she might

repeat with Clifford, would be stolen in defiance of her duty to mankind. Human passions, however, are stronger than technical rules. *"Le coeur a ses raisons,"* as Pascal says, *"que la raison ne connait pas";*[2] and however indifferent to all but the bare rules of the game the umpire, the abstract intellect, may be, the concrete players who furnish him the materials to judge of are usually, each one of them, in love with some pet "live hypothesis" of his own. Let us agree, however, that wherever there is no forced option, the dispassionately judicial intellect with no pet hypothesis, saving us, as it does, from dupery at any rate, ought to be our ideal.

The question next arises: Are there not somewhere forced options in our speculative questions, and can we (as men who may be interested at least as much in positively gaining truth as in merely escaping dupery) always wait with impunity till the coercive evidence shall have arrived? It seems *a priori* improbable that the truth should be so nicely adjusted to our needs and powers as that. In the great boarding-house of nature, the cakes and the butter and the syrup seldom come out so even and leave the plates so clean. Indeed, we should view them with scientific suspicion if they did.

IX

Moral questions immediately present themselves as questions whose solution cannot wait for sensible proof. A moral question is a question not of what sensibly exists, but of what is good, or would be good if it did exist. Science can tell us what exists; but to compare the *worths*, both of what exists and of what does not exist, we must consult not science, but what Pascal calls our heart….

Turn now from these wide questions of good to a certain class of questions of fact, questions concerning personal relations, states of mind between one man and another. *Do you like me or not*?—for example. Whether you do or not depends, in countless instances, on whether I meet you halfway, am willing to assume that you must like me, and show you trust and expectation. The previous faith on my part in your liking's existence is in such cases what makes your liking come. But if I stand aloof, and refuse to budge an inch until I have objective evidence, until you shall have done something apt, as the absolutists say, *ad extorquendum assensum meum*, ten to one your liking never comes. How many women's hearts are vanquished by the mere sanguine insistence of some man that they must love him! He will not consent to the hypothesis that they cannot. The desire for a certain kind of truth here brings about that special truth's existence; and so it is in innumerable cases of other sorts…. *And where faith in a fact can help create the fact*, that would be an insane logic which should say that faith running ahead of scientific evidence is the "lowest kind of immorality" into which a thinking being can fall. Yet such is the logic by which our scientific absolutists pretend to regulate our lives!

X

In truths dependent on our personal action, then faith based on desire is certainly a lawful and possibly an indispensable thing.

But now, it will be said, these are all childish human cases, and have nothing to do with great cosmical matters, like the question of religious faith. Let us then pass on to that. Religions differ so much in their accidents that in discussing the religious question we must make it very generic and broad. What then do we now mean by the religious hypothesis? Science says things are; morality says some things are better than other things; and religion says essentially two things.

First, she says that the best things are the more eternal things, the overlapping things, the things in the universe that throw the last stone, so to speak and say the final word. "Perfection is eternal"—this phrase of Charles Secrétan seems a good way of putting this first affirmation of religion, an affirmation which obviously cannot yet be verified scientifically at all.

The second affirmation of religion is that we are better off even now if we believe her first affirmation to be true.

Now, let us consider what the logical elements of this situation are *in case the religious hypothesis in both its branches be really true*. (Of course, we must admit that possibility at the outset. If we are to discuss the question at all, it must involve a living option. If for any of you religion be a hypothesis that cannot, by any living possibility, be true, then you need go no farther. I speak to the "saving remnant" alone.) So proceeding, we see, first, that religion offers itself as a *momentous* option. We are supposed to gain, even now, by our belief, and to lose by our non-belief, a certain vital good. Secondly religion is a *forced* option, so far as that good goes. We cannot escape the issue by remaining sceptical and waiting for more light, because, although we do avoid error in that way *if religion be untrue*, we lose the good, *if it be true*, just as certainly as if we positively chose to disbelieve. It is as if a man should hesitate indefinitely to ask a certain woman to marry him because he was not perfectly sure that she would prove an angel after he brought her home. Would he not cut himself off from that particular angel-possibility as decisively as if he went and married some one else? Scepticism, then, is not avoidance of option; it is option of a certain particular kind of risk. *Better risk loss of truth than chance of error*—that is your faith-vetoer's exact position. He is actively playing his stake as much as the believer is; he is backing the field against the religious hypothesis, just as the believer is backing the religious hypothesis against the field. To preach scepticism to us as a duty until "sufficient evidence" for religion to be found is tantamount therefore to telling us, when in presence of the religious hypothesis, that to yield to our fear of its being error is wiser and better than to yield to our hope that it may be true. It is not intellect against all passions, then; it is only intellect with one passion laying down its law. And by what, forsooth, is the supreme wisdom of this passion warranted? Dupery for dupery, what proof is there that dupery through hope is so much worse than dupery through fear? I, for one, can see no proof; and I simply refuse obedience to the scientist's command to imitate his kind of option, in a case where my own stake is important enough to give me the right to choose my own form of risk. If religion be true and the evidence for it be still insufficient, I do not wish, by putting your extinguisher upon my nature (which feels to me as if it had after all some business in this matter), to forfeit my sole chance in life of getting upon the winning side—that chance depending, of course, on my willingness to run the risk of acting as if my passional need of taking the world religiously might be prophetic and right.

All this is on the supposition that it really may be prophetic and right, and that, even to us who are discussing the matter, religion is a live hypothesis which may be true. Now, to most of us religion comes in a still further way that makes a veto on our active faith even more illogical. The more perfect and more eternal aspect of the universe is represented in our religions as having personal form. The universe is no longer a mere *It* to us, but a *Thou*, if we are religious; and any relation that may be possible from person to person might be possible here. For instance, although in one sense we are passive portions of the universe, in another we show a curious autonomy, as if we were small active centers on our own account. We feel, too, as if the appeal of religion to us were made to our own active goodwill, as if evidence might be forever withheld from us unless we met the hypothesis halfway to take a trivial illusion; just as a man who in a company of gentlemen made no advances, asked a warrant for every concession, and believed no one's word without proof, would cut himself off by such churlishness from all the social rewards that a more trusting spirit would earn—so here, one who should shut himself up in snarling logicality and try to make the gods extort his recognition willy-nilly, or not get it at all, might cut himself off forever from his only opportunity of making the gods' acquaintance. This feeling, forced on us we know not whence that by obstinately believing that there are gods (although not to do so would be so easy both for our logic and our life) we are doing the universe the deepest service we can, seems part of the living essence of the religious hypothesis. If the hypothesis were true in all its parts, including this one, then pure intellectualism, with its veto on our making willing advances,

would be an absurdity; and some participation of our sympathetic nature would be logically required. I therefore, for one, cannot see my way to accepting the agnostic rules for truth-seeking, or wilfully agree to keep my willing nature out of the game. I cannot do so for this plain reason, that *a rule of thinking which would absolutely prevent me from acknowledging certain kinds of truth if those kinds of truth were really there, would be an irrational rule*. That for me is the long and short of the formal logic of the situation, no matter what the kinds of truth might materially be.

I confess I do not see how this logic can be escaped. But sad experience makes me fear that some of you may still shrink from radically saying with me, *in abstracto*, that we have the right to believe at our own risk any hypothesis that is live enough to tempt our will. I suspect, however, that if this is so, it is because you have got away from the abstract logical point of view altogether, and are thinking (perhaps without realizing it) of some particular religious hypothesis which for you is dead. The freedom to "believe what we will" you apply to the case of some patent superstition; and the faith you think of is the faith defined by the schoolboy when he said, "Faith is when you believe something that you know ain't true." I can only repeat that this is misapprehension. *In concreto*, the freedom to believe can only cover living options which the intellect of the individual cannot by itself resolve; and living options never seem absurdities to him who has them to consider. When I look at the religious question as it really puts itself to concrete men, and when I think of all the possibilities which both practically and theoretically it involves, then this command that we shall put a stopper on our heart, instincts, and courage, and *wait*—acting of course meanwhile more or less as if religion were not true[3]—till doomsday, or till such time as our intellect and senses working together may have raked in evidence enough—this command, I say, seems to me the queerest idol ever manufactured in the philosophic cave. Were we scholastic absolutists, there might be more excuse. If we had an infallible intellect with its objective certitudes, we might feel ourselves disloyal to such a perfect organ or knowledge in not trusting to it exclusively, in not waiting for its releasing word. But if we are empiricists, if we believe that no bell in us tolls to let us know for certain when truth is in our grasp, then it seems a piece of idle fantasticality to preach so solemnly our duty of waiting for the bell. Indeed we may wait if we will—I hope you do not think that I am denying that—but if we do so, we do so at our peril as much as if we believed. In either case we act, taking our life in our hands. No one of us ought to issue vetoes to the other, nor should we bandy words of abuse. We ought, on the contrary, delicately and profoundly to respect one another's mental freedom: then only shall we bring about the intellectual republic; then only shall we have that spirit of inner tolerance without which all our outer tolerance is soulless, and which is empiricism's glory; then only shall we live and let live, in speculative as well as in practical things.

I began by a reference to Fitz-James Stephen; let me end by a quotation from him. "What do you think of yourself? What do you think of the world? … These are questions with which all must deal as it seems good to them. They are riddles of the Sphinx, and in some way or other we must deal with them.… In all important transactions of life we have to take a leap in the dark.… If we decide to leave the riddles unanswered, that is a choice; if we waver in our answer, that, too, is a choice: but whatever choice we make, we make it at our peril. If a man chooses to turn his back altogether on God and the future no one can prevent him; no one can show beyond reasonable doubt that he is mistaken. If a man thinks otherwise and acts as he thinks, I do not see that any one can prove that he is mistaken. Each must act as he thinks best; and if he is wrong, so much the worse for him. We stand on a mountain pass in the midst of whirling snow and blinding mist, through which we get glimpses now and then of paths which may be deceptive. If we stand still we shall be frozen to death. If we take the wrong road we shall be dashed to pieces. We do not certainly know whether there is any right one. What must we do? 'Be strong and of a good courage.' Act for the best, hope for the best, and take what comes.… If death ends all, we cannot meet death better."

NOTES

1. Compare Wilfrid Ward's Essay "The Wish to Believe," in his *Witnesses to the Unseen* (Macmillan & Co., 1893).
2. "The heart has its reasons which reason does not know."
3. Since belief is measured by action, he who forbids us to believe religion to be true, necessarily also forbids us to act as we should if we did believe it to be true. The whole defence of religious faith hinges upon action. If the action required or inspired by the religious hypothesis is in no way different from that dictated by the naturalistic hypothesis, then religious faith is a pure superfluity, better pruned away, and controversy about its legitimacy is a piece of idle trifling, unworthy of serious minds. I myself believe, of course, that the religious hypothesis gives to the world an expression which specifically determines our reactions, and makes them in a large part unlike what they might be on a purely naturalistic scheme of belief.

VII.B. EVIDENCE, RELIGIOUS BELIEF, AND FAITH

The previous section focused on the *practical* rationality of religious belief. Now, in this section, we turn to issues about the *epistemic* status of religious belief. To talk about the epistemic status of a belief is just to talk about whether the belief has whatever it takes (besides *truth*) to count as knowledge. If, for example, you believe that aliens from outer space have landed in New Mexico for no reason other than the fact that your favorite comic book series is premised on that claim, your belief has rather low, or poor, epistemic status—and this regardless of whether the belief is true. Believing things just because one's favorite comic book series is premised upon them just isn't a good way of forming beliefs if one is interested in maximizing one's knowledge of the world. In other words, forming beliefs in that way is epistemically irrational. On the other hand, if you believe that aliens have landed in New Mexico because CNN, MSNBC, the BBC, and a variety of other respectable news outlets are all presently doing "Breaking News" reports on the occurrence, your belief will have quite a bit more by way of positive epistemic status, or epistemic rationality. For purposes here, we are concerned with two main questions about the epistemic status of religious belief: (1) whether religious beliefs can be epistemically rational even if they aren't based on arguments, and (2) whether one might still have religious *faith* even in the absence of religious *belief*. Both are questions about the relation between evidence, religious belief, and faith. The first asks what sort of evidence (if any) is needed in order to make religious belief rational. The second asks whether faith is possible for those whose evidential situation leaves them unable to believe.

In the first reading, "Rational Theistic Belief Without Proof," John Hick discusses the relevance of the proofs or arguments for theistic beliefs that we studied in Part IV. He argues that the proofs are largely irrelevant to religion. They are neither sufficient nor necessary for the religious life. Not only do the so-called proofs for the existence of God fail to accomplish what they set out

to do, but even if they did demonstrate what they purported to demonstrate, this would at best only force our notional assent. They would not bring about the deep devotion and sense of worship necessary for a full religious life. Furthermore, they are not necessary because believers have something *better*—an intense, coercive, indubitable experience—which convinces them of the reality of the being in question. For believers, God is not a hypothesis brought in ex machina to explain the world, but a living presence, closer to them than the air they breathe.

Hick develops a notion of religious experience as analogous to our experience of an external world. Neither the existence of an external world nor the existence of an external religious reality can be proven, but belief in each is a natural response to our experience. The main difference between the two kinds of experiences is that virtually everyone has external-world experiences, but only a relatively small minority of humankind have noticeable religious experiences. Should this undermine the argument from religious experience? Not necessarily, for it may be the case that the few have access to a higher reality. They cannot easily be dismissed as insane or simply hallucinating, for the "general intelligence and exceptionally high moral quality of the great religious figures clashes with any analysis of their experience in terms of abnormal psychology." At the end of his article Hick applies his thesis about the sense of the presence of God to the problem of the plurality of religions. He suggests that there is a convergence of religious experience, indicating the existence of a common higher reality.

In our next reading, Anthony Flew defends the view that debate about the existence of God should start with a "presumption of atheism." As Flew uses the term, an "atheist" is anyone who isn't a theist, and the *presumption of atheism* is akin to the presumption of innocence in a criminal trial: It is the procedural idea that one should not move from the "presumed" position unless sufficient proof has been given. One might think that proof is not needed if one agrees with Hick that religious belief can be justified on the basis of experience rather than argument. But, Flew argues, even if one can (in principle) be justified in believing in God on the basis of experience, this does not remove the burden of proof: One must still provide an argument for the claim that "having religious experience really is a kind of perceiving, and hence a sort of being in a position to know about its putative object." Absent an argument for that claim, he thinks, it is "impossible to vindicate [one's] claims to be harbouring rational beliefs."

One might look to the work of William Alston on perceiving God (see Selection III.3) for a reply to Flew. Along similar lines, one might look to what has come to be called "Reformed epistemology." Reformed epistemology—so called because it traces its roots through the Protestant Reformed tradition to John Calvin—maintains (with both Alston and Hick) that religious beliefs, like the belief that God exists, can be rationally held on the basis of experience and in the absence of argument. The main difference between Reformed epistemology as such and the sorts of views defended by Alston and Hick is that Reformed

epistemologists are concerned with a wider range of experiences than the ones that might plausibly count as perceptual experiences of God.

The foremost contemporary developer and defender of Reformed epistemology is Alvin Plantinga; and the two most important sources for the view are his "Reason and Belief in God" and the magisterial conclusion to his *Warrant* trilogy: *Warranted Christian Belief.* Doing justice to the view in the short space that we have here, however, requires either a patchwork quilt of excerpts from these and perhaps other works by Plantinga or a brand new essay written with the aim of providing an accessible overview. We have gone the latter route, with a specially commissioned essay by Michael Bergmann. In "Rational Religious Belief Without Arguments," Bergmann presents the essentials of Reformed epistemology, along with replies to some of the most important objections. Along the way, he considers the question whether religious believers are indeed under a burden to defend with arguments the claim that their experiences are genuinely experiences *of God*. Drawing on an analogy with sense perception, Bergmann argues (contrary to Flew) that they are not.

In the final reading, "Faith, Hope, and Doubt," Louis Pojman examines the relationship between belief and faith and argues that religious faith can exist and flourish in the absence of belief. One may not be able to believe in God because of an insufficiency of evidence, but one may still live committed to a theistic worldview, in hope. Pojman argues that this is an authentic religious position, too often neglected in the literature.

VII.B.1

Rational Theistic Belief Without Proof

JOHN HICK

A short biographical sketch of John Hick precedes selection IV.C.2. In the present article, Hick argues that the so-called proofs for the existence of God are largely irrelevant for religion. Religious belief, he argues, can be rationally grounded in religious experience.

Reprinted from John Hick, *Arguments for the Existence of God* (Macmillan: London and Basingstoke, 1971) by permission of the author. Footnotes edited.

(A) THE RELIGIOUS REJECTION OF THE THEISTIC ARGUMENTS

We have seen that the major theistic arguments are all open to serious philosophical objections. Indeed we have in each case concluded, in agreement with the majority of contemporary philosophers, that these arguments fail to do what they profess to do. Neither those which undertake strictly to demonstrate the existence of an absolute. Being, nor those which profess to show divine existence to be probable, are able to fulfil their promise. We have seen that it is impossible to demonstrate the reality of God by *a priori* reasoning, since such reasoning is confined to the realm of concepts; impossible to demonstrate it by *a posteriori* reasoning, since this would have to include a premise begging the very question at issue; and impossible to establish it as in a greater or lesser degree probable, since the notion of probability lacks any clear meaning in this context. A philosopher unacquainted with modern developments in theology might well assume that theologians would, *ex officio*, be supporters of the theistic proofs and would regard as a fatal blow this conclusion that there can be neither a strict demonstration of God's existence nor a valid probability argument for it. In fact however such an assumption would be true only of certain theological schools. It is true of the more traditional Roman Catholic theology, of sections of conservative Protestantism, and of most of those Protestant apologists who continue to work within the tradition of nineteenth-century idealism. It has never been true, on the other hand, of Jewish religious thought; and it is not true of that central stream of contemporary Protestant theology which has been influenced by the "neo-orthodox" movement, the revival of Reformation studies and the "existentialism" of Kierkegaard and his successors; or of the most significant contemporary Roman Catholic thinkers, who are on this issue (as on so many others) in advance of the official teaching of the magisterium. Accordingly we have now to take note of this theological rejection of the theistic proofs, ranging from a complete lack of concern for them to a positive repudiation of them as being religiously irrelevant or even harmful. There are several different considerations to be evaluated.

1. It has often been pointed out that for the man of faith, as he is depicted in the Bible, no theistic proofs are necessary. Philosophers in the rationalist tradition, holding that to know means to be able to prove, have been shocked to find that in the Bible, which is supposed to be the basis of Western religion, no attempt whatever is made to demonstrate the existence of God. Instead of professing to establish the divine reality by philosophical reasoning the Bible throughout takes this for granted. Indeed to the biblical writers it would have seemed absurd to try to establish by logical argumentation that God exists. For they were convinced that they were already having to do with him and he with them in all the affairs of their lives. They did not think of God as an inferred entity but as an experienced reality. Many of the biblical writers were (sometimes, though doubtless not all times) as vividly conscious of being in God's presence as they were of living in a material world. It is impossible to read their pages without realising that to them God was not a proposition completing a syllogism, or an idea adopted by the mind, but the supreme experiential reality. It would be as sensible for a husband to desire a philosophical proof of the existence of the wife and family who contribute so much of the meaning and value of his life as for the man of faith to seek for a proof of the existence of the God within whose purpose he believes that he lives and moves and has his being.

As Cook Wilson wrote:

> If we think of the existence of our friends; it is the "direct knowledge" which we want: merely inferential knowledge seems a poor affair. To most men it would be as surprising as unwelcome to hear it could not be directly known whether there were such existences as their friends, and that it was only a matter of (probable) empirical argument and inference from facts which are directly known. And even

> if we convince ourselves on reflection that this is really the case, our actions prove that we have a confidence in the existence of our friends which can't be derived from an empirical argument (which can never be certain) for a man will risk his life for his friend. We don't want merely inferred friends. Could we possibly be satisfied with an inferred God?

In other words the man of faith has no need of theistic proofs; for he has something which for him is much better. However it does not follow from this that there may not be others who do need a theistic proof, nor does it follow that there are in fact no such proofs. All that has been said about the irrelevance of proofs to the life of faith may well be true, and yet it might still be the case that there are valid arguments capable of establishing the existence of God to those who stand outside the life of faith.

2. It has also often been pointed out that the God whose existence each of the traditional theistic proofs professes to establish is only an abstraction from and a pale shadow of the living God who is the putative object of biblical faith. A First Cause of the Universe might or might not be a deity to whom an unqualified devotion, love and trust would be appropriate; Aquinas's *Et hoc omnes intelligunt Deum* ("and this all understand to be God") is not the last step in a logical argument but merely an exercise of the custom of overlooking a gap in the argument at this point. A Necessary Being, and indeed a being who is metaphysically absolute in every respect—omnipotent, omniscient, eternal, uncreated—might be morally good or evil. As H. D. Aitken has remarked, "Logically, there is no reason why an almighty and omniscient being might not be a perfect stinker." A divine Designer of the world whose nature is read off from the appearances of nature might, as Hume showed, be finite or infinite, perfect or imperfect, omniscient or fallible, and might indeed be not one being but a veritable pantheon. It is only by going beyond what is proved, or claimed to have been proved, and identifying the First Cause, Necessary Being, or Mind behind Nature with the God of biblical faith that these proofs could ever properly impel to worship. By themselves and without supplementation of content and infusion of emotional life from religious traditions and experiences transcending the proofs themselves they would never lead to the life of faith.

The ontological argument on the other hand is in this respect in a different category. If it succeeds it establishes the reality of a being so perfect in every way that no more perfect can be conceived. Clearly if such a being is not worthy of worship none ever could be. It would therefore seem that, unlike the other proofs, the ontological argument, if it were logically sound, would present the relatively few persons who are capable of appreciating such abstract reasoning with a rational ground for worship. On the other hand, however, whilst this is the argument that would accomplish most if it succeeded it is also the argument which is most absolutely incapable of succeeding; for it is, as we have seen, inextricably involved in the fallacy of professing to deduce existence from a concept.

3. It is argued by some religious writers that a logical demonstration of the existence of God would be a form of coercion and would as such be incompatible with God's evident intention to treat his human creatures as free and responsible persons. A great deal of twentieth-century theology emphasises that God as the infinite personal reality, having made man as person in his own image, always treats men as persons, respecting their relative freedom and autonomy. He does not override the human mind by revealing himself in overwhelming majesty and power, but always approaches us in ways that leave room for an uncompelled response of human faith. Even God's own entry into our earthly history, it is said, was in an "incognito" that could be penetrated only by the eyes of faith. As Pascal put it, "willing to appear openly to those who seek him with all their heart and to be hidden from those who flee from him with all their heart, he so regulates the knowledge of himself that he has given indications of himself

which are visible to those who seek him and not to those who do not seek him. There is enough light for those to see who only desire to see, and enough obscurity for those who have a contrary disposition." God's self-revealing actions are accordingly always so mediated through the events of our temporal experience that men only become aware of the divine presence by interpreting and responding to these events in the way which we call religious faith. For if God were to disclose himself to us in the coercive manner in which our physical environment obtrudes itself we should be dwarfed to nothingness by the infinite power thus irresistibly breaking open the privacy of our souls. Further, we should be spiritually blinded by God's perfect holiness and paralysed by his infinite energy; "for human kind cannot bear very much reality." Such a direct, unmediated confrontation breaking in upon us and shattering the frail autonomy of our finite nature would leave no ground for a free human response of trust, self-commitment and obedience. There could be no call for a man to venture upon a dawning consciousness of God's reality and thus to receive this consciousness as an authentic part of his own personal existence precisely because it has not been injected into him or clamped upon him by magisterial exercise of divine omnipotence.

The basic principle invoked here is that for the sake of creating a personal relationship of love and trust with his human creatures God does not force an awareness of himself upon them. And (according to the view which we are considering) it is only a further application of the same principle to add that a logically compelling demonstration of God's existence would likewise frustrate this purpose. For men—or at least those of them who are capable of following the proof—could then be forced to know that God is real. Thus Alasdair MacIntyre, when a Christian apologist, wrote: "For if we could produce logically cogent arguments we should produce the kind of certitude that leaves no room for decision; where proof is in place, decision is not. We do not decide to accept Euclid's conclusions; we merely look to the rigour of his arguments. If the existence of God were demonstrable we should be as bereft of the possibility of making a free decision to love God as we should be if every utterance of doubt or unbelief was answered by thunderbolts from heaven." This is the "religious coercion" objection to the theistic proofs.

To what extent is it a sound objection? We may accept the theological doctrine that for God to force men to know him by the coercion of logic would be incompatible with his purpose of winning the voluntary response and worship of free moral beings. But the question still remains whether the theistic proofs could ever do this. Could a verbal proof of divine existence compel a consciousness of God comparable in coerciveness with a direct manifestation of his divine majesty and power? Could anyone be moved and shaken in their whole being by the demonstration of a proposition, as men have been by a numinous experience of overpowering impressiveness? Would the things that have just been said about an overwhelming display of divine glory really apply to verbal demonstrations—that infinite power would be irresistibly breaking in upon the privacy of our souls and that we should be blinded by God's perfect holiness and paralysed by his infinite energy? Indeed could a form of words, culminating in the proposition that "God exists," ever have power by itself to produce more than what Newman calls a notional assent in our minds?

It is of course true that the effect of purely rational considerations such as those which are brought to bear in the theistic proofs are much greater in some minds than in others. The more rational the mind the more considerable is the effect to be expected. In many persons—indeed taking mankind as a whole, in the great majority—the effect of a theistic proof, even when no logical flaw is found in it, would be virtually nil! But in more sophisticated minds the effect must be greater, and it is at least theoretically possible that there are minds so rational that purely logical considerations can move them as effectively as the evidence of their senses. It is therefore conceivable that someone who is initially agnostic might be presented with a philosophical proof of divine existence—

say the ontological argument, with its definition of God as that than which no more perfect can be conceived—and might as a result be led to worship the being whose reality has thus been demonstrated to him. This seems to be possible; but I believe that even in such a case there must, in addition to an intelligent appreciation of the argument, be a distinctively religious response to the idea of God which the argument presents. Some propensity to respond to unlimited perfection as holy and as rightly claiming a response of unqualified worship and devotion must operate, over and above the purely intellectual capacity for logical calculation. For we can conceive of a purely or merely logical mind, a kind of human calculating machine, which is at the same time devoid of the capacity for numinous feeling and worshipping response. Such a being might infer that God exists but be no more existentially interested in this conclusion than many people are in, say, the fact that the Shasta Dam is 602 feet high. It therefore seems that when the acceptance of a theistic proof leads to worship, a religious reaction occurs which turns what would otherwise be a purely abstract conclusion into an immensely significant and moving fact. In Newman's terminology, when a notional assent to the proposition that God exists becomes a real assent, equivalent to an actual living belief and faith in God, there has been a free human response to an idea which could instead have been rejected by being held at the notional level. In other words, a verbal proof of God's existence cannot by itself break down our human freedom; it can only lead to a notional assent which has little or no positive religious value or substance.

I conclude, then, that the theological objections to the theistic proofs are considerably less strong than the philosophical ones; and that theologians who reject natural theology would therefore do well to do so primarily on philosophical rather than on theological grounds. These philosophical reasons are, as we have seen, very strong; and we therefore now have to consider whether, in the absence of any theistic proofs, it can nevertheless be rational to believe in the existence of God.

(B) CAN THERE BE RATIONAL THEISTIC BELIEF WITHOUT PROOFS?

During the period dominated by the traditional theistic arguments the existence of God was often treated by philosophers as something to be discovered through reasoning. It was seen as the conclusion of an inference; and the question of the rationality of the belief was equated with that of the soundness of the inference. But from a religious point of view, as we have already seen, there has always been something very odd about this approach. The situation which it envisages is that of people standing outside the realm of faith, for whom the apologist is trying to build a bridge of rational inference to carry them over the frontier into that realm. But of course this is not the way in which religious faith has originally or typically or normally come about. When the cosmological, ontological, teleological and moral arguments were developed, theistic belief was already a functioning part of an immemorially established and developing form of human life. The claims of religion are claims made by individuals and communities on the basis of their experience—and experience which is none the less their own for occurring within an inherited framework of ideas. We are not dealing with a merely conceivable metaphysical hypothesis which someone has speculatively invented but which hardly anyone seriously believes. We are concerned, rather, with convictions born out of experience and reflection and living within actual communities of faith and practice. Historically, then, the philosophical proofs of God have normally entered in to support and confirm but not to create belief. Accordingly the proper philosophical approach would seem to be a probing of the actual foundations and structure of a living and operative belief rather than of theoretical and nonoperative arguments subsequently formulated for holding those beliefs. The question is not whether it is possible to prove, starting from zero, that God exists; the question is whether the religious man, given the distinctively religious form

of human existence in which he participates, is properly entitled as a rational person to believe what he does believe?

At this point we must consider what we mean by a rational belief. If by a belief we mean a proposition believed, then what we are to be concerned with here are not rational beliefs but rational believings. Propositions can be well-formed or ill-formed, and they can be true or false, but they cannot be rational or irrational. It is *people* who are rational or irrational, and derivatively their states and their actions, including their acts and states of believing. Further, apart from the believing of analytic propositions, which are true by definition and are therefore rationally believed by anyone who understands them, the rationality of acts (or states) of believing has to be assessed separately in each case. For it is a function of the relation between the proposition believed and the evidence on the basis of which the believer believes it. It might conceivably be rational for Mr. *X* to believe *p* but not rational for Mr. *Y* to believe *p*, because in relation to the data available to Mr. *X p* is worthy of belief but not in relation to the data available to Mr. *Y*. Thus the question of the rationality of belief in the reality of God is the question of the rationality of a particular person's believing given the data that he is using; or that of the believing of a class of people who share the same body of data. Or putting the same point the other way round, any assessing of the belief-worthiness of the proposition that God exists must be an assessing of it in relation to particular ranges of data.

Now there is one area of data or evidence which is normally available to those who believe in God, and that provides a very important part of the ground of their believing, but which is normally not available to and therefore not taken into account by those who do not so believe; and this is religious experience. It seems that the religious man is in part basing his believing upon certain data of religious experience which the non-religious man is not using because he does not have them. Thus our question resolves itself into one about the theist's right, given his distinctively religious experience, to be certain that God exists. It is the question of the rationality or irrationality, the well-groundedness or ill-groundedness, of the religious man's claim to know God. The theist cannot hope to prove that God exists; but despite this it may nevertheless be possible for him to show it to be wholly reasonable for him to believe that God exists.

What is at issue here is not whether it is rational for someone else, who does not participate in the distinctively religious mode of experience, to believe in God on the basis of the religious man's reports. I am not proposing any kind of "argument from religious experience" by which God is inferred as the cause of the special experiences described by mystics and other religious persons. It is not the non-religious man's theoretical use of someone else's reported religious experience that is to be considered, but the religious man's own practical use of it. The question is whether he is acting rationally in trusting his own experience and in proceeding to live on the basis of it.

In order to investigate this question we must consider what counts as rational belief in an analogous case. The analogy that I propose is that between the religious person's claim to be conscious of God and any man's claim to be conscious of the physical world as an environment, existing independently of himself, of which he must take account.

In each instance a realm of putatively cognitive experience is taken to be veridical and is acted upon as such, even though its veridical character cannot be logically demonstrated. So far as sense experience is concerned this has emerged both from the failure of Descartes' attempt to provide a theoretical guarantee that our senses relate us to a real material environment, and from the success of Hume's attempt to show that our normal non-solipsist belief in an objective world of enduring objects around us in space is neither a product of, nor justifiable by, philosophical reasoning but is what has been called in some expositions of Hume's thought (though the term does not seem to have been used by Hume himself) a natural belief. It is a belief which naturally and indeed inevitably arises in the normal human mind in response to normal human perceptual

experience. It is a belief on the basis of which we live and the rejection of which, in favour of a serious adoption of the solipsist alternative, would so disorient our relationship to other persons within a common material environment that we should be accounted insane. Our insanity would consist in the fact that we should no longer regard other people as independent centres of consciousness, with their own purposes and wills, with whom interpersonal relationships are possible. We should instead be living in a one-person world.

It is thus a basic truth in, or a presupposition of, our language that it is rational or sane to believe in the reality of the external world that we inhabit in common with other people, and irrational or insane not to do so.

What are the features of our sense experience in virtue of which we all take this view? They would seem to be twofold: the givenness or the involuntary character of this form of cognitive experience, and the fact that we can and do act successfully in terms of our belief in an external world. That is to say, being built and circumstanced as we are we cannot help initially believing as we do, and our belief is not contradicted, but on the contrary continuously confirmed, by our continuing experience. These characteristics jointly constitute a sufficient reason to trust and live on the basis of our perceptual experience in the absence of any positive reason to distrust it; and our inability to exclude the theoretical possibility of our experience as a whole being purely subjective does not constitute such a reason. This seems to be the principle on which, implicitly, we proceed. And it is, by definition, rational to proceed in this way. That is to say, this is the way in which all human beings do proceed and have proceeded, apart from a very small minority who have for that very reason been labelled by the majority as insane. This habitual acceptance of our perceptual experience is thus, we may say, part of our operative concept of human rationality.

We can therefore now ask whether a like principle may be invoked on behalf of a parallel response to religious experience. "Religious experience" is of course a highly elastic concept. Let us restrict attention, for our present purpose, to the theistic "sense of the presence of God," the putative awareness of a transcendent divine Mind within whose field of consciousness we exist and with whom therefore we stand in a relationship of mutual awareness. This sense of "living in the divine presence" does not take the form of a direct vision of God, but of experiencing events in history and in our own personal life as the medium of God's dealings with us. Thus religious differs from non-religious experience, not as the awareness of a different world, but as a different way of experiencing the same world. Events which can be experienced as having a purely natural significance are experienced by the religious mind as having also and at the same time religious significance and as mediating the presence and activity of God.

It is possible to study this type of religious experience either in its strongest instances, in the primary and seminal religious figures, or in its much weaker instances in ordinary adherents of the traditions originated by the great exemplars of faith. Since we are interested in the question of the claims which religious experience justifies it is appropriate to look at that experience in its strongest and purest forms. A description of this will accordingly apply only very partially to the ordinary rank-and-file believer either of today or in the past.

If then we consider the sense of living in the divine presence as this was expressed by, for example, Jesus of Nazareth, or by St. Paul, St. Francis, St. Anselm or the great prophets of the Old Testament, we find that their "awareness of God" was so vivid that he was as indubitable a factor in their experience as was their physical environment. They could no more help believing in the reality of God than in the reality of the material world and of their human neighbours. Many of the pages of the Bible resound with the sense of God's presence as a building might reverberate from the tread of some gigantic being walking through it. God was known to the prophets and apostles as a dynamic will interacting with their own wills; a sheerly given personal reality, as inescapably to be reckoned with as destructive storm and life-giving

sunshine, the fixed contours of the land, or the hatred of their enemies and the friendship of their neighbours.

Our question concerns, then, one whose "experience of God" has this compelling quality, so that he is no more inclined to doubt its veridical character than to doubt the evidence of his senses. Is it rational for him to take the former, as it is certainly rational for him to take the latter, as reliably cognitive of an aspect of his total environment and thus as knowledge in terms of which to act? Are the two features noted above in our sense experience—its givenness, or involuntary character, and the fact that we can successfully act in terms of it—also found here? It seems that they are. The sense of the presence of God reported by the great religious figures has a similar involuntary and compelling quality; and as they proceed to live on the basis of it they are sustained and confirmed by their further experiences in the conviction that they are living in relation, not to illusion, but to reality. It therefore seems prima facie, that the religious man is entitled to trust his religious experience and to proceed to conduct his life in terms of it.

The analogy operating within this argument is between our normal acceptance of our sense experiences as perception of an objective external world, and a corresponding acceptance of the religious experience of "living in God's presence" as the awareness of a divine reality external to our own minds. In each case there is a solipsist alternative in which one can affirm *solus ipse* to the exclusion of the transcendent—in the one case denying a physical environment transcending our own private consciousness and in the other case denying a divine Mind transcending our own private consciousness. It should be noted that this analogy is not grounded in die perception of particular material objects and does not turn upon the contrast between veridical and illusory sense perceptions, but is grounded in our awareness of an objective external world as such and turns upon the contrast between this and a theoretically possible solipsist interpretation of the same stream of conscious experience.

(C) RELIGIOUS AND PERCEPTUAL BELIEF

Having thus set forth the analogy fairly boldly and starkly I now want to qualify it by exploring various differences between religious and sensory experience. The resulting picture will be more complex than the first rough outline presented so far; and yet its force as supporting the rationality of theistic faith will not, I think, in the end have been undermined.

The most obvious difference is that everyone has and cannot help having sense experiences, whereas not everyone has religious experiences, at any rate of the very vivid and distinct kind to which we have been referring. As bodily beings existing in a material environment, we cannot help interacting consciously with that environment. That is to say, we cannot help "having" a stream of sense experiences; and we cannot help accepting this as the perception of a material world around us in space. When we open our eyes in daylight we cannot but receive the visual experiences that come to us; and likewise with the other senses. And the world which we thus perceive is not plastic to our wishes but presents itself to us as it is, whether we like it or not. Needless to say, our senses do not coerce us in any sense of the word "coerce" that implies unwillingness on our part, as when a policeman coerces an unwilling suspect to accompany him to the police station. Sense experience is coercive in the sense that we cannot when sane believe that our material environment is not broadly as we perceive it to be, and that if we did momentarily persuade ourselves that what we experience is not there we should quickly be penalised by the environment and indeed, if we persisted, destroyed by it.

In contrast to this we are not obliged to interact consciously with a spiritual environment. Indeed it is a commonplace of much contemporary theology that God does not force an awareness of himself upon mankind but leaves us free to know him by an uncompelled response of faith. And yet once a man has allowed himself freely to become

conscious of God—it is important to note—that experience is, at its top levels of intensity, coercive. It creates the situation of the person who *cannot help* believing in the reality of God. The apostle, prophet or saint may be so vividly aware of God that he can no more doubt the veracity of his religious awareness than of his sense experience. During the periods when he is living consciously in the presence of God, when God is to him the divine Thou, the question whether God exists simply does not arise. Our cognitive freedom in relation to God is not to be found at this point but at the prior stage of our coming to be aware of him. The individual's own free receptivity and responsiveness plays an essential part in his dawning consciousness of God; but once he *has* become conscious of God that consciousness can possess a coercive and indubitable quality.

It is a consequence of this situation that whereas everyone perceives and cannot help perceiving the physical world, by no means everyone experiences the presence of God. Indeed only rather few people experience religiously in the vivid and coercive way reported by the great biblical figures. And this fact immediately suggests a sceptical question. Since those who enjoy a compelling religious experience form such a small minority of mankind, ought we not to suspect that they are suffering from a delusion comparable with that of the paranoiac who hears threatening voices from the walls or the alcoholic who sees green snakes?

This is of course a possible judgment to make. But this judgment should not be made *a priori*, in the absence of specific grounds such as we have in the other cases mentioned. And it would in fact be difficult to point to adequate evidence to support this hypothesis. On the contrary the general intelligence and exceptionally high moral quality of the great religious figures clashes with any analysis of their experience in terms of abnormal psychology. Such analyses are not indicated, as is the parallel view of paranoiacs and alcoholics, by evidence of general disorientation to reality or of incapacity to live a productive and satisfying life. On the contrary, Jesus of Nazareth, for example, has been regarded by hundreds of millions of people as the fulfilment of the ideal possibilities of human nature. A more reasonable negative position would therefore seem to be the agnostic one that whilst it is proper for the religious man himself, given his distinctive mode of experience, to believe firmly in the reality of God, one does not oneself share that experience and therefore has no ground upon which to hold that belief. Theism is then not positively denied, but is on the other hand consciously and deliberately not affirmed. This agnostic position must be accepted by the theist as a proper one. For if it is reasonable for one man, on the basis of his distinctively religious experience, to affirm the reality of God it must also be reasonable for another man, in the absence of any such experience, not to affirm the reality of God.

The next question that must be raised is the closely connected one of the relation between rational belief and truth. I suggested earlier that, strictly, one should speak of rational believings rather than of rational beliefs. But nevertheless it is sometimes convenient to use the latter phrase, which we may then understand as follows. By a rational belief we shall mean a belief which it is rational for the one who holds it to hold, given the data available to him. Clearly such beliefs are not necessarily or always true. It is sometimes rational for an individual to have, on the basis of incomplete data, a belief which is in fact false. For example, it was once rational for people to believe that the sun revolves round the earth; for it was apparently perceived to do so, and the additional theoretical and observational data were not yet available from which it has since been inferred that it is the earth which revolves round the sun. If, then, a belief may be rational and yet false, may not the religious man's belief be of this kind? May it not be that when the data of religious experience are supplemented in the believer's mind by further data provided by the sciences of psychology or sociology, it ceases to be rational for him to believe in God? Might it not then be rational for him instead to believe that his "experience of the presence of God" is to be understood as an effect of a buried infancy memory of his father as a benevolent higher

power; or of the pressure upon him of the human social organism of which he is a cell; or in accordance with some other naturalistic theory of the nature of religion?

Certainly this is possible. Indeed we must say, more generally, that all our beliefs, other than our acceptance of logically self-certifying propositions, are in principle open to revision or retraction in the light of new data. It is always conceivable that something which it is now rational for us to believe, it may one day not be rational for us to believe. But the difference which this general principle properly makes to our present believing varies from a maximum in relation to beliefs involving a considerable theoretical element, such as the higher-level hypotheses of the sciences, to a minimum in relation to perceptual beliefs, such as the belief that I now see a sheet of paper before me. And I have argued that so far as the great primary religious figures are concerned, belief in the reality of God is closer to the latter in that it is analogous to belief in the reality of the perceived material world. It is not an explanatory hypothesis, logically comparable with those developed in the sciences, but a perceptual belief. God was not, for Amos or Jeremiah or Jesus of Nazareth, an inferred entity but an experienced personal presence. If this is so, it is appropriate that the religious man's belief in the reality of God should be no more provisional than his belief in the reality of the physical world. The situation is in each case that given the experience which he has and which is part of him, he cannot help accepting as "there" such aspects of his environment as he experiences. He cannot help believing either in the reality of the material world which he is conscious of inhabiting, or of the personal divine presence which is overwhelmingly evident to him and to which his mode of living is a free response. And I have been suggesting that it is as reasonable for him to hold and to act upon the one belief as the other.

VII.B.2

The Presumption of Atheism

ANTHONY FLEW

Anthony Flew (1923–2010) was one of the most well known and influential atheistic philosophers of religion of the twentieth century. He was a professor of philosophy at the University of Keele, among other places, and was co-editor of the 1963 volume New Essays in Philosophical Theology*, which is widely credited as marking the revival of philosophy of religion in the latter half of the twentieth century. In 2004, he stirred up controversy with the book* There Is a God: How the World's Most Notorious Atheist Changed His Mind. *In the present essay, he argues that dispute over God's existence should start from a "presumption of atheism" (akin to the "presumption of innocence" that is the starting point of criminal trials). In other words, the "burden of proof" lies on the theist.*

Flew, Antony, *"The Presumption of Atheism," Canadian Journal of Philosophy,* 2 (1972). p. 29–46. Used by permission of University of Calgary Press. Some footnotes deleted.

A. INTRODUCTORY

At the beginning of Book X of his last work *The Laws* Plato turns his attention from violent and outrageous actions in general to the particular case of undisciplined and presumptuous behaviour in matters of religion: "We have already stated summarily what the punishment should be for temple-robbing, whether by open force or secretly. But the punishments for the various sorts of insolence in speech or action with regard to the gods, which a man can show in word or deed, have to be proclaimed after we have provided an exordium. Let this be it: 'No one believing, as the laws prescribe, in the existence of the gods has ever yet performed an impious action willingly, or uttered a lawless word. Anyone acting in such a way is in one of three conditions: either, first, he does not believe the proposition aforesaid; or, second, he believes that though the gods exist they have no concern about men; or, third, he believes that they can easily be won over by the bribery of prayer and sacrifice," (§ 885B).[1]

So Plato in this notorious treatment of heresy might be said to be rebuking the presumption of atheism. The word "presumption" would then be employed as a synonym for "presumptuousness." But, interesting though the questions here raised by Plato are, the word has in my title a different interpretation. The presumption of atheism which I want to discuss is not a form of presumptuousness; indeed it might be regarded as an expression of the very opposite, a modest teachability. My presumption of atheism is closely analogous to the presumption of innocence in the English Law; a comparison which we shall later find it illuminating to develop. What I want to examine in this paper is the contention that the debate about the existence of God should properly begin from a presumption of atheism, that the onus of proof must lie on the theist.

The word "atheism," however, has in this contention to be construed unusually. Whereas nowadays the usual meaning of "atheist" in English is "someone who asserts that there is no such being as God," I want the word to be understood here much less positively. I want the originally Greek prefix "a" to be read in the same way in "atheist" as it customarily is read in such other Greco-English words as "amoral," "atypical," and "asymmetrical." In this interpretation an atheist becomes: not someone who positively asserts the non-existence of God; but someone who is simply not a theist. Let us, for future ready reference, introduce the labels "positive atheism" for the former doctrine and "negative atheism" for the latter.

The introduction of this new sense of the word "atheism" may appear to be a piece of perverse Humpty-Dumptyism,[2] going arbitrarily against established common usage. "Whyever," it could be asked, "don't you make it not the presumption of atheism but the presumption of agnosticism?" But this pardonably petulant reaction fails to appreciate just how completely noncommittal I intend my negative atheist to be. For in this context the agnostic—and it was, of course, in this context that Thomas Henry Huxley first introduced the term[3]—is by the same criterion of established common usage someone who, having entertained the existence of God as at least a theoretical possibility, now claims not to know either that there is or that there is not such a being. To be in this ordinary sense an agnostic you have already to have conceded that there is, and that you have, a legitimate concept of God; such that, whether or not this concept does in fact have application, it theoretically could. But the atheist in my peculiar interpretation, unlike the atheist in the usual sense, has not as yet and as such conceded even this.

This point is important, though the question whether the word "agnosticism" can bear the meaning which I want now to give to the word "atheism" is not. What the protagonist of the presumption of atheism, in my sense, wants to show is: that the debate about the existence of God ought be conducted in a particular way; and that the issue should be seen in a certain perspective. His thesis about the onus of proof involves that it is up to the theist: first, to introduce and to defend his proposed concept of God; and, second, to provide sufficient reason for believing that this concept of his does in fact have an application. It is the first of these two stages which needs perhaps to be emphasized even

more strongly than the second. Where the question of existence concerns, for instance, a Loch Ness Monster or an Abominable Snowman this stage may perhaps reasonably be deemed to be more or less complete before the argument begins. But in the controversy about the existence of God this is certainly not so: not only for the quite familiar reason that the word "God" is used—or misused—in more than one way; but also, and much more interestingly, because it cannot be taken for granted that even the would-be mainstream theist is operating with a legitimate concept which theoretically could have an application to an actual being.

This last suggestion is not really as new-fangled and factitious as it is sometimes thought to be. But its pedigree has been made a little hard to trace. For the fact is that, traditionally, issues which should be seen as concerning the legitimacy or otherwise of a proposed or supposed concept have by philosophical theologians been discussed: either as surely disposable difficulties in reconciling one particular feature of the Divine nature with another; or else as aspects of an equally surely soluble general problem of saying something about the infinite Creator in language intelligible to his finite creatures. These traditional and still almost universally accepted forms of presentation are fundamentally prejudicial. For they assume: that there is a Divine being, with an actual nature the features of which we can investigate; and that there is an infinite Creator, whose existence—whatever difficulties we finite creatures may have in asserting anything else about Him—we may take for granted.

The general reason why this presumption of atheism matters is that its acceptance must put the whole question of the existence of God into an entirely fresh perspective. Most immediately relevant here is that in this fresh perspective problems which really are conceptual are seen as conceptual problems; and problems which have tended to be regarded as advanced and, so to speak, optional extras now discover themselves as both elementary and indispensable. The theist who wants to build a systematic and thorough apologetic finds that he is required to begin absolutely from the beginning; and this absolute beginning is to ensure that the word "God" is provided with a meaning such that it is theoretically possible for an actual being to be so described.

Although I shall later be arguing that the presumption of atheism is neutral as between all parties to the main dispute, in as much as to accept it as determining a procedural framework is not to make any substantive assumptions, I must give fair warning now that I do nevertheless believe that in its fresh perspective the whole enterprise of theism appears even more difficult and precarious than it did before. In part this is a corollary of what I have just been suggesting; that certain difficulties and objections, which may previously have seemed peripheral or even factitious, are made to stand out as fundamental and unavoidable. But it is also in part, as we shall be seeing soon, a consequence of the emphasis which it places on the imperative need to produce some sort of sufficient reason to justify theist belief.

B. THE PRESUMPTION OF ATHEISM AND THE PRESUMPTION OF INNOCENCE

1. One thing which helps to conceal this need is a confusion about the possible varieties of proof, and this confusion is one which can be resolved with the help of the first of a series of comparisons between my proposed presumption of atheism and the legal presumption of innocence. It is frequently said nowadays, even by professing Roman Catholics, that everyone knows that it is impossible to prove the existence of God. The first objection to this putative truism is, as my reference to Roman Catholics should have suggested, that it is not true. For it is an essential dogma of Roman Catholicism, defined as such by the First Vatican Council, that "the one and true God our creator and lord can be known for certain through the creation by the natural light of human reason".[4] So even if this dogma is, as I myself believe, false, it is certainly not known

to be false by those many Roman Catholics who remain, despite all the disturbances consequent upon the Second Vatican Council, committed to the complete traditional faith.

To this a sophisticated objector might reply that the definition of the First Vatican Council speaks of knowing for certain rather than of proving or demonstrating; adding perhaps, if he was very sophisticated indeed, that the word "demonstrari" in an earlier draft was eventually replaced by the expression "*certo cognosci*." But though this is, I am told,[5] correct it is certainly not enough to vindicate the conventional wisdom. For the word "proof" is not ordinarily restricted in its application to demonstratively valid arguments; arguments, that is, in which the conclusion cannot be denied without thereby contradicting the premises. So it is too flattering to suggest that most of those who make this facile claim, that everyone knows that it is impossible to prove the existence of God, are intending only the strictly limited assertion that one special sort of proof is impossible.

The truth, and the danger, is that wherever there is any awareness of such a limited and specialized interpretation, there will be a quick and illegitimate move to the much wider general conclusion that it is impossible and, furthermore, unnecessary to provide any sufficient reason for believing. It is, therefore, worth underlining that when the presumption of atheism is explained as insisting that the onus of proof must be on the theist, the word "proof" is being used in the ordinary wide sense in which it can embrace any and every variety of sufficient reason. It is, of course, in this and only this sense that the word is interpreted when the presumption of innocence is explained as laying the onus of proof on the prosecution.

2. A second element of positive analogy between these two presumptions is that both are defeasible; and that they are, consequently, not to be identified with assumptions. The presumption of innocence indicates where the court should start and how it must proceed. Yet the prosecution is still able, more often than not, to bring forward what is in the end accepted as sufficient reason to warrant the verdict "Guilty"; which appropriate sufficient reason is properly characterized as a proof of guilt. The defeasible presumption of innocence is thus in this majority of cases in fact defeated; whereas, were the indefeasible innocence of all accused persons an assumption of any legal system, there could not be within that system any provision for any verdict other than "Not Guilty." To the extent that it is, for instance, an assumption of the English Common Law that every citizen is cognizant of all that the law requires of him, that law cannot admit the fact that this assumption is, as in fact it is, false.

The presumption of atheism is similarly defeasible. It lays it down that thorough and systematic inquiry must start from a position of negative atheism, and that the burden of proof lies on the theist proposition. Yet this is not at all the same thing as demanding that the debate should proceed on a positive atheist assumption, which must preclude a theist conclusion. Counsel for theism no more betrays his client by accepting the framework determined by this presumption than counsel for the prosecution betrays the state by conceding the legal presumption of innocence. The latter is perhaps in his heart unshakeably convinced of the guilt of the defendant. Yet he must, and with complete consistency and perfect sincerity may, insist that the proceedings of the court should respect the presumption of innocence. The former is even more likely to be persuaded of the soundness of his brief. Yet he too can with a good conscience allow that a thorough and complete apologetic must start from, meet, and go on to defeat, the presumption of atheism.

Put as I have just been putting it the crucial distinction between a defeasible presumption and a categorical assumption will, no doubt, seem quite obvious. But I know from experience that many do find it difficult to grasp, at least in its application to the present highly controversial case. Theists fear that if once they allow this procedural presumption they will have sold the pass to the atheist enemy. Most especially when the proponent of this procedure happens to be a known opponent of theism, the theist is inclined to mistake it that the procedure itself prejudicially assumes an

atheist conclusion. But this, as the comparison with the legal presumption of innocence surely makes clear, is wrong. Such presumptions are procedural and not substantive; they assume no conclusion, either positive or negative.

3. However, and here we come to a third element in the positive analogy, to say that such presumptions are in themselves procedural and not substantive is not to say that the higher-order questions of whether to follow this presumption or that are trifling and merely formal rather than material and substantial. These higher-order questions are not questions which can be dismissed cynically as "issues of principle as opposed to issues of substance." It can matter a lot which presumption is adopted. Notoriously there is a world of difference between legal systems which follow the presumption of innocence, and those which do not. And, as I began to indicate at the end of Part A, to adopt the presumption of atheism does put the whole argument into a distinctive perspective.

4. Next, as a fourth element in the positive analogy, it is a paradoxical consequence of the fact that these presumptions are procedural and not substantive that particular defeats do not constitute any sort of reason, much less a sufficient reason, for a general surrender. The fact that George Joseph Smith was in his trial proved guilty of many murders defeats the original presumption of his innocence. But this particular defeat has no tendency at all to show that even in this particular case the court should not have proceeded on this presumption. Still less does it tend to establish that the legal system as a whole was at fault in incorporating this presumption as a general principle. It is the same with the presumption of atheism. Suppose that someone is able to prove the existence of God. This achievement must, similarly, defeat our presumption. But it does not thereby show that the original contention about the onus of proof was mistaken.

One may, therefore, as a mnemonic think of the word "defeasible" (=defeatable) as implying precisely this capacity to survive defeat. A substantive generalization—such as, for instance, the assertion that all persons accused of murder are in fact innocent—is falsified decisively by the production of even one authentic counter-example. That is part of what is meant by the Baconian slogan: "Magis est vis instantiae negativae."[6] But a defeasible presumption is not shown to have been the wrong one to have made by being in a particular case in fact defeated. What does show the presumption of atheism to be the right one to make is what we have now to investigate.

C. THE CASE FOR THE PRESUMPTION OF ATHEISM

1. An obvious first move is to appeal to the old legal axiom: "Ei incumbit probatio qui dicit, non qui negat." Literally and unsympathetically translated this becomes: "The onus of proof lies on the man who affirms, not on the man who denies." To this the objection is almost equally obvious. Given just a very little verbal ingenuity, contrary motions can be rendered alternatively in equally positive forms: either, "That this house affirms the existence of God"; or, "That this house takes its stand for positive atheism." So interpreted, therefore, our axiom provides no determinate guidance.[7]

Suppose, however, that we take the hint already offered in the previous paragraph. A less literal but more sympathetic translation would be: "The onus of proof lies on the proposition, not on the opposition." The point of the change is to bring out that this maxim was offered in a legal context, and that our courts are institutions of debate. An axiom providing no determinate guidance outside that framework may nevertheless be fundamental for the effective conduct of orderly and decisive debate. Here the outcome is supposed to be decided on the merits of what is said within the debate itself, and of that alone. So no opposition can set about demolishing the proposition case until and unless that proposition has first provided them with a case for demolition.

Of course our maxim even when thus sympathetically interpreted still offers no direction on which contending parties ought to be made to

undertake which roles. Granting that courts are to operate as debating institutions, and granting that this maxim is fundamental to debate, we have to appeal to some further premise principle before we become licensed to infer that the prosecution must propose and the defence oppose. This further principle is, once again, the familiar presumption of innocence. Were we, while retaining the conception of a court as an institution for reaching decisions by way of formalized debate, to embrace the opposite presumption, the presumption of guilt, we should need to adopt the opposite arrangements. In these the defence would first propose that the accused is after all innocent, and the prosecution would then respond by struggling to disintegrate the case proposed.

2. The first move examined cannot, therefore, be by itself sufficient. To have considered it does nevertheless help to show that to accept such a presumption is to adopt a policy. And policies have to be assessed by reference to the aims of those for whom they are suggested. If for you it is more important that no guilty person should ever be acquitted than that no innocent person should ever be convicted, then for you a presumption of guilt must be the rational policy. For you, with your preference structure, a presumption of innocence becomes simply irrational. To adopt this policy would be to adopt means calculated to frustrate your own chosen ends; which is, surely paradigmatically irrational. Take, as an actual illustration, the controlling elite of a ruling Leninist party, which must as such refuse to recognize any individual rights if these conflict with the claims of the party, and which in fact treats all those suspected of actual or potential opposition much as if they were already known "counter-revolutionaries," "enemies of socialism," "friends of the United States," "advocates of free elections," and all other like things bad. I can, and do, fault this policy and its agents on many counts. Yet I cannot say that for them, once granted their scale of values, it is irrational.

What then are the aims by reference to which an atheist presumption might be justified? One key word in the answer, if not the key word, must be "knowledge." The context for which such a policy is proposed is that of enquiry about the existence of God; and the object of the exercise is, presumably, to discover whether it is possible to establish that the word "God" does in fact have application. Now to establish must here be either to show that you know or to come to know. But knowledge is crucially different from mere true belief. All knowledge involves true belief; not all true belief constitutes knowledge. To have a true belief is simply and solely to believe that something is so, and to be in fact right. But someone may believe that this or that is so, and his belief may in fact be true, without its thereby and necessarily constituting knowledge. If a true belief is to achieve this more elevated status, then the believer has to be properly warranted so to believe. He must, that is, be in a position to know.

Obviously there is enormous scope for disagreement in particular cases: both about what is required in order to be in a position to know; and about whether these requirements have actually been satisfied. But the crucial distinction between believing truly and knowing is recognized as universally as the prior and equally vital distinction between believing and believing what is in fact true. If, for instance, there is a question whether a colleague performed some discreditable action, then all of us, though we have perhaps to admit that we cannot help believing that he did, are rightly scrupulous not to assert that this is known unless we have grounds sufficient to warrant the bolder claim. It is, therefore, not only incongruous but also scandalous in matters of life and death, and even of eternal life and death, to maintain that you know either on no grounds at all, or on grounds of a kind which on other and comparatively minor issues you yourself would insist to be inadequate.

It is by reference to this inescapable demand for grounds that the presumption of atheism is justified. If it is to be established that there is a God, then we have to have good grounds for believing that this is indeed so. Until and unless some such grounds are produced we have literally no reason at all for believing; and in that situation the only reasonable posture must be that of either the negative atheist or the agnostic. So the onus of proof has to rest on the

proposition. It must be up to them: first, to give whatever sense they choose to the word "God," meeting any objection that so defined it would relate only to an incoherent pseudo-concept; and, second, to bring forward sufficient reasons to warrant their claim that, in their present sense of the word "God," there is a God. The same applies, with appropriate alterations, if what is to be made out is, not that atheism is known to be true, but only—more modestly—that it can be seen to be at least more or less probable.

D. OBJECTIONS TO THE PRESUMPTION OF ATHEISM

1. Once the nature of this presumption is understood, the supporting case is short and simple. One reason why it may appear unacceptable is a confusion of contexts. In a theist or post-theist society it comes more easily to ask why a man is not a theist than why he is. Provided that the question is to be construed biographically this is no doubt methodologically inoffensive. But our concern here is not all with biographical questions of why people came to hold whatever opinions they do hold. Rather it is with the need for opinions to be suitably grounded if they are to be rated as items of knowledge, or even of probable belief. The issue is: not what does or does not need to be explained biographically; but where the burden of theological proof should rest.

2. A more sophisticated objection of fundamentally the same sort would urge that our whole discussion has been too artificial and too general, and that any man's enquiries have to begin from wherever he happens to be. "We cannot begin," C. S. Peirce wrote, "with complete doubt. We must begin with all the prejudices which we actually have.... These prejudices are not to be dispelled by a maxim...."[8] With particular present reference Professor John Hick has urged: "The right question is whether it is rational for the religious man himself, given that his religious experience is coherent, persistent, and compelling, to affirm the reality of God. What is in question is not the rationality of an inference from certain psychological events to God as their cause; for the religious man no more infers the existence of God than we infer the existence of the visible world around us. What is in question is the rationality of the one who has the religious experiences. If we regard him as a rational person we must acknowledge that he is rational in believing what, given his experiences, he cannot help believing."[9]

To the general point drawn from Peirce the answer comes from further reading of Peirce himself. He was in the paper from which I quoted arguing against the Cartesian programme of simultaneous, systematic, and (almost) universal doubt. Peirce did not want to suggest that it is impossible or wrong to subject any of our beliefs to critical scrutiny. In the same paragraph he continues: "A person may, it is true, find reason to doubt what he began by believing; but in that case he doubts because he has a positive reason for it, and not on account of the Cartesian maxim." One positive reason for being especially leery towards religious opinions is that these vary so very much from society to society; being, it seems, mainly determined, in Descartes' phrase, "by custom and example."[10]

To Hick it has at once to be conceded: that it is one thing to say that a belief is unfounded or well-founded; and quite another to say that it is irrational or rational for some particular person, in his particular time and circumstances, and with his particular experience and lack of experience, to hold or to reject that belief. Granted that his usually reliable Intelligence were sure that the enemy tank brigade was in the town, it was entirely reasonable for the General also to believe this. But the enemy tanks had in fact pulled back. Yet it was still unexceptionably sensible for the General on his part to refuse to expose his flank to those tanks which were in fact not there. This genuine and important distinction cannot, however, save the day for Hick.

In the first place, to show that someone may reasonably hold a particular belief, and even that he may properly claim that he knows it to be

true, is at best still not to show that that belief is indeed well-grounded, much less that it constitutes an item of his knowledge.

Nor, second, is to accept the presumption of atheism as a methodological framework, as such: either to deprive anyone of his right "to affirm the reality of God"; or to require that to be respectable every conviction should first have been reached through the following of an ideally correct procedure. To insist on the correctness of this presumption as an initial presumption is to make a claim which is itself procedural rather than substantive; and the context for which this particular procedure is being recommended is that of justification rather than of discovery.

Once these fundamentals are appreciated those for whom Hick is acting as spokesman should at first feel quite content. For on his account they consider that they have the very best of grounds for their beliefs. They regard their "coherent, consistent, and compelling" religious experience as analogous to perception; and the man who can see something with his own eyes and feel it in his own hands is in a perfect position to know that it exists. His position is indeed so perfect that, as Hick says, it is wrong to speak here of evidence and inference. If he saw his wife in the act of intercourse with a lover then he no longer needs to infer her infidelity from bits and pieces of evidence. He has now what is better than inference; although for the rest of us, who missed this display, his testimony still constitutes an important part of the evidence in the case. The idiomatic expression "the evidence of my own eyes" derives its paradoxical piquancy from the fact that to see for oneself is better than to have evidence.

All this is true. Certainly too anyone who thinks that he can as it were see God must reject the suggestion that in so doing he infers "from certain psychological events to God as their cause." For to accept this account would be to call down upon his head all the insoluble difficulties which fall to the lot of all those who maintain that what we see, and all we ever really and directly see, is visual sense-data. And, furthermore, it is useful to be reminded that when we insist that knowledge as opposed to mere belief has to be adequately warranted, this grounding may be a matter either of having sufficient evidence or of being in a position to know directly and without evidence. So far, therefore it might seem that Hick's objection was completely at cross-purposes; and that anyway his protégés have no need to appeal to the distinction between actual knowledge and what one may rationally and properly claim to know.

Wait a minute. The passage of Hick which has been under discussion was part of an attempt to show that criticism of the Argument from Religious Experience is irrelevant to such claims to as it were see God. But on the contrary: what such criticism usually challenges is just the vital assumption that having religious experience really is a kind of perceiving, and hence a sort of being in a position to know about its putative object. So this challenge provides just exactly that positive reason, which Peirce demanded, for doubting what, according to Hick, "one who has the religious experiences … cannot help believing." If therefore he persists in so believing without even attempting to overcome this criticism, then it becomes impossible to vindicate his claims to be harbouring rational beliefs; much less items of authentic knowledge.

3. A third objection, of a different kind, starts from the assumption, mentioned in section B(1) earlier, that any programme to prove the existence of God is fundamentally misconceived; that this enterprise is on all fours with projects to square the circle or to construct a perpetual motion machine. The suggestion then is that the territory which reason cannot inhabit may nevertheless be freely colonized by faith:

"The world was all before them, where to choose."[11]

Ultimately perhaps it is impossible to establish the existence of God, or even to show that it is more or less probable. But, if so, this is not the correct moral: the rational man does not thereby become in this area free to believe, or not to believe, just as his fancy takes him. Faith, surely, should not be a leap in the dark but a leap towards

the light. Arbitrarily to plump for some particular conviction, and then stubbornly to cleave to it, would be—to borrow the term which St. Thomas employed in discussing natural reason, faith, and revelation[12]—frivolous. If your venture of faith is not to be arbitrary, irrational, and frivolous, you must have presentable reasons: first for making any such commitment in this area, an area in which by hypothesis the available grounds are insufficient to warrant any firm conclusion; and second for opting for one particular possibility rather than any of the other available alternatives. To most such offerings of reasons the presumption of atheism remains relevant. For though, again by the hypothesis, these cannot aspire to prove their conclusions they will usually embrace some estimation of their probability. If the onus of proof lies on the man who hopes definitively to establish the existence of God, it must also by the same token rest on the person who plans to make out only that this conclusion is more or less probable.

I put in the qualifications "most" and "usually" in order to allow for apologetic in the tradition of Pascal's Wager.[13] Pascal makes no attempt in this most famous argument to show that his Roman Catholicism is true or probably true. The reasons which he suggests for making the recommended bet on his particular faith are reasons in the sense of motives rather than reasons in our previous sense of grounds. Conceding, if only for the sake of the present argument, that we can have no knowledge here, Pascal tries to justify as prudent a policy of systematic self-persuasion, rather than to provide grounds for thinking that the beliefs recommended are actually true.

Another instructive feature of Pascal's argument is his unwarranted assumption that there are only two betting options, neither of which, on the assumption of total ignorance, can be awarded any measure of positive probability. Granted all this it then appears compulsively reasonable to wager one's life on the alternative which promises and threatens so inordinately much. But the number of theoretically possible world-systems is infinite, and the subset of those making similar promises and threats is also infinite. The immediate relevance of this to us is that it will not do, without further reason given, to set up as the two mutually exclusive and together exhaustive alternatives (one sort of) theism and (the corresponding sort of) positive atheism; and then to suggest that, since neither position can be definitely established, everyone is entitled simply to take their pick. The objection that this way of constructing the book leaves out a third, agnostic, opinion is familiar; and it is one which Pascal himself tried to meet by arguing that to refuse to decide is in effect to decide against religion. The objection based on the point that the number of theoretically possible Hell-threatening and Heaven-promising world-systems is infinite, is quite different and against the Wager as he himself sets it up decisive. The point is that on the given assumption of total ignorance, combined with our present recognition of the infinite range of alternative theoretical possibilities; to bet on any one of the, so to speak, positive options, none of which can by the hypothesis be awarded any measure of positive probability, must be in the last degree arbitrary and capricious.

E. THE FIVE WAYS AS AN ATTEMPT TO DEFEAT THE PRESUMPTION OF ATHEISM

I have tried, in the first four sections, to explain what I mean by "the presumption of atheism," to bring out by comparison with the presumption of innocence in law what such a presumption does and does not involve, to deploy a case for adopting my presumption of atheism, and to indicate the lines on which two sorts of objection may be met. Now, finally, I want to point out that St. Thomas Aquinas presented the Five Ways in his *Summa Theologica* as an attempt to defeat just such a presumption. My hope in this is, both to draw attention to something which seems generally to be overlooked, and by so doing to summon a massive authority in support of a thesis which many apparently find scandalous.

These most famous arguments were offered there originally, without any inhibition or equivocation, as proofs, period: "I reply that we must say that God can be proved in five ways"; and the previous second Article, raising the question "Whether the existence of God can be demonstrated?," gives the categorical affirmative answer that "the existence of God … can be demonstrated."[14] Attention usually and understandably concentrates on the main body of the third Article, which is the part where Aquinas gives his five supposed proofs. But, as so often, it is rewarding to read the entire Article, and especially the second of the two Objections to which these are presented as a reply: "Furthermore, what can be accounted for by fewer principles is not the product of more. But it seems that everything which can be observed in the world can be accounted for by other principles, on the assumption of the non-existence of God. Thus natural effects are explained by natural causes, while contrived effects are referred to human reason and will. So there is no need to postulate the existence of God."[15]

The Five Ways are thus at least in one aspect an attempt to defeat this presumption of (an Aristotelian) atheist naturalism, by showing that the things "which can be observed in the world" cannot "be accounted for … on the assumption of the non-existence of God," and hence that there is "need to postulate the existence of God."[16] One must never forget that Aquinas composed his own Objections, and hence that it was he who introduced into his formulation here the idea of (this Aristotelian) scientific naturalism. No such idea is integral to the presumption of atheism as that has been construed in the present paper. When the addition is made the presumption can perhaps be labelled "Stratonician." (Strato was the next but one in succession to Aristotle as head of the Lyceum, and was regarded by Bayle and Hume as the archetypal ancient spokesman for an atheist scientific naturalism.)

By suggesting, a century before Ockham, an appeal to an Ockhamist principle of postulational economy Aquinas also indicates a reason for adopting such a presumption. The fact that the Saint cannot be suspect of wanting to reach atheist conclusions can now be made to serve as a spectacular illustration of a point laboured in Part B, above, that to adopt such a presumption is not to make an assumption. And the fact, which has been put forward as an objection to this reading of Aquinas, that "Thomas himself was never in the position of a Stratonician, nor did he live in a milieu in which Stratonicians were plentiful,"[17] is simply irrelevant. For the thesis that the onus of proof lies upon the theist is entirely independent of these biographical and sociological facts.

What is perhaps slightly awkward for present purposes is the formulation of the first Objection: "It seems that God does not exist. For if of two contrary things one were to exist without limit the other would be totally eliminated. But what is meant by this word 'God' is something good without limit. So if God were to have existed no evil would have been encountered. But evil is encountered in the world. Therefore, God does not exist."

It would from my point of view have been better had this first Objection referred to possible difficulties and incoherencies in the meaning proposed for the word "God." Unfortunately it does not, although Aquinas is elsewhere acutely aware of such problems. The changes required, however, are, though important, not extensive. Certainly, the Objection as actually given is presented as one of the God hypothesis falsified by familiar fact. Yet a particular variety of the same general point could be represented as the detection of an incoherence, not in the proposed concept of God as such, but between that concept and another element in the theoretical structure in which it is normally involved.

The incoherence—or perhaps on this occasion I should say only the ostensible incoherence—is between the idea of creation, as necessarily involving complete, continual and absolute dependence of creature upon Creator, and the idea that creatures may nevertheless be sufficiently autonomous for their faults not to be also and indeed primarily His fault. The former idea, the idea of creation, is

so essential that it provides the traditional criterion for distinguishing theism from deism. The latter is no less central to the three great theist systems of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, since all three equally insist that creatures of the immaculate Creator are corrupted by sin. So where Aquinas put as his first Objection a statement of the traditional Problem of Evil, conceived as a problem of squaring the God hypothesis with certain undisputed facts, a redactor fully seized of the presumption of atheism as expounded in the present paper would refer instead to the ostensible incoherence, within the system itself, between the concept of creation by a flawless Creator and the notion of His creatures flawed by their sins.

NOTES

1. This and all later translations from the Greek and Latin are by me.
2. See Chapter VI of Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass*:

   > "But 'glory doesn't mean 'a nice knock-down argument,'" Alice objected.
   >
   > "When I use a word," Humpty Dumpty said in rather a scornful tone, "it means just what I choose it to mean—neither more nor less."
   >
   > "The question is," said Alice, "whether you can make words mean so many different things."
   >
   > "The question is," said Humpty Dumpty, "which is to be master—that's all."

3. See the essay 'Agnosticism', and also that on "Agnosticism and Christianity," in Volume V of his *Collected Essays* (MacMillan: London, 1894). I may perhaps also refer to my own article on "Agnosticism" for the 1972 revision of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*.
4. H. Denzingerd (Ed.) *Enchiridion Symbolorum* (Twenty-ninth Revised Edition, Herder: Freiburg im Breisgau, 1953), section 1806.
5. By Professor P. T. Geach of Leeds.
6. "The force of the negative instance is greater." For, whereas a single positive, supporting instance can do only a very little to confirm an universal generalization, one negative, contrary example would be sufficient decisively to falsify that generalization.
7. See the paper "Presumptions" by my former colleague Patrick Day in the *Proceedings of the XIVth International Congress of Philosophy* (Vienna, 1968), Vol. V, at p. 140. I am pleased that it was I who first suggested to him an exploration of this unfrequented philosophical territory.
8. In "Some Consequences of Four incapacities" at pp. 156–157 of Volume V of the *Collected Papers* (Harvard University Press; Cambridge (Mass.), 1934).
9. In his review of *God and Philosophy* in *Theology Today* 1967, pp. 86–87. He makes his point not against the general presumption but against one particular application.
10. *Discourse on the Method*, Part II. It occurs almost immediately after his observation: "I took into account also the very different character which a person brought up from infancy in France or Germany exhibits, from that which… he would have possessed had he lived among the Chinese or with savages."
11. *Paradise Lost*, Bk. XII, line 646.
12. *Summa contra Gentiles*, Bk. I, Ch. VI. The whole passage, in which Aquinas gives his reasons for believing that the Christian candidate does, and that of Mohammed does not, constitute an authentic revelation of God, should be compared with some defence of the now widely popular *assumption* that the contents of a religious faith must be without evidential warrant.

    Professor A. C. Macintyre, for instance, while he was still himself a Christian argued with great vigour for the Barthian thesis that "Belief cannot argue with unbelief: it can only preach to it." Thus, in his paper on 'The Logical Status of Religious Belief' in *Metaphysical Beliefs* (Student Christian Movement press: London, 1957), Macintyre urged: "…suppose religion could be provided with a

method of proof…since the Christian faith sees true religion only in a free decision made in faith and love, the religion would by this vindication be destroyed, For all possibility of free choice would have been done away. Any objective justification of belief would have the same effect … faith too would have been eliminated" (p. 209).

Now, first, in so far as this account is correct any commitment to a system of religious belief has to be made altogether without evidencing reasons. Macintyre himself concludes with a quotation from John Donne to illustrate the "confessional voice" of faith, commenting: "The man who speaks like this is beyond argument" (p. 211). But this, we must insist, would be nothing to be proud off. It is certainly no compliment, even if it were a faithful representation, to partray the true believer as necessarily irrational and a bigot. Furthermore, second, it is not the case that where sufficient evidence is available there can be no room for choice. Men can, and constantly do, choose to deceive themselves about the most well-evidenced, inconvenient truths. Also no recognition of any facts, however clear, is by itself sufficient to guarantee one allegiance and to preclude its opposite. MacIntyre needs to extend his reading of the Christian poets to the greatest of them all. For the hero of Milton's *Paradise Lost* had the most enviably full and direct knowledge of God. Yet Lucifer, if any creature could, chose freely to rebel.

13. *Pensées*, section 233 in the Brunschvicg arrangement. For a discussion of Pascal's argument see Chapter VI, section 7 of my *An Introduction to Western Philosophy* (Thames & Hudson, and Bobbs-Merrill: London and New York, 1971).
14. It is worth stressing this point, since nowadays it is frequently denied. Thus L. C. Velecky in an article in *Philosophy* 1968 asserts: "He did not prove here the existence of God, nor indeed, did the prove it anywhere else, for a very good reason. According to Thomas, God's existence is unknowable and, hence, cannot be proved" (p. 226). The quotations from Aquinas given in my text ought to be decisive. Yet there seems to be quite a school of devout interpretation which waives aside what the Saint straightforwardly said as almost irrelevant to the question of what he really meant.
15. I, Q2 A3.
16. In this perspective it becomes easier to see why Aquinas makes so much use of Aristotelian scientific ideas in his arguments. That they are in fact much more dependent on these now largely obsolete ideas is usefully emphasized in Anthony Kenny's *The Five Ways* (Routledge and Kegan Paul, and Schocken Books: London and New York, 1969). But Kenny does not bring out that they were deployed against a presumption of atheist naturalism.
17. Velecky *loc. cit.,* pp. 225–226.

VII.B.3

Rational Religious Belief Without Arguments

MICHAEL BERGMANN

Michael Bergmann (1964–) is professor of philosophy at Purdue University and works primarily in the fields of epistemology and philosophy of religion. In this chapter, Bergmann explains and defends the view (held by Alvin Plantinga and other so-called "Reformed epistemologists") that religious beliefs—like the belief that God exists—can be rational even if they are not based on arguments.

There have been many different attempts, by philosophers and others, to show that religious belief of various kinds is irrational. And there have been at least as many attempts by religious people to defend the rationality of their beliefs. Perhaps the most common religious belief to be attacked and defended in this way is belief in God—an omniscient, omnipotent, immaterial, eternal, perfectly good, wholly loving person on whom everything else depends. It will be convenient to focus our attention on belief in God, though much of our discussion will be relevant to other religious beliefs as well. Believers in God (theists) have for centuries now offered a variety of arguments for God's existence: they've argued that there must be a first cause (an uncaused cause) of the existence of things; they've argued that there must be a designer to account for the apparent design found in the natural world; they've argued that we can't make sense of morality without appealing to the existence of God; they've even argued that simply by reflecting on the concept of God we can see that God exists because such reflection reveals that God is the sort of being that *must* exist. The goal of these arguments is, at least in part, to show that belief in God is rational. Reliance on these sorts of arguments is supposed by many to be what *makes* belief in God rational. In fact, it is commonly thought that belief in God *couldn't* be rational unless it is held on the basis of such arguments. But is that last thought right? Could a person's belief in God be rational even if it is not held on the basis of any of these alleged theistic proofs? Could there be rational religious belief without arguments?

For the past few decades, a prominent position within the philosophy of religion literature is that belief in God *can* be rational even if it isn't based on any arguments. This position is often called "Reformed Epistemology" to signify its roots in the writings of John Calvin (1509–1564), the great Protestant theologian and the main source of the Reformed tradition within Christendom. But one can find developments of the same idea in the writings of earlier figures such as Aquinas, Augustine, and even the apostle Paul. The central thesis of Reformed Epistemology is simply that religious belief, including belief in God, can be rational (sensible, reasonable, justified) even if it is not inferred from any other beliefs—even if it is not held on the basis of any argument at all. In what follows, I will

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explain this view in greater detail and then consider and respond to a number of objections to it.

I. UNDERSTANDING REFORMED EPISTEMOLOGY

A. A Little Background in Epistemology

In order to understand Reformed Epistemology, it will be helpful to begin with a little background in epistemology, which is the study of knowledge and rational belief. Epistemologists typically aren't concerned with religious belief in particular. Their concern is more general. They are trying to understand the nature of knowledge and rationality as these concepts apply to any belief whatsoever, regardless of the belief's topic or the means by which it was produced.

Let's begin by highlighting two distinctions. The first, which we've already been employing, is the distinction between rational and irrational beliefs. This is an *evaluative* distinction insofar as rational beliefs are, by definition, epistemically *better* than irrational beliefs. The second distinction is between basic beliefs and nonbasic beliefs. A basic belief is a belief that is not based on or inferred from another belief. A nonbasic belief is a belief that *is* based on or inferred from another belief. This is a *psychological* distinction, not an evaluative one. It has to do with how the beliefs are formed. Let's consider some examples of basic and nonbasic beliefs. Suppose you're visiting your doctor after being in a minor car accident and she is trying to determine the extent of your injuries. She gently presses on various parts of your back and neck, asking if it hurts when she does so. At one point you feel a very sharp pain and you tell her that it hurts. You tell her that because you *believe* that it hurts. That belief isn't inferred from other beliefs you have. (You don't first believe that you flinched when she pressed that spot and then infer that, because you flinch only when you're in pain, you must be in pain now). Instead, that belief is an automatic noninferential response to the feeling of pain you experience; it is based on that experience, even though it isn't based on another belief. Because it is not based on another belief of yours, it is a basic (or noninferential) belief. Nonbasic (or inferential) beliefs are different. Suppose you want to figure out in your head what 9×53 equals. To do this, you typically will come first to believe that $9 \times 50 = 450$, that $9 \times 3 = 27$, and that $450 + 27 = 477$. Then you infer from those beliefs the further belief that $9 \times 53 = 477$. Since that last belief is inferred from other beliefs, it is a nonbasic belief.

An important question that has been of interest to philosophers as early as Aristotle (384–322 BCE) is whether any basic beliefs are rational. It's natural to think that for a belief to be rational, you must have a reason for holding it, where your reason is another belief of yours. But to hold a belief for a reason is to base it on or infer it from that other belief that is your reason. These considerations might incline a person to endorse *Inferentialism*, the view that a belief can be rational only if it's inferred from another belief. But there is a powerful and influential objection to Inferentialism, first proposed by Aristotle (*Posterior Analytics*, Book I, Chapters 2–3). This objection starts by noting that it's implausible to think that a belief can be rational in virtue of being inferred from an *irrational belief*. Hence, Inferentialism implies that a belief is rational only if it's inferred from another *rational* belief. But according to Inferentialism, for that second belief to be rational, it too must be inferred from another belief—which also must be rational. And so on. Thus, Inferentialism implies that in order for a belief to be rational, you must either base it on an infinite chain of reasoning or else reason in a circle. But it's obvious that reasoning in a circle cannot make a belief rational. And none of us is able to carry out an infinite chain of reasoning. (And even if we could, an infinite chain of reasoning cannot, by itself, make a belief rational without some original rationality to be transferred along the chain.) The upshot is that if Inferentialism is true, then it's impossible to have rational beliefs. Given that most philosophers think that it isn't impossible to have rational beliefs, it's widely believed that

Inferentialism is false: basic beliefs can be, and often are, rational. These rational basic beliefs are often called "properly basic beliefs."

Not just any basic belief is *properly* basic (i.e., both rational and noninferential). The reckless gambler who is having a run of terrible luck in the casino and who believes on a whim, not on the basis of any other beliefs, that his luck is about to improve, is thereby forming an irrational basic belief. Unlike your basic belief that you're in pain (when the doctor presses on your neck), the gambler's basic belief is not *properly* basic. So although some basic beliefs are properly basic, not all of them are. Which of our basic beliefs *are* properly basic? The answer to this question has to do with which belief-forming abilities we have. We humans have the ability to tell, without inference, that we're in pain. But we don't have the ability to tell, without inference, that our gambling luck is about to improve. We also have the ability to tell, without inference, what our own thoughts are. But we don't have the ability to tell, without inference, what others are thinking. Likewise, we have the ability to tell just by looking, without inference from other beliefs, that there's a book on the table in front of us. But we don't have the ability to tell in complete darkness, without inference, that there's a pillar six feet in front of us (though if we had the echolocation abilities that bats have, we could reasonably form such basic beliefs in the darkness). So which beliefs can be properly basic for us depends on which noninferential belief-forming abilities we have.

Which noninferential belief-forming abilities do we have? Which of our basic beliefs can be rational? There is wide agreement that we can tell noninferentially via introspection what we're thinking and feeling. In addition, there's wide agreement that we can tell noninferentially via rational intuition that one thing is logically implied by another, though this ability is limited for most people to very simple logical implications. (For example, we can tell noninferentially via rational intuition that if Jack and Jill are at the party then it logically follows that Jack is at the party.) Suppose that those were the only sorts of properly basic beliefs we had and that the only way for us to have rational beliefs in addition to beliefs of those kinds would be to draw inferences from them. The famous philosopher René Descartes (1596–1650) began with only those sorts of basic belief—i.e., those formed via introspection and rational intuition—and tried from there to see what he could learn by inference. He thought that in that way, starting from those meager foundations, he could prove that God exists and that there is a physical world surrounding us. Most philosophers think that he failed in this attempt and that the problem had a lot to do with the fact that he allowed so few beliefs to count as properly basic. Today, most epistemologists think that in addition to the ability to form noninferential beliefs via introspection and rational intuition, we also have the ability to form noninferential beliefs via perception and memory. When, upon glancing at a nearby basketball, I believe there's a ball in front of me, I don't do this via inference: I don't first notice that it visually appears to me as if there's a ball there and that such appearances are good indicators that there is a ball there and from this infer that there's a ball in front of me. I can just tell noninferentially via perception that there's a ball in front of me. Likewise, I can tell noninferentially via memory that I had orange juice at breakfast. I don't infer this from the fact that there's a glass on the kitchen counter that looks as if it contained orange juice a few hours ago and that no one else in the house likes orange juice. Thus, it's very common for epistemologists to think we have the ability to form noninferential beliefs via perception, memory, introspection, and rational intuition. Because we have these abilities, the beliefs so produced are properly basic (i.e., noninferentially rational). And from these starting points, we can make inferences via good reasoning to the many other beliefs we hold; these other beliefs are then inferentially rational.

It's important to emphasize that although these properly basic beliefs aren't inferred from other beliefs, it doesn't follow that they are groundless or that we hold them without any evidence. Take for example the belief that you are in pain. It's true

you don't infer that from other beliefs. But it's not groundless. Instead, it's based on your experience of pain. It's that experience, not another belief, which is the ground of your belief that you're in pain—that experience is your evidence for that belief. Other introspective beliefs are also based on experiences (such as the belief that you're happy or sad, which is based on your experience of feeling happy or sad).[1] Likewise, although perceptual beliefs aren't inferred from other beliefs, they aren't lacking in grounds or evidence. My belief that there's a ball in front of me is based on my visual experience at the moment (not on the belief that I'm having such a visual experience—I typically don't form such beliefs about my visual experience). That visual experience is my evidence—it is the ground of that visual belief. In the case of beliefs formed via memory or rational intuition, it's more difficult to say what they are based on. According to one common way of thinking about memory beliefs, they are based on memory seemings. It seems to me—in a remembering sort of way—that I had orange juice for breakfast. On the basis of that seeming (that memory seeming) I hold the memory belief that I had orange juice for breakfast. Similarly, beliefs in simple logical truths, formed via rational intuition are based on rational intuitions. I can just *see* (intellectually) that one thing logically follows from another. This "seeing" is a sort of insight, a rational intuition; it's an experience of something's seeming to me a certain way—it's an experience of its seeming obvious to me that this thing logically follows from that thing. And my belief that the one thing follows from the other is based on this rational intuition. Both the memory seeming and the rational intuition are experiences. They aren't themselves beliefs. So beliefs based on them still count as basic.

The resulting picture, widely endorsed by contemporary epistemologists, is the following. Some beliefs are rational and some are not. Those that are rational are either basic or not. The rational beliefs that aren't basic are inferred from other rational beliefs. These inference chains are ultimately traced back to properly basic beliefs—i.e., rational beliefs that aren't based on any other beliefs. What makes a basic belief rational has to do with which noninferential belief-forming abilities we have. At the very least, we humans seem to have the ability to form beliefs via perception, memory, rational intuition, and introspection. And the beliefs produced by these noninferential belief-forming abilities are based not on other beliefs but on experiences of various kinds—perceptual experiences, memory seemings, rational intuitions, and introspectable experiences such as pain, pleasure, happiness, sadness, etc.

There is one further "background epistemology" question that often gets discussed by philosophers and which will be relevant to our discussion of religious belief. The question is this: can a belief be properly basic for a person who has never thought at all about the epistemology of such beliefs in anything like the way we just have? For example, can a sad child be rational in remembering that his mother left the room a moment ago even if the child has no idea that that belief is based on a memory seeming? The answer, it seems, is "yes." One can be rational in forming noninferential beliefs via memory even if one has never thought about how memory works or what memory beliefs are based on or whether memory beliefs are basic or nonbasic.

However, given that rationality seems to rule out haphazard or careless belief formation, some might be tempted by a contrary view that we can call "Confirmationalism," which requires for a belief's rationality that we confirm that it was produced in the right way:

> *Confirmationalism:* In order for a belief to be rational, the person holding it needs a further belief that the first belief has an adequate basis.

So, for example, Confirmationalism would say that I can't be rational in my memory belief that I was in Florida last year unless I have an additional belief that that memory belief of mine has an adequate basis. Of course that second belief—required to confirm the adequacy of the first belief's basis—must itself be rational. But according to Confirmationalism, that second belief (like any other belief)

is rational only if the person holding it has yet another belief that the second belief has an adequate basis. And that third belief must be rational too, which will require a fourth belief confirming the adequacy of its basis. And so on. Thus, Confirmationalism implies that in order for a simple belief—such as the belief that *there is a ball in front of me*—to be rational, I need to have an infinite number of other beliefs, each of which is about the previous belief having an adequate basis. (Because each belief is about the previous belief, this chain of beliefs will not circle back on itself.) But people aren't able to have an infinite number of extra beliefs for each of the simple beliefs they hold. Given Confirmationalism, this implies that people aren't able to have any rational beliefs. For this reason, most epistemologists reject Confirmationalism.[2]

B. Reformed Epistemology

Let us turn now to the task of trying to gain a better understanding of Reformed Epistemology, the view that belief in God can be rational even if it is not inferred from any other beliefs. Our background reflections in epistemology will benefit us as our discussion proceeds.

A helpful way to begin our more careful examination of Reformed Epistemology is to consider the context in which it was introduced into the contemporary philosophy of religion literature. A prominent twentieth–century objection to the rationality of belief in God runs as follows:

The Evidentialist Objection

1. *The Evidentialist Thesis*: Belief in God is rational only if it is inferred from other rational beliefs via good arguments.
2. But there aren't any good arguments for God's existence.
3. Therefore, belief in God is irrational.

The reason this objection is called "The Evidentialist Objection" is that it relies on the Evidentialist Thesis as its first premise.[3] According to that premise, theistic belief is rational only if it is based on good evidence in the form of good theistic arguments. The proponent of this objection to theism will, of course, endorse the Evidentialist Thesis but will not believe in God. Let's call such a proponent a "Nontheistic Evidentialist." For most of the twentieth century, the most common response to this argument, by those who wanted to defend theistic belief, was the response given by Theistic Evidentialists. Like Nontheistic Evidentialists, they accept the first premise, the Evidentialist Thesis. But they reject the second premise. They think there *are* good arguments for God's existence. And they spend a lot of time devising such arguments and defending those arguments against objections. It was in just this context of disagreement (between Theistic Evidentialists and Nontheistic Evidentialists over whether there are good theistic arguments) that a second theistic response to the Evidentialist Objection was offered, this time by Reformed Epistemologists. They turned their sights on the first premise, the Evidentialist Thesis itself. Their claim was that belief in God—like the belief that I had orange juice for breakfast or the belief that there's a ball in front of me—can be properly basic. (As for the second premise, some Reformed Epistemologists join Nontheistic Evidentialists in accepting it; others join Theistic Evidentialists in rejecting it. But all Reformed Epistemologists reject the first premise; and that is what they tend to focus on in responding to the Evidentialist Objection.)

Given that Reformed Epistemologists think belief in God is properly basic (and in light of our background excursion into epistemology in the previous section), you would expect Reformed Epistemologists to also think that we have a noninferential belief-forming ability enabling us to tell, without inference, that God exists. And that's just what we find in their writings. Alvin Plantinga, perhaps the most prominent of contemporary Reformed Epistemologists, suggests that we have a "sense of divinity" enabling us to form properly basic beliefs about God. And just as noninferential beliefs formed via perception and memory are not groundless but instead based on experience, so also properly basic beliefs about God are, according to

the Reformed Epistemologist, not groundless but based on experience. Plantinga gives some examples of the sort of experiential grounds on which noninferential beliefs about God are based:

> [T]here is in us a disposition to believe propositions of the sort *this flower was created by God* or *this vast and intricate universe was created by God* when we contemplate the flower or behold the starry heavens or think about the vast reaches of the universe…. Upon reading the Bible, one may be impressed with a deep sense that God is speaking to him. Upon having done what I know is cheap, or wrong, or wicked I may feel guilty in God's sight and form the belief *God disapproves of what I've done*. Upon confession and repentance, I may feel forgiven, forming the belief *God forgives me for what I've done*. A person in grave danger may turn to God asking for his protection and help; and of course he or she then forms the belief that God is indeed able to hear and help if he sees fit. When life is sweet and satisfying, a spontaneous sense of gratitude may well up within the soul; someone in this condition may thank and praise the Lord for his goodness, and will of course form the accompanying belief that indeed the Lord is to be thanked and praised.[4]

The proposal here is that experiences of awe, guilt, forgiveness, fear, and gratitude can operate as grounds for beliefs about God. The beliefs so formed aren't usually of the form "God exists." They're more often of the form "God does this" or "God has done that" or "God is able to do such and such." In this way, they're like our more ordinary beliefs about the world around us. We typically don't form beliefs like "that lake exists." Instead, we think "that lake is cold" or "that lake is beautiful" or some such thing. But it's a short step from the belief about the lake (or God) to the further belief that the lake (or God) exists.[5]

It's important to emphasize (because it's so common for people to mistakenly think otherwise) that Reformed Epistemologists hold that ordinary unsophisticated religious believers who know nothing of the epistemological views discussed in this paper can have properly basic belief in God. As I already noted, most epistemologists (whether religious or not) think that a child's memory-produced belief that his mother left the room a few moments ago is rational even if the child can give no account of what that memory belief is based on or why it is rational. What matters for the rationality of that memory belief is that the child *has* the ability to form beliefs using his memory, not whether the child can give an account of the epistemology of memory beliefs. Likewise, Reformed Epistemologists say that what matters for properly basic belief in God is that the believer *has* the ability to form beliefs via the sense of divinity, not that the person can give an account of the epistemology of noninferential theistic beliefs. So a belief in God can be rational even if the person holding it doesn't have the further belief that her belief in God has an adequate basis via the sense of divinity. Some objectors will insist that your belief via this alleged sense of divinity won't be rational without a further belief, based on good reasons, that the experiences on which you base your belief in God provide an adequate basis for such a belief. In response, the Reformed Epistemologist will point out that this complaint seems to rely on an appeal to Confirmationalism discussed above—a principle which most philosophers reject, and for good reason.

Here is a simple way to think of the Reformed Epistemologist's position: *belief in God is more like belief in other people than it is like belief in electrons*. We are able to form properly basic beliefs that there are people around us because, by using our vision, we can tell noninferentially that there are people nearby. But we aren't able to tell noninferentially, just by looking, that there are electrons nearby. We don't have that sort of ability. Instead, humans arrived at the belief in electrons via inference: we inferred their existence because it provided the best explanation of all the experimental evidence collected by scientists. According to the Evidentialist Thesis, belief in God—like belief in electrons—is rational only if we infer it as the best

explanation of the available evidence (in the case of belief in God, the evidence in question is what gets cited in the premises of theistic arguments). But according to the Reformed Epistemologist, belief in God is more like belief in other people.[6] We don't first notice that it visually appears to us as if there are other people and then conclude that the best explanation of these visual appearances is that there really are other people that are the causes of these visual appearances. Rather, we just have the visual experiences and believe on the basis of them, without inference, that there are people around us. Likewise, the Reformed Epistemologist thinks that for many people, belief in God is not an inferred explanatory hypothesis but a noninferential response to experience. It's worth noting that it wouldn't be surprising for a loving God who wants all people to believe in him to give us the ability to believe in him noninferentially through a sense of divinity. That way of believing in God seems to be easier and less affected by differences in intelligence than inferential belief-formation, which requires an expertise (that isn't widely shared) in formulating and evaluating arguments.

As I signaled at the beginning of this essay, the Reformed Epistemologist's views don't apply only to the belief that God exists. Other religious beliefs as well can be rational in a similar way—beliefs in specific doctrines of this or that religion. There are a number of accounts of how these other religious beliefs are formed.[7] But ultimately it comes down to something very much like the views described above concerning properly basic belief in God.

II. OBJECTIONS TO REFORMED EPISTEMOLOGY

Let's turn now to some objections to Reformed Epistemology and consider what sorts of response are available.

> *Objection 1: Religious Interpretation of Experiential Evidence Needs Defense.* The Reformed Epistemologist says that beliefs about God are based on experiences such as feeling forgiven after confession and repentance. On the basis of such an experience a person believes "God forgives me for what I've done." But this is to *interpret* the experience within a particular theological framework—it's to impose one interpretation among many possible ones on a raw experience consisting of a feeling of being forgiven replacing a feeling of guilt. In order for the belief about God's forgiveness to be rational, one needs some reason for favoring that particular theological interpretation over some other nontheistic interpretation of that same raw experience.

Consider a parallel complaint lodged against perceptual beliefs: "When you believe, on the basis of visual experience, that there is a chair and a desk nearby, you are imposing one interpretation among many possible interpretations on the raw experience consisting of a visual appearance that seems to be of a chair and desk nearby. You've adopted the "standard" interpretation according to which there really is a chair and a desk nearby causing you to have that visual appearance. But perhaps you are dreaming. Or perhaps you are the victim of an experiment in which computers are connected to your brain causing you to have that visual appearance. You aren't rational in believing there really is a chair and desk nearby unless you first have a reason for favoring the standard interpretation over the dreaming interpretation and the computer–simulation interpretation."

How have epistemologists responded to this parallel complaint about perception? One common response is to note the following things. First, if this complaint were legitimate, then most people wouldn't be rational in their beliefs about the world around them since most people simply don't have any reasons they could produce for favoring the standard interpretation of perceptual experience. Second, epistemologists have worked very hard for centuries trying to come up with good reasons for preferring the standard interpretation of perceptual

experience to its rivals and have yet to come up with an argument acknowledged to be convincing. Because of this failure, it is widely believed that there is no good argument for preferring the standard interpretation of perceptual experience that doesn't itself rely on perceptual experience to tell us about the world around us.[8] Third, it seems that, in looking around us and forming visual beliefs about our environment, we don't first have a visual experience and then consider various ways to interpret it, ultimately selecting the standard interpretation. Instead, the world seems to present itself to us in visual experience as if the standard interpretation is true—the standard interpretation comes along unbidden with the visual experience. In light of all this, many epistemologists conclude that our perceptual beliefs are rational not because we've got a good reason for preferring the standard interpretation of our perceptual experience but because the rational response to having such experiences is to form beliefs, without inference, in accord with the standard interpretation.

The Reformed Epistemologist will say similar things about belief in God based on things such as an experience of feeling forgiven.[9] Many who believe, on the basis of such an experience, that God has forgiven them don't have any arguments available for favoring a theistic interpretation of that experience over a nontheistic one. Moreover, in many cases, they don't first have the experience and then consider various ways of interpreting it, ultimately selecting the theistic interpretation. Instead, that theistic interpretation comes along unbidden with that experience of feeling forgiven. And just as the rational response to perceptual experience is to form noninferential beliefs in the objects one takes oneself to see nearby, so also (says the Reformed Epistemologist) the rational response to the experience of feeling forgiven is to believe, without inference, that God is as one takes God to be on the basis of that experience.

> *Objection 2: The Great Pumpkin Objection.* The Reformed Epistemologist's strategy for defending the rationality of religious belief is seriously problematic because the same strategy could be used to defend any bizarre belief you like, including Linus's belief (in the Charlie Brown comics) that the gift-delivering Great Pumpkin rises each Halloween over the most sincere pumpkin patch. When challenged to give reasons for their belief, Great Pumpkinites could simply point out that their belief is properly basic so they don't need to give any arguments for it. The fact that this strategy can be used to defend such a bizarre view reveals the bankruptcy of the strategy. But it seems that the Reformed Epistemologist, in endorsing this sort of strategy for defending the rationality of her belief in God, cannot offer any principled objection to this same strategy used by others in defense of silly views like belief in the Great Pumpkin.

Here too we can consider a parallel complaint, this time against those who think introspective beliefs are rational. Suppose you tell me that you're feeling a little hungry and I ask you what your argument is for that claim. You tell me that you don't need an argument in order to be rational in believing that claim; you have the ability to tell, just by thinking about it, what sorts of feelings you are having. In response I say "Oh really? Well, with that sort of reasoning, you could have no objection to a person who claimed to be a mind-reader with the special ability to tell, just by thinking about it, what those around her are thinking and feeling." Notice what I would be suggesting by that response. I'd be suggesting that because you claim to be able to tell *one* thing without argument (namely, what sorts of feelings you're having), you can have no objection to a person who claims to be able to tell *another* thing without argument (namely, what those around her are thinking and feeling). But that suggestion of mine would be silly. It's perfectly sensible to say there are some things people can tell without argument and other things they can't tell without argument.

Reformed Epistemologists respond to the Great Pumpkin Objection in a similar manner.

They think there are some things people can tell without argument and other things people can't tell without argument. They think people can tell without argument that God exists but they can't tell without argument that the Great Pumpkin exists. There is nothing remarkable about the suggestion that people have abilities to tell some things, but not others, without inference. We already know that people can tell, just by looking and without inference, that there are people around them; but they can't tell just by looking and without inference that there are electrons. People can also tell, just by thinking about it and without inference, what thoughts they are having; but they can't in the same way tell, without inference, what thoughts others are having. They can, without inference, remember what happened in the recent past; but they can't in the same way tell, without inference, what is going to happen in the future. The Reformed Epistemologist's claim—that we have the ability to tell noninferentially that God exists but we don't have any such ability with respect to the Great Pumpkin—is just another claim of this sort. The "strategy" of claiming to have an ability to know something noninferentially can be employed in defending the rationality of a belief even by those who think there are many things we don't have the ability to know noninferentially. So Reformed Epistemologists aren't committed to approving of others who use the same sort of strategy to defend all sorts of silly views.

> *Objection 3: Why Doesn't Everyone Believe in God?* The previous two responses have compared basic belief in God to properly basic perceptual beliefs or properly basic introspective beliefs. But this ignores a very important difference between basic belief in God, on the one hand, and basic perceptual and introspective beliefs, on the other: pretty much everybody forms basic beliefs about their surroundings via perception and basic beliefs about their thoughts and feelings via introspection; but there are many people who don't believe in God at all. That's an important difference. If we have the ability to tell, without inference, that God exists, why are there so many people who don't believe in God?

The first thing to note here is that belief in some sort of deity is very widespread throughout human history, across many different cultures.[10] This of course doesn't prove that it's true. But it's important to keep in mind that it's not as if only a small minority of the world's population believes in God. Nevertheless, there are many people who don't seem to have any belief in God, and this is strikingly different from what we see when we compare basic belief in God with basic perceptual belief in the world around us or introspective belief in our mental states. What does the Reformed Epistemologist have to say about this?

The natural thing to say is that the *sense of divinity* isn't working equally well in all people. It is either damaged or hindered in its operation in many people and this has been so for a long time. It would be as if all humans had their vision damaged or otherwise hindered from normal operation and this condition of humanity lasted for many centuries. If that were to happen, some humans wouldn't be able to see at all and others would have only distorted or unclear vision. It might then happen that some who could see better than others would believe that the moon existed, but those who were blind or couldn't see as well, might not believe that the moon existed. Of course this analogy breaks down after a while.[11] But the main point of it, according to Reformed Epistemologists, is just that the sense of divinity is more damaged in some people than it is in others, and this explains why some people don't have properly basic belief in God whereas others do.[12]

> *Objection 4: Sinfulness Doesn't Explain Atheism.* In responding to the last objection, Reformed Epistemologists say that the sense of divinity is more damaged in some people than in others. But what is it that causes this damage? A common suggestion by some Reformed Epistemologists is that "sinfulness" is the cause of this

> damage. But that's both insulting and implausible. It's easy to give examples of nontheists and theists where the nontheists are, morally speaking, much better behaved than the theists.

It's true that many in the Reformed tradition say that operational deficiencies in the sense of divinity are caused by sinfulness. And it's also clear that some morally well-behaved people are nontheists and that some theists behave terribly (the Bible itself points to fallen angels as well as to many humans in giving examples of badly behaved theists). So how can anyone take seriously the suggestion that sinfulness explains why many people don't believe in God?

What follows is one possible way to make sense of the suggestion that sinfulness can explain lack of belief in God. (Notice that the goal here isn't to prove the truth of the explanation of unbelief in terms of sinfulness or of this particular way of making sense of it. Rather, it's to show how explaining unbelief by pointing to sinfulness can be consistent with the observation that nontheists often seem to be better behaved than theists.) We first need to distinguish inherited sinfulness from willful sinfulness. Ever since humans fell into sin, the result (according to Christians, including those in the Reformed tradition) has been that *all* of their descendents have been born with an inherited tendency to selfishness and pride.[13] This inherited tendency seems to come in various degrees. Because it is inherited, this tendency is not something we've chosen. Nor did we choose how severe it is in our own case.[14] In addition to inherited sinfulness, which we don't choose, there is also willful sinfulness. This occurs when we freely choose to act in a way that is contrary to our conscience. We are responsible for our willful sinfulness even though we aren't responsible for our inherited sinfulness. The explanation I want to consider for why not all people believe in God appeals, in part, to both inherited sinfulness and willful sinfulness.

There are really two things that need explaining: how sinfulness can keep people from believing in God and why, despite that first explanation, there isn't a tight correlation between one's belief status (as theist or nontheist) and one's moral status (as well-behaved or badly behaved). As for the first explanation, there are two ways sinfulness can hinder belief in God: it can hinder it in a way for which the unbeliever is *not* to blame; and it can hinder it in a way for which the unbeliever *is* to blame. Let's consider how it might hinder it in ways for which the unbeliever is not to blame. For starters, the inherited tendency to selfishness and pride damages the sense of divinity in all people so that it doesn't work as it was originally intended.[15] It's as if all of us have blurred vision when it comes to detecting God noninferentially. And because our inherited sinfulness comes in varying degrees, the damage it causes to the sense of divinity also comes in varying degrees. On top of that, due to both the inherited and willful sinfulness of those in our family and our larger society, our upbringing can cause further damage or hindrance to the operation of the sense of divinity in us. Here too, the resulting damage will come in varying degrees, depending on what has happened in our family and society, on what damage was caused by our own inherited sinfulness, and on how those two kinds of damage interact. All of these sin-caused effects on our sense of divinity hinder belief in God in a way for which the unbeliever is *not* to blame.

But, in addition to the above-mentioned things that affect what we might think of as our unchosen "starting point," there are other things that hinder belief in God. These other things affect how we progress from our starting point either further from or closer to belief in God. One contributor here could be willful sinfulness. By choosing to go against my conscience, I can perhaps further contribute to the damage to my sense of divinity. This is a case in which I am partially to blame for the way in which sin hinders my belief in God. But there are other possible contributors as well. God may choose to give experiential evidence for theistic belief to some people and not to others—evidence on which a properly basic belief in God can be based without inference.[16] (This might

involve giving experiences to a person that the person wouldn't otherwise have had. Or it might involve correcting damage to the sense of divinity so that the person treats as evidence for belief about God experiences that the person wouldn't otherwise have treated in that way.) God's decision to give or delay giving such evidence might be based on the willful sinfulness of the person in question. But it might be based on other things as well. Perhaps God thinks the person isn't yet ready to respond correctly to such evidence. Or perhaps God has a reason for wanting this person to progress further morally than others before corning to believe in God. And there may be other good reasons God has for delay in giving evidence, reasons that we don't know of.

In light of the above explanation for how sinfulness can hinder belief in God, we can see why it might be that there isn't a tight correlation between one's theistic-belief status and one's moral-behavior status. For, as we've just noted, though unbelief may be due to sinfulness in the ways described, God might give or delay giving evidence for properly basic belief in God on the basis of considerations that aren't correlated with how well-behaved the person is. And we aren't well placed to discern why there is unbelief in a particular case.

Moreover, appearances can be deceiving when we consider the moral goodness of those around us. It's natural to think that if God existed and were just and fair, he would judge people based on how well they did with the moral resources they were given. Consider two people, one of whom is given the opportunities of a naturally pleasant and cooperative personality and excellent moral training in her home and society while the other naturally has a more irritable and stubborn personality and is raised in a terrible home environment and influenced by a morally depraved society. It's easy to see how it might turn out that the person with the less fortunate background *might* be judged by God to have done much better, morally speaking, with what she was given than the more fortunate person; and this could be so even though the more fortunate person appears in many ways to behave better than the one with the less fortunate background. The point here is just that we really aren't able to tell how people are to be judged unless we can look into their hearts and backgrounds to see how well they are doing with what they were given, something we are rarely, if ever, able to do with much accuracy. This point is reinforced when we consider that motives matter tremendously. A person may perform many seemingly kind and generous actions but be doing them from motives of selfishness and pride. Again, it seems that if God existed and were to judge us fairly, he would take that into account. Because we can't always tell how good people are (in terms of their motives or how well they've done with what they've been given), we aren't well placed to draw conclusions about how belief in God is in fact correlated with goodness in people. There might be more of a correlation there than meets the eye. But even if there isn't (and Reformed Epistemologists certainly aren't committed to thinking there is), there are the other considerations noted above explaining why there needn't be any such correlation even if sinfulness (both inherited and willful) does go some way toward explaining why people don't believe in God.

> *Objection 5: Religious Disagreement as a Reason for Doubt.* In addition to the problem of people who don't believe in God, there's the problem of people who do believe in God but hold very different views about God. If each of them is relying on the sense of divinity and yet getting such different beliefs as a result, doesn't that give a person good reason to mistrust this alleged belief-forming ability in herself, especially given that many don't seem to have it at all? This problem is especially disconcerting when we consider that intelligent, thoughtful people who are sincerely seeking the truth discuss their disagreements about theism at length, explaining their evidence to each other, and yet continue to disagree.

There are three points to make in response to this objection.[17] The first has to do with the

principle on which the objection seems to be based. The principle focuses on disagreement with someone who is intellectually virtuous (let's say a person is intellectually virtuous when he or she is intelligent, thoughtful, and sincerely seeking the truth). The basic idea seems to be that when someone who is intellectually virtuous disagrees with you, especially if you recognize that this person is about as intellectually virtuous as you are, then you thereby have a good reason to give up your belief. We can call this principle on which this objection seems to rely "the Withholding Principle." It can be formulated as follows:

> *Withholding Principle:* If an intellectually virtuous person (whom you realize is about as intellectually virtuous as you are) disagrees with you on a controversial topic even after each of you has tried your best to disclose all your relevant evidence to the other (where this evidence falls short of being a knockdown proof that every intelligent thoughtful truth-seeker would accept), then to be rational each of you should give up your contentious belief on this topic and, instead, withhold judgment on the matter.

The problem is that intelligent, thoughtful truth-seekers disagree about the Withholding Principle itself. Some think you should withhold judgment whenever you're in the circumstances described in the principle; but others think that's not so. Moreover, those who endorse the Withholding Principle don't have a knockdown proof for the principle, one that every intelligent, thoughtful truth-seeker would accept. The result is that if the principle is true, then rationality requires you to reject it—since you can't *prove* the principle's truth to intelligent, thoughtful truth-seekers who think it's false. And that means that the principle is self-undermining, saying about itself that it's irrational to accept it.

A second thing worth pointing out is that the Reformed Epistemologist can distinguish internal rationality from external rationality, conceding the former but not the latter to those who disagree about religious matters. This distinction highlights the fact that there are two stages in the formation of noninferential beliefs based on experiential evidence rather than on arguments. The first stage is where the person comes to have the experiential evidence; the second stage is where the person bases the noninferential belief in question on that experiential evidence. The belief so based is *internally rational* if it is an appropriate (reasonable, sensible) response for a person to have to that sort of experiential evidence. One way to put this point is to say that, in the formation of an internally rational belief, all is going well *downstream* from (i.e., in response to) the experience on which it is based. The belief is *externally* rational if, in addition to being internally rational, it's also the case that all is going well *upstream* from that experience—that is to say, the experiential evidence arises in the right way in the person who has it and is not due, for example, to any sort of cognitive malfunction. With this distinction in hand, the Reformed Epistemologist can point out that those who disagree with her may well be internally rational even if they aren't externally rational. Thus, for example, a Jewish theist who denies the divinity of Christ and who endorses the Reformed Epistemologist approach[18] can say (i) the Christian is internally rational in believing, on the basis of her experiential evidence in support of the doctrine, that *Jesus is God incarnate* and (ii) the atheist who lacks any experiential evidence in support of belief in God is internally rational in believing there is no God. But the Jewish believer can go on to add that the Christian is externally *irrational* because it is only due to some sort of cognitive malfunction that the Christian has that experiential evidence supporting the doctrine that Jesus is God incarnate; likewise, the Jewish believer can say that the atheist is externally irrational in believing there is no God because it is only due to some sort of cognitive malfunction (affecting the sense of divinity) that the atheist lacks any experiential evidence in support of belief in God.[19] In this way, those who endorse the Reformed Epistemologist approach can recognize that there is a sense in which the intelligent, thoughtful truth-seekers who disagree with them may be rational—they may be internally rational. But the Reformed Epistemologist can also explain why her beliefs are epistemically better than the religious beliefs of

those who disagree—her own beliefs are externally rational whereas the beliefs of those who disagree with her are externally irrational.

The third point to make is that there seem to be examples where it is entirely appropriate to say—of intelligent, thoughtful truth-seekers whose views you disagree with but can't prove wrong—that their contrary views are externally irrational and mistaken whereas yours are externally rational and correct. Consider a case of moral disagreement about how to evaluate the following very disturbing behavior of Jack's. Jack takes pleasure in torturing and killing children, and he has found a way to do this without getting caught. I assume that you think this behavior of Jack's is morally wrong (extremely so). But you have a friend—who, like you, is an intelligent, thoughtful truth-seeker—who disagrees. She is a moral nihilist, someone who thinks it's false that Jack's behavior is morally wrong because there are no moral facts and nothing is morally wrong—or morally right. Like you, this friend is utterly disgusted by Jack's behavior and very strongly wishes that Jack wouldn't engage in it. But, unlike you, your friend doesn't think it is morally wrong. Now suppose you and your friend try to share with each other all your evidence for your opposing views. You point to your properly basic belief (based on some sort of intuitive seeming[20]) that actions of the sort Jack performs are morally wrong, which shows that moral nihilism is false. Your friend points to her properly basic belief (also based on some sort of intuitive seeming) in a key premise used to support her belief in moral nihilism—a view implying that Jack's behavior is neither morally wrong nor morally right. Unfortunately, even after you each try your best to share your relevant evidence, the disagreement persists. Does rationality require that, upon learning of this persistent disagreement with your friend, you should give up your belief that Jack's behavior is wrong? No. Instead of being moved to doubt the reliability of our own beliefs on this topic, we are sensibly moved to feel badly for the friend who disagrees with us and to be glad that we are fortunate enough not to lack the moral insight we have or to have the misleading moral views that our moral nihilist friend has.

Moreover, you can acknowledge that your moral nihilist friend may be *internally* rational in thinking Jack's behavior isn't wrong. After all, your friend has strong experiential evidence (i.e., *her* intuitive seemings) in support of that noninferential belief in the premise supporting moral nihilism. And your friend doesn't have the additional evidence you have which would outweigh this—namely, stronger experiential evidence (i.e., *your* intuitive seemings) in support of the view that Jack's behavior is wrong. You can concede that the right response to the evidence your friend has may be to believe in moral nihilism; so all may be going well downstream from your friend's experiential evidence. But you will insist that your friend isn't externally rational because something has gone wrong upstream from her experiential evidence. The very fact that moral nihilism seems intuitively more plausible to your friend than the claim that Jack's behavior is morally wrong shows that your friend is suffering from some sort of cognitive malfunction or problem, despite your friend's intelligence, thoughtfulness, and sincere interest in discovering the truth.[21]

The Reformed Epistemologist can, therefore, insist that, in the above scenario, it is appropriate for you to think Jack's behavior is wrong despite the fact that your intelligent, thoughtful, and truth-seeking friend continues to disagree with you about this, even after you share all your evidence. Moreover, it seems sensible for you to think that your friend is mistaken and externally irrational in her moral nihilist view that Jack's behavior is not wrong, though you could allow that that view of hers may be internally rational. And the Reformed Epistemologist can then point out that something similar is going on in the case of religious disagreement. Those who disagree with her religious beliefs might be *internally* rational in their beliefs in a different religion or against all religions. But the beliefs of those who disagree with her are both mistaken and *externally* irrational, despite the fact that they are held by intelligent, thoughtful truth-seekers. The point here is most definitely *not* that there is any connection between rejecting moral nihilism and endorsing a religious view. Rather, the point is that *if*—in the case of your belief that Jack's

behavior is wrong—you can sensibly think your friend is mistaken and externally irrational despite the fact that she's also an internally rational, intelligent, thoughtful truth-seeker, *then* there is, in principle, no bar to your sensibly thinking something similar of a friend in the case of a religious disagreement. In addition, the fact that you and your friend are both relying on intuitive seemings in arriving at your opposing views about the morality of Jack's behavior doesn't show that you rationally ought to give up all views you have that are based on intuitive seemings. Likewise, the fact that you and someone else differ in your views about God even though you both rely on the sense of divinity doesn't show that you rationally ought to give up all your views based on the sense of divinity.

Of course, it's true that the nontheist will be inclined to think that her nontheistic beliefs are externally rational and that it's the *theist* that is externally irrational. But why think this should be a problem for the theist? After all, your moral nihilist friend will be inclined to think that she is externally rational and that *you* are externally irrational in thinking Jack's behavior is morally wrong. Should the fact that the moral nihilist views you this way lead you to give up your view that you, not her, are the one that is holding the externally rational belief on this matter? It seems not. Even if your moral nihilist friend thinks that of you, it seems perfectly reasonable for you to continue holding your belief and thinking that you are externally rational in doing so.[22] In the same way, even if the nontheist will be inclined to view the theist as externally irrational, it doesn't follow that the theist should give up her view that she, and not the nontheist, is externally rational.

CONCLUSION

We've considered in this paper the Reformed Epistemologist's position that belief in God can be rational even if it is not based on any argument. We've tried to understand what her view is—the sense in which she thinks belief in God is more like belief in other people like belief in electrons. And we've considered several challenging objections to the Reformed Epistemologist's proposal. There is a lot more that could be said in explaining and trying to make plausible the Reformed Epistemologist's position, especially as it applies to religious beliefs other than belief in God. And more should also be said in response to the above objections and to others besides.[23] Nevertheless, I hope what has been said here helps the reader to appreciate why many people take this sort of view seriously.[24]

NOTES

1. What about your introspective beliefs about what you're thinking? What are they based on? They're based on your experience of having those thoughts. They aren't inferred from other beliefs of yours.
2. Confirmationalism is similar to Inferentialism; in fact, it seems to be one version of Inferentialism.
3. Notice, by the way, that the Evidentialist Thesis is different from Inferentialism. The latter says that *no* belief can be rational unless it is inferred from other rational beliefs; the former says merely that *belief in God* cannot be rational unless it is inferred from other beliefs.
4. Plantinga (1983:80).
5. For this reason, Plantinga suggests (1983:81-82) that it is beliefs about what God does or is like, not the belief that God exists, that are properly basic. But for simplicity's sake, I'll speak as if he and others think belief in God is properly basic.
6. Interestingly, current research in the cognitive science of religion has arrived at a similar conclusion in its attempts to explain the origins of

religious belief (which is widespread across times and cultures). One common theme in this research is that belief in God is a natural and instinctive reaction to a variety of stimuli; it is not the result of inferences or arguments. See Clark and Barrett (2010) for a summary of this research and a discussion of how it compares to the views of Reformed Epistemologists.

7. See Plantinga (2000) for one prominent example.
8. See Alston (1993) where this point is defended at length.
9. See, for example, Alston (1983).
10. For an extended explanation, from the perspective of cognitive science, of why this is so, see Barrett (2004).
11. Some might think that the analogy breaks down because vision can be cross-checked with other perceptual faculties such as sense of touch whereas we can't cross-check the sense of divinity in that same way. But see Alston (1991, ch. 5) for a discussion of how something like the sense of divinity might be subject to cross-checking.
12. Additional explanations for differences between properly basic religious belief and properly basic perceptual belief are given in Alston (1983) and Alston (1991).
13. Must one believe in a literal reading of early Genesis to believe that there was a time that humans fell into sin? And doesn't that literal reading conflict with the well-established theory of evolution? A literal reading of early Genesis does seem to conflict with evolutionary theory. But many religious people who accept the teachings of the Bible as authoritative think that (i) early Genesis is not best interpreted in that literal way, (ii) evolutionary theory is true, and (iii) one thing we can learn from early Genesis is that humanity fell into sin in some way or other, even if not in the precise way described there. For a discussion of how inherited sinfulness can be combined with an evolutionary account of human origin, see Collins (2003).
14. Is it fair for Gold to let the immoral choices of our ancestors cause us to have this inherited tendency? This is just an instance of the more general question: is it fair for God to let the wrong choices of some people negatively affect the lives of others? It's not implausible to think that, so long as God has some justifying reason for doing so (one that treats those negatively affected with love and respect), it is fair for God to do that.
15. How does selfishness and pride cause damage to the sense of divinity? This might happen in any number of ways: perhaps selfishness and pride make one less inclined to believe in a being to whom they owe worship and service; or perhaps the sense of divinity works by way of divine blessing that is withheld from those who are selfish and proud; or perhaps the damage to the sense of divinity caused by selfishness and pride comes about in some other way.
16. Recall that, although basic beliefs are ones that are not inferred from other beliefs, they might still be based on evidence of some kind.
17. These three points are developed at greater length in a different context in Bergmann (2009).
18. To endorse the Reformed Epistemologist approach is *not* to endorse the teachings of the Reformed tradition within Christendom or any other distinctively Christian doctrines. Rather, it's to say that belief in God (or other religious beliefs) can be properly basic.
19. This example is not meant to suggest that Jewish believers must or often do explain Christian and atheistic belief in this way. The point is just to give an illustration of how one *could* explain the beliefs of those with whom one disagrees on religious matters. Moreover, in explaining that Christian and atheistic belief involve cognitive malfunction, the Jewish believer needn't think the Christian and the atheist are insane or brain-damaged. Instead, the Jewish believer would just be saying that the sense of divinity isn't working property in the Christian or in the atheist.
20. An intuitive seeming that p is true is an experience of it seeming intuitively to you that p is true.
21. Again, the point isn't that your friend is insane or brain-damaged but just that the process by which her moral intuitions are formed is not working properly.
22. But won't the same hold for your moral nihilist friend? Won't the fact that you view her as externally irrational fail to show that she should give up her view that she, not you, is the one that is externally rational? That may be right. But if that's right, which of you *really is* externally rational? Presumably it could only be the one whose views on this matter are correct. Which one of you is

that? Unfortunately, that's a matter of dispute. But you (and many others) will sensibly think that your view (that Jack's behavior is morally wrong) is both true and externally rational. Questions parallel to those raised here can be raised in the case of disagreement over theistic belief and parallel answers can be given.

23. The main places to look for further discussion of these topics are Alston (1991) and Plantinga (2000).
24. Thanks to Jeffrey Brower and Michael Rea for helpful comments on earlier drafts of this paper.

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VII.B.4

Faith, Hope, and Doubt

LOUIS P. POJMAN

Louis Pojman (1935–2005), the original editor of this anthology, was professor of philosophy at the United States Military Academy, West Point, New York. In this selection, Pojman examines the relationship between belief and faith and argues that belief is not necessary for religious faith. One may not be able to believe in God because of an insufficiency of evidence, but one may still live in hope, committed to a theistic worldview.

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Many religious people have a problem because they doubt various credal statements contained in their religions. Propositional beliefs are often looked upon as necessary, though not sufficient, conditions for salvation. This doubt causes great anxiety and raises the question of the importance of belief in religion and in life in general. It is a question that has been neglected in the philosophy of religion and theology. In this paper I shall explore the question of the importance of belief as a religious attitude and suggest that there is at least one other attitude which may be adequate for religious faith, even in the absence of belief—that attitude being hope. I shall develop a concept of *faith as hope* as an alternative to the usual notion that makes a propositional belief that God exists a necessary condition for faith, as Plantinga implies in the following quotation. For simplicity's sake I shall concentrate on the most important proposition in Western religious creeds, which states that God exists (defined broadly as a benevolent, supreme Being, who is responsible for the creation of the universe), but the analysis could be applied *mutatis mutandis* to many other important propositions in religion (e.g., the Incarnation and the doctrine of the Trinity).

> It is worth noting, by way of conclusion, that the mature believer, the mature theist, does not typically accept belief in God tentatively, or hypothetically, or until something better comes along. Nor, I think, does he accept it as a conclusion from other things he believes; he accepts it as basic, as a part of the foundations of his noetic structure. The mature theist commits himself to belief in God: this means that he accepts belief in God as basic (Alvin Plantinga, "Is Belief in God Rational?").
>
> Entombed in a secure prison, thinking our situation quite hopeless, we may find unutterable joy in the information that there is, after all, the slimmest possibility of escape. Hope provides comfort, and hope does not always require probability. But we must be believe that what we hope for is at least possible (Gretchen Weirob in John Perry's *A Dialogue on Personal Identity and Immortality*).

INTRODUCTION

Traditionally, orthodox Christianity has claimed (1) that faith in God and Christ entails belief that God exists and that Christ is God incarnate and (2) that without faith we are damned to eternal hell. Thus doubt is an unacceptable propositional attitude. I argue that this thesis is misguided. One may doubt—that is, lack propositional belief—and yet have faith in God and Christ.

Let me preface my remarks with a confession. I am a religious doubter. Doubt has haunted my life as long as I can remember. My mother was a devout Roman. Catholic and my father an equally convinced rationalistic atheist. From an early age metaphysical tension produced in me a sense of wonder about religion. In the process of seeking a solution to this conflict, at the age of seven I became a Protestant. But doubts continued to haunt me. I recall coming home from my high school biology class, where we had studied naturalistic evolution, and weeping over the Bible, trying to reconcile evolution with the creation account in Genesis 1 through 3. Finally, when I was about 15, I went to a minister and confessed my doubts about God and Christianity. He listened carefully1 and said the situation was grave indeed. My eternal soul was at stake. Thus I must will myself to believe the message of Christianity. He quoted Romans 14:23: "He that doubteth is damned… for whatsoever is not of faith is sin." I was thrown into paroxysms of despair, for the attempt to get myself to believe that God exists or that Christ is perfect God and perfect man failed. Yet, I wanted to believe with all my heart, and some days I would find myself believing—only to wake up the next day with doubts. Hence, this preoccupation with faith and doubt. Hence, this paper.

I. IS BELIEF A NECESSARY CONDITION FOR SALVATION?

According to traditional Christianity, belief is a necessary condition for salvation. Paul says in Romans 10:10, "If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." In Hebrews 11 we are told that he who would please God must believe that He exists and is a rewarder of them that seek Him. The Athanasian Creed, an official doctrine of orthodox Christianity, states that salvation requires that one believe not only that God exists but also that God is triune and that Christ is perfect God and perfect man.[1] Most theologians and philosophers hold, at the least, that Christian faith requires propositional belief.[2] You can be judged and condemned according to your beliefs. As Romans 14:23 states, "He that doubteth is damned."

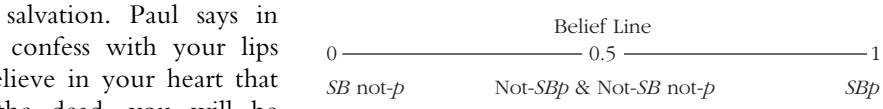
The basic argument goes Like this:

1. Faith in God through Christ is a necessary and sufficient condition for eternal salvation.
2. Belief that God exists is a necessary condition for faith.
3. Therefore belief is a necessary condition for salvation.
4. Therefore, doubt—the absence of belief—is an unacceptable attitude for salvation. No doubter will be saved.

Let us begin with some definitions:

1. **Belief**—an involuntary assenting of the mind to a proposition (a "yessing" to a proposition), a feeling of conviction about *p*—a *nonvolitional event.*

Consider the following belief line, defined in terms of subjective probability, the degree to which I think the proposition is probable. Let "*S*" stand for the believer or *subject,* "*B*" for *believe,* and "*p*" for the *proposition* in question. Then we can roughly locate our beliefs on the Belief Line. Greater than 0.5 equals various degrees of positive belief that *p*. Less than 0.5 equals various degrees of unbelief (or belief that the complement, "not-*p*" is true). 0.5 equals agnosticism or suspension of judgment.



2. **Acceptance**—deciding to include *p* in the set of propositions that you are willing to act on in certain contexts—*a volitional act.*

For example, in a *legal* context—say a jury, where there is insufficient evidence to convict an accused criminal—I may believe the subject is guilty but accept the proposition that he is not because the high standards of criminal justice have not been met; or in a *scientific* context—say, in testing the hypothesis that a formula will lead to the development of cold fusion—I may not believe the hypothesis I am testing is true but accept it for purposes of the experiment. Acceptance is different from belief in that we have some direct control over our acceptances, whereas we don't over our beliefs. We may or may not believe our acceptances and we may or may not accept our beliefs.

3. **Faith**—a commitment to something *X* (e.g., a person, hypothesis, religion, or worldview).

Faith is a *deep* kind of acceptance. An acceptance can be tentative. For example, when I make a marriage vow, I will to be faithful until death to my beloved, whether or not I believe that I will succeed. If my marriage vow were merely an acceptance, I suppose, it would be "I promise to be faithful to you for at least three years or until I lose interest in you." Faith involves commitment to its object. Under normal circumstances, it involves trusting and obeying the object of faith or doing what has the best chance of bringing its goals to fulfillment. It is a *volitional act.*

We may note at this point that the New Testament word *pistis* can be translated as either

belief or faith. The distinction is discernible only by the context.

II. PHENOMENOLOGY OF BELIEF

First we must understand what is involved in direct volitionalism (the act of acquiring a belief directly by willing to have it). The following features seem to be necessary and jointly sufficient conditions for a minimally interesting thesis of volitionalism:

1. The acquisition is a basic act. That is, some of our beliefs are obtained by acts of will directly upon being willed. Believing itself need not be an action. It may be dispositional. The volitionalist need not assert that all belief acquisitions occur via the fiat of the will, only that some of them do.
2. The acquisition must be done in full consciousness of what one is doing. The paradigm cases of acts of will are those in which the agent deliberates over two courses of action and decides on one of them. However, acts of will may take place with greater or lesser awareness. Here our notion of will is ambiguous between two meanings: "desiring" and "deciding." Sometimes by "act of will" we mean simply a desire that manifests itself in action, such as my being hungry and finding myself going to the refrigerator or tired and finding myself heading for bed. We are not always aware of our desires or intentions. There is a difference between this type of willing and the sort where we are fully aware of a decision to perform an act. If we obtain beliefs via the will in the weaker sense of desiring, of which we are only dimly aware, how can we ever be sure that it was really an act of will that caused the belief directly rather than the will simply being an accompaniment of the belief? That is, there is a difference between willing to believe and believing willingly. The latter case is not an instance of acquiring a belief by fiat of the will; only the former is. In order for the volitionalist to make his case, he must assert that the acts of will that produce beliefs are decisions of which he is fully aware.
3. The belief must be acquired independently of evidential considerations. That is, the evidence is not what is decisive in forming the belief. Perhaps the belief may be influenced by evidence (testimony, memory, inductive experience, and the like), so that the leap of faith cannot occur at just any time over any proposition, but only over propositions that have some evidence in their favor, though still inadequately supported by that evidence. They have an initial subjective probability of—or just under—0.5. According to Descartes, we ought to withhold belief in such situations where the evidence is exactly equal, whereas with Kierkegaard religious and existential considerations may justify leaps of believing even when the evidence is weighted against the proposition in question. William James prescribes such leaps only when the option is forced, living, and momentous. It may not be possible to volit* in the way Kierkegaard prescribes without a miracle of grace, as he suggests, but the volitionalist would have to assert that volitional belief goes beyond all evidence at one's disposal and hence the believer must acquire the belief through an act of choice that goes beyond evidential considerations. It is as though we place our volitional finger on the mental scales of evidence assessment, tipping the scale one way or the other.

In sum, then, a volit must be an act of will whereby I acquire a belief directly upon willing to have the belief, and it is an act made in full consciousness and independently of evidential considerations. The act of acquiring a belief may itself not be a belief but a way of moving from mere entertainment of a proposition to the disposition of having the belief. There is much to be said in

*__Volit__: (v.) to acquire a belief by choosing to have it or (n.) a belief acquired by exercising one's will. Voliting: obtaining beliefs by choosing to have them.

favor of volitionalism. It seems to extend the scope of human freedom to an important domain, and it seems to fit our experience o f believing where we are conscious of having made a choice. The teacher who sees that the evidence against a pupil's honesty is great and yet decides to trust him, believing that somehow he is innocent in spite of the evidence, and the theist who believes in God in spite of insufficient evidence, seem to be everyday examples confirming our inclination toward a volitional account of belief formation. We suspect, at times, that many of our beliefs, while not formed through *fully conscious* volits, have been formed through *half-aware* desires, for on introspection we note that past beliefs have been acquired in ways that could not have taken the evidence seriously into consideration. Volitionalism seems a good explanatory theory to account for a great deal of our cognitive experience.

Nonetheless, there are considerations which may make us question whether, upon reflection, volitionalism is the correct account of our situation. I will argue that choosing is not the natural way in which we acquire beliefs, and that whereas it may not be logically *im*possible that some people volit, it seems psychologically odd and even conceptually incoherent.

1. Beliefs-Are-Not-Chosen Argument against Volitionalism

Beliefs are not chosen but occur involuntarily as responses to states of affairs in the world. Beliefs are, to use Frank Ramsey's metaphor, mappings in the mind by which we steer our lives. As such, the states of affairs that beliefs represent exist independently of the mind; they exist independently of whether we want them to exist. Insofar as beliefs presume to represent the way the world is, and hence serve as effective guides to action, the will seems superfluous. Believing seems more like seeing than looking, falling than jumping, catching a cold than catching a ball, getting drunk than taking a drink, blushing than smiling, getting a headache than giving one to someone else. Indeed, this involuntary, passive aspect seems true on introspection of most propositional attitudes: anger, envy, fearing, suspecting, and doubting—although not necessarily of imagining or entertaining a proposition, where an active element may often be present.

When a person acquires a belief, the world forces itself upon him. Consider perceptual beliefs. If I am in a normal physiological condition and open my eyes, I cannot help but see certain things—for example, this piece of white paper in front of me. It seems intuitively obvious that I don't have to choose to have a belief that I see this piece of white paper before I believe I see it. Here "seeing is believing." This is not to deny a certain active element in perception. I can explore my environment—focus on certain features and turn from others. I can direct my perceptual mechanism, but once I do this the perceptions I obtain come of themselves whether or not I will to have them. I may even have an aversion to white paper and not want to have such a perception, but I cannot help having it. Likewise, if I am in a normal physiological state and someone nearby turns on loud music, I hear it. I cannot help believing that I hear it. Belief is forced on me.[3]

2. Logic-of-Belief Argument against Volitionalism

The notion of volitional believing involves a conceptual confusion; it is broadly speaking a logical mistake. There is something incoherent in stating that one can obtain or sustain a belief in full consciousness *simply* by a basic act of the will—that is, purposefully disregarding the evidence connection. This strategy does not altogether rule out the possibility of voliting when one is less than fully conscious (although one is not truly voliting if one is not fully conscious), but it asserts that when full consciousness enters, the "belief" will wither from one's noetic structure. One cannot believe in full consciousness "that p and I believe that p for other than truth considerations." If you understand that to believe that p is to believe that p is true and that *wishing never makes it so*, then there is simply no

epistemic reason for believing *p*. Suppose I say that I believe I have $1,000,000 in my checking account, and suppose that when you point out to me that there is no reason to believe this, I respond, "I know that there is not the slightest reason to suppose that there is $1,000,000 in my checking account, but I believe it anyway, simply because I want to." If you were convinced that I was not joking, you would probably conclude that I was insane or didn't know what I was talking about.

If I said that I somehow find myself believing that I have $1,000,000 but don't know why, you might suppose that there is a memory trace of my having deposited $1,000,000 into my account or evidence to that effect in the guise of an intuition that caused my belief. But if I denied that and said—"No, I don't have any memory trace of depositing of $1,000,000 in my account; in fact, I'm sure that I never deposited $1,000,000 in the account; I just find it good to believe that it's there, so I have chosen to believe it,"—you would be stumped.

The point is that because beliefs are just about the way the world is and are made true (or false) depending on the way the world is, it is a confusion to believe that any given belief is true simply on the basis of being its being willed. As soon as the believer—assuming that he understands these basic concepts—discovers the basis of his belief as being caused by the will alone, he must drop the belief. In this regard, saying "I believe that *p*, but I believe it only because I want to believe it," has the same incoherence attached to it as G. E. Moore's paradoxical, "I believe *p* but it is false that *p*." Structurally, neither is a strictly logical contradiction, but both show an incoherence that might be broadly called contradictory.

If this reasoning is sound, then we cannot be judged for our beliefs because beliefs are not actions. That is, if *ought* implies *can*, and we cannot acquire beliefs directly by choosing them, we cannot be judged according to our beliefs. Of course, we can be judged by our actions and by how well we have investigated the evidence and paid attention to the arguments on the various sides of the issue. That leads to the matter of the ethics of belief.

III. THE ETHICS OF BELIEF

Of course we can obtain beliefs indirectly by willing to have them. I can desire to believe that I am innocent of an unjust act against my neighbor—say directing my drain pipes to drain onto his property. I can bring to mind all the nasty things my neighbor may have done and use autosuggestion to convince myself that I am justified in redirecting may drain pipes toward his property, thus bringing about the desired belief. This manipulation of the mind is immoral. At the least, there is a strong case against indirect volitionalism.

W. K. Clifford has given a classic absolutist injunction against voliting: "It is wrong always, everywhere and for anyone to believe anything on insufficient evidence." This may have the sound of too "robustious pathos in the voice" as James notes, but it may sound hyperbolic only because we have not taken truth seriously enough. Nevertheless, I defend the principle of an ethic of belief only as a *prima facie* moral principle—one which can be overridden by other moral principles—but which has strong presumptive force.[4]

Why do we want true justified beliefs— beliefs based on the best evidence available?

We want true justified beliefs because beliefs make up our road map of life; they guide our desires. If I believe that I can fly and jump out of the top of the Empire State Building to take a short cut to Columbia University, I'm likely to be disappointed. If I want to live a long life and believe that living on alcohol and poison ivy will enable me to do so, I will not attain my desire.

The importance of having well-justified beliefs is connected with truth-seeking in general. We believe that these two concepts are closely related, so the best way to assure ourselves of having true beliefs is to seek to develop one's belief-forming mechanisms in such ways as to become good judges of various types of evidence, attaining the best possible justification of our beliefs. The value of having the best possible justified beliefs can be defended on both deontological grounds with regard to the individual and on teleological or utilitarian grounds with regard to society as a

whole. The deontological argument is connected with our notion of autonomy. To be an autonomous person is to have at one's disposal a high degree of warranted beliefs upon which to base one's actions. There is a tendency to lower one's freedom of choice as one lowers the repertoire of well-justified beliefs regarding a plan of action, and because it is a generally accepted moral principle that it is wrong to lessen one's autonomy or personhood, it is wrong to lessen the degree of justification of one's beliefs on important matters. Hence, there is a general presumption against beliefs by *willing* to have them. Cognitive voliting is a sort of lying or cheating in that it enjoins believing against what has the best guarantee of being the truth. When a friend or doctor lies to a terminally ill patient about her condition, the patient is deprived of the best evidence available for making decisions about her limited future. She is being treated less than fully autonomously. Whereas a form of paternalism may sometimes be justified, there is always a presumption against it and in favor of truth-telling. We even say that the patient has a *right* to know what the evidence points to. Cognitive voliting is a sort of lying to oneself, which, as such, decreases one's own freedom and personhood. It is a type of doxastic suicide that may be justified only in extreme circumstances. If there is something intrinsically wrong about lying (malting it *prima facie* wrong), then there is something intrinsically wrong with cognitive voliting, either directly or indirectly. Whether it be Pascal, William James, John Henry Newman, or Søren Kierkegaard, all prescriptive volitionalists (consciously or not) seem to undervalue the principle of truthfulness and its relationship to personal autonomy.

The utilitarian, or teleological, argument against cognitive voliting is fairly straightforward. General truthfulness is a *desideratum* without which society cannot function. Without it language itself would not be possible because it depends on faithful use of words and sentences to stand for appropriately similar objects and states of affairs. Communication depends on a general adherence to accurate reporting. More specifically, it is very important that a society have true beliefs with regard to important issues so that actions that are based on beliefs have a firm basis.

The doctor who cheated her way through medical school and who, as a consequence, lacks appropriate beliefs about certain symptoms may endanger a patient's health. A politician who fails to take into consideration the amount of pollutants being discharged into the air or water by large corporations that support his candidacy may endanger the health and even the lives of his constituents. Even the passer-by who gives wrong information to a stranger who asks for directions may seriously inconvenience the stranger. Here Clifford's point about believing against the evidence is well taken, despite its all-too-robustious tone: the shipowner who failed to make necessary repairs on his vessel and "chose" to believe that the ship was seaworthy is guilty of the deaths of the passengers. "He had no right to believe on such evidence as was before him." It is because beliefs are action-guiding maps by which we steer and, as such, tend to cause actions, that society has a keen interest in our having the best justified beliefs possible regarding important matters.

Some people object to my model of the verific person, the truth-seeker, as being neutral on the matter of religion. They point out that the issue is too important to permit neutrality as an appropriate attitude. Let me clear this up by making a distinction between *neutrality* and *impartiality*. The verific person is not neutral but impartial. For a proper model of the verific person—one seeking to proportion his or her beliefs to the strength of the evidence—consider the referee in an Army vs. Notre Dame football game. The veterans of foreign wars and Army alumni will tend to be biased toward Army, considering close calls against "their" team by the referee as clear instances of poor officiating—even of injustice. Roman Catholics throughout the nation will tend to be biased toward Notre Dame, seeing close calls against "their" team by the referee as clear instances of poor officiating—even of injustice. The neutral person is the atheist pacifist in the crowd—the one who doesn't care who wins the game. But

the impartial person is the referee who, knowing that his wife has just bet their family fortune on the underdog, Notre Dame, still manages to call a fair game. He is able to separate his concerns about his financial security from his ability to discern the right calls in appropriate situations. The verific person is one who can be trusted to reach sound judgments where others are driven by bias, prejudice, and self-interest.

If we have a moral duty not to volit but to seek the truth impartially and passionately, then we ought not to obtain religious beliefs by wiling to have them; instead we should follow the best evidence we can get.

IV. HOPE AS THE PROPER RELIGIOUS PROPOSITIONAL ATTITUDE FOR DOUBTERS

For those who find it impossible to believe directly that God exists and who follow an ethic of belief acquisition (voliting), hope may be a sufficient substitute for belief. I can hope that God exists without believing that He does.

Let us first analyze the concept of hope in order to determine whether it is a viable option. Consider some examples of hope.

1. Ryan hopes that he will get an A in his philosophy course.
2. Mary hopes that Tom will marry her.
3. Susan hopes that Happy Dancer will win the Kentucky Derby next week.
4. Steve hopes that the Cubs won their game yesterday.
5. Although Bill desires a cigarette, he hopes he will not give into his desire.
6. Christy hopes her saying "no" to Ron's proposal of marriage is the right decision.

If we look closely at these examples of hoping, we can pick out salient features of the concept. First of all, hope involves *belief in the possibility* that a state of affairs obtains or can obtain. We cannot hope for what we believe to be impossible. If Ryan hopes to get an A in philosophy, he must believe that it is possible to do so, and if Mary hopes that Tom will marry her, she must deem it possible. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines *hope* as an "expectation of something desired," but this seems too strong. Expectation implies belief that something will occur, whereas we may hope even when we do not expect the object to obtain, as when Mary hopes that Tom will marry her or when Steve hopes the languishing Cubs won their game against the awesome Atlanta Braves. Susan may hope that Happy Dancer will win the race even though she doesn't expect that to happen. Thus belief that the object of desire will obtain does not seem necessary for hope. It is enough that the hoper believe that the proposition in question is possible, though not necessarily probable (it has a subjective probability of greater than 0 but not necessarily greater than 0.5).

Second, hope precludes certainty. Mary is not certain that Tom will marry her, and Susan is not certain that Happy Dancer will win the race. There must be an apparent possibility that the state of affairs will not obtain. We would think it odd to say, "Steve knows that the Cubs won the game yesterday, for he was there, but he still hopes that the Cubs won the game." As Paul wrote in Romans 8:24, "For hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man sees, why does he yet hope for?" Hope entails uncertainty, a subjective probability index of greater than 0 but less than 1.

Third, hope entails desire (or a pro-attitude) for the state of affairs in question to obtain or for the proposition to be true. In all of the preceding examples a propositional content can be seen as the object of desire. The states of affairs envisaged evoke a pro-attitude. The subject wants some proposition p to be true. It matters not whether the state of affairs is past (case 4) or present (cases 5 and 6) or future (cases 1 through 3), although it generally turns out, because of the role hope plays in goal orientation, that the state of affairs will be a future situation.

Fourth, the desire involved in hoping must be motivational—greater than mere *wishing*. I may

wish to live forever, but if I don't think it is sufficiently probable or possible, it will not serve as a spring for action. I can wish, but not hope, for what I believe to be impossible—as when I wish I were twenty-years-old again. If I hope for some state of affairs to occur, under appropriate circumstances I will do what I can to bring it about—as Ryan will study hard to earn his A in philosophy. Bill's hope that he will not give in to his first-order desire for a cigarette will lead him to strive to reject the weed now being offered to him.

In this regard, hoping involves a willingness to run some risk because of the positive valuation of the object in question. Consider case 3 (Susan hopes Happy Dancer will win the Kentucky Derby). For this to be the case, Susan must be disposed to act in some way as to manifest trust in Happy Dancer. She may bet on the horse without believing he will win the race, and the degree to which she hopes Happy Dancer will win the race may be reflected in how much she is willing to bet.

Fifth, hoping—unlike believing—is typically under our direct control. I may decide to hope that the Cubs will win, but it doesn't make sense to decide to believe that they will win. I hear that my enemy is suffering and find myself hoping that he will suffer great harm. Then I reflect that this *schadenfreude* is a loathsome attitude and decide to change it (to hoping he will suffer only as he deserves!). I may or may not be able to give up a hope, but, unlike a belief, normally I am able to alter the degree to which I hope for something. I may find that I am hoping too strongly that I will get an A—I notice that I am preoccupied with it to the point of distraction—and decide to invest less hope in that goal. It seems that the degree of hope has something to do with cost-benefit analysis about the pay-off involved in obtaining a goal. The greater the combination of the (perceived) probability of p obtaining and the value to me of its obtaining, the more likely I am to hope for p. So reflection on the cost-benefits of p will affect hope. Still, I can exercise some voluntary control over my hopes in a way that I can't over beliefs.

Sixth, hoping—like wanting—is evaluative in a way that believing is not. We may have morally unacceptable hopes, but not morally unacceptable beliefs. Consider the difference between:

> i. "I believe that we are heading toward World War III in which nuclear weapons will destroy the world."

and

> ii. "I hope that we are heading toward World War III in which nuclear weapons will destroy the world."

Beliefs may be formed through a culpable lack of attention and thus have a moral dimension, but a belief itself cannot be judged moral or immoral. This is applicable to beliefs about racial or gender differences. Sometimes being a "racist" or a "sexist" is defined by holding that people of different races or genders have different native cognitive abilities. The inference is then made that because racism and sexism are immoral, anyone holding these beliefs is immoral. Such beliefs may be false, but unless the believer has obtained the belief through immoral activities, there is nothing immoral in having such beliefs, as such. So either racism and sexism should be defined differently (as immoral actions) or the charge of immorality should be dropped (if it is simply the cognitive feature that is in question).

Finally, we must make a distinction between ordinary hope (such as hoping you will receive a high grade) and deep hope. Consider Susan's situation as she hopes that Happy Dancer will win. She may believe that horse has only a l-in-10 chance of winning the Kentucky Derby, but she may judge this to be significantly better than the official odds of 100-to-l against him. Suppose that she has only $10 but wants desperately to enter a professional program that costs $1,000. She has no hope of getting the money elsewhere, and if she bets on Happy Dancer and wins, she will get the required amount. Because she believes that the real odds are better than the official odds and that winning will enable her to get into the professional program, she bets her $10 on the horse. She commits herself to Happy Dancer although she never *believes* that he will win. We might call such cases where one is disposed to risk something significant on the

possibility of the proposition's being true *deep* or *profound* hope. When the risk involves something of enormous value, we might call it *desperate* hope.

We conclude, then, that *hoping is distinguished from believing* in that it may involve a strong volitional or affective aspect in a way that believing does not and that, as such, it is subject to moral assessment in a way that believing is not. Hoping is desiderative, but it is more inclined to action than mere wishing. Hope may be ordinary or profound.

Let us apply this distinction to religious faith. Can hope serve as a *type of faith* in a religion like Christianity without the belief that the object of faith exists? Let me tell a story to help focus our discussion.

Suppose that when Moses decides to launch a pre-emptive strike against the Amalekites in obedience to the command of Yahweh (in the book of Exodus in the Hebrew Bible), his brother Aaron doubts whether such a pre-emptive strike is morally right, let alone the command of God. Aaron is inclined to make a treaty with the neighboring tribe. He doubts whether Yahweh has revealed such a command to Moses, doubts whether God appeared to Moses in the burning bush, and wonders whether Moses is hallucinating. When Moses points out that God annihilated the Egyptian pharaoh's army, Aaron is inclined to see that deed as merely the army's getting caught in a flash flood. When Moses offers the fact that a cloud pillar leads them by day and that a pillar of fire leads them by night, Aaron entertains the supposition that the clouds are natural phenomena and the appearance of "fire" is simply the effect of the rays of the setting sun on the distant sands. Aaron is agnostic about both the existence of Yahweh and His "revelation" to Moses. Although he cannot bring himself to overcome his doubts, he opts for the better story. He decides to accept the proposition that Yahweh exists and has revealed himself to Moses, and so he lives according to this hypothesis as an experimental faith. He assists Moses in every way in carrying out the campaign. He proclaims the need for his people to fight against the enemy, helps hold up Moses's arms during the battle, and urges the warriors on to victory in the name of God.

True, Aaron may not act out of spontaneous abandon as Moses does. On the other hand, his scrupulous doubt may help him to notice problems and evidence that might otherwise be neglected and to which the true believer may be impervious. This awareness may signal danger that may be avoided, thus saving the tribe from disaster. Doubt may have as many virtues as belief, although they may be different.

Moses is the true believer, whereas Aaron—the doubter—lives in hope, *profound* hope. He believes that it would be a good thing if Moses's convictions are true and that it is possible that they are true, and so he decides to throw in his lot with his brother, living as if God exists and has revealed his plans to Moses.

The point may be put more simply. Suppose you are fleeing a murderous gang of desperados—perhaps members of the Mafia—who are bent on your annihilation. You come to the edge of a cliff that overlooks a yawning gorge. You find a rope spanning the gorge—tied to a tree on the cliff on the opposite side—and a man who announces that he is a tight-rope walker and can carry you over the gorge on the rope. He doesn't look as if he can do it, so you wonder whether he is insane or simply overconfident. He takes a few steps on the rope to assure you that he can balance himself. You agree that it's possible that he can navigate the rope across the gorge, but you have grave doubts about whether he can carry you. But your options are limited. Soon your pursuers will be upon you. You must decide. Whereas you still don't believe that the "tight-rope walker" can save you, you decide to trust him. You place your faith in his ability, climb on his back, close your eyes (so as not to look down into the yawning gorge), and do your best to relax and obey his commands in adjusting your body as he steps onto the rope. You have a profound, even *desperate*, hope that he will be successful.

This is how I see religious hope functioning in the midst of doubt. The verific person recognizes the tragedy of existence, that unless there is a God

and life after death, the meaning of life is less than glorious, but if there is a God and life after death, the meaning of that life is glorious. There is just enough evidence to whet his or her appetite, to inspire hope, a decision to live according to theism or Christianity as an experimental hypothesis, but not enough evidence to cause belief. So keeping his or her mind open, the hoper opts for the better story, gets on the back of what may be the Divine Tight-Rope Walker, and commits to the pilgrimage. Perhaps the analogy is imperfect, for it may be possible to get off the tight-rope walker's back in actual existence and to get back to the cliff. Perhaps the Mafia men make a wrong turn or take their time searching for you. Still, the alternative to the tight-rope walker is not exactly welcoming: death and the extinction of all life in a solar system that will one day be extinguished. We may still learn to enjoy the fruits of finite love and resign ourselves to a final, cold fate. As Russell wrote:

> Brief and powerless is man's life; on him and all his race the slow, sure doom falls pitiless and dark. Blind to good and evil, reckless of destruction, omnipotent matter rolls on its relentless way; for man, condemned today to lose his dearest, tomorrow himself to pass through the gate of darkness, it remains only to cherish, ere yet the blow fall, the lofty thoughts that ennoble his little day; disdaining the coward terrors of the slave of Fate, to worship at the shrine that his own hands have built; undismayed by the empire of chance, to preserve a mind free from the wanton tyranny that rules his outward life; proudly defiant of the irresistible forces that tolerate, for a moment, his knowledge and his condemnation, to sustain alone, a weary but unyielding Atlas, the world that his own ideals have fashioned despite the trampling march of unconscious power.[5]

But if there is some evidence for something better, something eternal, someone benevolent who rules the universe and will redeem the world from evil and despair, isn't it worth betting on that worldview? Shouldn't we, at least, consider getting on the back of the tight-rope walker and letting him carry us across the gorge?

CONCLUSION

1. What's so great about belief? Note that the Epistle of James tells us that belief is insufficient for salvation, for "the devils believe and also tremble" (James 2:19). Note too that the verse quoted by the minister to me as a 15-year-old (Romans 14:23) was taken out of context. The passage reads: "For meat destroy not the work of God. All things are pure; but it is evil for that man who eateth with offense. It is good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor any thing whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak. Hast thou faith? Have it to thyself before God. Happy is he that condemneth not himself in that thing which he alloweth. And he that doubteth is damned if he eats, because he eateth not of faith, for whatsoever is not of faith is sin." The passage is not about one's eternal salvation but about eating meat previously offered to idols. Paul is saying, "Let your conscience be your guide here. If your conscience condemns you—if you have doubts about this act—then refrain!"
2. Can we be judged (condemned) for our beliefs? No, not for our beliefs, as such, for they are not things we choose, so we're not (directly) responsible for them; we can be judged only according to what we have responsibly done (ought implies can).
   a. We can be judged only for things over which we have control.
   b. We only have control over our actions.

c. Beliefs are not actions.

d. Therefore we cannot be judged for our beliefs, but only for our actions.

Although we have some *indirect* control over acquiring beliefs, we ought not violate the ethics of belief and force ourselves to believe more than the evidence warrants.

3. We can be judged by how faithful we have been to the light we have, to how well we have lived, including how well we have impartially sought the truth. We may adopt theism and/or Christianity as experimental faith, living by hope in God, yet keeping our minds open to new evidence that may confirm or disconfirm our decision.

If this argument is sound, the people who truly have faith in God are those who live with moral integrity within their lights—some unbelievers will be in heaven and some religious, true believers, who never doubted, will be absent. My supposition is that they will be in purgatory. What is purgatory? It is a large philosophy department where people who compromised the truth and the good will be taught to think critically and morally, according to the ethics of belief. The faculty, God's servants in truth-seeking, will be David Hume, John Stuart Mill, Voltaire, Immanuel Kant, and Bertrand Russell.

NOTES

1. Whoever desires to be saved must above all things hold the Catholic faith. Unless a man keeps it in its entirety, inviolate, he will assuredly perish eternally. Now this is the Catholic faith, that we worship one God in Trinity and Trinity in unity without either confusing the persons or dividing the substance…. So he who desires to be saved should think thus of the Trinity.

   It is necessary, however, to eternal salvation that he should also faithfully believe in the Incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ. Now the right faith is that we should believe and confess that our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is equally both God and man.

   This is the Catholic faith. Unless a man believes it faithfully and steadfastly, he will not be able to be saved. (Athanasian Creed).

2. Most theologians and Christian philosophers hold that belief is a necessary condition for faith. For example, Alvin Plantinga writes, "The mature theist does not typically accept belief in God tentatively or hypothetically or until something better comes along. Nor, I think, does he accept it as a conclusion from other things he believes; he accepts it as basic, as a part of the foundations of his noetic structure. The mature theist commits himself to belief in God: this means that he accepts belief in God as basic." ("Is Belief in God Rational" in *Rationality and Religious Belief*, ed. C. F. Delaney, Notre Dame University Press, 1979, p. 27). See Reading VII.A.2 in this book.

3. Much more needs to be said than can be said here. I have developed a fuller argument against direct volitionalism in my book *What Can We Know?* (Wadsworth Publishing Co., 2001).

4. Many philosophers have criticized Clifford's advice as being self-referentially incoherent. It doesn't have sufficient evidence for itself. But, suitably modified, I think this problem can be overcome. We can give reasons why we ought generally to try to believe according to the evidence, and if these reasons are sound, then we do have sufficient evidence for accepting the principle. See W. K. Clifford, Reading VII.A.2 in this book.

5. Bertrand Russell, "A Free Man's Worship," pp. 104–116 in his *Why I Am Not A Christian and Other Essays on Religion and Related Subjects*, edited by Paul Edwards (Simon & Schuster, 1967) reading X.3 in this book.

PART VIII



Science, Religion, and Evolution

WHAT IS THE RELATIONSHIP between science and religion? Many think that the relationship is one of conflict: Scientific theories, and the modern scientific worldview, contradict the claims of religion, and so religious believers ought to approach science with a wary and skeptical eye. Others, however, think that the relationship must necessarily be one of concord. All truth is God's truth, some are inclined to say; thus, to the extent that science is (as it seems to be) a way of discovering the truth about the world, it cannot possibly come into conflict with religious truth (whatever the religious truth might happen to be).

The tension (or alleged tension) between science and religion is interesting and important for at least three interconnected reasons. First, scientific and religious beliefs both make a big difference in how we live our lives and in how we interact with others. Medical disasters, environmental disasters, mechanical disasters, new vaccines, better telecommunication equipment, and so on are all caused at least in part by people's beliefs in the domain covered by science. People have been persecuted, tortured, and killed as a result of other people's religious beliefs. People have also benefited from mind-boggling generosity as a result of such beliefs; and, according to many religious believers, one's very eternal destiny depends critically on one's own personal religious beliefs. Second, the methods of science have established an impressive and publicly measurable track record of success as a way of investigating their domain. No method of forming religious belief can make the same claim. Third, taken as a whole, the fields of theology and religion are a lot like philosophy: a mess of disagreement on matters big and small, with arguments typically founded on little more than what seems "obviously to be true" or on what seems to have been "revealed by God (or the gods)." So it is deeply worrisome when science and religion appear to conflict because that seems to suggest that a lot of people (either religious believers of a particular sort or else the scientific establishment) are forming and propagating false beliefs on topics that matter quite a lot. Consider, in this vein, W. K. Clifford's attitude (expressed in essay VII.A.2) toward people like the negligent shipowner, who quite literally put the lives of others in jeopardy because of their

sloppy belief-forming habits. Neither religion nor science is to be treated lightly, and any apparent conflict between them is rightly very disturbing.

For this reason, questions about the relationship between science and religion are receiving a lot of attention in the scientific, philosophical, and theological literature and also in the popular media. Although many questions in this general area deserve our consideration, in the present section we shall focus on just two. (a) What is the nature of the relationship between science and religion? Are they disparate disciplines, irremediably in conflict, or somehow partners in a common quest? (b) Is it the case that, as those in the so-called "Intelligent Design Movement" allege, good science in fact points toward the existence of God or some other sort of intelligent designer? These questions are taken up, respectively, in each of the two sections that follow.

VIII.A THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SCIENCE AND RELIGION

In his 1989–1990 Gifford Lectures, Ian Barbour proposed what has become a widely influential taxonomy of the ways in which science and religion might be thought to relate to one another:

1. *Conflict:* Science and religion investigate common questions, but their theories contradict one another and so compete with one another for our acceptance.
2. *Independence:* Science and religion are separate disciplines addressing distinct, nonoverlapping subjects.
3. *Dialogue:* Science and religion share some common methods and presuppositions and can fruitfully employ one another's concepts in developing their respective theories.
4. *Integration:* Science and religion are partners in a common quest for a comprehensive understanding of the world, and the theories and results of science can be brought to bear in fruitful ways on the development of theories in theology, and vice versa.

There has been much discussion about whether this fourfold classification is adequate to capture all of the different ways in which science might be thought to relate to religion. (Some have proposed eight- or ninefold classification schemes.) For our purposes, however, it is perhaps more useful to collapse Barbour's taxonomy into just two options: independence and overlap. Some people think that science and religion investigate a common subject matter. Those who do will see at least the possibility for conflict, but they might also hope for a more fruitful sort of interaction—what Barbour might call dialogue or integration. Others think that science and religion investigate wholly different questions. On this view, any apparent conflict is simply the result of misunderstanding the nature and limits of science, the nature and bounds of religion, or both.

We begin with a selection in which Richard Dawkins forcefully articulates an antireligious version of the idea that science and religion overlap in their subject matter but are irremediably in conflict with one another. On Dawkins's

view, both science and religion aim at telling us true stories about things like the origin of life, but one of the main differences is that science pursues this aim in a rational and objective way whereas religion does not. The main vice of religion, Dawkins says, is *faith*, and this, he thinks, is a vice that science wholly avoids. Thus, when the theories of science and religion conflict—as they inevitably do, on his view—the scientific theories are always to be preferred precisely because they, unlike religious theories, are grounded in evidence rather than faith. There are a lot of questions that one might want to raise about Dawkins's essay, but two rather important ones seem to be these: (a) Is it really true that there is no faith at all involved in believing a scientific theory? and (b) Why is "rational moral *philosophy*" (which Dawkins recommends at the end of his essay as a better alternative to religion) any better off evidentially speaking than religion?

Whereas Dawkins regards religion ultimately as a virulent influence in the world—he characterizes it as a "brain virus"—Stephen Jay Gould regards it as valuable and important as long as it stays within the bounds of its proper *magisterium* (teaching authority). In our second reading in this section, Gould articulates his view that science and religion constitute nonoverlapping realms of teaching authority. Broadly speaking, the proper domain of science is matters of fact, the proper domain of religion is matters of value, and as long as each confines its claims to subjects falling within its proper domain, both will make valuable contributions to human life and human understanding, and there will not even be the appearance of conflict between the two.

Gould, an important and influential paleontologist, speaks as a representative of the magisterium of science, and he cites Pope John Paul II as a representative of the magisterium of religion who shares his view that science and religion do not overlap. However, we have included as our third reading in this section excerpts from two essays by Pope John Paul II that together seem to provide an excellent contrast both to Dawkins's suggestion that conflict is inevitable (religion being, by and large, just bad science) and to Gould's suggestion that the two modes of inquiry concern themselves with wholly nonoverlapping domains. In the first essay, "Lessons from the Galileo Case," John Paul II urges the view that there can be no *true conflict* between science and religion because both are simply different branches of inquiry cooperating in the task of discovering the total truth about the world. To whatever extent there seems to be conflict, then, either science has erred in its reflections upon the relevant empirical data or else religion has gone astray in its understanding of the meaning of divine revelation. However, we can and sometimes do find points of apparent conflict. Thus, for example, in his "Message on Evolution to the Pontifical Academy of Sciences," he notes that certain ways of developing evolutionary theory will contradict Catholic doctrines about the soul and about original sin. In those cases, he argues, Catholic doctrine is to be preferred. But here, too, caution on both sides is required: The church should look carefully to see whether its understanding of divine revelation has been articulated in the most perspicuous manner or whether the apparent conflict might be avoided by a clearer statement of the relevant doctrines. And one must also be careful to distinguish between those aspects of scientific theory that are virtually undeniable in light of the empirical data and those that, in one way or another, represent rationally contestable extrapolations from the data.

VIII.A.1

Is Science A Religion?

RICHARD DAWKINS

Richard Dawkins (1941–) is professor of biology at Oxford University and the author of several important books, including The Selfish Gene *(1976),* The Blind Watchmaker *(1986), and* The God Delusion *(2006). He argues that science is a far more defensible process than religion for securing truth.*

It is fashionable to wax apocalyptic about the threat to humanity posed by the AIDS virus, "mad cow" disease, and many others, but I think a case can be made that *faith* is one of the world's great evils, comparable to the smallpox virus but harder to eradicate.

Faith, being belief that isn't based on evidence, is the principle vice of any religion. And who, looking at Northern Ireland or the Middle East, can be confident that the brain virus of faith is not exceedingly dangerous? One of the stories told to young Muslim suicide bombers is that martyrdom is the quickest way to heaven—and not just heaven but a special part of heaven where they will receive their special reward of 72 virgin brides. It occurs to me that our best hope may be to provide a kind of "spiritual arms control": send in specially trained theologians to deescalate the going rate in virgins.

Given the dangers of faith—and considering the accomplishments of reason and observation in the activity called science—I find it ironic that, whenever I lecture publicly, there always seems to be someone who comes forward and says, "Of course, your science is just a religion like ours. Fundamentally, science just comes down to faith, doesn't it?"

Well, science is not religion and it doesn't just come down to faith. Although it has many of religion's virtues, it has none of its vices. Science is based upon verifiable evidence. Religious faith not only lacks evidence, its independence from evidence is its pride and joy, shouted from the rooftops. Why else would Christians wax critical of doubting Thomas? The other apostles are held up to us as exemplars of virtue because faith was enough for them. Doubting Thomas, on the other hand, required evidence. Perhaps he should be the patron saint of scientists.

One reason I receive the comment about science being a religion is because I believe in the fact of evolution. I even believe in it with passionate conviction. To some, this may superficially look like faith. But the evidence that makes me believe in evolution is not only overwhelmingly strong; it is freely available to anyone who takes the trouble to read up on it. Anyone can study the same evidence that I have and presumably come to the same

Transcript of a speech delivered to the American Humanist Association, accepting the award of 1996 Humanist of the Year.

conclusion. But if you have a belief that is based solely on faith, I can't examine your reasons. You can retreat behind the private wall of faith where I can't reach you.

Now in practice, of course, individual scientists do sometimes slip back into the vice of faith, and a few may believe so single-mindedly in a favorite theory that they occasionally falsify evidence. However, the fact that this sometimes happens doesn't alter the principle that, when they do so, they do it with shame and not with pride. The method of science is so designed that it usually finds them out in the end.

Science is actually one of the most moral, one of the most honest disciplines around—because science would completely collapse if it weren't for a scrupulous adherence to honesty in the reporting of evidence. (As James Randi has pointed out, this is one reason why scientists are so often fooled by paranormal tricksters and why the debunking role is better played by professional conjurors; scientists just don't anticipate deliberate dishonesty as well.) There are other professions (no need to mention lawyers specifically) in which falsifying evidence or at least twisting it is precisely what people are paid for and get brownie points for doing.

Science, then, is free of the main vice of religion, which is faith. But, as I pointed out, science does have some of religion's virtues. Religion may aspire to provide its followers with various benefits—among them explanation, consolation, and uplift. Science, too, has something to offer in these areas.

Humans have a great hunger for explanation. It may be one of the main reasons why humanity so universally has religion, since religions do aspire to provide explanations. We come to our individual consciousness in a mysterious universe and long to understand it. Most religions offer a cosmology and a biology, a theory of life, a theory of origins, and reasons for existence. In doing so, they demonstrate that religion is, in a sense, science; it's just bad science. Don't fall for the argument that religion and science operate on separate dimensions and are concerned with quite separate sorts of questions. Religions have historically always attempted to answer the questions that properly belong to science. Thus religions should not be allowed now to retreat from the ground upon which they have traditionally attempted to fight. They do offer both a cosmology and a biology; however, in both cases it is false.

Consolation is harder for science to provide. Unlike religion, science cannot offer the bereaved a glorious reunion with their loved ones in the hereafter. Those wronged on this earth cannot, on a scientific view, anticipate a sweet comeuppance for their tormentors in a life to come. It could be argued that, if the idea of an afterlife is an illusion (as I believe it is), the consolation it offers is hollow. But that's not necessarily so; a false belief can be just as comforting as a true one, provided the believer never discovers its falsity. But if consolation comes that cheap, science can weigh in with other cheap palliatives, such as pain-killing drugs, whose comfort may or may not be illusory, but they do work.

Uplift, however, is where science really comes into its own. All the great religions have a place for awe, for ecstatic transport at the wonder and beauty of creation. And it's exactly this feeling of spine-shivering, breath-catching awe—almost worship—this flooding of the chest with ecstatic wonder, that modern science can provide. And it does so beyond the wildest dreams of saints and mystics. The fact that the supernatural has no place in our explanations, in our understanding of so much about the universe and life, doesn't diminish the awe. Quite the contrary. The merest glance through a microscope at the brain of an ant or through a telescope at a long-ago galaxy of a billion worlds is enough to render poky and parochial the very psalms of praise.

Now, as I say, when it is put to me that science or some particular part of science, like evolutionary theory, is just a religion like any other, I usually deny it with indignation. But I've begun to wonder whether perhaps that's the wrong tactic. Perhaps the right tactic is to accept the charge gratefully and demand equal time for science in religious education classes. And the more I think about it, the more I realize that an excellent case could be made for this. So I want to talk a little bit about religious education and the place that science might play in it.

I do feel very strongly about the way children are brought up. I'm not entirely familiar with the way things are in the United States, and what I say may have more relevance to the United Kingdom, where there is state-obliged, legally enforced religious instruction for all children. That's unconstitutional in the United States, but I presume that children are nevertheless given religious instruction in whatever particular religion their parents deem suitable.

Which brings me to my point about mental child abuse. In a 1995 issue of the *Independent*, one of London's leading newspapers, there was a photograph of a rather sweet and touching scene. It was Christmas time, and the picture showed three children dressed up as the three wise men for a nativity play. The accompanying story described one child as a Muslim, one as a Hindu, and one as a Christian. The supposedly sweet and touching point of the story was that they were all taking part in this nativity play.

What is not sweet and touching is that these children were all four years old. How can you possibly describe a child of four as a Muslim or a Christian or a Hindu or a Jew? Would you talk about a four-year-old economic monetarist? Would you talk about a four-year-old neo-isolationist or a four-year-old liberal Republican? There are opinions about the cosmos and the world that children, once grown, will presumably be in a position to evaluate for themselves. Religion is the one field in our culture about which it is absolutely accepted, without question—without even noticing how bizarre it is—that parents have a total and absolute say in what their children are going to be, how their children are going to be raised, what opinions their children are going to have about the cosmos, about life, about existence. Do you see what I mean about mental child abuse?

Looking now at the various things that religious education might be expected to accomplish, one of its aims could be to encourage children to reflect upon the deep questions of existence, to invite them to rise above the humdrum preoccupations of ordinary life and think *sub specie aleternitatis*.

Science can offer a vision of life and the universe which, as I've already remarked, for humbling poetic inspiration far outclasses any of the mutually contradictory faiths and disappointingly recent traditions of the world's religions.

For example, how could any child in a religious education class fail to be inspired if we could get across to them some inkling of the age of the universe? Suppose that, at the moment of Christ's death, the news of it had started traveling at the maximum possible speed around the universe outwards from the earth? How far would the terrible tidings have traveled by now? Following the theory of special relativity, the answer is that the news could not, under any circumstances whatever, have reached more than one-fiftieth of the way across one galaxy—not one-thousandth of the way to our nearest neighboring galaxy in the 100-million-galaxy strong universe. The universe at large couldn't possibly be anything other than indifferent to Christ, his birth, his passion, and his death. Even such momentous news as the origin of life on earth could have traveled only across our little local cluster of galaxies. Yet so ancient was that event on our earthly time-scale that, if you span its age with your open arms, the whole of human history, the whole of human culture, would fall in the dust from your fingertip at a single stroke of a nail file.

The argument from design, an important part of the history of religion, wouldn't be ignored in my religious education classes, needless to say. The children would look at the spellbinding wonders of the living kingdoms and would consider Darwinism alongside the creationist alternatives and make up their own minds. I think the children would have no difficulty in making up their minds the right way if presented with the evidence. What worries me is not the question of equal time but that, as far as I can see, children in the United Kingdom and the United States are essentially given *no* time with evolution yet are taught creationism (whether at school, in church, or at home).

It would also be interesting to teach more than one theory of creation. The dominant one in this

culture happens to be the Jewish creation myth, which is taken over from the Babylonian creation myth. There are, of course, lots and lots of others, and perhaps they should all be given equal time (except that wouldn't leave much time for studying anything else). I understand that there are Hindus who believe that the world was created in a cosmic butter churn and Nigerian peoples who believe that the world was created by God from the excrement of ants. Surely these stories have as much right to equal time as the Judeo-Christian myth of Adam and Eve.

So much for Genesis; now let's move on to the prophets. Halley's Comet will return without fail in the year 2062. Biblical or Delphic prophecies don't begin to aspire to such accuracy; astrologers and Nostradamians dare not commit themselves to factual prognostications but, rather, disguise their charlatanry in a smokescreen of vagueness. When comets have appeared in the past, they've often been taken as portents of disaster. Astrology has played an important part in various religious traditions, including Hinduism. The three wise men I mentioned earlier were said to have been led to the cradle of Jesus by a star. We might ask the children by what physical route do they imagine the alleged stellar influence on human affairs could travel.

Incidentally, there was a shocking program on the BBC radio around Christmas 1995 featuring an astronomer, a bishop, and a journalist who were sent off on an assignment to retrace the steps of the three wise men. Well, you could understand the participation of the bishop and the journalist (who happened to be a religious writer), but the astronomer was a supposedly respectable astronomy writer, and yet she went along with this! All along the route, she talked about the portents of when Saturn and Jupiter were in the ascendant up Uranus or whatever it was. She doesn't actually believe in astrology, but one of the problems is that our culture has been taught to become tolerant of it, even vaguely amused by it—so much so that even scientific people who don't believe in astrology sort of think it's a bit of harmless fun. I take astrology very seriously indeed: I think it's deeply pernicious because it undermines rationality, and I should like to see campaigns against it.

When the religious education class turns to ethics, I don't think science actually has a lot to say, and I would replace it with rational moral philosophy. Do the children think there are absolute standards of right and wrong? And if so, where do they come from? Can you make up good working principles of right and wrong, like "do as you would be done by" and "the greatest good for the greatest number" (whatever that is supposed to mean)? It's a rewarding question, whatever your personal morality, to ask as an evolutionist where morals come from; by what route has the human brain gained its tendency to have ethics and morals, a feeling of right and wrong?

Should we value human life above all other life? Is there a rigid wall to be built around the species *Homo sapiens*, or should we talk about whether there are other species which are entitled to our humanistic sympathies? Should we, for example, follow the right-to-life lobby, which is wholly preoccupied with *human* life, and value the life of a human fetus with the faculties of a worm over the life of a thinking and feeling chimpanzee? What is the basis of this fence we erect around *Homo sapiens*—even around a small piece of fetal tissue? (Not a very sound evolutionary idea when you think about it.) When, in our evolutionary descent from our common ancestor with chimpanzees, did the fence suddenly rear itself up?

Well, moving on, then, from morals to last things, to eschatology, we know from the second law of thermodynamics that all complexity, all life, all laughter, all sorrow, is hell-bent on leveling itself out into cold nothingness in the end. They—and we—can never be more than temporary, local buckings of the great universal slide into the abyss of uniformity.

We know that the universe is expanding and will probably expand forever, although it's possible it may contract again. We know that, whatever happens to the universe, the sun will engulf the earth in about 60 million centuries from now.

Time itself began at a certain moment, and time may end at a certain moment—or it may

not. Time may come locally to an end in miniature crunches called black holes. The laws of the universe seem to be true all over the universe. Why is this? Might the laws change in these crunches? To be really speculative, time could begin again with new laws of physics, new physical constants. And it has even been suggested that there could be many universes, each one isolated so completely that, for it, the others don't exist. Then again, there might be a Darwinian selection among universes.

So science could give a good account of itself in religious education. But it wouldn't be enough. I believe that some familiarity with the King James versions of the Bible is important for anyone wanting to understand the allusions that appear in English literature. Together with the Book of Common Prayer, the Bible gets 58 pages in the *Oxford Dictionary of Quotations*. Only Shakespeare has more. I do think that not having any kind of biblical education is unfortunate if children want to read English literature and understand the provenance of phrases like "through a glass darkly," "all flesh is as grass," "the race is not to the swift," "crying in the wilderness," "reaping the whirlwind," "amid the alien corn," "Eyeless in Gaza," "Job's comforters," and "the widow's mite."

I want to return now to the charge that science is just a faith. The more extreme version of this charge—and one that I often encounter as both a scientist and a rationalist—is an accusation of zealotry and bigotry in scientists themselves as great as that found in religious people. Sometimes there may be a little bit of justice in this accusation; but as zealous bigots, we scientists are mere amateurs at the game. We're content to *argue* with those who disagree with us. We don't kill them.

But I would want to deny even the lesser charge of purely verbal zealotry. There is a very, very important difference between feeling strongly, even passionately, about something because we have thought about and examined the evidence for it on the one hand, and feeling strongly about something because it has been internally revealed to us, or internally revealed to somebody else in history and subsequently hallowed by tradition. There's all the difference in the world between a belief that one is prepared to defend by quoting evidence and logic and a belief that is supported by nothing more than tradition, authority, or revelation.

VIII.A.2

Nonoverlapping Magisteria

STEPHEN JAY GOULD

Stephen Jay Gould (1941–2002) was a leading figure in paleontology, evolutionary biology, and the history of science, and was the author of several important books, both popular and scholarly, on these subjects. He taught at Harvard University and also worked at the American Museum of Natural History. In this essay, he argues that science and religion constitute nonoverlapping magisteria*—separate domains of teaching authority that are concerned with wholly different subjects of inquiry.*

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Incongruous places often inspire anomalous stories. In early 1984, I spent several nights at the Vatican housed in a hotel built for itinerant priests. While pondering over such puzzling issues as the intended function of the bidets in each bathroom, and hungering for something other than plum jam on my breakfast rolls (why did the basket only contain hundreds of identical plum packets and not a one of, say, strawberry?), I encountered yet another among the innumerable issues of contrasting cultures that can make life so interesting. Our crowd (present in Rome for a meeting on nuclear winter sponsored by the Pontifical Academy of Sciences) shared the hotel with a group of French and Italian Jesuit priests who were also professional scientists.

At lunch, the priests called me over to their table to pose a problem that had been troubling them. What, they wanted to know, was going on in America with all this talk about "scientific creationism"? One asked me: "Is evolution really in some kind of trouble; and if so, what could such trouble be? I have always been taught that no doctrinal conflict exists between evolution and Catholic faith, and the evidence for evolution seems both entirely satisfactory and utterly overwhelming. Have I missed something?"

A lively pastiche of French, Italian, and English conversation then ensued for half an hour or so, but the priests all seemed reassured by my general answer: Evolution has encountered no intellectual trouble; no new arguments have been offered. Creationism is a homegrown phenomenon of American sociocultural history—a splinter movement (unfortunately rather more of a beam these days) of Protestant fundamentalists who believe that every word of the Bible must be literally true, whatever such a claim might mean. We all left satisfied, but I certainly felt bemused by the anomaly of my role as a Jewish agnostic, trying to reassure a group of Catholic priests that evolution remained both true and entirely consistent with religious belief.

Another story in the same mold: I am often asked whether I ever encounter creationism as a live issue among my Harvard undergraduate students. I reply that only once, in nearly thirty years of teaching, did I experience such an incident. A very sincere and serious freshman student came to my office hours with the following question that had clearly been troubling him deeply: "I am a devout Christian and have never had any reason to doubt evolution, an idea that seems both exciting and particularly well documented. But my roommate, a proselytizing Evangelical, has been insisting with enormous vigor that I cannot be both a real Christian and an evolutionist. So tell me, can a person believe both in God and evolution?" Again, I gulped hard, did my intellectual duty, and reassured him that evolution was both true and entirely compatible with Christian belief—a position I hold sincerely, but still an odd situation for a Jewish agnostic.

These two stories illustrate a cardinal point, frequently unrecognized but absolutely central to any understanding of the status and impact of the politically potent, fundamentalist doctrine known by its self-proclaimed oxymoron as "scientific creationism"—the claim that the Bible is literally true, that all organisms were created during six days of twenty-four hours, that the earth is only a few thousand years old, and that evolution must therefore be false. Creationism does not pit science against religion (as my opening stories indicate), for no such conflict exists. Creationism does not raise any unsettled intellectual issues about the nature of biology or the history of life. Creationism is a local and parochial movement, powerful only in the United States among Western nations, and prevalent only among the few sectors of American Protestantism that choose to read the Bible as an inerrant document, literally true in every jot and tittle.

I do not doubt that one could find an occasional nun who would prefer to teach creationism in her parochial school biology class, or an occasional orthodox rabbi who does the same in his yeshiva, but creationism based on biblical literalism makes little sense in either Catholicism or Judaism, for neither religion maintains any extensive tradition for reading the Bible as literal truth rather than illuminating literature, based partly on metaphor

and allegory (essential components of all good writing) and demanding interpretation for proper understanding. Most Protestant groups, of course, take the same position—the fundamentalist fringe notwithstanding.

The position that I have just outlined by personal stories and general statements represents the standard attitude of all major Western religions (and of Western science) today. (I cannot, through ignorance, speak of Eastern religions, although I suspect that the same position would prevail in most cases.) The lack of conflict between science and religion arises from a lack of overlap between their respective domains of professional expertise—science in the empirical constitution of the universe, and religion in the search for proper ethical values and the spiritual meaning of our lives. The attainment of wisdom in a full life requires extensive attention to both domains—for a great book tells us that the truth can make us free and that we will live in optimal harmony with our fellows when we learn to do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly.

In the context of this standard position, I was enormously puzzled by a statement issued by Pope John Paul II on October 22, 1996, to the Pontifical Academy of Sciences, the same body that had sponsored my earlier trip to the Vatican. In this document, entitled "Truth Cannot Contradict Truth," the pope defended both the evidence for evolution and the consistency of the theory with Catholic religious doctrine. Newspapers throughout the world responded with front-page headlines, as in the *New York Times* for October 25: "Pope Bolsters Church's Support for Scientific View of Evolution."

Now I know about "slow news days," and I do admit that nothing else was strongly competing for headlines at that particular moment. (The *Times* could muster nothing more exciting for a lead story than Ross Perot's refusal to take Bob Dole's advice and quit the presidential race.) Still, I couldn't help feeling immensely puzzled by all the attention paid to the pope's statement (while being wryly pleased, of course, for we need all the good press we can get, especially from respected outside sources). The Catholic Church had never opposed evolution and had no reason to do so. Why had the pope issued such a statement at all? And why had the press responded with an orgy of worldwide, front-page coverage?

I could only conclude at first, and wrongly as I soon learned, that journalists throughout the world must deeply misunderstand the relationship between science and religion, and must therefore be elevating a minor papal comment to unwarranted notice. Perhaps most people really do think that a war exists between science and religion, and that (to cite a particularly newsworthy case) evolution must be intrinsically opposed to Christianity. In such a context, a papal admission of evolution's legitimate status might be regarded as major news indeed—a sort of modern equivalent for a story that never happened, but would have made the biggest journalistic splash of 1640: Pope Urban VIII releases his most famous prisoner from house arrest and humbly apologizes, "Sorry, Signor Galileo … the sun, er, is central."

But I then discovered that the prominent coverage of papal satisfaction with evolution had not been an error of non-Catholic Anglophone journalists. The Vatican itself had issued the statement as a major news release. And Italian newspapers had featured, if anything, even bigger headlines and longer stories. The conservative *II Giornale*, for example, shouted from its masthead: "Pope Says We May Descend from Monkeys."

Clearly, I was out to lunch. Something novel or surprising must lurk within the papal statement, but what could it be?—especially given the accuracy of my primary impression (as I later verified) that the Catholic Church values scientific study, views science as no threat to religion in general or Catholic doctrine in particular, and has long accepted both the legitimacy of evolution as a field of study and the potential harmony of evolutionary conclusions with Catholic faith.

As a former constituent of Tip O'Neill's, I certainly know that "all politics is local"—and that the Vatican undoubtedly has its own internal reasons, quite opaque to me, for announcing papal support of evolution in a major statement. Still, I knew that I was missing some important key, and I felt frustrated. I then remembered the primary rule of intellectual life: when puzzled, it never hurts to read the primary documents—a rather simple and self-evident principle that has, nonetheless, completely disappeared from large sectors of the American experience.

I knew that Pope Pius XII (not one of my favorite figures in twentieth-century history, to say the least) had made the primary statement in a 1950 encyclical entitled *Humani Generis*. I knew the main thrust of his message: Catholics could believe whatever science determined about the evolution of the human body, so long as they accepted that, at some time of his choosing, God had infused the soul into such a creature. I also knew that I had no problem with this statement, for whatever my private beliefs about souls, science cannot touch such a subject and therefore cannot be threatened by any theological position on such a legitimately and intrinsically religious issue. Pope Pius XII, in other words, had properly acknowledged and respected the separate domains of science and theology. Thus, I found myself in total agreement with *Humani Generis*—but I had never read the document in full (not much of an impediment to stating an opinion these days).

I quickly got the relevant writings from, of all places, the Internet. (The pope is prominently on-line, but a Luddite like me is not. So I got a computer-literate associate to dredge up the documents. I do love the fracture of stereotypes implied by finding religion so hep and a scientist so square.) Having now read in full both Pope Pius's *Humani Generis* of 1950 and Pope John Paul's proclamation of October 1996, I finally understand why the recent statement seems so new, revealing, and worthy of all those headlines. And the message could not be more welcome for evolutionists and friends of both science and religion.

The text of *Humani Generis* focuses on the magisterium (or teaching authority) of the Church—a word derived not from any concept of majesty or awe but from the different notion of teaching, for *magister* is Latin for "teacher." We may, I think, adopt this word and concept to express the central point of this essay and the principled resolution of supposed "conflict" or "warfare" between science and religion. No such conflict should exist because each subject has a legitimate magisterium, or domain of teaching authority—and these magisteria do not overlap (the principle that I would like to designate as NOMA, or "nonoverlapping magisteria"). The net of science covers the empirical universe: what is it made of (fact) and why does it work this way (theory). The net of religion extends over questions of moral meaning and value. These two magisteria do not overlap, nor do they encompass all inquiry (consider, for starters, the magisterium of art and the meaning of beauty). To cite the arch clichés, we get the age of rocks, and religion retains the rock of ages; we study how the heavens go, and they determine how to go to heaven.

This resolution might remain all neat and clean if the nonoverlapping magisteria (NOMA) of science and religion were separated by an extensive no man's land. But, in fact, the two magisteria bump right up against each other, interdigitating in wondrously complex ways along their joint border. Many of our deepest questions call upon aspects of both for different parts of a full answer—and the sorting of legitimate domains can become quite complex and difficult. To cite just two broad questions involving both evolutionary facts and moral arguments: Since evolution made us the only earthly creatures with advanced consciousness, what responsibilities are so entailed for our relations with other species? What do our genealogical ties with other organisms imply about the meaning of human life?

Pius XII's *Humani Generis* is a highly traditionalist document by a deeply conservative man forced

to face all the "isms" and cynicisms that rode the wake of World War II and informed the struggle to rebuild human decency from the ashes of the Holocaust. The encyclical, subtitled "Concerning some false opinions which threaten to undermine the foundations of Catholic doctrine," begins with a statement of embattlement:

> Disagreement and error among men on moral and religious matters have always been a cause of profound sorrow to all good men, but above all to the true and loyal sons of the Church, especially today, when we see the principles of Christian culture being attacked on all sides.

Pius lashes out, in turn, at various external enemies of the Church: pantheism, existentialism, dialectical materialism, historicism, and of course and preeminently, communism. He then notes with sadness that some well-meaning folks within the Church have fallen into a dangerous relativism—"a theological pacifism and egalitarianism, in which all points of view become equally valid"—in order to include people of wavering faith who yearn for the embrace of Christian religion but do not wish to accept the particularly Catholic magisterium.

What is this world coming to when these noxious novelties can so discombobulate a revealed and established order? Speaking as a conservative's conservative, Pius laments:

> Novelties of this kind have already borne their deadly fruit in almost all branches of theology…. Some question whether angels are personal beings, and whether matter and spirit differ essentially…. Some even say that the doctrine of Transubstantiation, based on an antiquated philosophic notion of substance, should be so modified that the Real Presence of Christ in the Holy Eucharist be reduced to a kind of symbolism.

Pius first mentions evolution to decry a misuse by overextension often promulgated by zealous supporters of the anathematized "isms":

> Some imprudently and indiscreetly hold that evolution … explains the origin of all things…. Communists gladly subscribe to this opinion so that, when the souls of men have been deprived of every idea of a personal God, they may the more efficaciously defend and propagate their dialectical materialism.

Pius's major statement on evolution occurs near the end of the encyclical in paragraphs 35 through 37. He accepts the standard model of NOMA and begins by acknowledging that evolution lies in a difficult area where the domains press hard against each other. "It remains for US now to speak about those questions which, although they pertain to the positive sciences, are nevertheless more or less connected with the truths of the Christian faith."[1]

Pius then writes the well-known words that permit Catholics to entertain the evolution of the human body (a factual issue under the magisterium of science), so long as they accept the divine Creation and infusion of the soul (a theological notion under the magisterium of religion).

> The Teaching Authority of the Church does not forbid that, in conformity with the present state of human sciences and sacred theology, research and discussions, on the part of men experienced in both fields, take place with regard to the doctrine of evolution, in as far as it inquires into the origin of the human body as coming from pre-existent and living matter—for the Catholic faith obliges us to hold that souls are immediately created by God.

I had, up to here, found nothing surprising in *Humani Generis*, and nothing to relieve my

puzzlement about the novelty of Pope John Paul's recent statement. But I read further and realized that Pope Pius had said more about evolution, something I had never seen quoted, and that made John Paul's statement most interesting indeed. In short, Pius forcefully proclaimed that while evolution may be legitimate in principle, the theory, in fact, had not been proven and might well be entirely wrong. One gets the strong impression, moreover, that Pius was rooting pretty hard for a verdict of falsity.

Continuing directly from the last quotation, Pius advises us about the proper study of evolution:

> However, this must be done in such a way that the reasons for both opinions, that is, those favorable and those unfavorable to evolution, be weighed and judged with the necessary seriousness, moderation and measure…. Some, however, rashly transgress this liberty of discussion, when they act as if the origin of the human body from pre-existing and living matter were already completely certain and proved by the facts which have been discovered up to now and by reasoning on those facts, and as if there were nothing in the sources of divine revelation which demands the greatest moderation and caution in this question.

To summarize, Pius generally accepts the NOMA principle of nonoverlapping magisteria in permitting Catholics to entertain the hypothesis of evolution for the human body so long as they accept the divine infusion of the soul. But he then offers some (holy) fatherly advice to scientists about the status of evolution as a scientific concept: the idea is not yet proven, and you all need to be especially cautious because evolution raises many troubling issues right on the border of my magisterium. One may read this second theme in two different ways: either as a gratuitous incursion into a different magisterium or as a helpful perspective from an intelligent and concerned outsider. As a man of good will, and in the interest of conciliation, I am happy to embrace the latter reading.

In any case, this rarely quoted second claim (that evolution remains both unproven and a bit dangerous)—and not the familiar first argument for the NOMA principle (that Catholics may accept the evolution of the body so long as they embrace the creation of the soul)—defines the novelty and the interest of John Paul's recent statement.

John Paul begins by summarizing Pius's older encyclical of 1950, and particularly by reaffirming the NOMA principle—nothing new here, and no cause for extended publicity:

> In his encyclical "Humani Generis" (1950), my predecessor Pius XII had already stated that there was no opposition between evolution and the doctrine of the faith about man and his vocation.

To emphasize the power of NOMA, John Paul poses a potential problem and a sound resolution: How can we reconcile science's claim for physical continuity in human evolution with Catholicism's insistence that the soul must enter at a moment of divine infusion:

> With man, then, we find ourselves in the presence of an ontological difference, an ontological leap, one could say. However, does not the posing of such ontological discontinuity run counter to that physical continuity which seems to be the main thread of research into evolution in the field of physics and chemistry? Consideration of the method used in the various branches of knowledge makes it possible to reconcile two points of view which would seem irreconcilable. The sciences of observation describe and measure the multiple manifestations of life with increasing precision and correlate them with the time line. The moment of

> transition to the spiritual cannot be the object of this kind of observation.

The novelty and news value of John Paul's statement lies, rather, in his profound revision of Pius's second and rarely quoted claim that evolution, while conceivable in principle and reconcilable with religion, can cite little persuasive evidence, and may well be false. John Paul states—and I can only say amen, and thanks for noticing—that the half century between Pius's surveying the ruins of World War II and his own pontificate heralding the dawn of a new millennium has witnessed such a growth of data, and such a refinement of theory, that evolution can no longer be doubted by people of good will:

> Pius XII added … that this opinion [evolution] should not be adopted as though it were a certain, proven doctrine…. Today, almost half a century after the publication of the encyclical, new knowledge has led to the recognition of more than one hypothesis in the theory of evolution. It is indeed remarkable that this theory has been progressively accepted by researchers, following a series of discoveries in various fields of knowledge. The convergence, neither sought nor fabricated, of the results of work that was conducted independently is in itself a significant argument in favor of the theory.

In conclusion, Pius had grudgingly admitted evolution as a legitimate hypothesis that he regarded as only tentatively supported and potentially (as I suspect he hoped) untrue. John Paul, nearly fifty years later, reaffirms the legitimacy of evolution under the NOMA principle—no news here—but then adds that additional data and theory have placed the factuality of evolution beyond reasonable doubt. Sincere Christians must now accept evolution not merely as a plausible possibility but also as an effectively proven fact. In other words, official Catholic opinion on evolution has moved from "say it ain't so, but we can deal with it if we have to" (Pius's grudging view of 1950) to John Paul's entirely welcoming "it has been proven true; we always celebrate nature's factuality, and we look forward to interesting discussions of theological implications." I happily endorse this turn of events as gospel—literally *good news.* I may represent the magisterium of science, but I welcome the support of a primary leader from the other major magisterium of our complex lives. And I recall the wisdom of King Solomon: "As cold waters to a thirsty soul, so is good news from a far country" (Prov. 25:25).

Just as religion must bear the cross of its hardliners, I have some scientific colleagues, including a few prominent enough to wield influence by their writings, who view this rapprochement of the separate magisteria with dismay. To colleagues like me—agnostic scientists who welcome and celebrate the rapprochement, especially the pope's latest statement—they say: "C'mon, be honest; you know that religion is addlepated, superstitious, old-fashioned b.s.; you're only making those welcoming noises because religion is so powerful, and we need to be diplomatic in order to assure public support and funding for science." I do not think that this attitude is common among scientists, but such a position fills me with dismay—and I therefore end this essay with a personal statement about religion, as a testimony to what I regard as a virtual consensus among thoughtful scientists (who support the NOMA principle as firmly as the pope does).

I am not, personally, a believer or a religious man in any sense of institutional commitment or practice. But I have enormous respect for religion, and the subject has always fascinated me, beyond almost all others (with a few exceptions, like evolution, paleontology, and baseball). Much of this fascination lies in the historical paradox that throughout Western history organized religion has fostered both the most unspeakable horrors and the most heart-rending examples of human goodness in the face of personal danger. (The evil, I believe, lies in the occasional confluence of religion with

secular power. The Catholic Church has sponsored its share of horrors, from Inquisitions to liquidations—but only because this institution held such secular power during so much of Western history. When my folks held similar power more briefly in Old Testament times, they committed just as many atrocities with many of the same rationales.)

I believe, with all my heart, in a respectful, even loving concordat between our magisteria—the NOMA solution. NOMA represents a principled position on moral and intellectual grounds, not a mere diplomatic stance. NOMA also cuts both ways. If religion can no longer dictate the nature of factual conclusions properly under the magisterium of science, then scientists cannot claim higher insight into moral truth from any superior knowledge of the world's empirical constitution. This mutual humility has important practical consequences in a world of such diverse passions.

Religion is too important to too many people for any dismissal or denigration of the comfort still sought by many folks from theology. I may, for example, privately suspect that papal insistence on divine infusion of the soul represents a sop to our fears, a device for maintaining a belief in human superiority within an evolutionary world offering no privileged position to any creature. But I also know that souls represent a subject outside the magisterium of science. My world cannot prove or disprove such a notion, and the concept of souls cannot threaten or impact my domain. Moreover, while I cannot personally accept the Catholic view of souls, I surely honor the metaphorical value of such a concept both for grounding moral discussion and for expressing what we most value about human potentiality: our decency, care, and all the ethical and intellectual struggles that the evolution of consciousness imposed upon us.

As a moral position (and therefore not as a deduction from my knowledge of nature's factuality), I prefer the "cold bath" theory that nature can be truly "cruel" and "indifferent"—in the utterly inappropriate terms of our ethical discourse—because nature was not constructed as our eventual abode, didn't know we were coming (we are, after all, interlopers of the latest geological microsecond), and doesn't give a damn about us (speaking metaphorically). I regard such a position as liberating, not depressing, because we then become free to conduct moral discourse—and nothing could be more important—in our own terms, spared from the delusion that we might read moral truth passively from nature's factuality.

But I recognize that such a position frightens many people, and that a more spiritual view of nature retains broad appeal (acknowledging the factuality of evolution and other phenomena, but still seeking some intrinsic meaning in human terms, and from the magisterium of religion). I do appreciate, for example, the struggles of a man who wrote to the *New York Times* on November 3, 1996, to state both his pain and his endorsement of John Paul's statement:

> Pope John Paul II's acceptance of evolution touches the doubt in my heart. The problem of pain and suffering in a world created by a God who is all love and light is hard enough to bear, even if one is a creationist. But at least a creationist can say that the original creation, coming from the hand of God was good, harmonious, innocent and gentle. What can one say about evolution, even a spiritual theory of evolution? Pain and suffering, mindless cruelty and terror are its means of creation. Evolution's engine is the grinding of predatory teeth upon the screaming, living flesh and bones of prey…. If evolution be true, my faith has rougher seas to sail.

I don't agree with this man, but we could have a wonderful argument. I would push the "cold bath" theory; he would (presumably) advocate the theme of inherent spiritual meaning in nature, however opaque the signal. But we would both be enlightened and filled with better understanding of these deep and ultimately unanswerable issues.

Here, I believe, lies the greatest strength and necessity of NOMA, the nonoverlapping magisteria of science and religion. NOMA permits—indeed enjoins—the prospect of respectful discourse, of constant input from both magisteria toward the common goal of wisdom. If human beings are anything special, we are the creatures that must ponder and talk. Pope John Paul II would surely point out to me that his magisterium has always recognized this distinction, for *in principio erat verbum*—"In the beginning was the Word."

Postscript

Carl Sagan organized and attended the Vatican meeting that introduces this essay; he also shared my concern for fruitful cooperation between the different but vital realms of science and religion. Carl was also one of my dearest friends. I learned of his untimely death on the same day that I read the proofs for this essay. I could only recall Nehru's observations on Gandhi's death—that the light had gone out, and darkness reigned everywhere. But I then contemplated what Carl had done in his short sixty-two years and remembered John Dryden's ode for Henry Purcell, a great musician who died even younger: "He long ere this bad tuned the jarring spheres, and left no bell below."

The days I spent with Carl in Rome were the best of our friendship. We delighted in walking around the Eternal City, feasting on its history and architecture—and its food! Carl took special delight in the anonymity that he still enjoyed in a nation that had not yet aired Cosmos, the greatest media work in popular science of all time.

I dedicate this essay to his memory. Carl also shared my personal suspicion about the nonexistence of souls—but I cannot think of a better reason for hoping we are wrong than the prospect of spending eternity roaming the cosmos in friendship and conversation with this wonderful soul.

NOTE

1. Interestingly, the main thrust of these paragraphs does not address evolution in general but lies in refuting a doctrine that Pius calls "polygenism," or the notion of human ancestry from multiple parents—for he regards such an idea as incompatible with the doctrine of original sin, "which proceeds from a sin actually committed by an individual Adam and which, through generation, is passed on to all and is in everyone as his own." In this one instance, Pius may be transgressing the NOMA principle—but I cannot judge, for I do not understand the details of Catholic theology and therefore do not know how symbolically such a statement may be read. If Pius is arguing that we cannot entertain a theory about derivation of all modern humans from an ancestral population rather than through an ancestral individual (a potential fact) because such an idea would question the doctrine of original sin (a theological construct), then I would declare him out of line for letting the magisterium of religion dictate a conclusion within the magisterium of science.

VIII.A.3

Faith and Science: Lessons from the Galileo Case and Message on Evolution

POPE JOHN PAUL II

Pope John Paul II, originally Karol Józef Wojtyla (1920–2005), served as Pope of the Roman Catholic Church from 1978 until his death in 2005. The present selection consists of two of his more important addresses on the relationship between faith and science: Lessons from the Galileo Case *(1992) and* Message on Evolution to the Pontifical Academy of Sciences *(1996). In these essays, he argues that although there can be no true conflict between religion and science, apparent conflicts sometimes do arise. When that happens, we must take care to be sure that divine revelation has been properly interpreted and understood, but we must also distinguish between those aspects of scientific theory that report the observed data and those that, in one way or another, go beyond the data.*

FAITH CAN NEVER CONFLICT WITH REASON

[…]

5. A twofold question is at the heart of the debate of which Galileo was the centre. The first is of the epistemological order and concerns biblical hermeneutics. In this regard, two points must again be raised. In the first place, like most of his adversaries, Galileo made no distinction between the scientific approach to natural phenomena and a reflection on nature, of the philosophical order, which that approach generally calls for. That is why he rejected the suggestion made to him to present the Copernican system as a hypothesis, inasmuch as it had not been confirmed by irrefutable proof. Such therefore, was an exigency of the experimental method of which he was the inspired founder.

Secondly, the geocentric representation of the world was commonly admitted in the culture of the time as fully agreeing with the teaching of the Bible of which certain expressions, taken literally seemed to affirm geocentrism. The problem posed by theologians of that age was, therefore, that of the compatibility between heliocentrism and Scripture.

Thus the new science, with its methods and the freedom of research which they implied, obliged theologians to examine their own criteria of scriptural interpretation. Most of them did not know how to do so.

Paradoxically, Galileo, a sincere believer, showed himself to be more perceptive in this regard than the theologians who opposed him. "If Scripture cannot err," he wrote to Benedetto Castelli, "certain of its interpreters and commentators can and do so in many ways."[1] We also know of his letter to Christine de Lorraine (1615) which is like a short treatise on biblical hermeneutics.[2]

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6. From this we can now draw our first conclusion. The birth of a new way of approaching the study of natural phenomena demands a clarification on the part of all disciplines of knowledge. It obliges them to define more clearly their own field, their approach, their methods, as well as the precise import of their conclusions. In other words, this new way requires each discipline to become more rigorously aware of its own nature.

The upset caused by the Copernican system thus demanded epistemological reflection on the biblical sciences, an effort which later would produce abundant fruit in modern exegetical works and which has found sanction and a new stimulus in the Dogmatic Constitution *Dei Verbum* of the Second Vatican Council.

7. The crisis that I have just recalled is not the only factor to have had repercussions on biblical interpretation. Here we are concerned with the second aspect of the problem, its pastoral dimension.

By virtue of her own mission, the Church has the duty to be attentive to the pastoral consequences of her teaching. Before all else, let it be clear that this teaching must correspond to the truth. But it is a question of knowing how to judge a new scientific datum when it seems to contradict the truths of faith. The pastoral judgement which the Copernican theory required was difficult to make, in so far as geocentrism seemed to be a part of scriptural teaching itself. It would have been necessary all at once to overcome habits of thought and to devise a way of teaching capable of enlightening the people of God. Let us say, in a general way, that the pastor ought to show a genuine boldness, avoiding the double trap of a hesitant attitude and of hasty judgement, both of which can cause considerable harm.

8. Another crisis, similar to the one we are speaking of, can be mentioned here. In the last century and at the beginning of our own, advances in the historical sciences made it possible to acquire a new understanding of the Bible and of the biblical world. The rationalist context in which these data were most often presented seemed to make them dangerous to the Christian faith. Certain people, in their concern to defend the faith, thought it necessary to reject firmly-based historical conclusions. That was a hasty and unhappy decision. The work of a pioneer like Fr. Lagrange was able to make the necessary discernment on the basis of dependable criteria.

It is necessary to repeat here what I said above. It is a duty for theologians to keep themselves regularly informed of scientific advances in order to examine if such be necessary, whether or not there are reasons for taking them into account in their reflection or for introducing changes in their teaching.

9. If contemporary culture is marked by a tendency to scientism, the cultural horizon of Galileo's age was uniform and carried the imprint of a particular philosophical formation. The unitary character of culture, which in itself is positive and desirable even in our own day, was one of the reasons for Galileo's condemnation. The majority of theologians did not recognize the formal distinction between Sacred Scripture and its interpretation, and this led them unduly to transpose into the realm of the doctrine of the faith a question which in fact pertained to scientific investigation.

In fact, as Cardinal Poupard has recalled, Robert Bellarmine, who had seen what was truly at stake in the debate personally felt that, in the face of possible scientific proofs that the earth orbited round the sun, one should "interpret with great circumspection" every biblical passage which seems to affirm that the earth is immobile and "say that we do not understand, rather than affirm that what has been demonstrated is false."[3] Before Bellarmine, this same wisdom and same respect for the divine Word guided St Augustine when he wrote: "If it happens that the authority of Sacred Scripture is set in opposition to clear and certain reasoning, this must mean that the person who interprets Scripture does not understand it correctly. It is not the meaning of Scripture which is opposed to the truth but the meaning which he has wanted to give to it. That which is opposed to Scripture is not what is in Scripture but what he has placed there himself, believing that this is what Scripture meant."[4] A century ago, Pope Leo XIII echoed this advice in his Encyclical *Providentis-simus Deus*:

"Truth cannot contradict truth and we may be sure that some mistake has been made either in the interpretation of the sacred words, or in the polemical discussion itself."[5]

Cardinal Poupard has also reminded us that the sentence of 1633 was not irreformable, and that the debate which had not ceased to evolve thereafter, was closed in 1820 with the imprimatur given to the work of Canon Settele.[6]

10. From the beginning of the Age of Enlightenment down to our own day, the Galileo case has been a sort of "myth," in which the image fabricated out of the events was quite far removed from reality. In this perspective, the Galileo case was the symbol of the Church's supposed rejection of scientific progress, or of "dogmatic" obscurantism opposed to the free search for truth. This myth has played a considerable cultural role. It has helped to anchor a number of scientists of good faith in the idea that there was an incompatibility between the spirit of science and its rules of research on the one hand and the Christian faith on the other. A tragic mutual incomprehension has been interpreted as the reflection of a fundamental opposition between science and faith. The clarifications furnished by recent historical studies enable us to state that this sad misunderstanding now belongs to the past.

11. From the Galileo affair we can learn a lesson which remains valid in relation to similar situations which occur today and which may occur in the future.

In Galileo's time, to depict the world as lacking an absolute physical reference point was, so to speak, inconceivable. And since the cosmos, as it was then known, was contained within the solar system alone, this reference point could only be situated in the earth or in the sun. Today, after Einstein and within the perspective of contemporary cosmology neither of these two reference points has the importance they once had. This observation, it goes without saying, is not directed against the validity of Galileo's position in the debate; it is only meant to show that often, beyond two partial and contrasting perceptions, there exists a wider perception which includes them and goes beyond both of them.

12. Another lesson which we can draw is that the different branches of knowledge call for different methods. Thanks to his intuition as a brilliant physicist and by relying on different arguments, Galileo, who practically invented the experimental method, understood why only the sun could function as the centre of the world, as it was then known, that is to say, as a planetary system. The error of the theologians of the time, when they maintained the centrality of the earth, was to think that our understanding of the physical world's structure was, in some way, imposed by the literal sense of Sacred Scripture. Let us recall the celebrated saying attributed to Baronius "Spiritui Sancto mentem fuisse nos docere quomodo ad coelum eatur, non quomodo coelum gradiatur." In fact, the Bible does not concern itself with the details of the physical world, the understanding of which is the competence of human experience and reasoning. There exist two realms of knowledge, one which has its source in Revelation and one which reason can discover by its own power. To the latter belong especially the experimental sciences and philosophy. The distinction between the two realms of knowledge ought not to be understood as opposition. The two realms are not altogether foreign to each other, they have points of contact. The methodologies proper to each make it possible to bring out different aspects of reality….

MAGISTERIUM IS CONCERNED WITH QUESTION OF EVOLUTION FOR IT INVOLVES CONCEPTION OF MAN

Science at the Dawn of the Third Millenium

[…]

3. Before offering a few more specific reflections on the theme of the origin of life and evolution, I would remind you that the magisterium of

the Church has already made some pronouncements on these matters, within her own proper sphere of competence. I will cite two such interventions here.

In his encyclical *Humani Generis* (1950), my predecessor Pius XII has already affirmed that there is no conflict between evolution and the doctrine of the faith regarding man and his vocation, provided that we do not lose sight of certain fixed points.

For my part, when I received the participants in the plenary assembly of your Academy on October 31, 1992, I used the occasion—and the example of Galileo—to draw attention to the necessity of using a rigorous hermeneutical approach in seeking a concrete interpretation of the inspired texts. It is important to set proper limits to the understanding of Scripture, excluding any unseasonable interpretations which would make it mean something which it is not intended to mean. In order to mark out the limits of their own proper fields, theologians and those working on the exegesis of the Scripture need to be well informed regarding the results of the latest scientific research.

Evolution and the Church's Magisterium

4. Taking into account the scientific research of the era, and also the proper requirements of theology, the encyclical *Humani Generis* treated the doctrine of "evolutionism" as a serious hypothesis, worthy of investigation and serious study, alongside the opposite hypothesis. Pius XII added two methodological conditions for this study: one could not adopt this opinion as if it were a certain and demonstrable doctrine, and one could not totally set aside the teaching Revelation on the relevant questions. He also set out the conditions on which this opinion would be compatible with the Christian faith—a point to which I shall return.

Today, more than a half-century after the appearance of that encyclical, some new findings lead us toward the recognition of evolution as more than an hypothesis. In fact it is remarkable that this theory has had progressively greater influence on the spirit of researchers, following a series of discoveries in different scholarly disciplines. The convergence in the results of these independent studies—which was neither planned nor sought—constitutes in itself a significant argument in favor of the theory.

What is the significance of a theory such as this one? To open this question is to enter into the field of epistemology. A theory is a meta-scientific elaboration, which is distinct from, but in harmony with, the results of observation. With the help of such a theory a group of data and independent facts can be related to one another and interpreted in one comprehensive explanation. The theory proves its validity by the measure to which it can be verified. It is constantly being tested against the facts; when it can no longer explain these facts, it shows its limits and its lack of usefulness, and it must be revised.

Moreover, the elaboration of a theory such as that of evolution, while obedient to the need for consistency with the observed data, must also involve importing some ideas from the philosophy of nature.

And to tell the truth, rather than speaking about the theory of evolution, it is more accurate to speak of the theories of evolution. The use of the plural is required here—in part because of the diversity of explanations regarding the mechanism of evolution, and in part because of the diversity of philosophies involved. There are materialist and reductionist theories, as well as spiritualist theories. Here the final judgment is within the competence of philosophy and, beyond that, of theology.

5. The magisterium of the Church takes a direct interest in the question of evolution, because it touches on the conception of man, whom Revelation tells us is created in the image and likeness of God. The conciliar constitution *Gaudium et Spes* has given us a magnificent exposition of this doctrine, which is one of the essential elements of Christian thought. The Council recalled that "man is the only creature on earth that God wanted for its own sake." In other words, the human person cannot be subordinated as a means to an end, or as an

instrument of either the species or the society; he has a value of his own. He is a person. By this intelligence and his will, he is capable of entering into relationship, of communion, of solidarity, of the gift of himself to others like himself. St. Thomas observed that man's resemblance to God resides especially in his speculative intellect, because his relationship with the object of his knowledge is like God's relationship with his creation. (*Summa Theologica* I-II, q 3, a 5, ad 1) But even beyond that, man is called to enter into a loving relationship with God himself, a relationship which will find its full expression at the end of time, in eternity. Within the mystery of the risen Christ the full grandeur of this vocation is revealed to us. (*Gaudium et Spes*, 22) It is by virtue of his eternal soul that the whole person, including his body, possesses such great dignity. Pius XII underlined the essential point: if the origin of the human body comes through living matter which existed previously, the spiritual soul is created directly by God ("animas enim a Deo immediate creari catholica fides non retimere iubet"). (*Humani Generis*)

As a result, the theories of evolution which, because of the philosophies which inspire them, regard the spirit either as emerging from the forces of living matter, or as a simple epiphenomenon of that matter, are incompatible with the truth about man. They are therefore unable to serve as the basis for the dignity of the human person.

6. With man, we find ourselves facing a different ontological order—an ontological leap, we could say. But in posing such a great ontological discontinuity, are we not breaking up the physical continuity which seems to be the main line of research about evolution in the fields of physics and chemistry? An appreciation for the different methods used in different fields of scholarship allows us to bring together two points of view which at first might seem irreconcilable. The sciences of observation describe and measure, with ever greater precision, the many manifestations of life, and write them down along the time-line. The moment of passage into the spiritual realm is not something that can be observed in this way—although we can nevertheless discern, through experimental research, a series of very valuable signs of what is specifically human life. But the experience of metaphysical knowledge, of self-consciousness and self-awareness, of moral conscience, of liberty, or of aesthetic and religious experience—these must be analyzed through philosophical reflection, while theology seeks to clarify the ultimate meaning of the Creator's designs….

NOTES

1. Letter of 21 November 1613, in *Edizione nazionale delle Opere de Galileo Galilei*, dir. A. Favaro, edition of 1968, vol. V. p. 282.
2. Letter to Christine de Lorraine, 1615, in *Edizione nazionale delle Opere de Galileo Galilei*, dir. A Favaro, edition of 1968, vol. V, pp. 307–348.
3. Letter to Fr A. Foscarini, 12 April 1615, cf. *Edizione nazionale delle Opere de Galileo Galilei*, dir. A. Favaro, edition of 1968, vol. XII, p. 172.
4. Saint Augustine, *Espitula* 143, n. 7 PL 33, col. 588.
5. Leonis XIII Pont. Max. Acta, vol. XIII (1894), p. 361. Cf. Pontificia Academia Scientiarum Copernico, Galilei e la Chiesa. Fine della controversia (1820). Gli atti del Sant'Ufficio, a cura di W. Brandmuller e E. J. Griepl, Firenze, Olschki, 1992.

VIII.B. INTELLIGENT DESIGN, EVOLUTION, AND NATURALISM

In the contemporary literature on science and religion, proponents of "Intelligent Design" are united, broadly speaking, by the idea that (1) the universe is the product of an intelligent designing agent, and (2) the property of being designed by an intelligent agent is a *scientifically detectable* property, so that the hypothesis that the universe was designed counts as a scientific hypothesis. Not just any theist, therefore, counts as a proponent of Intelligent Design in this sense; indeed, not just any believer in *creation* counts as such. The first two articles in this section focus on Intelligent Design; the next two articles focus on Alvin Plantinga's controversial and widely discussed argument for the conclusion that evolutionary naturalism is self-defeating.

We begin with an article by William Dembski outlining the central ideas of his work on the detection of design. On Dembski's view, design is an empirically detectable property; and so there is no in-principle obstacle to detecting a cosmic designer by way of scientific investigation. That design is empirically detectable is undeniable. Plagiarism, for example, is a common intellectual crime on college campuses, and it is typically fairly easy to detect. But, of course, the empirical detection of plagiarism is, in large part, the empirical detection of design. For constructing a case in support of the conclusion that Student X plagiarized her paper will involve, among other things, constructing a case for the conclusion that X's paper resembles some source material S *by design* rather than by chance. Note too that the case for the conclusion that X plagiarized her paper will appeal (as in the fine-tuning argument) to the fact that it is vastly *improbable* that X's paper match the source S by chance, but that the odds of a match are not all that slim on the design-hypothesis. The match therefore constitutes evidence of design.

But now an important question arises: We don't *always* infer design from improbability. You take a trip to Spain, for example. While you are walking through the streets of Madrid, you bump into an old friend—one you haven't seen or heard from in years and who happens (like you) only to be in Spain for the weekend. What are the odds? Very slim indeed. But, of course, you won't feel forced to conclude that your meeting was arranged by an intelligent designer. Likewise, lottery winners don't feel forced to conclude that they won only because the lottery was rigged in their favor. The improbable happens all the time, and we quite often think that it is perfectly rational to chalk such events up to chance. Why not, then, in the case of apparent plagiarism? Is it just that the odds of X's paper matching the source are much slimmer than the odds of your bumping into an old friend while wandering about in Spain? Or is there some other difference?

This is precisely the question that Dembski aims to address in our first reading. On his view, the improbable outcomes that warrant design inferences are just those that are *specified*. Very roughly, a specified complex (improbable) event is one that conforms to an independently established pattern. Had someone

predicted that you would bump into your friend in Spain, that event would have conformed to an independent "specification." One would then rightly suspect design of some sort. (How else could a prediction like that be made?) Likewise, the match between X's paper and the source S seems to be an instance of specified complexity: the event (the material in the paper) matches an independently specified "pattern" (the source, S); and the precise arrangement of words and so on that constitutes the event is very improbable.

Dembski's arguments, presented not only in the present article but in a variety of other articles and books, have received a great deal of attention, both in the popular media and in the scholarly literature. The second reading in this section develops some of the better, more persuasive criticisms of his work. In "Natural Providence (or Design Trouble)," Michael Murray argues that Dembski's criteria for detecting design are fatally flawed. Furthermore, he argues that, contrary to what Dembski and other leading figures in the Intelligent Design movement claim, there is good reason to doubt that Intelligent Design Theory represents anything like a viable scientific research program.

In the second pair of readings of this section, we turn toward Alvin Plantinga's argument for the conclusion that, if we think that our cognitive faculties are reliable, then we ought not to accept both evolutionary theory and naturalism (which he characterizes as the view that there is no God or any other supernatural entity). Here is a highly simplified version of the argument:

1. If there is no God, Darwinian evolutionary theory is probably correct.
2. Darwinian evolutionary theory says that …
    a. … our minds came into existence as a result of chance processes.
    b. … our minds are the way they are because they produce *behavior* that contributes to survival.

1. But: You don't need *true beliefs* to survive.
2. And: The odds of creatures with minds that can form true beliefs (about anything) coming into existence as a result of chance processes are astronomically small.
3. So: Belief in Darwinian evolutionary theory gives us good reason to think that it's unlikely that our minds are able to produce true beliefs.
4. So: A naturalist—someone who believes that there is no God or any other sort of supernatural entity—has good reason to doubt everything she believes (including naturalism and the Darwinian theory of evolution).
5. It is irrational to believe something you have good reason to doubt.
6. So: It is irrational to accept naturalism.

If Plantinga is right, then, surprisingly, those who take themselves to be rationally committed to some form of evolutionary theory ought to *reject* naturalism and embrace some theistic version of evolutionary theory. Plantinga's argument is developed in the third reading in this section. In our fourth reading, Michael Bergmann raises objections against Plantinga's evolutionary argument against naturalism.

VIII.B.1

Signs of Intelligence: A Primer on the Detection of Intelligent Design

WILLIAM DEMBSKI

William Dembski (1960–) is research professor of philosophy at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. He holds doctoral degrees in mathematics and philosophy and a master's degree in theology. His works include The Design Inference *(1988),* No Free Lunch *(2001), and* The Design Revolution *(2004), and he is one of the leading figures in the Intelligent Design movement. In this essay, Dembski lays out the central tenets of his views about how to detect intelligent design.*

Intelligent design examines the distinction between three modes of explanation: necessity, chance, and design. In our workaday lives we find it important to distinguish between these modes of explanation. Did she fall or was she pushed? And if she fell, was it simply bad luck or was her fall unavoidable? More generally, given an event, object, or structure, we want to know:

1. Did it have to happen?
2. Did it happen by accident?
3. Did an intelligent agent cause it to happen?

Given an event to be explained, the first thing to determine is whether it had to happen. If so, the event is necessary. By "necessary" I don't just mean logically necessary, as in true across all possible worlds, but I also include physical necessity, as in a law-like relation between antecedent circumstances and consequent events. Not all events are necessary.

Events that happen but do not have to happen are said to be contingent. In our everyday lives we distinguish two types of contingency: one blind, the other directed. A blind contingency lacks a superintending intelligence and is usually characterized by probabilities. Blind contingency is another name for chance. A directed contingency, on the other hand, is the result of a superintending intelligence. Directed contingency is another name for design.

AN ANCIENT QUESTION

This characterization of necessity, chance, and design is pretheoretical and therefore inadequate for building a precise scientific theory of design. We therefore need to inquire whether there is a principled way to distinguish these modes of explanation. Philosophers and scientists have disagreed not only about how to distinguish these modes of explanation, but also about their very legitimacy. The Epicureans, for instance, gave pride of place to chance. The Stoics, on the other hand, emphasized necessity and design, but rejected chance. In the Middle Ages, Moses Maimonides contended with the Islamic interpreters of Aristotle who viewed the heavens as, in Maimonides's words, "the necessary result of natural laws." Where the Islamic philosophers saw necessity, Maimonides saw design.

From William Dembski and James Kushiner (eds.), *Signs of Intelligence: Understanding Intelligent Design* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2001). © 2001 by The Fellowship of St. James. Used with permission. Notes deleted.

In arguing for design in his *Guide for the Perplexed*, Maimonides looked to the irregular distribution of stars in the heavens. For him that irregularity demonstrated contingency. But was that contingency the result of chance of design? Neither Maimonides nor the Islamic interpreters of Aristotle had any use for Epicurus and his views on chance. For them chance could never be fundamental but was at best a placeholder for ignorance. Thus for Maimonides and his Islamic colleagues, the question was whether a principled distinction could be drawn between necessity and design. Maimonides, arguing from observed contingency in nature, said yes. The Islamic philosophers, intent on keeping Aristotle pure of theology, said no.

A MODERN DEMISE

Modern science has also struggled with how to distinguish between necessity, chance, and design. Newtonian mechanics, construed as a set of deterministic physical laws, seemed only to permit necessity. Nonetheless, in the General Scholium to his *Principia*, Newton claimed that the stability of the planetary system depended not only on the regular action of the universal law of gravitation, but also on the precise initial positioning of the planets and comets in relation to the sun. As he explained: "Though these bodies may, indeed, persevere in their orbits by the mere laws of gravity, yet they could by no means have at first derived the regular position of the orbits themselves from those laws.... [Thus] this most beautiful system of the sun, planets, and comets, could only proceed from the counsel and dominion of an intelligent and powerful being." Like Maimonides, Newton saw both necessity and design as legitimate explanations, but gave short shrift to chance.

Newton published his *Principia* in the seventeenth century. By the nineteenth century, necessity was still in, chance was still out, but design had lost much of its appeal. When asked by Napoleon where God fit into his equations of celestial mechanics, astronomer and mathematician Laplace famously replied, "Sire, I have no need of that hypothesis." In place of a designing intelligence that precisely positioned the heavenly bodies, Laplace proposed his nebular hypothesis, which accounted for the origin of the solar system strictly as the result of natural gravitational forces.

Since Laplace's day, science has largely dispensed with design. Certainly Darwin played a crucial role here by eliminating design from biology. Yet at the same time science was dispensing with design, it was also dispensing with Laplace's vision of a deterministic universe (recall Laplace's famous demon who could predict the future and retrodict the past with perfect precision provided that present positions and momenta of particles were fully known). With the rise of statistical mechanics and then quantum mechanics, the role of chance in physics came to be regarded as ineliminable. Consequently, a deterministic, necessitarian universe has given way to a stochastic universe in which chance and necessity are both regarded as fundamental modes of scientific explanation, neither being reducible to the other. To sum up, contemporary science allows a principled distinction between necessity and chance, but repudiates design.

BACON AND ARISTOTLE

But was science right to repudiate design? My aim in *The Design Inference* is to rehabilitate design. I argue that design is a legitimate and fundamental mode of scientific explanation on a par with chance and necessity. Since my aim is to rehabilitate design, it will help to review why design was removed from science in the first place. Design, in the form of Aristotle's formal and final causes, after all, had once occupied a perfectly legitimate role within natural philosophy, or what we now call science. With the rise of modern science, however, these causes fell into disrepute.

We can see how this happened by considering Francis Bacon. Bacon, a contemporary of Galileo and Kepler, though himself not a scientist, was a terrific propagandist for science. Bacon was concerned about the proper conduct of science and provided detailed canons for experimental observation,

the recording of data, and drawing inferences from data. What interests us here, however, is what he did with Aristotle's four causes. For Aristotle, to understand any phenomenon properly, one had to understand its four causes, namely its material, efficient, formal, and final cause.

Two points about Aristotle's causes are relevant to this discussion. First, Aristotle gave equal weight to all four causes and would have regarded any inquiry that omitted one of his causes as fundamentally deficient. Second, Bacon adamantly opposed the inclusion of formal and final causes within science (see his *Advancement of Learning*). For Bacon, formal and final causes belonged to metaphysics and not to science. Science, according to Bacon, needed to limit itself to material and efficient causes, thereby freeing science from the sterility that inevitably results when science and metaphysics are conflated. This was Bacon's line, and he argued it forcefully.

We see Bacon's line championed in our own day. For instance, in his book *Chance and Necessity*, biologist and Nobel laureate Jacques Monod argued that chance and necessity alone suffice to account for every aspect of the universe. Now whatever else we might want to say about chance and necessity, they provide at best a reductive account of Aristotle's formal causes and leave no room for Aristotle's final causes. Indeed, Monod explicitly denies any place for purpose within science.

Now I don't want to give the impression that I'm advocating a return to Aristotle's theory of causation. There are problems with Aristotle's theory, and it needed to be replaced. My concern, however, is with what replaced it. By limiting scientific inquiry to material and efficient causes, which are of course, perfectly compatible with chance and necessity, Bacon championed a view of science that could only end up excluding design.

THE DESIGN INSTINCT

But suppose we lay aside *a priori* prohibitions against design. In that case, what is wrong with explaining something as designed by an intelligent agent? Certainly there are many everyday occurrences that we explain by appealing to design. Moreover, in our daily lives it is absolutely crucial to distinguish accident from design. We demand answers to such questions as: Did she fall or was she pushed? Did someone die accidentally or commit suicide? Was this song conceived independently or was it plagiarized? Did someone just get lucky on the stock market or was there insider trading?

Not only do we demand answers to such questions, but entire industries are also devoted to drawing the distinction between accident and design. Here we can include forensic science, intellectual property law, insurance claims investigation, cryptography, and random number generation—to name but a few. Science itself needs to draw this distinction to keep itself honest. As a January 1998 issue of *Science* made clear, plagiarism and data falsification are far more common in science than we would like to admit. What keeps these abuses in check is our ability to detect them.

If design is so readily detectable outside of science, and if its detectability is one of the key factors keeping scientists honest, why should design be barred from the actual content of science? There's a worry here. The worry is that when we leave the constricted domain of human artifacts and enter the unbounded domain of scientific inquiry, the distinction between design and nondesign cannot be reliably drawn. Consider, for instance, the following remark by Darwin in the concluding chapter of his *Origin of Species*:

> Several eminent naturalists have of late published their belief that a multitude of reputed species in each genus are not real species; but that other species are real, that is, have been independently created.... Nevertheless they do not pretend that they can define, or even conjecture, which are the created forms of life, and which are those produced by secondary laws. They admit variation as a *vera causa* in one case, they arbitrarily reject it in another, without assigning any distinction in the two cases.

It's this worry of falsely attributing something to design (here construed as creation) only to have it overturned later, that has prevented design from entering science proper.

This worry, though perhaps understandable in the past, can no longer be justified. There does in fact exist a rigorous criterion for discriminating intelligently from unintelligently caused objects. Many special sciences already use this criterion, though in a pretheoretic form (e.g., forensic science, artificial intelligence, cryptography, archeology, and the search for extraterrestrial intelligence). In *The Design Inference* I identify and make precise this criterion. I call it the *complexity-specification criterion*. When intelligent agents act, they leave behind a characteristic trademark or signature—what I call *specified complexity*. The complexity-specification criterion detects design by identifying this trademark of designed objects.

THE COMPLEXITY-SPECIFICATION CRITERION

A detailed explanation and justification of the complexity-specification criterion is technical and can be found in *The Design Inference*. Nevertheless, the basic idea is straightforward and easily illustrated. Consider how the radio astronomers in the movie *Contact* detected an extraterrestrial intelligence. This movie, based on a novel by Carl Sagan, was an enjoyable piece of propaganda for the SETI research program—the Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence. To make the movie interesting, the SETI researchers in *Contact* actually did find an extraterrestrial intelligence (the nonfictional SETI program has yet to be so lucky).

How, then, did the SETI researchers in *Contact* convince themselves that they had found an extraterrestrial intelligence? To increase their chances of finding an extraterrestrial intelligence, SETI researchers monitor millions of radio signals from outer space. Many natural objects in space produce radio waves (e.g., pulsars). Looking for signs of design among all these naturally produced radio signals is like looking for a needle in a haystack. To sift through the haystack, SETI researchers run the signals they monitor through computers programmed with pattern-matchers. So long as a signal doesn't match one of the preset patterns, it will pass through the pattern-matching sieve (and that even if it has an intelligent source). If, on the other hand, it does match one of these patterns, then, depending on the pattern matched, the SETI researchers may have cause for celebration.

The SETI researchers in *Contact* did find a signal worthy of celebration, namely the following:

110111011111011111101111111111011111111
111111111111111111111111110111111111111
111110111111111111111111111111111011111
111111111111111111111111111101111111111
111111111111111111011111111111111111111
111111111111111111101111111111111111111
111111111111111111111111101111111111111
111111111111111111111111111111111011111
111111111111111111111111111111111111111
111110111111111111111111111111111111111
111111111111111111111011111111111111111
111111111111111111111111111111111111111
111111111111101111111111111111111110111
111111111111111111111111111111111111111
111111111111111111111111111111111101111
111111111111111111111111111111111111111
111111111111111111111111111111111101111
111111111111111111111111111111111111111
011111111111111111111111111111111111111
111111111111111111111111111111111111111
111111111110111111111111111111111111111
111111111111111111111111111111111111111
111111111111111111111111111111101111111
111111111111111111111111111111111111111
111111111111111111111111111111111111111
111111111111101111111111111111111111111
111111111111111111111111111111111111111
111111111111111111111111111111111111111
1111

The SETI researchers in *Contact* received this signal as a sequence of 1,126 beats and pauses, where 1s correspond to beats and 0s to pauses.

This sequence represents the prime numbers from 2 to 101, where a given prime number is represented by the corresponding number of beats (i.e., 1s), and the individual prime numbers are separated by pauses (i.e., 0s). The SETI researchers in *Contact* took this signal as decisive confirmation of an extraterrestrial intelligence.

What is it about this signal that implicates design? Whenever we infer design, we must establish three things: *contingency*, *complexity*, and *specification*. Contingency ensures that the object in question is not the result of an automatic and therefore unintelligent process that had no choice in its production. Complexity ensures that the object is not so simple that it can readily be explained by chance. Finally, specification ensures that the object exhibits the type of pattern characteristic of intelligence. Let us examine these three requirements more closely.

Contingency

In practice, to establish the contingency of an object, event, or structure, one must establish that it is compatible with the regularities involved in its production, but that these regularities also permit any number of alternatives to it. Typically these regularities are conceived as natural laws or algorithms. By being compatible with but not required by the regularities involved in its production, an object, event, or structure becomes irreducible to any underlying physical necessity. Michael Polanyi and Timothy Lenoir have both described this method of establishing contingency.

The method applies quite generally: the position of Scrabble pieces on a Scrabble board is irreducible to the natural laws governing the motion of Scrabble pieces; the configuration of ink on a sheet of paper is irreducible to the physics and chemistry of paper and ink; the sequencing of DNA bases is irreducible to the bonding affinities between the bases; and so on. In the case at hand, the sequence of 0s and 1s to form a sequence of prime numbers is irreducible to the laws of physics that govern the transmission of radio signals. We therefore regard the sequence as contingent.

Complexity

To see next why complexity is crucial for inferring design, consider the following sequence of bits:

110111011111

These are the first twelve bits in the previous sequence representing the prime numbers 2, 3, and 5 respectively. Now it is a sure bet that no SETI researcher, if confronted with this twelve-bit sequence, is going to contact the science editor at the *New York Times*, hold a press conference, and announce that an extraterrestrial intelligence has been discovered. No headline is going to read, "Aliens Master First Three Prime Numbers!"

The problem is that this sequence is much too short (and thus too simple) to establish that an extraterrestrial intelligence with knowledge of prime numbers produced it. A randomly beating radio source might by chance just happen to produce this sequence. A sequence of 1,126 bits representing the prime numbers from 2 to 101, however, is a different story. Here the sequence is sufficiently long (and therefore sufficiently complex) to allow that an extraterrestrial intelligence could have produced it.

Complexity as I am describing it here is a form of probability. (Later in this essay I will require a more general conception of complexity to unpack the logic of design inferences. But for now complexity as a form of probability is all we need.) To see the connection between complexity and probability, consider a combination lock. The more possible combinations of the lock, the more complex the mechanism, and, correspondingly, the more improbable that the mechanism can be opened by chance. Complexity and probability therefore vary inversely: the greater the complexity, the smaller the probability. Thus to determine whether something is sufficiently complex to warrant a design inference is to determine whether it has sufficiently small probability.

Even so, complexity (or improbability) isn't enough to eliminate chance and establish design. If I flip a coin one thousand times, I'll participate in a highly complex (i.e., highly improbable) event. Indeed, the sequence I end up flipping will be one

in a trillion trillion trillion…, where the ellipsis indicates twenty-two more "trillions." This sequence of coin tosses won't, however, trigger a design inference. Though complex, this sequence won't exhibit a suitable pattern. Contrast this with the previous sequence representing the prime numbers from 2 to 101. Not only is this sequence complex, but it also embodies a suitable pattern. The SETI researcher who in the movie *Contact* discovered this sequence put it this way: "This isn't noise; this has structure."

Specification

What is a *suitable* pattern for inferring design? Not just any pattern will do. Some patterns can legitimately be employed to infer design whereas others cannot. The intuition underlying the distinction between patterns that alternately succeed or fail to implicate design is, however, easily motivated. Consider the case of an archer. Suppose an archer stands fifty meters from a large wall with bow and arrow in hand. The wall is sufficiently large that the archer cannot help but hit it. Now suppose each time the archer shoots an arrow at the wall, the archer paints a target around the arrow so that the arrow sits squarely in the bull's-eye. What can be concluded from this scenario? Absolutely nothing about the archer's ability as an archer. Yes, a pattern is being matched, but it is a pattern fixed only after the arrow has been shot. The pattern is thus purely *ad hoc*.

But suppose instead the archer paints a fixed target on the wall and then shoots at it. Suppose the archer shoots a hundred arrows, and each time hits a perfect bull's-eye. What can be concluded from this second scenario? Confronted with this second scenario we are obligated to infer that here is a world-class archer, one whose shots cannot legitimately be referred to luck, but rather must be referred to the archer's skill and mastery. Skill and mastery are of course instances of design.

The archer example introduces three elements that are essential for inferring design:

1. A reference class of possible events (here the arrow hitting the wall at some unspecified place);
2. A pattern that restricts the reference class of possible events (here a target on the wall); and
3. The precise event that has occurred (here the arrow hitting the wall at some precise location).

In a design inference, the reference class, the pattern, and the event are linked, with the pattern mediating between event and reference class, and helping to decide whether the event is due to chance or design. Note that in determining whether an event is sufficiently improbable or complex to implicate design, the relevant improbability is not that of the precise event that occurred, but that of the target/pattern. Indeed, the bigger the target, the easier it is to hit it by chance and thus apart from design.

The type of pattern in which an archer fixes a target first and then shoots at it is common to statistics, where it is known as setting a *rejection region* prior to an experiment. In statistics, if the outcome of an experiment falls within a rejection region, the chance hypothesis supposedly responsible for the outcome is rejected. The reason for setting a rejection region prior to an experiment is to forestall what statisticians call "data snooping" or "cherry picking." Just about any data set will contain strange and improbable patterns if we look hard enough. By forcing experimenters to set their rejection regions prior to an experiment, the statistician protects the experiment from spurious patterns that could just as well result from chance.

Now a little reflection makes clear that a pattern need not be given prior to an event to eliminate chance and implicate design. Consider the following cipher text:

nfuijolt ju jt mjlf b xfbtfm

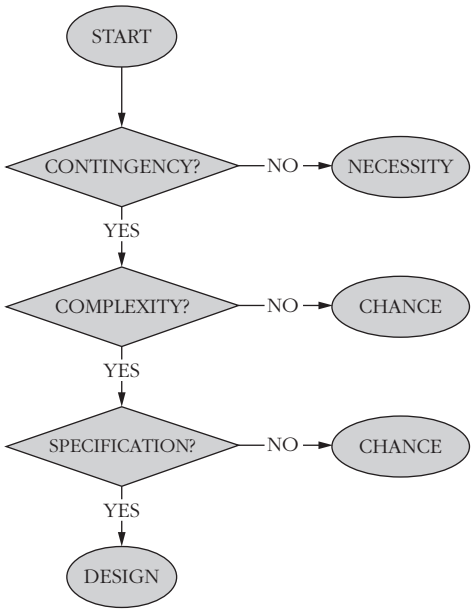
Initially this looks like a random sequence of letters and spaces—you lack any pattern for rejecting chance and inferring design.

But suppose that someone comes along and tells you to treat this sequence as a Caesar cipher, moving each letter one notch down the alphabet. Now the sequence reads,

methinks it is like a weasel

Even though the pattern (in this case, the decrypted text) is given after the fact, it still is the right sort of pattern for eliminating chance and inferring design. In contrast to statistics, which always identifies its patterns before an experiment is performed, cryptanalysis must discover its patterns after the fact. In both instances, however, the patterns are suitable for inferring design.

Patterns thus divide into two types: those that in the presence of complexity warrant a design inference and those that, despite the presence of complexity, do not warrant a design inference. The first type of pattern I call a *specification*, the second a *fabrication*. Specifications are the non-*ad hoc* patterns that can legitimately be used to eliminate chance and warrant a design inference. In contrast, fabrications are the *ad hoc* patterns that cannot legitimately be used to warrant a design inference.



To sum up, the complexity-specification criterion detects design by establishing three things: contingency, complexity, and specification. When called to explain an event, object, or structure, we have to decide: Are we going to attribute it to *necessity*, *chance*, or *design*? According to the complexity-specification criterion, to answer this question is to answer three simpler questions: Is it contingent? Is it complex? Is it specified? Consequently, the complexity-specification criterion can be represented as a flowchart with three decision nodes. I call this flowchart the Explanatory Filter.

INDEPENDENT PATTERNS ARE DETACHABLE

For a pattern to count as a specification, the important thing is not when it was identified, but whether in a certain well-defined sense it is *independent* of the event it describes. Drawing a target around an arrow already embedded in a wall is not independent of the arrow's trajectory. Consequently, such a target/pattern cannot be used to attribute the arrow's trajectory to design. Patterns that are specifications cannot simply be read off the events whose design is in question. Rather, to count as specifications, patterns must be suitably independent of events. I refer to this relation of independence as *detachability*, and say that a pattern is detachable only if it satisfies that relation.

Detachability can be understood as asking this question: Given an event (whose design is in question) and a pattern describing it, would we be able to construct that pattern if we had no knowledge of which event occurred? Assume an event has occurred. A pattern describing the event is given. The event is one from a range of possible events. If all we knew was the range of possible events without any specifics about which event actually occurred, could we still construct the pattern describing the event? If so, the pattern is detachable from the event.

A TRICK WITH COINS

To see what's at stake, consider the following example. (It was this example that finally clarified for me what transforms a pattern *simpliciter* into a

pattern *qua* specification.) The following event E to all appearances was obtained by flipping a fair coin one hundred times:

E: THTTTHHTHHTTTTTHTHTTHHHTTH
THHHTHHTTTTTTTHTTHTTTHHTHT
TTHTHTHHTTHHHTTTHTTHHTHTH
THHHHTTHHTHHHHTHHHHTT

Is E the product of chance or not? A standard trick of statistics professors with an introductory statistics class is to divide the class in two and have students in one half of the class each flip a coin one hundred times and write down the sequence of heads and tails on a slip of paper; students in the other half each generate with their minds a "random-looking" string that mimics the tossing of a coin one hundred times and also write down the sequence of heads and tails on a slip of paper. When the students then hand in their slips of paper, it is the professor's job to sort the papers into two piles, those generated by flipping a fair coin, and those concocted in the students' heads. To the amazement of the students, the statistics professor is typically able to sort the papers with 100 percent accuracy.

There's no mystery here. The statistics professor simply looks for a repetition of six or seven heads or tails in a row to distinguish the truly random from the pseudo-random sequences. In a hundred coin flips, one is quite likely to see such a repetition. On the other hand, people concocting pseudo-random sequences with their minds tend to alternate between heads and tails too frequently. Whereas with a truly random sequence of coin tosses there is a 50 percent chance that one toss will differ from the next, as a matter of human psychology people expect that one toss will differ from the next around 70 percent of the time.

How, then, will our statistics professor fare when confronted with E? Will she attribute E to chance or to the musings of someone trying to mimic chance? According to the professor's crude randomness checker, E would be assigned to the pile of sequences presumed to be truly random, for E contains a repetition of seven tails in a row. Everything that at first blush would lead us to regard E as truly random checks out. There are exactly fifty alternations between heads and tails (as opposed to the seventy that would be expected from human beings trying to mimic chance). What's more, the relative frequencies of heads and tails check out: there were forty-nine heads and fifty-one tails. Thus it's not as though the coin supposedly responsible for generating E was heavily biased in favor of one side versus the other.

BUT IS IT REALLY CHANCE?

Suppose, however, that our statistics professor suspects she is not up against a neophyte statistics student, but instead a fellow statistician who is trying to put one over on her. To help organize her problem, study it more carefully, and enter it into a computer, she will find it convenient to let strings of 0s and 1s represent the outcomes of coin flips, with 1 corresponding to heads and 0 to tails. In that case the following pattern D will correspond to the event E:

01000110110000010100111001011101110000000
10010001101000101011001111000100110101011
110011011110111100

Now, the mere fact that the event E conforms to the pattern D is no reason to think that E did not occur by chance. As things stand, the pattern D has simply been read off the event E.

But D need not have been read off of E. Indeed, D could have been constructed without recourse to E. To see this, let us rewrite D as follows:

0
1
00
01
10
11
000
001
010

011
100
101
110
111
0000
0001
0010
0011
0100
0101
0110
0111
1000
1001
1010
1011
1100
1101
1110
1111
00 D

By viewing D this way, anyone with the least exposure to binary arithmetic immediately recognizes that D was constructed simply by writing binary numbers in ascending order, starting with the one-digit binary numbers (i.e., 0 and 1), proceeding then to the two-digit binary numbers (i.e., 00, 01, 10, and 11), and continuing on until one hundred digits were recorded. It's therefore intuitively clear that D does not describe a truly random event (i.e., an event gotten by tossing a fair coin), but rather a pseudo-random event, concocted by doing a little binary arithmetic.

SIDE INFORMATION DOES THE TRICK

Although it's now intuitively clear why chance cannot properly explain E, we need to consider more closely why this mode of explanation fails here. We started with a putative chance event E, supposedly the result of flipping a fair coin one hundred times. Since heads and tails each have probability ½, and since this probability gets multiplied for each flip of the coin, it follows that the probability of E is 2^{-100}, or approximately 10^{-30}.

In addition, we constructed a pattern D to which E conforms. Initially D proved insufficient to eliminate chance as the explanation of E since in its construction D was simply read off E. Rather, to eliminate chance we also had to recognize that D could have been constructed quite easily by performing some simple arithmetic operations with binary numbers. Thus to eliminate chance we needed to employ additional *side information*, which in this case consisted of our knowledge of binary arithmetic. This side information detached the pattern D from the event E and thereby rendered D a specification.

For side information to detach a pattern from an event, it must satisfy two conditions, *conditional independence* and *tractability*. First, the side information must be conditionally independent of the event E. Conditional independence, a well-defined notion from probability theory, means that the probability of E doesn't change once the side information is taken into account. Conditional independence is the standard probabilistic way of unpacking epistemic independence. Two things are epistemically independent if knowledge about one thing (in this case the side information) does not affect knowledge about the other (in this case the occurrence of E). This is certainly the case here since our knowledge of binary arithmetic does not affect the probabilities we assign to coin tosses.

The second condition, the tractability condition, requires that the side information enable us to construct the pattern D to which E conforms. This is evidently the case here as well, since our knowledge of binary arithmetic enables us to arrange binary numbers in ascending order, and thereby construct the pattern D.

But what exactly is this ability to construct a pattern on the basis of side information? Perhaps

the most slippery words in philosophy are "can," "able," and "enable." Fortunately, just as there is a precise theory for characterizing the epistemic independence between an event and side information—namely, probability theory—so too there is a precise theory for characterizing the ability to construct a pattern on the basis of side information— namely, complexity theory.

COMPLEXITY THEORY

Complexity theory, conceived now quite generally and not merely as a form of probability, assesses the difficulty of tasks given the resources available for accomplishing those tasks. If I may generalize computational complexity theory, it ranks tasks according to difficulty and then determines which tasks are sufficiently manageable to be doable or tractable. For instance, given current technology we find sending a person to the moon tractable, but sending a person to the nearest galaxy intractable.

In the tractability condition, the task to be accomplished is the construction of a pattern, and the resources for accomplishing that task are side information. Thus, for the tractability condition to be satisfied, side information must provide the resources necessary for constructing the pattern in question. All of this admits a precise complexity-theoretic formulation and makes definite what I called "the ability to construct a pattern on the basis of side information."

Taken jointly, the tractability and conditional independence conditions mean that side information enables us to construct the pattern to which an event conforms, yet without recourse to the actual event. This is the crucial insight. Because the side information is conditionally and therefore epistemically independent of the event, any pattern constructed from this side information is obtained without recourse to the event. In this way any pattern that is constructed from such side information avoids the charge of being *ad hoc*. These, then, are the detachable patterns. These are the specifications.

A MATTER OF CHOICE

The complexity-specification criterion is exactly the right instrument for detecting design. To see why, we need to understand what makes intelligent agents detectable in the first place. The principal characteristic of intelligent agency is choice. Even the etymology of the word "intelligent" makes this clear. "Intelligent" derives from two Latin words, the preposition *inter*, meaning between, and the verb *lego*, meaning to choose or select. Thus, according to its etymology, intelligence consists in *choosing between*. For an intelligent agent to act is therefore to choose from a range of competing possibilities.

This is true not just of humans, but of animals as well as of extraterrestrial intelligences. A rat navigating a maze must choose whether to go right or left at various points in the maze. When SETI researchers attempt to discover intelligence in the extraterrestrial radio transmissions they are monitoring, they assume an extraterrestrial intelligence could have chosen any number of possible radio transmissions, and then attempt to match the transmissions they observe with certain patterns as opposed to others. Whenever a human being utters meaningful speech, a choice is made from a range of possible sound combinations that might have been uttered. Intelligent agency always entails discrimination, choosing certain things, ruling out others.

RECOGNIZING INTELLIGENCE

Given this characterization of intelligent agency, the crucial question is how to recognize it. Intelligent agents act by making a choice. How, then, do we recognize that an intelligent agent has made a choice? A bottle of ink spills accidentally onto a sheet of paper; someone takes a fountain pen and writes a message on a sheet of paper. In both instances ink is applied to paper. In both instances one among an almost infinite set of possibilities is

realized. In both instances a contingency is actualized and others are ruled out. Yet in one instance we ascribe agency, in the other chance.

What is the relevant difference? Not only do we need to observe that a contingency was actualized, but we need also to be able to specify that contingency. The contingency must conform to an independently given pattern, and we must be able independently to construct that pattern. A random inkblot is unspecified; a message written with ink on paper is specified. The exact message recorded may not be specified, but orthographic, syntactic, and semantic constraints will nonetheless specify it.

Actualizing one among several competing possibilities, ruling out the rest, and specifying the one that was actualized encapsulates how we recognize intelligent agency, or equivalently, how we detect design. Experimental psychologists who study animal learning and behavior have known this all along. To learn a task an animal must acquire the ability to actualize behaviors suitable for the task as well as the ability to rule out behaviors unsuitable for the task. Moreover, for a psychologist to recognize that an animal has learned a task, it is necessary not only to observe the animal making the appropriate discrimination, but also to specify the discrimination.

RATS AND MAZES

Thus, to recognize whether a rat has successfully learned how to traverse a maze, a psychologist must first specify which sequence of right and left turns conducts the rat out of the maze. No doubt, a rat randomly wandering a maze also discriminates a sequence of right and left turns. But by randomly wandering the maze, the rat gives no indication that it can discriminate the appropriate sequence of right and left turns for exiting the maze. Consequently, the psychologist studying the rat will have no reason to think the rat has learned how to traverse the maze.

Only if the rat executes the sequence of right and left turns specified by the psychologist will the psychologist recognize that the rat has learned how to traverse the maze. Now it is precisely the learned behaviors we regard as intelligent in animals. Hence it is no surprise that the same scheme for recognizing animal learning recurs for recognizing intelligent agency generally, to wit: actualizing one among several competing possibilities, ruling out the others, and specifying the one actualized.

Note that complexity is implicit here as well. To see this, consider again a rat traversing a maze, but now take a very simple maze in which two right turns conduct the rat out of the maze. How will a psychologist studying the rat determine whether it has learned to exit the maze? Just putting the rat in the maze will not be enough. Because the maze is so simple, the rat by chance could just happen to take two right turns and thereby exit the maze. The psychologist will therefore be uncertain whether the rat actually learned to exit this maze or just got lucky.

But contrast this with a complicated maze in which a rat must take just the right sequence of left and right turns to exit the maze. Suppose the rat must take one hundred appropriate right and left turns, and that any mistake will prevent the rat from exiting the maze. A psychologist who sees the rat take no erroneous turns and quickly exit the maze will be convinced that the rat has indeed learned how to exit the maze, and that it was not dumb luck.

This general scheme for recognizing intelligent agency is but a thinly disguised form of the complexity-specification criterion. In general, to recognize intelligent agency we must observe an actualization of one among several competing possibilities, note which possibilities were ruled out, and then be able to specify the possibility that was actualized. What's more, the competing possibilities that were ruled out must be live possibilities, and sufficiently numerous so that specifying the possibility that was actualized cannot be attributed to chance. In terms of complexity, this is just another

way of saying that the range of possibilities is complex. In terms of probability, this is just another way of saying that the possibility that was actualized has small probability.

All the elements in this general scheme for recognizing intelligent agency (i.e., actualizing, ruling out, and specifying) find their counterpart in the complexity-specification criterion. It follows that this criterion formalizes what we have been doing right along when we recognize intelligent agency. The complexity-specification criterion pinpoints how we detect design.

DESIGN, METAPHYSICS, AND BEYOND

Where is this work on design heading? Specified complexity, that key trademark of design, is, as it turns out, a form of information (though one considerably richer than Claude Shannon's purely statistical form of it). Although called by different names and developed with different degrees of rigor, specified complexity is starting to have an effect on the special sciences.

For instance, specified complexity is what Michael Behe has uncovered with his irreducibly complex biochemical machines, what Manfred Eigen regards as the great mystery of life's origin, what for cosmologists underlies the fine-tuning of the universe, what David Chalmers hopes will ground a comprehensive theory of human consciousness, what enables Maxwell's demon to outsmart a thermodynamic system tending toward thermal equilibrium, and what within the Kolmogorov-Chaitin theory of algorithmic information identifies the highly compressible, nonrandom strings of digits. How complex specified information gets from an organism's environment into an organism's genome was one of the key questions at the October 1999 Santa Fe Institute symposium, "Complexity, Information & Design: A Critical Appraisal."

Shannon's purely statistical theory of information is giving way to a richer theory of complex specified information whose possibilities are only now coming to light. A natural sequel to *The Design Inference* is therefore to develop a general theory of complex specified information.

Yet despite its far-reaching implications for science. I regard the ultimate significance of this work on design to lie in metaphysics. In my view, design died not at the hands of nineteenth-century evolutionary biology, but at the hands of the mechanical philosophy two centuries earlier—and that despite the popularity of British natural theology at the time. Though the originators of the mechanical philosophy were typically theists, the design they retained was at best an uneasy rider on top of a mechanistic view of nature. Design is neither use nor ornament within a strictly mechanistic world of particles or other mindless entities organized by equally mindless principles of association, even if these be natural laws ordained by God.

The primary challenge, once the broader implications of design for science have been worked out, is therefore to develop a relational ontology in which the problem of being resolves thus: to be is to be in communion, and to be in communion is to transmit and receive information. Such an ontology will not only safeguard science and leave adequate breathing space for design, but will also make sense of the world as sacrament.

The world is a mirror representing the divine life. The mechanical philosophy was ever blind to this fact. Intelligent design, on the other hand, readily embraces the sacramental nature of physical reality. Indeed, intelligent design is just the Logos theology of John's Gospel restated in the idiom of information theory.

VIII.B.2

Natural Providence (or Design Trouble)

MICHAEL J. MURRAY

Michael Murray (1963–) is currently vice president of philosophy and theology at the John Templeton Foundation. Previously he was professor of philosophy at Franklin and Marshall College. He works primarily in the fields of philosophy of religion and history of modern philosophy. In this article he raises objections against William Dembski's theory about how to detect intelligent design. He also argues, against Dembski, that even if the existence of a designer were empirically detectable, this fact should not have any impact on the actual practice of natural science.

Recent work in Intelligent Design Theory (IDT) reopens a number of questions concerning the nature of God's providence over creation. Friends of IDT claim that their "explanatory filter" allows us to detect design empirically and that this provides a way to make appeal to supernatural design in properly scientific explanations while at the same time undercutting methodological naturalism. I argue here that the explanatory filter is fatally flawed, and that detection of design would not undercut methodological naturalism in any case. Friends of IDT fail to see this because they adopt a Newtonian conception of natural providence, while failing to consider a preferable Leibnizian conception.

I. INTRODUCTION

The history of discussions concerning divine providence contains two distinct strands. The first strand concerns God's providence over those features of his creation that directly concern human beings. Discussions concerning foreknowledge and freedom, freedom and predestination, soteriological election, etc. fall under this strand. In the sixteenth century, and for the latter portion of the twentieth century, this is the strand that has been most pronounced in Christian philosophical discussions of providence. However, while traditional theistic religions hold that God exercises providential control over human affairs, they also hold that God's providential activity has a wider scope, extending to the workings of all of nature. The Christian faith specifically holds that God's intentions and handiwork are not merely evident in those features of creation that centrally concern human beings, but throughout the whole of creation. This second strand held sway in discussions of providence in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, most notably in the disputes between Leibniz and the Newtonians. Recently, interest in questions regarding natural providence has resurfaced, and this resurgence is due in large part to the work in Intelligent Design Theory.

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Intelligent Design theorists contend that the deliverances of natural science show us that much of the natural world can only be explained by appeal to intelligent design, and that this means that natural science must be willing to accommodate appeals to design. This position is distinctively Newtonian and, I think, mistaken. In this paper I want to show how one can happily admit evidence of design in nature, while rejecting the claim that this has any implications for the practice of natural science at all. Rather, friends of Intelligent Design should favor a Leibnizian model in which design is perfectly compatible with thoroughgoing nomic regularity in nature, and thus with a form of methodological naturalism in scientific practice.

II. Intelligent Design Theory

In the last five years or so, advocates of so-called Intelligent Design Theory, or IDT, have argued that Christians need to take their beliefs about natural providence more seriously, and that when they do, this will have an impact on how they think about the workings of nature itself. Christians believe, they argue, that God is not one to create the universe and then leave it to its own devices. Christian commitments concerning miracles and prayer are sufficient to demonstrate that. Since God is intimately connected with his creation, Christians are thereby committed to thinking that certain states of the natural world are brought about directly by the divine hand. Any such events, of course, are going to be ones which cannot be truthfully accounted for by appeal merely to natural entities and their native powers. All attempts to explain such immediately divinely caused states of affairs by appeal only to natural entities and their native powers will thereby end up either in frustration or error.

Friends of IDT are, however, quick to point out that contemporary natural science is firmly committed to a policy of methodological naturalism in science. Thus, in cases where God's activity has in fact played a role in causing states of nature, the contemporary scientist will, they claim, necessarily land in frustration and error. Christian scientists who are willing to countenance the hand of design in natural explanations will not be at such a disadvantage. For these scientists' awareness of divine activity in the world leaves them open to the possibility that states of nature might not be explicable by reference to natural entities and their native powers. And if there are reliable empirical means for discerning when states of nature cannot be naturally explained, the Christian scientist will have a distinct advantage here. She will be able to defend an empirically grounded, scientific explanation for the phenomenon in question that does not end in frustration or error.

IDT theorists thus commend such a program to the scientific community generally, and to the Christian scientific community specifically. To that end, they have offered intriguing arguments for the claim that design can be discerned by empirical means and that in some cases, scientific explanations that invoke design are vastly preferable to the best-explanations available under methodological naturalism.

However, and perhaps not surprisingly, IDT is not a monolith. A closer look at the work of IDT advocates reveals that they do not all understand IDT or its implications in the same way. The somewhat more than casual observer comes away with the impression that some claim a greater reach for IDT than others. In particular, defenders of the view claim that IDT demonstrates one of the following increasingly bold claims:

1. Intelligent design in the natural world, if it exists, is empirically detectable.
2. The natural world exhibits empirically detectable intelligent design.
3. The natural world exhibits empirically detectable intelligent design that can only be accounted for by direct intervention of a designing agent.
4. The natural world exhibits empirically detectable intelligent design that can only be accounted for by direct intervention of a designing agent and this requires that science reject methodological naturalism.

Christian philosophers should and do exhibit a good deal of sympathy with the motivation and substance of IDT. Christian natural scientists, however, seem to exhibit a great deal of reticence about IDT and its purported relevance for scientific practice.

In what follows I will examine three of the four claims above and consider whether or not IDT advocates have given us good reasons to adopt them. Although I will ignore (2) here, I will argue that their work has given us good reason to adopt (1), but not (3) and (4). Instead, I will argue that even though IDT advocates have given us reason to think that design is detectable in nature, there are no possible empirical grounds that could lead us to endorse (3). Since, by their lights, endorsing (3) provides us with the only reason for seeking to dump methodological naturalism, we thus also have reason for rejecting both conjuncts of (4).

III. THE "EXPLANATORY FILTER"

William Dembski has undoubtedly done more than any other friend of IDT to make the case for the empirical detectability of intelligent design. It will be important to lay out Dembski's view here in brief. According to Dembski, there are only three general explanatory paradigms available when we aim to explain the existence of an object, event, or state of affairs: law, chance, or design.[1] Dembski characterizes the three explanatory paradigms as follows:

> To attribute an event to law is to say that the event will almost always happen given certain antecedent circumstances. To attribute an event to chance is to say that its occurrence is characterized by some (perhaps not fully specified) probability distribution according to which the event might equally well not have happened. To attribute an event to design is to say that it cannot plausibly be referred to either law or chance.[2]

In some cases, Dembski says that we attribute an event to law when we regard the event as necessary or, more cautiously, as the "almost inevitable outcome of prior circumstances in conjunction with the laws of nature." The point here is straightforward enough. If one were to stumble across an ornate naturally occurring scolecite crystal, one might think that they had stumbled upon a masterful work of art. Consultation with a local geochemist, however, would reveal that scolecite is the crystalline form of hydrated calcium aluminum silicate, and that such crystals form due to the fact that the lattice structure in the crystal represents the minimal energy state for hydrated calcium aluminum silicate in solid form. While it might look like such a remarkable structure requires intelligent intervention, its occurrence is almost inevitable given certain conditions and the laws governing crystal formation.

What about an event which is not explained as the almost inevitable outcome of prior circumstances in conjunction with natural laws? Such might be the case for a) events which result from probabilistic laws (where the occurrence of the event in question is improbable), or b) events for which there is no underlying law-like regularity which governs the occurrence of such events. In these cases, Dembski claims we must first ask whether or not the event is complex. If not, then it is reasonable to conclude that the event is the result of chance.

To illustrate, Dembski asks us to consider a scene from the film *Contact* in which researchers searching for extraterrestrial life receive a signal consisting of pulses and pauses. Interpreting pulses as 1's and pauses as 0's, the fictional researchers find that an extra-galactic signal they received represents the prime numbers from 2 to 101 in base 2. In the film, this gives the researchers a strong motive for believing that intelligent design was responsible for the signal. Yet, as Dembski points out, if the researchers had received a series of pulses and pauses yielding the sequence 11011101111 no one would have thought this result worthy of an inference to design, even though this constitutes the first 5 prime numbers in base 2. The reason this shorter

sequence is more reasonably attributed to chance than design is the *lack of sufficient complexity*. The string is too short to conclude with any confidence that it results from anything other than chance.

In cases where events are a) complex and b) not explicable as the inevitable outcome of conditions and laws, the appropriate explanatory inference depends on the *sort of complexity* involved. If I, in a moment of bad gamesmanship, throw a Scrabble game out of the window, the resulting arrangement of tiles on the ground outside will be complex and not explicable as the inevitable outcome of natural laws. However, no one could reasonably conclude that that arrangement of tiles was the result of intelligent design. Though an intelligent agent threw the game pieces, the arrangement might have just as easily resulted from the game box being blown off the windowsill as from being thrown.

However, if you were to pass by my window and find the very same Scrabble pieces arranged in such a way as to spell out the sentence "WELCOME TO PENNSYLVANIA" you would be quite confident that this arrangement was the result of design. Though the arrangement of thrown pieces and carefully placed pieces both exhibit a high degree of complexity, the latter instances an outcome that we would regard as *favored* in some sense, whereas the former would not. Dembski labels such favored outcomes "specified complexity." Thus, in cases of complex, nonnomically inevitable events, unspecified complexity is best explained by chance, whereas specified complexity is explained by design.

Dembski claims that his "explanatory filter" is nothing but an explicit and carefully formulated explanation of the sorts of ordinary reasoning processes we employ when explaining events generally. If we stumble across a large, perfectly pyramidal shaped structure in the Central American jungle (i.e., a pyramid), we are able to infer reasonably that the structure was intelligently designed since we can reasonably infer that such structures do not arise from inevitable nomic processes, and they exhibit a high degree of "specified complexity."

In what follows I will raise two difficulties for the explanatory filter. The first concerns the detection of the specification of complexity which licenses the design inference. The second concerns the claim that events explained as the result of inevitable nomic regularities should not be regarded as designed. I will address the former in section IV briefly, and the latter in sections V through VIII in some detail.

IV. SPECIFIED COMPLEXITY?

When we are trying to determine if a complex event exhibits specification, it is the *pattern* exhibited by the event that is the focus of attention. Dembski claims that a complex event exhibits specified complexity when the pattern the event displays is *detachable*. For the sake of clarity, note that it is the *pattern the event exemplifies* rather than *the event itself* which is detachable. Roughly, a pattern is detachable if we can construct the pattern independent of our knowledge of the event which instances the pattern. In other words, if the pattern instanced in the event is one we can derive only after becoming acquainted with the outcomes, the pattern is not detachable.

Dembski illustrates this with a case in which an election official was convicted of tampering when it was discovered that in 40 out of 41 cases, he gave Democrats the privileged top spot on the ballot. Given our knowledge of how elections work and the aims of a corrupt Democratic official, we can, without knowing any actual outcomes, know what a "cheating pattern" looks like. It looks like Democrats getting top billing every time (or nearly every time). If that pattern is a pattern we can "come up with" without consulting any actual ballots we would have a *detachable pattern*.

More specifically, a pattern is detachable if we can "come up with it" via *side information* which exhibits *conditional independence* and *tractability*. In the election case, our side information consists of information about what a pattern of cheating by a corrupt election official would look like. Such side information is *conditionally independent* when we have access to it in a way that is independent of our knowledge of the actual election outcomes. The side information is *tractable* when we are able,

using that independent information, to construct the pattern which the event displays. As we saw, the side information in the election case is tractable as well since we can construct "election ballot cheating patterns" from our knowledge of how cheating would be accomplished.

Thus we have a recipe for discerning specified complexity. If the pattern displayed by the complex event in question is detachable (i.e., can be derived from side information that is both conditionally independent and tractable), then the event exhibits specified complexity and is designed (unless explained by "law").

The trouble with Dembski's account however is that too many, perhaps all, patterns end up exhibiting specified complexity. The reason for this is that if we help ourselves to the right side information, we can generate a host of detachable patterns that should be regarded as the result of chance. In the election case, we can specify all patterns of outcomes (Democrats on top 41 times, 40 times, 39 times, in all of their permutations) by simply using an algorithm which delivers every possible outcome of ballot placement. That is, if my side information is an algorithm which will spit out a list of all possible placements of Democrats and Republicans on the ballot, then we will be able to specify *any pattern* by using side information (the algorithm) that is truly *conditionally independent* and *tractable*.[3]

What we need here, no doubt, is a restriction on side information so that we can correspondingly restrict the range of patterns that will count as "specified." But how should we do that? The only way, it appears, is to have in mind in advance what sorts of outcomes are privileged, and then consider cases in which side information would yield these privileged outcomes. Thus, in the case of the Scrabble tiles above, if the pattern of tiles is one that spells out a coherent sentence in the English language, it counts as specified. So, side information concerning the formation of coherent English sentences should be permitted.

Unfortunately, this sort of exercise is futile. We were looking for a way of objectively determining which events exhibit patterns of specified complexity. But on the "restricted side information" strategy, this is silly. To restrict side information we must already *know* how to pick out specified complexity in the first place. Thus, rather than the explanatory filter helping us to figure out when there is specified complexity and thus design, the filter's success requires that we *already* be capable of picking out design independently.

How then should we (or rather, how *do* we) detect design among the occurrences of improbable outcomes? I am not sure. But I, like friends of IDT, am confident we can do it. Perhaps we should take a cue from the old-fashioned design arguments which said that "specified outcomes" are ones that exhibit patterns that intelligent beings often purpose to bring about in the world. So, when events exemplify patterns which are useful or aesthetically pleasing, we can regard them as likely to have resulted from design rather than chance.

Peter van Inwagen has offered a principle in another context which we might be able to employ here as well. In considering patterns of fine-tuning in the cosmos, van Inwagen proposes that we might be able to distinguish improbable but unspecified outcomes from equally improbable but specified outcomes by using the following principle, slightly modified here:

> Suppose that there is a certain nonnomically determined fact that has no known explanation; suppose that one can think of a possible explanation of that fact, an explanation that (if only it were true) is a very good explanation; then it is wrong to say that that event stands in no more need of an explanation than an otherwise similar event for which no such explanation is available.[4]

On this principle, we look at events which exhibit patterns not explained by law and see if a plausible alternative (read "design") explanation can be given. If so, we should regard the event as likely designed. If not, we should regard it as a result of chance. Thus, if we see Democrats receiving top billing in 40 out of 41 elections, and we notice that the election official is biased towards Democratic candidates, we have a pattern that admits of an explanation which, if true, is a very good one (cheating). But when the pattern is Democrats on

top 21 times, Republicans 20 times, no such corresponding good explanation can be found, and the pattern can, and should, be taken as random.

The upshot of this first criticism of Dembski is that the explanatory filter as described is flawed, but not fatally so. We can still see a way of distinguishing chance and design, though the method of doing so is far less rule governed and objective than perhaps the friends of IDT would wish for.

V. NOMIC REGULARITY AND THE DEFEAT OF DESIGN

I turn now to a second problem for Dembski's explanatory filter. The above criticism focuses on the way in which Dembski distinguishes explanations via chance and design. This criticism concerns the distinction of explanations via law and design. In describing Dembski's explanatory filter we have seen that the first node in the decision tree requires us to determine if the event is the (nearly) inevitable outcome of nomic regularities. If so, the explanation is law, not chance or design. If we can discern some law-like way that an event, even a complex specified event, comes about, this defeats the design explanation. Michael Behe, in his book *Darwin's Black Box*, makes this claim repeatedly in referring to the "irreducibly complex" biochemical processes and structures he treats. He writes:

> How do we confidently detect design? For discrete physical systems-if there is not a separate route to their production, design is evident when a number of separate, interacting components are ordered in such a way as to accomplish a function beyond the individual components.[5]

And later,

> We must also consider the laws of nature. The laws of nature can organize matter.... The most relevant laws are those of biological reproduction, mutation, and natural selection. If a biological structure can be explained in terms of natural laws, then we cannot conclude that it was designed.[6]

Thus, for Behe, success at explaining an event via nomic regularities trumps design explanations.

However, this seems to entail a claim that many IDT advocates deny, sometimes strenuously, namely, that appeal to intelligent design requires appeal to supernatural intervention in the course of nature. One cannot have it both ways. If my success at explaining an event's occurrence through law-like processes undercuts a design explanation, then the presence of design requires that some events be caused in a non-nomically regular way, i.e., miraculously. This is simple modus tollens.[7]

Behe is not alone in such claims. Here, for example, is Phillip Johnson:

> If God had created a lifeless world, even with oceans rich in amino acids and other organic molecules, and thereafter had left matter alone, life would not have come into existence. If God had done nothing but create a world of bacteria and protozoa, it would still be a world of bacteria and protozoa. Whatever may have been the case in the remote past, the chemicals we see today have no observable tendency or ability to form complex plants and animals. Persons who believe that chemicals unassisted by intelligence can combine to create life, or that bacteria can evolve by natural processes into complex animals, are making an a priori assumption that nature has the resources to do its own creating. I call such persons metaphysical naturalists.[8]

Although Johnson is not as explicit here, the point is the same. Natural entities, operating via their natural powers, are incapable of explaining the existence of the complex biological entities we find. Thus, explanation of such entities must require reference to supernatural intervention into the course of nature.

Above I noted, however, that many friends of IDT deny that design has any such implications. Dembski, to cite one example, insists that even

though we might be able to assert confidently that a designer is required to explain an event, this has no direct implications for the *way* in which the designer brought the event about. Dembski claims the question of whether an intelligent cause was involved, the *detectability question*, is independent of the question of how such a designer acted, the *modality question*.

> The point I want to stress, however, is that the detectability and modality questions are largely independent, with the… answer to one question not necessarily affecting the correct answer to the other.[9]

And yet, in the same work, Dembski indicates that a *sine qua non* of IDT is that it appeals to divine interventions. In the following passage, Dembski is explaining the difference between IDT and naturalistic evolution, claiming, it appears, that the course of nature will have gaps in the former but not the latter:

> The first thing to notice is that naturalistic evolution and intelligent design both make definite assertions of fact. To see this, consider your own personal genealogy. Here you are. You had parents. They in turn had parents. They too had parents. And so on. If we run the video camera back in time, generation upon generation, what do we see? Do we see a continuous chain of natural causes which go from apes to small furry mammals to reptiles to slugs and slime molds to blue-green algae and finally all the way back to prebiotic soup, with no event in the chain ever signaling the activity of an intelligent cause? Or as we trace back the genealogy, do we find events that clearly signal the activity of an intelligent cause? There exist reliable criteria for inferring the activity of intelligent causes. Does the natural history display clear marks of intelligence and thereby warrant a design inference, or does it not? To answer this question one way is to embrace intelligent design; to answer it the other way is to embrace naturalistic evolution.[10]

Perhaps one might think that these remarks don't force Dembski to hold that IDT requires divine intervention in the processes of nature. After all, he merely says that if IDT is correct, some event in the chain will "signal" the activity of a designer. Perhaps this just means that such activity is detectable, leaving the modality question still wide open. Yet a few pages earlier Dembski is clear that the earmarks of design in question cannot be seen if the natural causal nexus is uninterrupted. As a result, he claims, so-called theistic evolution and atheistic evolution are identical in scientific content.

Thus, it seems that IDT advocates might consistently hold that the answer to the detectability question leaves the modality question open. But the Explanatory Filter contradicts this, by holding that if the modality question yields a nomically regular answer, the detectability question must be answered in the negative. And this implies that if design is detectable, there must have been intervention. We now turn to see why this claim is deeply problematic.

VI. INTERVENTION AND DECK-STACKING

Imagine that I invite you and two other friends to my home for a friendly game of high stakes poker. In order to insure the integrity of the game, I propose that we play each hand with a freshly opened deck of preshuffled cards. After five hands of five-card stud you grow suspicious. The reason: I have won every pot with a hand of four aces.

Convinced that I am cheating, you set out to figure out how I have done it. You look up my sleeve, my pant leg, under my hat, all to no avail. It becomes clear to you that I did not break the rules by unfairly adding cards to, or removing cards from, my hand during the game. All attempts to discover signs of intervention during the course of the game come up empty. What should you conclude? Perhaps one might conclude that no rules of poker playing were violated during the course of the game and *thus* that there was no cheating after all.

No contravention of the rules during the game, no cheating.

One of the other losers is, however, not convinced by such reasoning. While it might be true that there was no cheating by *intervention*, there are other ways to manipulate the game to get the favored outcome. How? The answer is, of course, easily discovered in the neatly stacked pile of "new pre-shuffled" decks at the edge of the table. Upon examining the first, we notice that among the cards at the top of the deck, every fourth one is an ace. The jig is up! All I had to do is control certain initial conditions, i.e., who dealt the hands, and I would be a guaranteed winner.

Here we have a case in which the earmarks of intelligent intervention are clear. It is reasonable for us to expect that no one would, just by chance, win five rounds of poker with hands of four aces. But there are two very different ways in which intelligent agency might have secured the result, by *intervention* and by *deck-stacking*.

Notice two important implications of the distinction that I will return to later. First, the inference that we make that cheating occurred here (call it "the cheating inference") was made in [a] way that was *indifferent* to our knowledge of how it was pulled off. It might be the case that someone looking at the game that we played would plainly see that no rules of poker playing were violated. The game was utterly "nomically regular." Nonetheless, the cheating inference would not be undercut.

The relevance of this observation should be obvious. As we saw earlier, IDT advocates, most notably Behe and Johnson, argue that design inferences are defeated if the processes that lead to the designed outcome are nomically regular. This is a mistake. Even if the designed outcomes can be explained by appeal to the regular operations of the laws of nature, inferences to design can still be warranted.

The second implication, the flip-side of the first perhaps, is that if all we had access to was the outcomes of the poker games, there would be no way in principle to discern whether or not the cheating occurred via deck-stacking or intervention. So, if we imagine that after each hand, the players laid out their sets of five cards on a separate table, and one had access only to those final results, we could tell that the one player had cheated, but would have nothing to offer about whether deck-stacking or intervention explained it.

This second implication is important because it helps us think through the relevance of design for the philosophy of science generally. As we have seen, friends of IDT offer arguments along the lines of the following:

1. If design inferences concerning natural phenomena are warranted, then intelligent agency has played a role in bringing about some natural phenomena.
2. If intelligent agency has played a role in bringing about some natural phenomena, then purely naturalistic science will fail to explain truly such phenomena.
3. If purely naturalistic science will fail to explain truly such phenomena, then any methodologically naturalistic science will necessarily ultimately lead to errant explanations.
4. Any methodology that necessarily ultimately leads to errant explanations should be abandoned.
5. Thus, if design inferences are warranted, methodological naturalism should be abandoned.

Although the argument might look plausible on first glance, there is something deeply mistaken about it. And the cheating analogy makes clear that the trouble is premise 2. To see this we must consider first what the analogue for methodological naturalism would be in the cheating case. The answer can only be that it is an attempt to explain the outcomes of poker games by appeal to the rules of poker play. Call this "methodological rule-following." Can we explain the outcomes of the game described earlier by adopting methodological rule-following? In one sense we can. That is, if the role of the explainer here is simply to explain what rules brought us from the starting point of the game (cracking open the deck) to the (apparently

designed) outcome, the answer is yes. Knowing the rules of poker would be sufficient to explain the outcomes in that sense. In another sense, of course, the explanation will be incomplete, since we have not explained every feature of the outcome about which we are curious, specifically, those features that tipped us off to the presence of cheating.

This leads us directly to the question of what it is exactly that scientific inquiry is supposed to be doing. We will turn to this question below. For the moment I want us to take note of this point, namely, that the success of "law" explanations has nothing to do with cheating inferences or design inferences. This means, of course, that Dembski's explanatory filter requires further adjusting. As we will see, however, the required adjustment will force friends of IDT to abandon intelligent design as a paradigm of natural science inconsistent with methodological naturalism.

VII. DESIGN AND NATURAL SCIENCE

Critics of IDT have frequently replied that methodological naturalism either cannot or should not be abandoned in science. But why should there be such insistence on maintaining methodological naturalism? Assume, for a moment, that God did miraculously intervene in the course of nature to bring about the origin of life, or the origin of the first instances of distinct biological kinds, or the origin of (some or all) human beings? If the scientist were by fiat to be blocked from countenancing such causes, then scientific attempts to understand these phenomena would be doomed to frustration or falsity. How absurd for the Christian, if he or she is convinced, perhaps by the contents of revelation, that God did act in just such a fashion, to reject the true explanation. How, on the naturalistic view, should the Christian scientist proceed when trying to explain scientifically the origins of natural kinds? Should she offer the best naturalistic explanation available, knowing all along that while the explanation is the best *scientific* one, it is nonetheless ultimately false? Why not rather drop such artificial, partisan barriers, and attempt to give the *right explanation* rather than the best "merely scientific" explanation or the best "merely theological" explanation?

One common reply to this question is simply that such explanations transcend the bounds of science properly construed. I think many Christian philosophers bristle at the suggestion that appeals to divine intervention rule out an explanation as "genuinely scientific." That strikes too close to the little tolerated view that bringing God into, for example, philosophy makes one's work not "genuinely philosophical." Why not rather say, as we do in philosophy, and as friends of IDT do concerning science, that we should lift such *ad hoc* restrictions, and let the chips fall where they may? If the best explanation for a philosophical problem requires appeal to the supernatural, so be it; and likewise in the case of science. This is just what IDT advocates are stumping for.

So perhaps disciplinary territorialism should not rule out Intelligent Design as a genuinely scientific explanation. But we are not out of the woods yet. For even though countenancing design as an explanation might in principle count as genuine science, it cannot if the design hypothesis is not empirically distinguishable from explanations which appeal only to the natural powers of natural substances. If such empirical distinguishability is not possible, then there is no scientifically respectable way, by IDT's own lights, to defend intelligent design as an explanation distinct from law and chance.

But why think that IDT advocates are stuck with this problem, a problem we might call the *empirical vacuity* problem? The answer, once again, can be found in the poker case above. If,

a. one acknowledges that designed outcomes might in principle be explained either via deck-stacking or intervention and,

b. we have no access to the actual sequence of events that led to the obtaining of the apparently designed outcome,[11] then,

c. there are no empirical grounds for favoring explanations via law *over* explanation via design.

The point becomes clear when we consider cases in which friends of IDT think design is empirically detectable. The two most commonly discussed cases are those concerning so-called cosmological fine-tuning and concerning irreducible biological complexity. For reasons that will become clear shortly, I will focus on just the latter here. The details of the argument concerning irreducible complexity are widely known and I won't repeat them here. Irreducible biological complexity is a notion introduced by Michael Behe in his widely cited work *Darwin's Black Box*. In the book, Behe gives numerous examples of microbiological structures and of biochemical processes which are a) complex, b) such that the function they perform for the organism is essential for the organism's survival, and c) such that were the structure or process to lack some of the parts it has, it would be unable to perform its essential function, rendering it, from the organism's standpoint, totally non-functional—perhaps even maladaptive.

Since structures or processes which contain only proper subsets of the parts of the fully functional structure or process are non-functional, standard Darwinian models cannot explain these complex structures or processes. Standard Darwinism requires that such complex structures arise by gradual accretion of parts, accompanied by gradual improvement in adaptiveness. Thus, these irreducibly complex structures must have come into existence some other way. Given the complexity of the structures and processes in question, and the fact that the whole organism in which the structure or process is instantiated requires that structure or process to exist, it is incredible, claims Behe, that the process comes into existence by any other means than design.

Behe's argument has generated a good deal of controversy. Most of that controversy has been with advocates of some variant of Darwinism arguing that purely natural processes *can* account for such structures after all (either because such complex structures can arise all at once, or because precursors to the complex structure are not non-functional in the way Behe contends). Consider, however, a different worry about Behe's argument. Earlier I noted that Behe asserts that if some nomically regular process were discovered which explains the origins of the irreducibly complex structures, this would provide a defeater for design. The cheating example made clear that this was a mistake. Since we do not have access to the actual sequence of events which generated the irreducibly complex outcome, we cannot tell whether or not the process came about via intervention or deck-stacking. Undoubtedly it would take a good deal of up front design work to insure that nomically regular processes would generate the irreducibly complex outcomes Behe points to. But God is smart, omniscient in fact, and would no doubt be able to figure out how to secure such results through deck-stacking.[12]

And so we are compelled to admit that events which display the earmarks of design leave us in the dark about whether or not the chain of events leading up to a designed event came about by intervention or purely nomically regular processes. The friend of IDT is, at this juncture, likely to reply that far from a surprise, this result is just what IDT has claimed all along. After all, doesn't Dembski himself distinguish between detectability and modality? No doubt he does. But this reply misses the thrust of the argument. The claim here is that designed events can be caused by either intervention or deck-stacking-plus-nomic-regularity (or something more complex if indeterminacy is relevant; see note 12 for more on this). If all we have access to is apparently designed outcomes, we cannot distinguish between those that result via "law" (deck-stacking) and those that result from "design" (intervention). Thus, we cannot engage in the project suggested by IDT advocates after all, namely, setting aside methodological naturalism and letting the explanatory chips fall where they may. The explanatory chips can't discriminate between these competitors.

VIII. OBJECTION AND REPLY

Before proceeding further, let me pause to respond to a worry that may arise at this point in the dialectic. The friend of IDT may, at this point, object as

follows: "Let's say that one does accept (a) and (b) above. You have claimed that in such a case one cannot empirically distinguish between cases in which an apparently designed event results from intervention and from nomically regular processes. Surely this is false. For if that were so, it would mean that we could not decide whether or not the pyramids in the jungle are caused by law or intervention. But this is surely wrong. We are quite confident that pyramids result from design and not mere nomic regularity. And this shows that we have the ability to distinguish law from design after all."

The imaginary critic is correct, except concerning what he takes the objection to imply. Of course we can see that the pyramids are designed. What I have claimed here is that we must admit that the design either arose via intervention or deck-stacking. That is, either intelligent beings intervened in the course of nature to secure the designed outcome, or someone set up the universe from the beginning so that this otherwise unexpected arrangement of matter would arise through nomically regular processes. We favor intervention in *this* case (i.e., the pyramid case) because we see that the outcomes (pyramids) serve the sorts of aims that intelligent *human creatures* typically have. Thus we have good reason to suspect that human creatures, and not mere nomically regular processes, caused them. But if someone could show us a time lapse video of universal history in which pyramids come to be via a nomically regular process, we should still conclude that this is a case of design, but of the deck-stacking sort.

So, a good reason (but not the commonly professed reason) why such explanations should not be favored in science is because there are no empirical grounds for favoring them over their methodologically natural competitors. Of course, if God were to privilege us with a revelation which filled us in on all of the occasions in which he directly intervened in natural affairs to bring about events that could not have occurred given the natural powers of natural entities alone, then the theist would be required to say that any explanation of the event (or its causal consequences) is incomplete without reference to divine causal activity. But absent this, IDT in its boldest form (the form described as (4) in section II) stalls.

IX. LESS BOLD VERSIONS OF IDT

In the remainder of this paper I want to consider two fall-back positions that friends of IDT might defend. Each provides a way of maintaining the integrity of design in science without falling into the greedier version with its errant methodological implications. What if, in light of the above, friends of IDT contend that we should scrap the explanatory filter, recognizing that law does not defeat design in explanation after all, but still admit that, whether the designed event comes to be by deck-stacking or intervention, a *complete* explanation will need to make reference to the activity of designer. And if scientists are honest seekers of complete explanations of natural phenomena, they are still going to be obliged to take Intelligent Design seriously in their final rendering.

There is a sense in which this fall back is clearly on target. Regardless of how the cheating occurred, intelligent agency is required in the complete explanation. Still, we can fairly ask at this juncture whether or not scientists are or should be concerned with complete explanations as described here. The answer is no. The reason for this is that when a deck-stacking explanation is sufficient (and one always would be in these cases)[13] scientists, theists or not, will be able to explain how the events came to be simply by appeal to the existence and activity of some set of theoretically postulated natural substances and their powers. To use Dembski's analogy, if we were to watch the time lapse video of universal history, nomic regularity would be preserved at each instant. As a result, it would be best for us to see the deliverances of IDT as helpful natural theology, but useless science. Irreducible complexity or fine-tuning might provide us with evidence of intelligent design, and thus with arguments for the existence of God. But they do not

provide us with scientific explanations that compete with methodologically natural ones. As a result, the first fall-back position will not take us where the friends of IDT want to go (though it might still be able to deliver some important and interesting results in natural theology nonetheless).

Perhaps the friends of IDT might avail themselves of one last ditch. Dembski and others have argued that the value of IDT lies not merely in the fact that it is better able than methodological naturalism to explain, say, irreducible biological complexity, but that the IDT hypothesis is, in the sense employed by Kuhn, fertile or fecund. Thus, even if we were to drop the explanatory filter and the claim that complete scientific explanations must make appeal to design, we might still hold that belief in design might provide a useful background assumption when we are theorizing. Far from being a science-stopper, as God-of-the-gaps science is often claimed to be, IDT promotes fertile scientific theorizing. Thus, our belief that nature is designed might lead us to see the world in ways we otherwise would not.

It is hard to know what to make of this suggestion *a priori*. Leibniz, no friend of divine intervention in proper science, argued that scientific speculation that proceeds on the assumption of design was likely to be fertile in this way, though ultimate scientific explanations would not, he argued, make reference to facts about design. His favorite example concerned Snell's Law, the law describing the behavior of refracting light (and electromagnetic radiation generally). Leibniz claimed that Snell was led to his formulation of the law because it represents light as travelling by the path of least resistance. This makes sense from the design perspective and so provided a good place to start experimenting concerning the behavior of refracting light.[14]

Friends of IDT have suggested some concrete ways in which the fertility of IDT might be manifest in contemporary science. Two recurring examples are: a) it might lead us to think that "junk" DNA has some important function after all and b) it might similarly lead us to look for the function, of so-called vestigial organs.[15]

While it might be the case that approaching natural science in this way will sometimes yield fruit, the likelihood of red herrings runs equally strong. The reason for this is that IDT will provide a fertile theoretical backdrop in a certain domain only if (a) we can be fairly confident of what the designer's intentions are in that domain, and (b) we are sure that the specific matter under investigation is relevant to those intentions. With respect to the first, we can imagine how far astray we might be led in the search for the function of vestigial organs if one of God's chief aims in constructing organ systems was aesthetic. Attempts to look for the functional utility provided by such organs would lead either to frustration or falsity. With respect to the second, consider the handle end of a plastic fork. Often, such forks will have a sharp burr at the end which is a result of the manufacturing process. The fork could have been produced in a way so that this was absent. But all things considered, the manufacturer found it better suited to its aims to bring it about through a process that left this burr. These burrs have no purpose and serve no function. They are byproducts of a contingent process of manufacture. And there is no reason to think that similar byproducts would be absent even from intelligently designed nature. Perhaps hairy armpits are an example. The point however is straightforward. Even Christians who claim to have a good bit of special revelation concerning God's purposes for the natural world have precious little of value when it comes to help with fertile scientific theorizing.[16]

Some have argued that there is something suspect about framing a view of providence in the way that the deck-stacker does, and that this should lead the Christian to favor interventionism. A deck-stacking God is the God of deism. Christians, on the other hand, see a God whose direct handiwork is evidenced repeatedly in the pages of Scripture and in the metaphysical speculations of philosophers. Plantinga claims:

> First and most important, according to serious theism, God is constantly, immediately intimately and directly active in his creation: he constantly upholds it in

> existence and providentially governs it. He is immediately and directly active in everything from the Big Bang to the sparrow's fall. Literally nothing happens without his upholding hand. Second, natural laws are not in any way independent of God, and are perhaps best thought of as regularities in the ways in which he treats the stuff he has made, or perhaps as counterfactuals of divine freedom. (Hence there is nothing in the least untoward in the thought that on some occasions God might do something in a way different from his usual way—e.g., raise someone from the dead or change water into wine.)…. God is already and always intimately acting in nature, which depends from moment to moment for its existence upon immediate divine activity….[17]

Likewise, Paul Helm argues in *The Providence of God* that deistic views of God as deck-stacker are inconsistent with Christian commitments to divine miraculous intervention and to the power of petitionary prayer. Helm describes the view as one according to which:

> [God], in creating the universe, creates it in such a way that he does not *need* to exercise a superintending care of it. This is the deistic view.[18]

Concerning petitionary prayer, Helm contends:

> According to the Christian faith, God answers petitionary prayer. That is, certain things happen in the universe because people ask God that they happen, and God is pleased to do what they ask. Had they not asked, the event in question would not have occurred; or at least, had they not asked, there is no reason to think that the event would have occurred. A deist, however, (at least if he is consistent) will find no place for petitionary prayer.[19]

Other Christians have argued, on the contrary, that there is something unworthy of a theism which countenances a God who once creates the natural order and yet leaves it without the resources to bring about the desired results. The most vocal advocate of this line in the contemporary arena is Howard Van Till who argues:

> I believe that the universe in its present form is to be seen as a potentiality of the creation that has been actualized by the exercise of its God-given creaturely capabilities. For this to be possible, however, the creation's formational economy must be astoundingly robust and gapless—lacking none of the resources or capabilities necessary to make possible the sort of continuous actualization of new structures and life forms as now envisioned by the natural sciences. The optimally-equipped character of the universe's formational economy is, I believe, a vivid manifestation of the fact that it is the product, not of mere accident or happenstance, as the worldview of naturalism would have it, but of *intention*. In other words, the universe bears the marks of being the *product of thoughtful conceptualization for the accomplishment of some purpose*.[20]

Similar sentiments were staked out and defended with perhaps even more gusto in the past. Leibniz was aware of the fact that in the 1706 version of Query 31 of the *Optiks* Newton endorsed the claim that God on occasion directly intervenes to maintain nature's integrity. In particular, Newton claims that this was necessary to prevent the planets from falling in on each other. Leibniz, near the end of his life, seeks to provoke one prominent Newtonian spokesperson, Samuel Clarke, on the matter. In the third paragraph of his opening letter to Clarke, Leibniz acerbically remarks:

> Sir Isaac Newton, and his followers, also have a very odd opinion concerning the work of God. According to their doctrine, God Almighty wants to wind up his watch from time to time: otherwise it would cease

> to move. He had not, it seems, sufficient foresight to make it a perpetual motion. Nay, the machine of God's making, is so imperfect, according to these gentlemen; that he is obliged to clean it now and then by an extraordinary concourse and even to mend it, as a clockmaker mends his work; who must consequently be so much the more unskillful a workman, as he is more often obliged to mend his work and set it right. According to my opinion, the same force and vigor remains always in the world, and only passes from one part of matter to another, agreeably to the laws of nature, and the beautiful pre-established order. And I hold, that when God works miracles, he does not do it in order to supply the wants of nature, but those of grace. Whoever thinks otherwise must needs have a very mean notion of the wisdom and power of God.[21]

If one favors the sentiments expressed by Plantinga and Helm above, one might be inclined to break the empirical deadlock between deck-stacking and intervention in favor of intervention. If one were to favor van Till and Leibniz, one would likely be inclined in the opposite direction. In the end, however, the philosophical grounds for deciding this dispute may turn out to be no more useful than the empirical evidence (i.e., not at all).

I am not sure how to defend the claim that the considerations appealed to by Leibniz are more persuasive than those appealed to by Plantinga. Nonetheless, I am inclined toward the deck-stacking model, and it is a model which according to Helm, faces a pair of serious objections from miracles and petitionary prayer. Can the deck-stacker successfully respond to these?

One might think that the challenge concerning miracles is rather easily met. In order to meet it one would first have to conceive of miracles in a way different than perhaps most Christians have, i.e., as violations of laws of nature. I think there are decisive independent reasons for jettisoning this conception of miracles, making any proposed reconception easier to swallow.[22] On this alternative view, miracles would have to consist of arrangements of matter that were intentionally brought about by God via deck-stacking and nomic regularity, which arrangements would have been exceedingly improbable without God having stacked the deck in precisely the way that he did. Thus, though we all know it would be exceedingly improbable, it could be the case that all of the water molecules in the Red Sea at the time of the Israelite crossing were such that their velocity and direction caused the parting of the Sea for just the amount of time needed for the Israelites to cross. Similar accounts can be given for miracles ranging from Elisha's floating axe head to Christ's resurrection. Still, it is an open question whether or not all miracles could be accounted for via deck-stacking.[23]

Initially, it is hard to see how petitionary prayer raises any more trouble for the deck-stacker than it does for the advocate of complete foreknowledge or robust providence over human affairs generally. In any of these cases, if God has middle knowledge, and thus knows what will in fact be prayed for in advance, God can determine that an event, X, will occur in a world at least in part because someone prayed for X to occur.

It should be noted as well that Plantinga's arguments do not pack any punch against the sort of deck-stacking view of natural providence I am defending here. Deck-stackers can heartily support divine conservation and the possibility for divine intervention into the order of nature if needed.

But do the arguments of Van Till and Leibniz have any force for friends of deck-stacking? I think they do. For those who are not advocates of divine openness, it is hard to see what motives God might have for electing to create the world and then later supplement his work, a la Newton and Clarke, to bring about all of the aims he has for it. No doubt, universe creation and providential superintending of universes are tricky businesses, and perhaps no set of natural entities and powers could, through deck-stacking, bring off everything God intended for his creation to accomplish. But we cannot with any confidence at all proclaim that God

couldn't bring about, say, all the arrangements of created things we now see about us through deck-stacking. Opponents of deck-stacking will be happy to point out that we can't proclaim with any confidence that he *could* do it either.

And this brings us back to one of the central questions of the paper: Does any of this have any practical implications for the practice of science? At best I think the implication is this. If we cannot establish a preference for intervention over deck-stacking; by empirical means (and we can't) or philosophical arguments (perhaps we can't) we should simply appeal to induction. God usually works by law-like means, so we should infer that probably he does the same here and that if he did not, our ability to know that would be outstripped. Perhaps this just adds up to sound intellectual humility. To me, it sounds like methodological naturalism.[24]

NOTES

1. See William A. Dembski, *Mere Creation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998:): 98–104. Also see William A. Dembski, *The Design Inference* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998) 36–47, and William A. Dembski, *Intelligent Design* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999): 133–134. For simplicity's sake I will refer only to "events" in what follows though the explanatory filter is meant to apply to objects, events, and states of affairs.
2. See Dembski, *Mere Creation*, 98.
3. I should note here that Robin Collins has independently hit upon a similar criticism of Dembski. However, he proposes a resolution that is distinct from the one I propose here. See Robin Collins, "An Evaluation of William A. Dembski's *The Design Inference*," in *Christian Scholar's Review*, vol. XXX., no. 3 (Spring 2001).
4. See Peter van Inwagen, *Metaphysics* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1993): 135.
5. See Michael J. Behe, *Darwin's Black Box: The Biochemical Challenge to Evolution* (New York: Free Press, 1996): 194.
6. *Ibid.*, 203.
7. With one modification. The modus tollens only tells us that designed events are ones that are not explicable in terms of nomic regularities. No doubt, this is a necessary condition of the miraculous as normally understood, but not a sufficient condition. For sufficiency, one would have to include the claim that the event had a divine cause. But one would think that this is had for free on IDT.
8. See Howard J. Van Till and Phillip E. Johnson, "God and Evolution: An Exchange," *First Things* (June/July 1993): 38.
9. See Dembski's *intelligent Design*, 240.
10. *Ibid.*, 116.
11. It must be added "and we cannot with reasonable certainty re-create the very sequence of events that led to the designed outcome."
12. One might think that in a Newtonian world such deck-stacking might be a possibility, but that in a physical world shot through with quantum indeterminacy, deck-stacking cannot be guaranteed to yield any old physically possible arrangement without intervention along the way. This may be right, and whether or not it is depends on whether or not God has middle knowledge with respect to subjunctive conditionals concerning causally indeterministic natural events. Perhaps those who balk at middle knowledge generally might find little comfort here. Even if we reject middle knowledge, however, it is still *possible*, perhaps even *likely*, that God could stack the universal deck in a way that would bring about the instances of design we see without any intervention. For example, if God could not know the outcomes of indeterministic physical processes, God might still set in motion a number of chains of events which are such that each carries some (perhaps high) probability of yielding the outcome he desires (organic life perhaps). In this way, God might be able to bring about the outcome by deck-stacking without middle knowledge, though such outcomes could not be *guaranteed*.

What if it were to happen that God could not, given indeterminacy, secure even a high likelihood of the desired outcome? Even if such were the case, God could form an intention to intervene only if all the chains of events set in motion seem to be turning into dead ends. Thus, he might do everything possible via deck-stacking to set in motion chains of events that will lead to organic life, and only intervene if necessary. If that is how things are (or were) in the actual world, it might be the case that God actually intervened to bring about irreducibly complex results, but it might not as well. Available evidence would not settle the matter. The same sort of modal ignorance that leaves us in the dark concerning the actualizability of a world with free creatures who never sin, leaves us in the dark about the actualizability of a world where deck-stacking yields irreducible complexity.

13. That may strike the reader as puzzling. But given what has gone before it should not be. Perhaps one might think that in some cases, no explanation in terms of the natural powers of natural substances is possible. But what would make such an explanation impossible? Sometimes, critics of methodological naturalism claim that the impossibility is really just a very high improbability. For irreducibly complex structures to have arisen by law would have required a chance arrangement of matter in the primordial soup/clay/what have you that strains credibility. But credibility is strained here only if we think that deck-stacking was not involved. Perhaps there are some cases where the claim is not that naturalistic explanations are improbable, but that they are downright impossible. One might think such cases can be found in miraculous events. Water cannot turn to wine given the natural powers of natural substances. That, an objector might hold, is surely impossible, not just improbable. It might be the case that some miracles do present us with cases where the explanation requires intervention. Two things should be said in response. First, none of the cases presented by IDT advocates are anything like water-to-wine miracles. They are, rather, cases of credibility-straining-improbabilities. Second, as I will discuss in the text below when treating miracles directly, the claim that miracles of the water-to-wine sort require direct intervention is not irresistible. As we will see, Christian thinkers such as Leibniz have cogently defended the possibility of a no-intervention world, even in the face of such miracles.
14. See G. W. Leibniz, *Discourse on Metaphysics* ¶22 found in *Philosophical Essays*, eds. Roger Ariew and Daniel Garber (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 1989): 55.
15. See Dembski's *Intelligent Design*, 150.
16. I say this with apologies to those who favor a literal six 24 hour day reading of the Genesis 1–3. Perhaps in such a case we would have some evidence that would be fruitful for theorizing. But even in that case, it is not evidence that assists us by putting us in touch with the aims of a designer. The fruitfulness in this case is simply due to the fact that we are made aware of facts about universal origins that might otherwise not be empirically accessible.
17. See Alvin Plantinga, "Methodological Naturalism?," in *Facets of Faith and Science*, ed. J. van der Meer (Lanham, MA: University Press of America, 1996).
18. See Paul Helm, *The Providence of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994): 75–76.
19. *Ibid.*, 77–78.
20. See Howard J. Van Till, "The Creation: Intelligently Designed or Optimally Equipped?" *Theology Today* 55, no. 3 (1998): 362.
21. See *The Leibniz-Clarke Correspondence*, ed. H. G. Alexander (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1956): 11–12, ¶4.
22. The case I have in mind is made by Jan Cover in "Miracles and the Christian Faith" in *Reason for the Hope Within*, ed. Michael Murray (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999): 345–374. Though I commend the account Cover gives, I will not be adopting the same conception he adopts in this essay. Cover characterizes miracles as events that exceed the power of the natural substances involved in the event. Even this will be too strong for the deck-stacker.
23. Perhaps not all miracles could be accounted for in this way. Miracles in which, say, water is turned to wine do not seem to involve anything that deck-stacking could account for. Perhaps instantaneous rearrangements of quarks could transmute hydrogen and oxygen molecules into the complex aromatic hydrocarbons that would be needed in fine wine. If anyone can be a proficient alchemist, no doubt God can. I leave it to the physicists to determine the plausibility of potentially accounting

for all Biblical miracles in this fashion. Note, however, that the physicist alone might not be up to the task. It could be the case, for all our feeble powers can discern, that certain natural substances have natural powers that are only actualized under extremely rare circumstances. Thus perhaps under just the right conditions (conditions that might include an incarnate man in Palestine uttering certain words), water molecules or their parts can actualize powers to transmute into wine. In principle the effects of such powers should be reproducible. Whether they are in fact depends on how finely tuned the conditions must be to actualize the power.

24. Thanks to Glenn Ross, Bill Hasker, Timothy O'Connor, Del Ratzsch, Gary Mar, Philip Clayton, Robin Collins, and two anonymous referees for this journal for helpful comments on earlier drafts of this paper.

VIII.B.3

An Evolutionary Argument against Naturalism

ALVIN PLANTINGA

Brief biographical remarks about Alvin Plantinga appear before selection I.B.8. In this article, Alvin Plantinga analyzes David Hume's epistemic skepticism, according to which we lack knowledge altogether, opposes it to Thomas Reid's Christian commonsense philosophy, and applies the results to naturalism (the view that there is no God or any other supernatural entity). He argues that naturalism is essentially Humean, so that anyone who adopts it has no knowledge at all, let alone knowledge of naturalism. Naturalism is self-undermining. If it is true, we are not justified in believing it, for Darwinian evolutionary theory (to which naturalists are presently committed) offers convincing reason to doubt that our cognitive faculties are successfully aimed at truth.

… Now turn to the question whether our cognitive faculties are reliable and do, in fact, produce for the most part true belief. Given Hume's complete agnosticism about the origins of his cognitive faculties, something like his deeply agnostic attitude to that question is no more than sensible. For suppose Hume asks himself how likely it is that our cognitive faculties are reliable, given his views (or rather lack of views) about the origin and provenance of ourselves and those faculties. What is the probability that our faculties produce the considerable preponderance of true belief over false required by reliability, given his views of their origin and purpose (if any)? I should think he would have to say that this probability is either low or inscrutable —impossible to determine. From his point of view, there are innumerable scenarios, innumerable ways in which we and our cognitive faculties could have come into being: perhaps we have been created by God, but perhaps we and the world are the result of

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some kind of vegetative principle, or a result of copulation on the part of animals we have no knowledge of, or the result of Russell's accidental collocation of atoms, or of.... On many of these scenarios, our cognitive faculties wouldn't be reliable (although they might contribute to fitness or survival); perhaps on others they would be reliable; on balance, one just wouldn't know what to think about this probability.

We can see this more fully as follows. Let R be the proposition that our cognitive faculties are reliable: now what is the likelihood of R? As Reid points out, we all instinctively believe or assume that our cognitive faculties are indeed reliable; but what is the probability of that assumption, given the relevant facts? Well, what are the relevant facts? First, they would be facts about those faculties: the probability of R given (relative to) the population of China would not be relevant. And presumably the relevant facts would be facts about how these faculties originated; whether they were designed; if so, by whom and with what end in view; what constraints governed their development; and what their purpose and function is, if, indeed, they have a purpose and function. Were they, as Reid thought, created in us by a being who intends that they function reliably to give us knowledge about our environment, ourselves, and God himself—all the knowledge needed for us to attain shalom, to be the sort of beings God intended us to be? On that scenario, the purpose of our cognitive faculties would be (in part, at least) to supply us with true beliefs on those topics, and (given that they are functioning properly) there would be a high probability of their doing just that.

Did they, by contrast, arise by way of some chance mechanism, something like the mindless swerve of atoms in the Democritian void? What is the likelihood, on *that* possibility, that our cognitive faculties are reliable? Well, you might think it pretty low. More likely, you may think that you simply can't say what that probability is: perhaps it is high (though presumably not very high), perhaps it is low; you simply can't tell. There will be many more such scenarios, says Hume, some involving vegetative origin, some copulative origin, some still other kinds of origin; with respect to them, too, the probability that our cognitive faculties are reliable is simply inscrutable. So first, Hume thinks his grasp of the whole set of relevant scenarios is at best infirm; second, with respect to many of these scenarios, those possible origins, the probability of R is inscrutable; and finally, the probability with respect to any of these scenarios that it is in fact the truth of the matter is also, as far as Hume is concerned, quite inscrutable.

But that means that the probability of R, given Hume's agnosticism, is also inscrutable for Hume. Let F be the relevant facts about their origin, purpose, and provenance: my claim is that, for Hume, P(R/F) (the probability of R on F) is inscrutable. He simply doesn't know what it is and has no opinion about its value, although presumably it wouldn't be very high. Another way to put it: the probability of R, given Hume's agnosticism, is inscrutable.

And that gives Hume a reason to be agnostic with respect to R as well; it gives him a reason to doubt that R is, in fact, true. For our cognitive faculties, our belief-producing mechanisms, are a bit like measuring instruments (more exactly, measuring instruments under an interpretation). Our faculties produce beliefs; for each belief, there is the content of that belief, the proposition believed, a proposition that is true if and only if the belief is true. Now a state of a measuring instrument (relative to a scheme of interpretation) can also be said (in an analogically extended sense) to have content. For definiteness, consider a thermometer and suppose its pointer is resting on the number 70. Given the natural scheme of interpretation, this state can be said to have the content that the ambient temperature is 70°F. And of course a thermometer is *reliable* only if the propositions it delivers in this way are for the most part true, or nearly true.

Imagine, then, that you embark on a voyage of space exploration and land on a planet revolving about a distant sun. This planet has a favorable atmosphere, but you know little more about it. You crack the hatch, step out, and immediately find something that looks a lot like a radio; it periodically emits strings of sounds that, oddly enough, form sentences in English. The sentences emitted

by this instrument express propositions only about topics of which you have no knowledge: what the weather is like in Beijing at the moment, whether Caesar had eggs on toast on the morning he crossed the Rubicon, whether the first human being to cross the Bering Strait and set foot on North America was left-handed, and the like. A bit unduly impressed with your find, you initially form the opinion that this quasi radio speaks the truth: that is, the propositions expressed (in English) by those sentences are true. But then you recall that you have no idea at all as to what the purpose of this apparent instrument is, whether it *has* a purpose, or how it came to be. You see that the probability of its being reliable, given what you know about it, is for you inscrutable. Then (in the absence of investigation) you have a *defeater* for your initial belief that the thing does, in fact, speak the truth, a reason to reject that belief, a reason to give it up, to be agnostic with respect to it. Relative to your beliefs about the origin, purpose, and provenance of this apparent instrument, the probability that it is a reliable source of information is low or (more likely) inscrutable. And that gives you a defeater for your original and hasty belief that the thing really does speak the truth. If you don't have or get further information about its reliability, the reasonable course is agnosticism about that proposition.

The same goes, I think, in the case of Humean views (or nonviews) about our origins and the origin and purpose, if any, of our cognitive faculties. Suppose I join Hume in that agnosticism. Then P(R/F) is for me inscrutable (as for Hume); I have no idea what the probability of my faculties being reliable is, given the relevant facts about their origin and purpose. But then I have a defeater for my original belief or assumption that my faculties are in fact reliable. If I have or can get no further information about their reliability, the reasonable course for me is agnosticism with respect to R, giving it up, failing to believe it. It isn't that rationality requires that I believe its *denial*, but it does require that I not believe *it*.

Suppose, therefore, that I *am* agnostic with respect to R: I believe neither it nor its denial. And now consider any belief *B* I have: that belief, of course, will be a deliverance of my cognitive faculties. However, I don't believe that my cognitive faculties are reliable—not because I've never thought about the question, but because I *have* thought about it and seen that P(R/F) is inscrutable for me. Well, what does rationality require with respect to this belief *B*? The clear answer seems to be that I have a defeater for this belief too, a reason to withhold it, to be agnostic with respect to it. Perhaps it isn't possible, given my nature, that I *be* agnostic with respect to it, at least much of the time; as Hume says, nature may not permit this. Still, this agnosticism is what reason requires, just as Hume suggests (though for different reasons). And we can take one further step with Hume. Because *B* is just *any* belief I hold—because I have a defeater for just any belief I hold—I also have a defeater for my belief that I *have* a defeater for *B*. This universal, all-purpose defeater provided by my agnosticism is also a defeater for *itself*, a self-defeating defeater. And hence this complex, confusing, multilayered, reflexive skepticism Hume describes, a skepticism in which I am skeptical of my beliefs and also of my doubts, and of the beliefs that lead to those doubts, and of my doubts with respect to those doubts, and the beliefs leading to *them*. Thus the true skeptic will be skeptical all the way down; he "will be diffident of his philosophical doubts, as well as his philosophical conviction."

Here we can imagine the following response: "Hey, hang on a minute! You said Hume and any similarly situated agnostic has a defeater for R, a belief to which he is inclined by nature—and you added that the rational course for them therefore is to give up belief in R—*provided they have no other information* about the reliability of their faculties. But what about that strong natural inclination to believe that our faculties are in fact reliable? Doesn't *that* count as 'other information'?" According to Reid (who might object to being pressed into service in defense of Hume), this belief in the reliability of our faculties is a *first principle*:

> Another first principle is—*That the natural faculties, by which we distinguish truth from error, are not fallacious*….

He goes on:

> If any truth can be said to be prior to all others in the order of nature, this seems to have the best claim; because, in every instance of assent, whether upon intuitive, demonstrative, or probable evidence, the truth of our faculties is taken for granted….

Surely there is truth here: this conviction is one normal human beings ordinarily have, and, as Reid gleefully points outs, even skeptics also seem to assume, in the course of ordinary daily living, to be sure, but most poignantly when proposing their skeptical arguments, that their faculties are functioning reliably. Very few skeptics, in offering their skeptical arguments, preface the argument by saying something like, "Well, here is an argument for general skepticism with respect to our cognitive faculties; of course I realize that the premises of this argument are themselves produced by cognitive faculties whose reliability the conclusion impugns, and of whose truth I am therefore extremely doubtful."

But our question is whether this belief can sensibly be pressed into service as information that can defeat the defeater provided for R by Hume's agnosticism about the origin and provenance of ourselves and our faculties. As Reid clearly sees, it cannot. If the general reliability of our cognitive faculties is under question, we can't hope to answer the question whether they *are* reliable by pointing out that these faculties themselves deliver the belief that they are, in fact, reliable. "If a man's honesty were called into question," says Reid, "it would be ridiculous to refer it to the man's own word, whether he be honest or not."… Concede that it is part of our nature to assume R; concede further that it is part of our nature to take R in the *basic* way, so that this conviction is not given or achieved by argument and evidence but comes with our mother's milk; concede still further, if you like, that this belief is produced by our cognitive faculties functioning properly. None of this, clearly enough, can serve to defeat the defeater for R provided by Hume's agnosticism. That is because any doubt about our cognitive faculties generally is a doubt about the specific faculty that produces this conviction; therefore we can't allay such a doubt by appealing to the deliverances of that faculty.

2. NATURALISM AND LACK OF KNOWLEDGE

Agnosticism with respect to our origins is one way to reject the theistic belief that we human beings have been created in the image of God: as we have seen, agnosticism with respect to origins destroys knowledge. There is another way to reject the belief in question: by accepting a belief incompatible with it, for example, philosophical or metaphysical naturalism. As Bas van Fraassen notes, it isn't easy to say precisely what naturalism is; for present purposes, suppose we take it to be the view that there is no such person as God, nor anyone or anything at all like him (it isn't that you believe, for example, that there are one or more finite gods). Paradigm cases of naturalism would be the views of Daniel Dennett in *Darwin's Dangerous Idea* or Bertrand Russell in "A Free Man's Worship": you think that "man is the product of causes which had no prevision of the end they were achieving, that his origin, his growth, his hopes and fears, his loves and his beliefs, are but the outcome of accidental collocations of atoms." (Perhaps you even go so far as to add, with Richard Dawkins, that the very idea that there is such a person as God is really a kind of cognitive virus, an epistemic sickness or disease, distorting the cognitive stance of what would otherwise be reasonable and rational human beings.) Unlike Hume, therefore, you are not agnostic as to whether there is such a person as God or any being at all like him; you think there is not.

There is likely to be a further difference between you and Hume. Having rejected theism, Hume had no comparable story to put in its place: he was left with no idea as to how humanity arose, under what conditions our cognitive faculties came to be, and so on. The contemporary naturalist, however, is in a different condition; for naturalism

now sports a shared myth or story about ourselves and our origins, a set of shared beliefs about who we are, where we come from, and how we got here. The story is familiar; I shall be brief. We human beings have arrived on the scene after millions, indeed, billions of years of organic evolution. In the beginning, there was just inorganic matter; somehow, and by way of processes of which we currently have no grasp, life, despite its enormous and daunting complexity at even the simplest level, arose from nonliving matter, and arose just by way of the regularities studied in physics and chemistry. Once life arose, random genetic mutation and natural selection, those great twin engines of evolution, swung into action. These genetic mutations are multiply random: they weren't intended by anyone, of course, but also were not directed by any sort of natural teleology and do not arise at the behest of the design plan of the organism. They are "not in a response to the needs of the organism" (Ernst Mayr); they just unaccountably appear. Occasionally, some of them yield an adaptive advantage; their possessors come to predominate in the population, and they are passed on to the next and subsequent generations. In this way, all the enormous variety of flora and fauna we behold came into being.

Including ourselves and our cognitive systems. These systems and the underlying mechanisms have also been selected for, directly or indirectly, in the course of evolution. Consider, for example, the mammalian brain in all its enormous complexity. It could have been directly selected for in the following sense: at each stage in its development, the new stage (by virtue of the structures and behaviors it helped bestow) contributed to fitness and conferred an evolutionary advantage, giving its possessors a better chance of surviving and reproducing. Alternatively, at certain stages new structures (or new modifications of old structures) arose, not because they were themselves selected for, but because they were genetically associated with something else that *was* selected for (pliotropy). Either way these structures were not selected for their penchant for producing true beliefs in us; instead, they conferred an adaptive advantage or were genetically associated with something that conferred such an advantage. And the ultimate purpose or function, if any, of these belief-producing mechanisms will not be the production of true beliefs, but *survival*—of the gene, genotype, individual, species, whatever.

If you are a naturalist and also believe these things, then you are what I shall call an *ordinary* naturalist. In chapter 12 of *Warrant and Proper Function* (WPF), I argued that an ordinary naturalist is like Hume in that she has a defeater for any belief she holds—including, ironically enough, ordinary naturalism itself, so that ordinary naturalism is self-defeating. I shall not repeat that argument; instead, I will take this opportunity to make some corrections, simplifications, and additions….

In essence, the main argument is for the conclusions that P(R/N&E&C) (which I'll abbreviate as P(R/N)…) is either low or inscrutable; in either case, so I argued, one who accepts N (and also grasps the argument for a low or inscrutable value of P(R/N)) has a *defeater* for R. This induces a defeater, for him, for any belief produced by his cognitive faculties, including N itself; hence, ordinary naturalism is self-defeating. Now I argued, that P(R/N) is low or inscrutable by noting first that natural selection isn't interested in *true belief* but in *adaptive behavior* (taken broadly), so that everything turns on the relation between belief and behavior. I then presented five mutually exclusive and jointly exhaustive possibilities for the relation between belief and behavior, arguing with respect to each possibility P_i that $P(R/N\&P_i)$ is low or inscrutable, yielding the result that P(R/N) is low or inscrutable.

Here we can simplify by dropping two of the five possibilities, leaving just epiphenomenalism, semantic epiphenomenalism (perhaps "content epiphenomenalism" would be a more felicitous name), and the common sense ("folk psychological") view of the causal relation between belief and behavior. The first possibility (call it "P_1") is epiphenomenalism, the proposition that belief (conscious belief) isn't involved in the causal chain leading to behavior at all. This view was named and suggested by T. H. Huxley ("Darwin's bulldog"). Although

epiphenomenalism runs counter to our commonsense ways of thinking, it is nonetheless widely popular among those enthusiastic about the "scientific" study of human beings. According to *Time*, a few years ago the eminent biologist J. M. Smith "wrote that he had never understood why organisms have feelings. After all, orthodox biologists believe that behavior, however complex, is governed entirely by biochemistry and that the attendant sensations—fear, pain, wonder, love—are just shadows cast by that biochemistry, not themselves vital to the organism's behavior."

And the same can be said for conscious belief, if "behavior, however complex, is governed entirely by biochemistry," there seems to be no room for conscious belief to become involved in the causal story, no way in which conscious belief can get its hand in; it will be causally inert. Furthermore, if this possibility were, in fact, actual, then evolution would not have been able to mold and shape our beliefs, or belief-producing structures, weeding out falsehood and encouraging truth; for then our beliefs would be, so to speak, *invisible* to evolution. Which beliefs (if any) an organism had, under this scenario, would be merely accidental as far as evolution is concerned. It wouldn't make any difference to behavior or fitness what beliefs our cognitive mechanisms had produced, because (under this scenario) those beliefs play no role in the production or explanation of behavior. What then is the probability of R on this scenario? That is, what is $P(R/N\&P_1)$? What reliability requires, of course, is that a large preponderance of our beliefs be true. Now most large sets of propositions do not meet that condition; but one large set of beliefs—at any rate, of beliefs we human beings are capable of having—would seem to be about as likely as any other on this scenario. Hence we couldn't claim with a straight face that there is a high probability, on this scenario, that most of our beliefs are true. Perhaps the verdict is that this probability is relatively low; just for definiteness, let's say it's in the neighborhood of .3 or so. Alternatively, we might think that the right attitude here is that we simply can't make a sensible estimate of this probability, so that $P(R/N\&P_1)$ is inscrutable.

The second possibility as to the relation between belief and behavior (call it P_2) is semantic epiphenomenalism. From a naturalistic point of view, the natural thing to think is that human beings are material objects. Well, suppose that's what they are: then what sort of thing will a belief—perhaps the belief that Cartesian dualism is false—*be*? Presumably it will be a long-standing neural or neuronal event of some kind. This neural event will have *electrochemical* properties: the number of neurons involved; the way in which the neurons involved are connected with each other, with other neuronal events, with muscles, with sense organs, and so on; the average rate and intensity of neuronal firing in various parts of this event and the ways in which this changes over time and with respect to input from other areas. (Call these the "syntax" of the belief.) Of course it is easy to see how *these* properties of this neuronal event should have causal influence on behavior. A given belief is neurally connected both with other beliefs and with muscles; we can see how electrical impulses coming from the belief can negotiate the usual neuronal channels and ultimately cause muscular contraction.

Now if this belief is really a *belief*, then it will also have *other* properties, properties in addition to its syntax or neurophysiological properties. In particular, it will have *content*; it will be the belief that *p*, for some proposition *p*—in this case, the proposition *Cartesian dualism is false*. But how does the *content* of this neuronal event—that *proposition*—get involved in the causal chain leading to behavior? Under this scenario, it will be difficult or impossible to see how a belief can have causal influence on our behavior or action *by virtue of its content*. Suppose the belief had had the same electrochemical properties but some entirely different content, perhaps the proposition *Cartesian dualism is true*; would that have made any difference to its role in the causation of behavior? It is certainly hard to see how: there would have been the same electrical impulses traveling down the same channels, issuing in the same muscular contractions. The neurophysiological properties seem to have swept the field when it comes to the causation of behavior; there

seems to be no way in which content can get its foot in the door. Of course, it is the *content* of my beliefs, not their electrochemical properties, that is the subject of truth and falsehood: a belief is true just if the proposition that constitutes its content is true. As in the epiphenomenalist scenario, therefore, the content of belief would be invisible to evolution. Accordingly, the fact that we have survived and evolved, that our cognitive equipment was good enough to enable our ancestors to survive and reproduce—that fact would tell us nothing at all about the *truth* of our beliefs or the reliability of our cognitive faculties. It would tell something about the *neurophysiological* properties of our beliefs; it would tell us that, by virtue of these properties, those beliefs have played a role in the production of adaptive behavior. But it would tell us nothing about the *contents* of these beliefs, and hence nothing about their truth or falsehood. On this scenario as on the last, therefore, we couldn't sensibly claim a high probability for R. As with the last scenario, the best we could say, I think, is that this probability is either low or inscrutable; $P(R/N\&P_2)$ is low or inscrutable, just as is $P(R/N\&P_1)$.

Finally, what is the probability of R, given $N\&P_3$, the commonsense (folk psychological) view as to the causal relation between behavior and belief? According to folk psychology, belief serves as a (partial) *cause* and thus *explanation* of behavior—and this explicitly holds for the content of belief. I want a beer and believe there is one in the fridge; that belief, we ordinarily think, partly explains those movements of that large lumpy object that is my body as it heaves itself out of the armchair, moves over to the fridge, opens it, and extracts the beer.

Can we mount an argument from the evolutionary origins of the processes, whatever they are, that produce these beliefs to the reliability of those processes? Could we argue, for example, that these beliefs of ours are connected with behavior in such a way that false belief would produce maladaptive behavior, behavior which would tend to reduce the probability of the believers' surviving and reproducing? No. False belief doesn't by any means guarantee maladaptive action. Perhaps a primitive tribe thinks that everything is really alive, or is a witch or a demon of some sort; and perhaps all or nearly all of their beliefs are of the form *this witch is F or that demon is G: this witch is good to eat, or that demon is likely to eat me if I give it a chance*. If they ascribe the right properties to the right witches, their beliefs could be adaptive while nonetheless (assuming that in fact there aren't any witches) false. Also, of course, there is the fact that behavior, if it is partly produced by belief, is also partly produced by desire: it is belief and desire, along with other things, that together produce behavior. But then clearly there could be many different systems of belief and desire that yield the same bit of adaptive behavior, and in many of those systems the belief components are largely false; there are many possible belief–desire systems that yield the whole course of my behavior, where in each system most of the beliefs are false. The fact that my behavior (or that of my ancestors) has been adaptive, therefore, is at best a third-rate reason for thinking my beliefs mostly true and my cognitive faculties reliable—and that is true even given the commonsense view of the relation of belief to behavior. So we can't sensibly argue from the fact that our behavior (or that of our ancestors) has been adaptive, to the conclusion that our beliefs are mostly true and our cognitive faculties reliable. It isn't easy to estimate $P(R/N\&P_3)$; if it isn't inscrutable, perhaps it is moderately high. To concede as much as possible to the opposition, let's say that this probability is either inscrutable or in the neighborhood of .9.

Note that epiphenomenalism simpliciter and semantic epiphenomenalism unite in declaring or implying that the content of belief lacks causal efficacy with respect to behavior; the content of belief does not get involved in the causal chain leading to behavior. So perhaps we can reduce these two possibilities to one: the possibility that the content of belief has no causal efficacy. Call this possibility −C. What we have so far seen is that the probability of R on N & −C is low or inscrutable and that the probability of R on N&C is also inscrutable or at best moderate. Now what we are looking for is P(R/N). Because C and −C are jointly exhaustive and mutually exclusive, the calculus of probabilities tells us that

$$P(R/N) = P(R/N\&C) \times P(C/N) + P(R/N\&{-}C) \times P({-}C/N),$$

that is, the probability of R on N is the weighted average of the probabilities of R on N&C and N & −C—weighted by the probabilities of C and −C on N.

We have already noted that the left-hand term of the first of the two products on the right side of the equality is either moderately high or inscrutable; the second is either low or inscrutable. What remains is to evaluate the weights, the right-hand terms of the two products. So what is the probability of −C, given ordinary naturalism: what is the probability that one or the other of the two epiphenomenalistic scenarios is true? Note that according to Robert Cummins, semantic epiphenomenalism is in fact the received view as to the relation between belief and behavior. That is because it is extremely hard to envisage a way, given materialism, in which the content of a belief *could* get causally involved in behavior. If a belief just is a neural structure of some kind—a structure that somehow possesses content—then it is exceedingly hard to see how content can get involved in the causal chain leading to behavior: had a given such structure had a different content, its causal contribution to behavior, one thinks, would be the same. By contrast, if a belief is not a material structure at all but a nonphysical bit of consciousness, it is hard to see that there is any room for it in the causal chain leading to behavior; what causes the muscular contractions involved in behavior will be states of the nervous system, with no point at which this nonphysical bit of consciousness makes a causal contribution. So it is exceedingly hard to see, given N, how the content of a belief can have causal efficacy.

It is exceedingly hard to see, that is, how epiphenomenalism—semantic or simpliciter—can be avoided, given N. (There have been some valiant efforts, but things don't look hopeful.) So it looks as if P(−C/N) will have to be estimated as relatively high; let's say (for definiteness) .7, in which case P(C/N) will be .3. Of course we could easily be wrong—we don't really have a solid way of telling—so perhaps the conservative position here is that this probability, too, is inscrutable: one simply can't tell what it is. Given current knowledge, therefore, P(−C/N) is either high or inscrutable. And if P(−C/N) is inscrutable, then the same goes, naturally enough, for P(C/N). What does that mean for the sum of these two products, i.e., P(R/N)?

Well, we really have several possibilities. Suppose we think first about the matter from the point of view of someone who doesn't find any of the probabilities involved inscrutable. Then P(C/N) will be in the neighborhood of .3, P(−C/N) in the neighborhood of .7, and P(R/N& −C) perhaps in the neighborhood of .2. This leaves P(R/N&C), the probability that R is true, given ordinary naturalism together with the commonsense or folk-theoretical view as to the relation between belief and behavior. Given that this probability is not inscrutable, let's say that it is in the neighborhood of .9. And given these estimates, P(R/N) will be in the neighborhood of .4 Suppose, however, we think the probabilities involved are inscrutable: then we will have to say the same for P(R/N). Therefore, P(R/N) is either relatively low—less than .5, at any rate—or inscrutable.

In either case, however, doesn't the ordinary naturalist—at any rate, one who sees that P(R/N) is low or inscrutable—have a defeater for R, and for the proposition that his own cognitive faculties are reliable? I say he does. To see how, we must note some analogies with clear cases. First, there are the analogies I mentioned in WPF…; here are a couple more. Return … to that voyage of space exploration and the radio-like device that emitted sounds that constitute English sentences, sentences that express propositions of whose truth value you are ignorant. At first, you were inclined to believe these propositions, if only because of shock and astonishment. After a bit of cool reflection, however, you realize that you know nothing at all about the purpose, if any, of this instrument, or who or what constructed it. The probability that this device is reliable, given what you know about it, is low or inscrutable; and this gives you a defeater for your initial belief that the instrument indeed speaks the truth. Consider another analogy. You start thinking

seriously about the possibility that you are a brain in a vat, being subjected to experiment by Alpha Centaurian cognitive scientists in such a way that your cognitive faculties are not, in fact, reliable. For one reason or another, you come to think this probability is greater than .5; then you have a defeater for your belief that your cognitive faculties are reliable. Suppose instead that you think this is a genuine possibility, but you can't make any estimate at all of its likelihood, so that you can't make any estimate at all of the probability that your faculties are reliable: as far as you can tell, the probability could be anywhere between 0 and 1. Then too you have a defeater for your natural belief that your cognitive faculties are reliable.

The same goes for the naturalist who realizes that P(R/N) is low or inscrutable. With respect to those factors crucially important for coming to a sensible view of the reliability of his belief-producing mechanisms—how they were formed and what their purpose is, if any—he must concede that the probability that those faculties are reliable is at best inscrutable. Unless he has some other information, the right attitude would be to withhold R. But then something like Hume's attitude toward my beliefs would be the appropriate one. I recognize that I can't help forming most of the beliefs I do form; for example, it isn't within my power, just now, to withhold the belief that there are trees and grass outside my window. However, because I now do not believe that my cognitive faculties are reliable (I withhold that proposition), I also realize that these beliefs produced by my cognitive faculties are no more likely to be true than false: I therefore assume a certain skeptical distance with respect to them. And, because my doubts about my beliefs themselves depend on my beliefs, I also assume a certain skeptical distance with respect to these doubts, and with respect to the beliefs prompting those doubts, and with respect to the beliefs prompting the doubts about those doubts…. The ordinary naturalist, therefore, should join Hume in this same skeptical, ironic attitude toward his beliefs. This holds, of course, for N itself; for this reason, we might say that N is self-defeating, in that if it is accepted in the ordinary way, it provides a defeater for itself, a defeater that can't be defeated….

By way of conclusion: the noetic effects of sin don't necessarily include failure to know anything; Calvin (if that is what, in fact, he thought) goes too far. Still, something in the same general neighborhood is true. If I reject theism in favor of ordinary naturalism, and also see that P(R/N) is low or inscrutable, then I will have a defeater for any belief I hold. If so, I will not, if forming beliefs rationally, hold any belief firmly enough to constitute knowledge. The same goes if I am merely agnostic as between theism and ordinary naturalism. And the same goes if I am agnostic about my origin and the origin of my cognitive faculties. So rejection of theistic belief doesn't automatically produce skepticism: many who don't believe in God know much. But that is only because they don't accurately think through the consequences of this rejection. Once they do, they will lose their knowledge; here, therefore, is another of those cases where, by learning more, one comes to know less….

VIII.B.4

Commonsense Naturalism

MICHAEL BERGMANN

Biographical remarks about Michael Bergmann precede selection VII.B.3. In the article from which the present selection has been excerpted, Bergmann draws on the work of Thomas Reid to provide a response on behalf of the naturalist to Alvin Plantinga's evolutionary argument against naturalism.

I. INTRODUCTION

Metaphysical naturalism is, roughly speaking, the view that there are no supernatural beings—no such beings as, for example, God or angels or ghosts.[1] Thomas Reid was a theist and, therefore, not a naturalist. Consequently, one wouldn't expect to find in Reid's writings an argument in support of naturalism. But one *can* find in Reid the resources for a defense of naturalism against a certain sort of objection to it. In this chapter I will propose a Reid-inspired commonsense response to Alvin Plantinga's evolutionary argument against naturalism. It is a response whose relevance extends far beyond Plantinga's argument. For it also serves as a preliminary defense and illustration of some of the main elements in a commonsense response to skepticism.

Plantinga has recently argued (in *Warrant and Proper Function*, chapter 12, and in "Naturalism Defeated")[2] that naturalism is self-defeating. He asks us to imagine a race of creatures about whom we know nothing except that they form and change beliefs and that they came into existence via the mechanisms of evolution. Then he asks us to consider the probability that the cognitive faculties of these creatures are reliable—more specifically, he asks us to consider the probability that their cognitive faculties are reliable given naturalism and evolution. We can express this probability as P(R/N&E) where "R" is the claim that the cognitive faculties in question are reliable, "N" is the claim that naturalism is true, and "E" is the claim that these faculties came into existence by way of the mechanisms of evolution. Plantinga thinks P(R/N&E) is low or inscrutable because evolutionary processes aim at adaptive behavior and having reliable faculties doesn't seem particularly probable with respect to adaptive behavior. This is so, he thinks, when P(R/N&E) is specified to the hypothetical creatures mentioned. But he also thinks P(R/N&E) is low or inscrutable when we specify it to ourselves—there being no relevant difference between ourselves and the creatures in his example.

That's the first stage of Plantinga's argument. In the second stage he points out that the fact that P(R/N&E) is low or inscrutable constitutes a *defeater* for R for anyone who endorses N&E. Then he says that if you're a naturalist, the sensible thing for you to believe is that evolution is true (you have no recourse to divine creation). So the naturalist should believe N&E. But then, once apprised of Plantinga's argument, the naturalist will have a defeater for R. And a defeater for R is a defeater for every one of a person's beliefs— including belief in N. This, says

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Plantinga, makes naturalism self-defeating. (Notice that Plantinga's argument can be construed as an argument— starting from naturalistic premises—for global skepticism. This is why my Reidian response to it can be used as an example of how to respond to more typical skeptical challenges.)

For the purposes of this chapter, I will grant to Plantinga the conclusion of the first stage of his argument—that P(R/N&E) is low or inscrutable when specified to us. My contention is simply that this does not necessarily constitute a defeater for R (for the supporter of N&E). In order to defend this view I will first explain, in the next section, a response Plantinga gives to the probabilistic argument from evil. Then, in sections 3 and 4, I will present a view of Reid's that makes possible a *Reidian* response to Plantinga's evolutionary argument against naturalism that parallels *Plantinga's* response to the probabilistic argument from evil.[3] In section … 8 I will develop Reid's commonsense response in the context of considering a variety of objections to it. I will conclude in section 9 by connecting that response as well as my defense and development of it with the more general issue of skepticism.

I should note at the outset that my Reidian response isn't merely an ad hominem attack on Plantinga. True, Plantinga endorses a Reidian epistemology, so a Reidian response patterned after a response Plantinga himself gives in another setting will, if successful, create a special problem for him. But the Reidian response I offer relies on elements of Reid's epistemology that have a much wider appeal than does Plantinga's own epistemology. It depends on the Reidian views that (i) a belief can be *noninferentially* justified or warranted—that is, justified or warranted even if formed on the basis of an experience rather than on the basis of another belief[4]—and that (ii) among our noninferentially justified beliefs are a good number of our commonsense beliefs. The sort of foundationalism inherent in (i) is not the least bit unusual among contemporary epistemologists. And the commonsensism endorsed in (ii) is thoroughly intertwined with the particularist approach to philosophical analysis that is commonly employed in contemporary metaphysics, ethics, and epistemology.[5] So although the response I propose will be of no use to those who reject (i) and (ii), its benefits are by no means limited to those who accept Plantinga's epistemology.

One more preliminary remark. Some will wonder if my use of Reid (a theist) in defense of naturalism is something of which Reid himself would approve. To soften up such readers, I will include a quotation from Reid in which he suggests that one needn't be a theist to believe with justification in the reliability of one's senses:

> Shall we say, then, that this belief [in the reliability of our senses] is the inspiration of the Almighty? I think this may be said in a good sense; for I take it to be the immediate effect of our constitution, which is the work of the Almighty. But, if inspiration be understood to imply a persuasion of its coming from God, our belief of the objects of sense is not inspiration; for a man would believe his senses though he had no notion of a Deity. He who is persuaded that he is the workmanship of God, and that it is a part of his constitution to believe his senses, may think that a good reason to confirm his belief. But he had the belief before he could give this or any other reason for it.[6]

I'm sure that Reid would say that similar remarks apply to the naturalist's belief in R.

II. PLANTINGA ON THE ARGUMENT FROM EVIL

Plantinga has a lot to say about the probabilistic argument from evil.[7] I don't propose to discuss all of it here. But one thing he says is of particular interest for our purposes. Suppose that P(G/HE) is low (where G is the claim that God exists and HE is the claim that there are horrendous evils). What follows concerning the rationality or reasonableness or warrant for the belief that G? Not much, says Plantinga. For someone who believes that P(G/HE) is low might also believe some other proposition Q and recognize that P(G/HE&Q)

is high. If so, the fact that she also believes that P(G/HE) is low won't make it unreasonable for her to believe G. But, says Plantinga, suppose we grant to the atheist objector that P(G/k) is low (where k is the *total* relevant propositional evidence at one's disposal). What follows then concerning the rationality of holding G? Again not much, says Plantinga.

Here's an example he uses to explain why.[8] Suppose that a letter has gone missing, that you have an obvious motive for stealing it, and that both circumstantial evidence and eyewitnesses place you at the scene of the crime with ample opportunity to steal the letter. You claim to have been out alone for a walk in the woods at the time the letter was stolen (call this claim "W").

But because of the strength of the case against you (and the fact that you have done things of this sort in the past), others are extremely doubtful of W. They sensibly conclude that P(W/k)—where k is their total propositional evidence—is quite low. However, you clearly remember being out in the woods for a walk earlier in the day at the time the letter was stolen. This memory involves a belief ground that is *nonpropositional*; it involves a *seeming* of some sort that results in your taking a particular memory belief to be obviously correct under the circumstances (the phenomenology of these belief grounds is familiar enough but it is very difficult to describe). You, unlike those who think you are guilty, have the experiential evidence of *its seeming to you like you were out for a walk earlier in the day* and that very evidence grounds the belief that you did not steal the letter.[9]

So you know you didn't steal the letter and you know this on the basis of *non*propositional evidence. Nevertheless, your total relevant *propositional* evidence is more or less the same as that of those who think you are guilty.[10] You too agree that P(W/k) is low. Yet this doesn't in the least suggest that you are irrational to believe W; for you clearly remember being out in the woods at the time in question. The point is that a proposition's being improbable on everything else you know or believe doesn't make belief in it irrational. And this is so even if these other things you believe are clearly *relevant* bits of evidence. For you may have in addition to all the *propositional* evidence at your disposal certain *non*propositional evidence. And this nonpropositional evidence may be strong enough to make it completely reasonable for you to hold the belief in question even while recognizing that the belief is improbable on your total relevant *propositional* evidence. Furthermore, given that this total relevant propositional evidence is all your accusers have to go on, you can also concede that your accusers are completely reasonable in thinking you are guilty. They are in this unfortunate situation because they lack an important bit of (nonpropositional) evidence that only you have.

Plantinga applies these considerations to the theist confronted with the probabilistic argument from evil in the following way. A person might have sufficiently strong nonpropositional evidence for G by way of what John Calvin calls "the *sensus divinitatis*." This faculty triggers belief in God (or beliefs about God) in response to certain experiences and circumstances. We observe the beauty and majesty of a starry night, are overwhelmed with a sense of awe, and find ourselves thinking *God has created this universe*; we recognize that we have done something that is wrong, feel guilty before God, and find ourselves thinking *God disapproves of this*; when life is sweet and satisfying we are overcome with a sense of gratitude and believe *God is to be thanked and praised*. In each case, we have a belief about God formed not on the basis of other beliefs but on the basis of experiences.[11] In cases where this evidence is sufficiently strong, one can come to rationally believe in God's existence despite recognizing that P(G/k) is low. The nonpropositional evidence makes rational a belief that is improbable with respect to one's total relevant propositional evidence.

In evaluating Plantinga's response to the argument from evil, one might wonder whether there *is* any such nonpropositional evidence for theism and, if so, how strong it is. But the main point I want to draw attention to is that the belief that P(G/k) is low does not in itself constitute a defeater for G (for the person whose total relevant propositional evidence is k). In addition, it must be the case that the

person in question has no sufficiently strong *non*-propositional evidence for G.

III. REID ON KNOWING R

Reid (or Reid as I understand him) says that we know R not by basing that belief on other beliefs but instead in the basic way. According to Reid, R is a first principle: "Another first principle is, that the natural faculties, by which we distinguish truth from error, are not fallacious."[12] And first principles, says Reid, are properly believed *noninferentially*.[13] We obtain this noninferential knowledge of first principles—which he also calls "principles of common sense," "self-evident truths," and "intuitive judgments"—by employing that branch of our faculty of reason he calls "common sense."[14] The idea isn't that we have a faculty for knowing in the basic way things like "You shouldn't try to drive downtown in a hurry during rush hour." Common wisdom of this latter sort is cultural and learned and will vary across times and places. Reid is talking about something else. He's speaking of a faculty whereby we form beliefs naturally held by sane humans in normal circumstances— noninferential beliefs that are not the result of education but of our constitution (though they are certainly acquired sometime after birth).[15] Reid thinks that by means of this faculty we know both contingent and necessary truths.[16] What he thinks of as knowledge via common sense of necessary truths is what we would call "a priori knowledge." Examples he gives of necessary truths known via common sense are the axioms of logic and mathematics.[17] Examples he gives (in addition to R) of contingent truths known noninferentially via common sense are beliefs such as "The thoughts of which I am conscious are *my* thoughts," "Other humans have minds," and "I have some degree of control over my actions."[18]

So Reid thinks we know R and other first principles (both contingent and necessary) in the basic way by means of common sense. Now, just as there is a mechanism by which we form sense perceptual beliefs in the basic way, so also there is a mechanism of sorts for forming our commonsense beliefs. Sense perception seems to work as follows: we experience sensations (visual, tactile, etc.) and on the basis of them form beliefs in the existence of external objects having certain qualities. The ground of our sense perceptual beliefs is our sense experience, not other beliefs. It is because they aren't based on other beliefs that they are called basic or noninferential. Now consider what Reid says about how commonsense beliefs in first principles are formed:

> We may observe, that opinions which contradict first principles are distinguished from other errors by this; that they are not only false, but absurd: and, to discountenance absurdity, nature has given us a particular emotion, to wit, that of ridicule, which seems intended for this very purpose of putting out of countenance what is absurd, either in opinion or practice.[19]

The idea is that when we entertain the contrary of a first principle, we experience the emotion of ridicule. On the basis of this experience, we dismiss as absurd the contrary of the first principle and believe the first principle. In other words, we consider the contrary of a first principle and have an experience that prompts this sort of belief: "That's absolutely nuts! It's ridiculous!" It thereby also prompts belief in the first principle itself, though, as Reid notes, we rarely attend to beliefs in first principles.[20] Just as in the case of sense perception, the ground of the first principle belief is an experience not a belief.

IV. A REIDIAN RESPONSE TO PLANTINGA

It should now be pretty obvious how a Reidian could respond to Plantinga's evolutionary argument

against naturalism. She could combine *Plantinga's* method of responding to the probabilistic argument from evil with *Reid's* account of how we can know R in the basic way. For the sake of argument, we've conceded to Plantinga that P(R/N&E) is low or inscrutable. He says this is a defeater for R. But the commonsense naturalist can respond as follows: "Even if a naturalist believed that P(R/N&E) is low or inscrutable, this needn't give her a defeater for R. For she could have *non*propositional evidence for R that is sufficiently strong to make belief in R rational, reasonable, and warranted—even for someone whose total relevant *propositional* evidence, k, was such that P(R/k) is low or inscrutable. The nonpropositional evidence she has could be of the sort Reid describes."

To clarify this Reidian response, let me briefly consider two objections to it that are based on misunderstanding. The first has to do with the parallel between ourselves and the hypothetical creatures mentioned in stage one of Plantinga's evolutionary argument. It seems that the conjunction of the belief that N&E and the belief that P(R/N&E) is low or inscrutable *does*—when specified to these hypothetical creatures—constitute a defeater for our belief that *their* cognitive faculties are reliable. But then why should the same beliefs specified to ourselves not constitute a defeater for R specified to us? There is no relevant difference between the two cases since the facts concerning our origins are the same.

But there is a relevant difference. It may be true that if P(R/N&E) is assigned a low value when specified to the hypothetical creatures then it should also be assigned a low value when specified to us. But it's *not* true that if belief in that low probability claim results in a defeater in the case of the hypothetical creatures it also results in a defeater in our own case. First let's be clear about what exactly gets defeated in the case of the hypothetical creatures. It is *our* belief that *their* faculties are reliable. But notice that, in thinking about these hypothetical creatures, all we have to go on is *propositional* evidence; we have no *non*propositional evidence for R specified to them (recall how little we know about them). That's why it is plausible to think that the belief that N&E along with the belief that P(R/ N&E) is low or inscrutable (where both beliefs are specified to these hypothetical creatures) constitutes a defeater for our belief that *their* faculties our reliable. But of course things are different with our belief in the reliability of *our own* cognitive faculties. In our own case, we have nonpropositional evidence *in addition* to the sort of propositional evidence we have in the case of the hypothetical creatures. That's why the belief that P (R/N&E) is low or inscrutable along with the belief that N&E (where both beliefs are specified to us) does not constitute a defeater for our belief that our own faculties are reliable.[21]

A second objection is that the Reidian response implies that R is beyond defeat. But R *could* be defeated. Suppose someone became convinced that she was the victim of a Cartesian demon. This would give her a defeater for R.

That seems right. But nothing I've said conflicts with it. Consider again the example of your being falsely accused of stealing a letter when you clearly remember your innocence. The circumstantial (propositional) evidence fails to defeat your memory belief. But that doesn't mean that your memory belief is beyond defeat. You could become convinced that the memory in question was planted in you artificially by someone intending to deceive you. This would create a defeater for it. Or consider theism and horrendous evil. You might believe G in the basic way and thereby have a lot of warrant for it. If so, then the fact that you also think P(G/HE) is low does not defeat your belief that G. But you could become convinced that your belief in G is the product of a Freudian sort of wish fulfillment—a way of forming beliefs that you take to be unreliable. Then you would have a defeater for your theistic belief.[22] In the same way, belief in the Cartesian demon might be a defeater for R even though belief in N&E together with belief in the low probability of R on N&E is not. Notice that the presence of these defeaters (the Freudian defeater for G or the Cartesian defeater for R) is compatible with the existence of nonpropositional evidence for G or for R. It's not that this

nonpropositional evidence has no effect; rather, it's that its effect has been defeated by the stronger contrary effect of the defeater in question.[23]

VIII. BUT IS REID'S ACCOUNT TRUE?

… But how does this help the naturalist if Reid's account isn't true or even plausible? In order for my commonsense response to Plantinga to be useful, we need some reason to take Reid's account seriously. I don't have the space here to launch into a full-fledged defense of Reid's account of commonsense knowledge. However, I would at least like to *say something* in support of Reid's view and to explain some of the considerations that attract me to it.

But first, let's make the task more manageable. There is no need to defend all of Reid's views on common sense. One certainly doesn't need to agree with Reid about which propositions are first principles. For the purposes of this chapter, what matters is that we justifiably believe R via common sense. Nor does one need to hold Reid's views on the details of how one comes to believe in first principles like R— details such as whether we have a faculty of common sense or whether there is an emotion of ridicule. What matters for my Reidian response to Plantinga is that *we believe R noninferentially on the basis of some sort of nonpropositional evidence and thereby have a lot of justification or warrant for it*. Our question, then, is whether this last (italicized) suggestion can be taken seriously.

As a matter of fact, it *is* taken seriously. I've mentioned above that the particularist approach to epistemology is currently quite popular among analytic philosophers. Those who employ it rely heavily on the noninferential knowledge they have of Moorean truths—truths such as that we aren't being deceived by a Cartesian demon about the external world or about the past and that we aren't brains in vats. According to the particularist methodology, accounts of justification according to which it turns out that we aren't justified in believing such Moorean truths are, thereby, disqualified. The question of *how* it is that such epistemologists know these Moorean truths isn't very often addressed. But it seems that any answer given will be something along the lines suggested by Reid's account sketched above in section 3. At the very least, it will involve justified or warranted noninferential belief in R.

Furthermore, a defense of Reid's account could be developed along the following lines. First one could point out that sense perceptual beliefs based on sense experiences can be justified despite the fact that we lack compelling noncircular inductive or deductive arguments from the existence of such experiences to the truth of the beliefs they ground.[24] Then one could point out that a priori knowledge also involves belief processes in which a belief is based on a certain sort of seeming—a seeming which is an experience of some sort.[25] In this case too it looks like there is no deductive or inductive argument from the existence of such an experiential ground to the truth of the a priori belief based on it. But this doesn't cast doubt on the justification of our a priori beliefs any more than a similar concern casts doubt on the justification of our sense perceptual beliefs. In each case (sense perceptual and a priori) the belief is noninferentially justified as a result of its being based on the experiential ground in question.

Once one has shown that the above suggestions are plausible one could then argue that commonsense belief in contingent truths is very much like a priori belief insofar as they each have the same sort of experiential ground (i.e., a certain sort of seeming). Because it is plausible to take seriously both the existence of justified a priori beliefs as well as the account of them as experience based, it is also plausible to take seriously both the existence of justified commonsense beliefs in contingent truths as well as an account of them as experience based. Our starting point is the fact that we *do* seem to have justified noninferential beliefs of each kind despite the fact that in each case the belief in question is based on a ground from whose existence we can't deductively or inductively infer the truth of the belief it grounds. And my suggestion is that since many philosophers

are inclined to express very little resistance to an account of justified sense perceptual belief according to which the justifying grounds don't entail the truth of the belief, there should also be very little resistance to similar accounts of justified a priori or commonsense belief—especially when such accounts fit so nicely with our introspective understanding of what is going on in typical cases of what seem like justified a priori or commonsense beliefs.

The above remarks are meant to gesture in the direction of a defense of that part of Reid's account that is employed in my response to Plantinga. They are *not* intended to put to rest all doubts those who resist Reid's account might have. To do that one would have to defend the existence of a priori belief as well as the account of it as experience based. And one would also need to consider whether the differences between commonsense belief and a priori belief prevent us from moving from a favorable evaluation of our account of justified a priori belief to a favorable evaluation of a similar account of commonsense belief. For example, one might think (though I don't) that although we *can* have noninferential knowledge of propositions that are general and necessary as well as of propositions that are particular and contingent, we *can't* have noninferential knowledge of propositions that are general and contingent. If this were true, it would suggest that a priori knowledge (which is typically of truths that are general and necessary) is acceptable in a way that commonsense knowledge (which at least sometimes is supposedly of general and contingent truths like R) is not. But dealing with these sorts of concerns is a project for another occasion. Here I merely hope to have shown that a plausible defense of the required elements of Reid's account of commonsense knowledge is by no means out of the question….

NOTES

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1. This is how Alvin Plantinga characterizes the view he attacks in his evolutionary argument against naturalism ("Naturalism Defeated," unpublished). See also Plantinga, "Respondeo," in *Warrant in Contemporary Epistemology: Essays in Honor of Plantinga's Theory of Knowledge*, ed. Jonathan Kvanvig (Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 1996), 350–352. Since the naturalism under discussion in this paper is the sort—whatever it is—that Plantinga is attacking, it would be best to begin with his understanding of it. Another similar characterization of metaphysical naturalism is Michael Devitt's. He says that it amounts to physicalism—the view that all entities are physical entities ("Naturalism and the A Priori," *Philosophical Studies* 92 [1998]: 46). If I were trying to give a precise account of metaphysical naturalism, much more would have to be said. But this will do for our purposes. See the essays in *Midwest Studies in Philosophy*, vol. 19, *Philosophical Naturalism*, ed. Peter French, Theodore Uehling, and Howard Wettstein (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), and in *Naturalism: A Critical Appraisal*, ed. Steven Wagner and Richard Warner (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1993), for various attempts to clarify what naturalism is, as well as the essays in *Objections to Physicalism*, ed. Howard Robinson (New York: Clarendon Press, 1993), for discussions of what physicalism is. See also section 7 of this chapter [omitted here], where I discuss varieties of naturalism other than the sort roughly defined here. For a defense of the view that naturalism isn't a thesis at all but rather a research program (more specifically, a plan to conduct inquiry using only the methods of the natural sciences), see Michael Rea, *World without Design: The Ontological Consequences of Naturalism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002).

2. *Warrant and Proper Function* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), hereafter *WPF*; and "Naturalism Defeated."
3. Keith Lehrer's response to Plantinga's evolutionary argument against naturalism is superficially similar to my own. In giving his response to that argument he too draws upon Plantinga's response to the problem of evil (see Lehrer, "Proper Function versus Systematic Coherence," *Warrant in Contemporary Epistemology: Essays in Honor of Plantinga's Theory of Knowledge*, ed. Jonathan Kvanvig [Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 1996]) and upon Reid (see Keith Lehrer and Bradley Warner, "Reid, God and Epistemology," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 74 [2000]: 357–372). But the use Lehrer makes of Reid and of Plantinga's response to the problem of evil is quite unlike the use I make of them. So our responses to Plantinga's evolutionary argument against naturalism are, in the end, very different (which is what one might expect given that I'm an externalist foundationlist and that Lehrer is at least very sympathetic to an internalist sort of coherentism).
4. In saying that (i) is a Reidian view, I'm assuming that he is a foundationalist. Lehrer challenges that assumption. In support of a coherentist reading, Lehrer points out passages in Reid which could be taken as saying that the justification of each of our beliefs depends on a further belief about the trustworthiness of that original belief's source. See Lehrer, "Chisholm, Reid and the Problem of the Epistemic Surd," *Philosophical Studies* 60 (1990): 42–43. This isn't the place to defend the view that Reid is a foundationalist. So I'll just say that I read those passages in Reid as saying that we *can* be justified in the further belief that our belief sources are trustworthy, not that we *must* be in order for our beliefs produced by those sources to be justified.
5. See Roderick Chisholm. "The Problem of the Criterion," in *The Foundations of Knowing* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), 61–75, for an account of this particularist approach.
6. Thomas Reid, *Essays on the Intellectual Powers* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1969), 294–295; hereafter Reid, *Essays*. See also Reid, *Inquiries and Essays*, ed. Ronald Beanblossom and Keith Lehrer (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1983), 203; hereafter Reid, *Inquiries;* Reid's *Essays* is complete but his *Inquiries* (which isn't complete) is more readily available. I will give references to both where possible.
7. See Plantinga, "The Probabilistic Argument from Evil," *Philosophical Studies* 35 (1979): 1–53; "Epistemic Probability and Evil," *Archivo di filasofia* 56 (1988); "On Being Evidentially Challenged," in *The Evidential Argument from Evil*, ed. Daniel Howard-Snyder (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 244–261; and "Degenerate Evidence and Rowe's New Evidential Argument from Evil," *Noûs* 32 (1998): 531–544.
8. Plantinga, "Epistemic Probability and Evil," in *The Evidential Argument from Evil*, ed. Daniel Howard-Snyder (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 88–89.
9. When I describe the experience as one of its *seeming to you that you were out for a walk in the woods earlier in the day*, I don't mean to suggest that the experience has a propositional content. I'm just saying that the experience in question is a seeming that inclines you to believe that you were out for a walk in the woods earlier in the day.
10. We have to imagine the case so that you have all the propositional evidence your accusers have and that additionally all you have is the memory experience and the belief that W. In particular, you don't have any beliefs about your memory experience or about how trustworthy it is, etc. Your belief that W is based solely on the memory experience in question and nothing other than the belief that W is based on that memory experience. One might think that, upon being accused and thinking carefully about your memory experience, you will form additional beliefs on the basis of it. But we can stipulate that we are focusing on the time before you are accused—the point at which you first learn of all the evidence that exists against you.
11. Plantinga, "Reason and Belief in God," in *Faith and Rationality*, ed. Alvin Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), 80–81.
12. Reid, *Essays*, 630; Reid, *Inquiries*, 275.
13. Reid, *Essays*, 593.
14. Ibid., 567. The other branch of reason enables us "to draw conclusions that are not self-evident from those that are."

15. See ibid., essay 6, chap. 4, "Of First Principles in General," parts of which are included in Reid, *Inquiries*.
16. Reid, *Essays*, 614–615.
17. Ibid., 644; Reid, *Inquiries*, 284–285.
18. Reid, *Essays*, 611–643.
19. Ibid., 606; Reid, *Inquiries*, 259.
20. Reid, *Essays*, 632–633; Reid, *Inquiries*, 277.
21. Thus Plantinga is right when he says in *WPF*, 229, that the person considering R specified to the hypothetical creatures has no source of information about R other than the propositional evidence mentioned. But when he considers (223–234) what other sources of information we might have for R specified to *us*, he considers only other *propositional* evidence for R. And he considers it only as a candidate for being a defeater of a defeater for R instead of thinking of the other source of information about R as something that prevents us from having a defeater for R in the first place. He fails to acknowledge that we have nonpropositional evidence for R specified to us and that this is a relevant difference between the two cases; it's a difference that results in our having a defeater in the one case and not in the other.
22. Notice that the mere *existence* of the Freudian explanation is not in itself a defeater for G, just as the mere existence of the Cartesian demon hypothesis is not in itself a defeater for R. It must also be the case that the alternative hypothesis in question is reasonable and/or believed.
23. Those sane humans for whom R is defeated (assuming there are such) are not counterexamples to my earlier suggestion that the outputs of R are beliefs naturally held by *all* sane humans in normal circumstances. For in order to be defeated, these beliefs had to first be held. And, in fact, they are held in normal circumstances; it is only in *abnormal* circumstances that someone comes to later believe she is the victim of a Cartesian demon.
24. See William Alston, *The Reliability of Sense Perception* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1993) for an extended critique of various attempts to show that there is some such connection between sense experiences and the beliefs they ground.
25. See Plantinga, *WPF*, chap. 6. Because the experiential ground of a priori beliefs is nonempirical the beliefs are still properly called "a priori" rather than "posterior."

PART IX



Religious Pluralism

IS THERE ONLY ONE WAY to God? If God exists, why hasn't he revealed himself in all times and places to all nations and people? Or has he done so, but through different faiths, through different symbols, and different interpretations of himself? Are all religions simply different paths to the same ultimate reality?

In recent decades, the question of religious pluralism has become a burning issue among theologians and philosophers of religion. On the one side are the *pluralists*, those who hold that all religions, or at least all major religions, are different paths to the same God, or ultimate reality. On the other side are the *exclusivists*, who argue that there is only one way to God. Pluralist philosophers like John Hick (see our first reading in this section) believe that the major religions—Judaism, Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam—are different paths to the same ultimate reality. The Buddhist parable of the six blind men is sometimes used to illustrate this point:

> Once upon a time a group of religious seekers from different traditions came together and began to discuss the nature of God. Offering quite different answers, they began quarreling among themselves as to who was right and who wrong. Finally, when no hope for a reconciliation was in sight, they called in the Buddha and asked him to tell them who was right. The Buddha proceeded to tell the following story.
>
> There was once a king who asked his servants to bring him all the blind people in a town and an elephant. Six blind men and an elephant were soon set before him. The king instructed the blind men to feel the animal and describe the elephant. "An elephant is like a large waterpot," said the first who touched the elephant's head. "Your Majesty, he's wrong," said the second, as he touched an ear. "An elephant is like a fan." "No," insisted a third, "an elephant is like a snake," as he held his trunk. "On the contrary, you're all mistaken," said a fourth, as he held the tusks, "An elephant is like two prongs of a plow." The fifth man demurred and said, "It is quite clear that an elephant is like a pillar," as he grasped the animal's rear leg. "You're all mistaken," insisted

> the sixth. "An elephant is a long snake," and he held up the tail. Then they all began to shout at each other about their convictions of the nature of an elephant.
>
> After telling the story the Buddha commented, "How can you be so sure of what you cannot see. We are all like blind people in this world. We cannot see God. Each of you may be partly right, yet none completely so."

The religious pluralist calls on us to give up our claims to exclusivity and accept the thesis that many paths lead to God and to salvation or liberation. As Lord Krishna says in the *Bhagavad Gita*, "In whatever way men approach me, I am gracious to them; men everywhere follow my path."

On the other side of the debate are exclusivists. They believe that only one way leads to God or salvation. Whereas Hinduism, reflected in the words of Lord Krishna (above), has tended to be pluralistic, Christianity and Islam have tended toward exclusivity. In the Gospel of John, Jesus says, "I am the way, the truth, and the life, no man cometh to the Father but by me." And Peter says in the Book of Acts, "Neither is there salvation in any other; for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved." The inspiration of the missionary movement within Christianity and Islam has been to bring salvation to those who would otherwise be lost.

Christians and Muslims have historically rejected pluralism. If Christ or Mohammed is the unique way to God, the other creeds must be erroneous since they deny these claims. Since Muslims and Christians believe that they have good reasons for their beliefs, why should they give them up? Why should they give up their claims to exclusivity?

One consideration given by the pluralists is that it is an empirical fact that people generally adhere to the religion of their geographical location, of their native culture. Thus, Indians are likely to be Hindus, Tibetan Buddhists, Israelis Jews, Arabs Muslims, and Europeans and Americans Christians. If we recognize the accidentality of our religious preference, shouldn't we give up the claim to exclusivity?

The exclusivist responds that one may give up a claim to *certainty* as he or she recognizes that other traditions have different beliefs. But if on reexamination of one's position, one still finds oneself adhering to one's position, then the person might be perfectly reasonable in continuing to think that her religion offers the only path to God or salvation. The fact that one's religious beliefs are partly a result of where one lives doesn't by itself show that exclusivist claims are false. At best, the exclusivist will say, it shows that sociological factors have some role to play in determining how easy it is for one to happen upon the truth.

In our readings, John Hick defends the pluralist position and Alvin Plantinga defends religious exclusivity. Plantinga argues that religious exclusivity is not (or need not be) morally or epistemically improper and that a certain exclusivity is present no matter what we believe. That is, suppose the pluralist believes that all the major religions are equally good paths to God. In that case, the pluralist is an *exclusivist* with regard to that belief. Believing anything implies that those who believe the contrary of what you believe are wrong. So we are all inevitably exclusivist in one way or another.

David Basinger, in the third reading, attempts to reconcile Hick's religious pluralism with Plantinga's exclusivism. Basinger argues that, properly understood, the two positions are compatible, both offering valid insights on the diversity of religious phenomena.

In our fourth reading the Dalai Lama reflects on the Buddhist perspective on world religions, indicating some areas of unity within diversity. And, in our final reading, Joseph Runzo identifies six different responses to the relationship between one's own religion and other religions. He defends religious relativism, which holds that first-order truth-claims about reality are relative to the worldview of a particular culture.

IX.1

Religious Pluralism and Ultimate Reality

JOHN HICK

Biographical remarks about John Hick precede selection IV.C.2. In this essay from his path-breaking work God and the Universe of Faiths *(1973), Hick sets forth the thesis that God historically revealed himself (or itself) through various individuals in various situations where geographic isolation prevented a common revelation to all humanity. Each major religion has a different interpretation of the same ultimate reality, to the same salvation. Now the time has come to engage in interreligious dialogue so that we may discover our common bonds and realize that other religious people participate in ultimate reality as validly as we do within our religion, "for all these exist in time, as ways through time to eternity."*

Let me begin by proposing a working definition of religion as an understanding of the universe, together with an appropriate way of living within it, which involves reference beyond the natural world to God or gods or to the Absolute or to a transcendent order or process. Such a definition includes such theistic faiths as Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Sikhism; the theistic Hinduism of the Bhagavad Gītā; the semi-theistic faith of Mahayana Buddhism and the non-theistic faiths of Theravada Buddhism and non-theistic Hinduism. It does not however include purely naturalistic systems of belief, such as communism and humanism, immensely important though these are today as alternatives to religious life.

When we look back into the past we find that religion has been a virtually universal dimension of

Reprinted from John Hick, *God and the Universe of Faiths*, published 1973 (St. Martin's Press, New York). Reproduced with permission of Palgrave MacMillan. Notes deleted.

human life—so much so that man has been defined as the religious animal. For he has displayed an innate tendency to experience his environment as being religiously as well as naturally significant, and to feel required to live in it as such. To quote the anthropologist, Raymond Firth, "religion is universal in human societies." "In every human community on earth today," says Wilfred Cantwell Smith, "there exists something that we, as sophisticated observers, may term religion, or a religion. And we are able to see it in each case as the latest development in a continuous tradition that goes back, we can now affirm, for at least one hundred thousand years." In the life of primitive man this religious tendency is expressed in a belief in sacred objects endowed with *mana*, and in a multitude of natural and ancestral spirits needing to be carefully propitiated. The divine was here crudely apprehended as a plurality of quasianimal forces which could to some extent be controlled by ritualistic and magical procedures. This represents the simplest beginning of man's awareness of the transcendent in the infancy of the human race—an infancy which is also to some extent still available for study in the life of primitive tribes today.

The development of religion and religions begins to emerge into the light of recorded history as the third millennium B.C. moves towards the period around 2000 B.C. There are two main regions of the earth in which civilisation seems first to have arisen and in which religions first took a shape that is at least dimly discernible to us as we peer back through the mists of time—these being Mesopotamia in the Near East and the Indus valley of northern India. In Mesopotamia men lived in nomadic shepherd tribes, each worshipping its own god. Then the tribes gradually coalesced into nation states, the former tribal gods becoming ranked in hierarchies (some however being lost by amalgamation in the process) dominated by great national deities such as Marduk of Babylon, the Sumerian Ishtar, Amon of Thebes, Jahweh of Israel, the Greek Zeus, and so on. Further east in the Indus valley there was likewise a wealth of gods and goddesses, though apparently not so much tribal or national in character as expressive of the basic forces of nature, above all fertility. The many deities of the Near East and of India expressed man's awareness of the divine at the dawn of documentary history, some four thousand years ago. It is perhaps worth stressing that the picture was by no means a wholly pleasant one. The tribal and national gods were often martial and cruel, sometimes requiring human sacrifices. And although rather little is known about the very early, pre-Aryan Indian deities, it is certain that later Indian deities have vividly symbolised the cruel and destructive as well as the beneficent aspects of nature.

These early developments in the two cradles of civilisation, Mesopotamia and the Indus valley, can be described as the growth of natural religion, prior to any special intrusions of divine revelation or illumination. Primitive spirit-worship expressed man's fears of unknown forces; his reverence for nature deities expressed his sense of dependence upon realities greater than himself; and his tribal gods expressed the unity and continuity of his group over against other groups. One can in fact discern all sorts of causal connections between the forms which early religion took and the material circumstances of man's life, indicating the large part played by the human element within the history of religion. For example, Trevor Ling points out that life in ancient India (apart from the Punjab immediately prior to the Aryan invasions) was agricultural and was organised in small village units; and suggests that "among agricultural peoples, aware of the fertile earth which brings forth from itself and nourishes its progeny upon its broad bosom, it is the mother-principle which seems important." Accordingly God the Mother, and a variety of more specialised female deities, have always held a prominent place in Indian religious thought and mythology. This contrasts with the characteristically male expression of deity in the Semitic religions, which had their origins among nomadic, pastoral, herd-keeping peoples in the Near East. The divine was known to the desert-dwelling herdsmen who founded the Israelite tradition as God the King and Father; and this conception has continued both in later Judaism and in Christianity, and was renewed out of the desert experience of Mohammed in the Islamic religion. Such regional variations in our

human ways of conceiving the divine have persisted through time into the developed world faiths that we know today. The typical western conception of God is still predominantly in terms of the male principle of power and authority; and in the typical Indian conceptions of deity the female principle still plays a distinctly larger part than in the west.

Here then was the natural condition of man's religious life: religion without revelation. But sometime around 800 B.C. there began what has been called the golden age of religious creativity. This consisted in a remarkable series of revelatory experiences occurring during the next five hundred or so years in different parts of the world, experiences which deepened and purified men's conception of the ultimate, and which religious faith can only attribute to the pressure of the divine Spirit upon the human spirit. First came the early Jewish prophets, Amos, Hosea and first Isaiah, declaring that they had heard the Word of the Lord claiming their obedience and demanding a new level of righteousness and justice in the life of Israel. Then in Persia the great prophet Zoroaster appeared; China produced Lao-tzu and then Confucius; in India the Upanishads were written, and Gotama the Buddha lived, and Mahavira, the founder of the Jain religion and, probably about the end of this period, the writing of the Bhagavad Gītā, and Greece produced Pythagoras and then, ending this golden age, Socrates and Plato. Then after the gap of some three hundred years came Jesus of Nazareth and the emergence of Christianity; and after another gap the prophet Mohammed and the rise of Islam.

The suggestion that we must consider is that these were all moments of divine revelation. But let us ask, in order to test this thought, whether we should not expect God to make his revelation in a single mighty act, rather than to produce a number of different, and therefore presumably partial, revelations at different times and places? I think that in seeing the answer to this question we receive an important clue to the place of the religions of the world in the divine purpose. For when we remember the facts of history and geography we realise that in the period we are speaking of, between two and three thousand years ago, it was not possible for God to reveal himself through any human mediation to all mankind. A world-wide revelation might be possible today, thanks to the inventions of printing, and even more of radio, TV and communication satellites. But in the technology of the ancient world this was not possible. Although on a time scale of centuries and millennia there has been a slow diffusion and interaction of cultures, particularly within the vast Euro-Asian land mass, yet the more striking fact for our present purpose is the fragmented character of the ancient world. Communications between the different groups of humanity was then so limited and slow that for all practical purposes men inhabited different worlds. For the most part people in Europe, in India, in Arabia, in Africa, in China were unaware of the others' existence. And as the world was fragmented, so was its religious life. If there was to be a revelation of the divine reality to mankind it had to be a pluriform revelation, a series of revealing experiences occurring independently within the different streams of human history. And since religion and culture were one, the great creative moments of revelation and illumination have influenced the development of the various cultures, giving them the coherence and impetus to expand into larger units, thus creating the vast, many-sided historical entities which we call the world religions.

Each of these religio-cultural complexes has expanded until it touched the boundaries of another such complex spreading out from another centre. Thus each major occasion of divine revelation has slowly transformed the primitive and national religions within the sphere of its influence into what we now know as the world faiths. The early Dravidian and Aryan polytheisms of India were drawn through the religious experience and thought of the Brahmins into what the west calls Hinduism. The national and mystery cults of the Mediterranean world and then of northern Europe were drawn by influences stemming from the life and teaching of Christ into what has become Christianity. The early polytheism of the Arab peoples has been transformed under the influence of Mohammed and his message into Islam. Great areas of Southeast Asia, of China, Tibet and Japan were drawn into the spreading Buddhist movement.

None of these expansions from different centres of revelation has of course been simple and uncontested, and a number of alternatives which proved less durable have perished or been absorbed in the process—for example, Mithraism has disappeared altogether; and Zoroastrianism, whilst it greatly influenced the development of the Judaic-Christian tradition, and has to that extent been absorbed, only survives directly today on a small scale in Parseeism.

Seen in this historical context these movements of faith—the Judaic-Christian, the Buddhist, the Hindu, the Muslim—are not essentially rivals. They began at different times and in different places, and each expanded outwards into the surrounding world of primitive natural religion until most of the world was drawn up into one or other of the great revealed faiths. And once this global pattern had become established it has ever since remained fairly stable. It is true that the process of establishment involved conflict in the case of Islam's entry into India and the virtual expulsion of Buddhism from India in the medieval period, and in the case of Islam's advance into Europe and then its retreat at the end of the medieval period. But since the frontiers of the different world faiths became more or less fixed there has been little penetration of one faith into societies moulded by another. The most successful missionary efforts of the great faiths continue to this day to be "downwards" into the remaining world of relatively primitive religions rather than "sideways" into territories dominated by another world faith. For example, as between Christianity and Islam there has been little more than rather rare individual conversions; but both faiths have successful missions in Africa. Again, the Christian population of the Indian subcontinent, after more than two centuries of missionary effort, is only about 2.7 percent; but on the other hand the Christian missions in the South Pacific are fairly successful. Thus the general picture, so far as the great world religions is concerned, is that each has gone through an early period of geographical expansion, converting a region of the world from its more primitive religious state, and has thereafter continued in a comparatively settled condition within more or less stable boundaries.

Now it is of course possible to see this entire development from the primitive forms of religion up to and including the great world faiths as the history of man's most persistent illusion, growing from crude fantasies into sophisticated metaphysical speculations. But from the standpoint of religious faith the only reasonable hypothesis is that this historical picture represents a movement of divine self-revelation to mankind. This hypothesis offers a general answer to the question of the relation between the different world religions and of the truths which they embody. It suggests to us that the same divine reality has always been self-revealingly active towards mankind, and that the differences of human response are related to different human circumstances. These circumstances—ethnic, geographical, climatic, economic, sociological, historical—have produced the existing differentiations of human culture, and within each main cultural region the response to the divine has taken its own characteristic forms. In each case the post-primitive response has been initiated by some spiritually outstanding individual or succession of individuals, developing in the course of time into one of the great religio-cultural phenomena which we call the world religions. Thus Islam embodies the main response of the Arabic peoples to the divine reality; Hinduism, the main (though not the only) response of the peoples of India; Buddhism, the main response of the peoples of South-east Asia and parts of northern Asia; Christianity, the main response of the European peoples, both within Europe itself and in their emigrations to the Americas and Australasia.

Thus it is, I think, intelligible historically why the revelation of the divine reality to man, and the disclosure of the divine will for human life, had to occur separately within the different streams of human life. We can see how these revelations took different forms related to the different mentalities of the peoples to whom they came and developed within these different cultures into the vast and many-sided historical phenomena of the world religions.

But let us now ask whether this is intelligible theologically. What about the conflicting truth claims of the different faiths? Is the divine nature personal or non-personal; does deity become

incarnate in the world; are human beings born again and again on earth; is the Bible, or the Koran, or the Bhagavad Gītā the Word of God? If what Christianity says in answer to these questions is true, must not what Hinduism says be to a large extent false? If what Buddhism says is true, must not what Islam says be largely false?

Let us begin with the recognition, which is made in all the main religious traditions, that the ultimate divine reality is infinite and as such transcends the grasp of the human mind. God, to use our Christian term, is infinite. He is not a thing, a part of the universe, existing alongside other things; nor is he a being falling under a certain kind. And therefore he cannot be defined or encompassed by human thought. We cannot draw boundaries around his nature and say that he is this and no more. If we could fully define God, describing his inner being and his outer limits, this would not be God. The God whom our minds can penetrate and whom our thoughts can circumnavigate is merely a finite and partial image of God.

From this it follows that the different encounters with the transcendent within the different religious traditions may all be encounters with the one infinite reality; though with partially different and overlapping aspects of that reality. This is a very familiar thought in Indian religious literature. We read, for example, in the ancient Rig-Vedas, dating back to perhaps as much as a thousand years before Christ:

> They call it Indra, Mitra, Varuna, and Agni
> And also heavenly, beautiful Garutman:
> The real is one, though sages name it variously.

We might translate this thought into the terms of the faiths represented today in Britain:

> They call it Jahweh, Allah, Krishna, Param Atma,
> And also holy, blessed Trinity:
> The real is one, though sages name it differently.

And in the Bhagavad Gītā the Lord Krishna, the personal God of love, says, "However men approach me, even so do I accept them: for, on all sides, whatever path they may choose is mine."

Again, there is the parable of the blind men and the elephant, said to have been told by the Buddha. An elephant was brought to a group of blind men who had never encountered such an animal before. One felt a leg and reported that an elephant is a great living pillar. Another felt the trunk and reported that an elephant is a great snake. Another felt the tusk and reported that an elephant is like a sharp ploughshare. And so on. And then they all quarrelled together, each claiming that his own account was the truth and therefore all the others false. In fact of course they were all true, but each referring only to one aspect of the total reality and all expressed in very imperfect analogies.

Now the possibility, indeed the probability, that we have seriously to consider is that many different accounts of the divine reality may be true, though all expressed in imperfect human analogies, but that none is "the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth." May it not be that the different concepts of God, as Jahweh, Allah, Krishna, Param Atma, Holy Trinity, and so on; and likewise the different concepts of the hidden structure of reality, as the eternal emanation of Brahman or as an immense cosmic process culminating in Nirvana, are all images of the divine, each expressing some aspect or range of aspects and yet none by itself fully and exhaustively corresponding to the infinite nature of the ultimate reality?

Two immediate qualifications however to this hypothesis. First, the idea that we are considering is not that any and every conception of God or of the transcendent is valid, still less all equally valid; but that every conception of the divine which has come out of a great revelatory religious experience and has been tested though a long tradition of worship, and has sustained human faith over centuries of time and in millions of lives, is likely to represent a genuine encounter with the divine reality. And second, the parable of the blind men and the elephant is of course only a parable and like most parables it is designed to make one point and must not be pressed as an analogy at other points. The suggestion is not that the different encounters with the divine which lie at the basis of the great religious traditions are responses to different *parts* of the divine. They are rather encounters from

different historical and cultural standpoints with the same infinite divine reality and as such they lead to differently focused awareness of the reality. The indications of this are most evident in worship and prayer. What is said about God in the theological treatises of the different faiths is indeed often widely different. But it is in prayer that a belief in God comes alive and does its main work. And when we turn from abstract theology to the living stuff of worship we meet again and again the overlap and confluence of faiths.

Here, for example, is a Muslim prayer at the feast of Ramadan:

> Praise be to God, Lord of creation, Source of all livelihood, who orders the morning, Lord of majesty and honour, of grace and beneficence. He who is so far that he may not be seen and so near that he witnesses the secret things. Blessed be he and for ever exalted.

And here is a Sikh creed used at the morning prayer:

> There is but one God. He is all that is.
> He is the Creator of all things and He is all pervasive.
> He is without fear and without enmity.
> He is timeless, unborn and self-existent. He is the Enlightener
> And can be realised by grace of Himself alone. He was in the beginning; He was in all ages.
> The True One is, was, O Nanak, and shall for ever be.

And here again is a verse from the Koran:

> To God belongs the praise. Lord of the heavens and Lord of the earth, the Lord of all being. His is the dominion in the heavens and in the earth: he is the Almighty, the All-wise.

Turning now to the Hindu idea of the many incarnations of God, here is a verse from the Rāmāyana:

> Seers and sages, saints and hermits, fix on Him their reverent gaze,
> And in faint and trembling accents, holy scripture hymns His praise.
> He the omnipresent spirit, lord of heaven and earth and hell,
> To redeem His people, freely has vouchsafed with men to dwell.

And from the rich literature of devotional song here is a Bhakti hymn of the Vaishnavite branch of Hinduism:

> Now all my days with joy I'll fill, full to the brim
> With all my heart to Vitthal cling, and only Him.
> He will sweep utterly away all dole and care;
> And all in sunder shall I rend illusion's snare.
> O altogether dear is He, and He alone,
> For all my burden He will take to be His own.
> Lo, all the sorrow of the world will straight way cease,
> And all unending now shall be the reign of peace.

And a Muslim mystical verse:

> Love came a guest
> Within my breast,
> My soul was spread,
> Love banqueted.

And finally another Hindu (Vaishnavite) devotional hymn:

> O save me, save me, Mightiest, Save me and set me free.
> O let the love that fills my breast Cling to thee lovingly.
> Grant me to taste how sweet thou art; Grant me but this, I pray.
> And never shall my love depart Or turn from thee away.
> Then I thy name shall magnify And tell thy praise abroad,
> For very love and gladness I Shall dance before my God.

Such prayers and hymns as these must express, surely, diverse encounters with the same divine reality. These encounters have taken place within

different human cultures by people of different ways of thought and feeling, with different histories and different frameworks of philosophical thought, and have developed into different systems of theology embodied in different religious structures and organisations. These resulting large-scale religio-cultural phenomena are what we call the religions of the world. But must there not lie behind them the same infinite divine reality, and may not our divisions into Christian, Hindu, Muslim, Jew, and so on, and all that goes with them, accordingly represent secondary, human, historical developments?

There is a further problem, however, which now arises. I have been speaking so far of the ultimate reality in a variety of terms—the Father, Son and Spirit of Christianity, the Jahweh of Judaism, the Allah of Islam, and so on—but always thus far in theistic terms, as a personal God under one name or another. But what of the non-theistic religions? What of the non-theistic Hinduism according to which the ultimate reality, Brahman, is not He but It; and what about Buddhism, which in one form is agnostic concerning the existence of God even though in another form it has come to worship the Buddha himself? Can these non-theistic faiths be seen as encounters with the same divine reality that is encountered in theistic religion?

Speaking very tentatively, I think it is possible that the sense of the divine as non-personal may indeed reflect an aspect of the same infinite reality that is encountered as personal in theistic religious experience. The question can be pursued both as a matter of pure theology and in relation to religious experience. Theologically, the Hindu distinction between Nirguna Brahman and Saguna Brahman is important and should be adopted into western religious thought. Detaching the distinction, then from its Hindu context we may say that Nirguna God is the eternal self-existent divine reality, beyond the scope of all human categories, including personality; and Saguna God is God in relation to his creation and with the attributes which express this relationship, such as personality, omnipotence, goodness, love and omniscience. Thus the one ultimate reality is both Nirguna and non-personal, and Saguna and personal, in a duality which is in principle acceptable to human understanding. When we turn to men's religious awareness of God we are speaking of Saguna God, God in relation to man. And here the larger traditions of both east and west report a dual experience of the divine as personal and as other than personal. It will be a sufficient reminder of the strand of personal relationship with the divine in Hinduism to mention Iswaru, the personal God who represents the Absolute as known and worshipped by finite persons. It should also be remembered that the characterisation of Brahman as *satcitananda*, absolute being, consciousness and bliss, is not far from the conception of infinitely transcendent personal life. Thus there is both the thought and the experience of the personal divine within Hinduism. But there is likewise the thought and the experience of God as other than personal within Christianity. Rudolph Otto describes this strand in the mysticism of Meister Eckhart. He says:

> The divine, which on the one hand is conceived in symbols taken from the social sphere, as Lord, King, Father, Judge—a person in relation to persons—is on the other hand denoted in dynamic symbols as the power of life, as light and life, as spirit ebbing and flowing, as truth, knowledge, essential justice and holiness, a glowing fire that penetrates and pervades. It is characterized as the principle of a renewed, supernatural Life, mediating and giving itself, breaking forth in the living man as his nova vita, as the content of his life and being. What is here insisted upon is not so much an immanent God, as an "experienced" God, known as an inward principle of the power of new being and life. Eckhart knows this *deuteros theos* besides the personal God …

Let me now try to draw the threads together and to project them into the future. I have been suggesting that Christianity is a way of salvation which, beginning some two thousand years ago, has become the principal way of salvation in three

continents. The other great faiths are likewise of salvation, providing the principal path to the divine reality for other large sections of humanity. I have also suggested that the idea that Jesus proclaimed himself as God incarnate, and as the sole point of saving contact between God and man, is without adequate historical foundation and represents a doctrine developed by the church. We should therefore not infer, from the christian experience of redemption through Christ, that salvation cannot be experienced in any other way. The alternative possibility is that the ultimate divine reality—in our christian terms, God—has always been pressing in upon the human spirit, but in ways which leave men free to open or close themselves to the divine presence. Human life has developed along characteristically different lines in the main areas of civilisation, and these differences have naturally entered into the ways in which men have apprehended and responded to God. For the great religious figures through whose experience divine revelation has come have each been conditioned by a particular history and culture. One can hardly imagine Gotama the Buddha except in the setting of the India of his time, or Jesus the Christ except against the background of Old Testament Judaism, or Mohammed except in the setting of Arabia. And human history and culture have likewise shaped the development of the webs of religious creeds, practices and organisations which we know as the great world faiths.

It is thus possible to consider the hypothesis that they are all, at their experiential roots, in contact with the same ultimate reality, but that their differing experiences of that reality, interacting over the centuries with the different thought-forms of different cultures, have led to increasing differentiation and contrasting elaboration—so that Hinduism, for example, is a very different phenomenon from Christianity, and very different ways of conceiving and experiencing the divine occur within them.

However, now that the religious traditions are consciously interacting with each other in the "one world" of today, in mutual observation and dialogue, it is possible that their future developments may be on gradually converging courses. For during the next few centuries they will no doubt continue to change, and it may be that they will grow closer together, and even that one day such names as "Christianity," "Buddhism," "Islam," "Hinduism," will no longer describe the then current configurations of men's religious experience and belief. I am not here thinking of the extinction of human religiousness in a universal wave of secularisation. This is of course a possible future; and indeed many think it the most likely future to come about. But if man is an indelibly religious animal he will always, even in his secular cultures, experience a sense of the transcendent by which he will be both troubled and uplifted. The future I am thinking of is accordingly one in which what we now call the different religions will constitute the past history of different emphases and variations within a global religious life. I do not mean that all men everywhere will be overtly religious, any more than they are today. I mean rather that the discoveries now taking place by men of different faiths of central common ground, hitherto largely concealed by the variety of cultural forms in which it was expressed, may eventually render obsolete the sense of belonging to rival ideological communities. Not that all religious men will think alike, or worship in the same way or experience the divine identically. On the contrary, so long as there is a rich variety of human cultures—and let us hope there will always be this—we should expect there to be correspondingly different forms of religious cult, ritual and organisation, conceptualised in different theological doctrines. And so long as there is a wide spectrum of human psychological types—and again let us hope that there will always be this—we should expect there to be correspondingly different emphases between, for example, the sense of the divine as just and as merciful, between *karma* and *bhakti*; or between worship as formal and communal and worship as free and personal. Thus we may expect the different world faiths to continue as religio-cultural phenomena, though phenomena which are increasingly influencing one another's development. The relation between them will then perhaps be somewhat like that now obtaining between the different denominations of Christianity in Europe or

the United States. That is to say, there will in most countries be a dominant religious tradition, with other traditions present in varying strengths, but with considerable awareness on all hands of what they have in common; with some degree of osmosis of membership through their institutional walls; with a large degree of practical cooperation; and even conceivably with some interchange of ministry.

Beyond this the ultimate unity of faiths will be an eschatological unity in which each is both fulfilled and transcended—fulfilled in so far as it is true, transcended in so far as it is less than the whole truth. And indeed even such fulfilling must be a transcending; for the function of a religion is to bring us to a right relationship with the ultimate divine reality, to awareness of our true nature and our place in the Whole, into the presence of God. In the eternal life there is no longer any place for religions; the pilgrim has no need of a way after he has finally arrived. In St. John's vision of the heavenly city at the end of our christian scriptures it is said that there is no temple—no christian church or chapel, no jewish synagogue, no hindu or buddhist temple, no muslim mosque, no sikh gurdwara…. For all these exist in time, as ways through time to eternity.

IX.2

A Defense of Religious Exclusivism

ALVIN PLANTINGA

Biographical remarks about Alvin Plantinga appear before selection I.B.8. In this selection, Plantinga argues for three theses: (1) The religious exclusivist is not necessarily guilty of any moral wrongdoing; (2) the religious exclusivist is not necessarily guilty of any epistemic fault; (3) some exclusivism in our beliefs is inevitable. If a person truly believes his or her creed, it may be wrong to expect him or her to treat all religions as equally good ways to God, or even as ways to God simpliciter. *Nevertheless, Plantinga agrees that the knowledge of other religions is something to be sought, and that this may lessen our assurance in our own belief.*

When I was a graduate student at Yale, the philosophy department prided itself on diversity, and it was indeed diverse. There were idealists, pragmatists, phenomenologists, existentialists, Whiteheadians, historians of philosophy, a token positivist, and what could only be described as observers of the passing intellectual scene. In some ways, this was indeed something to take pride in; a student could behold and encounter real, live representatives of many of the main traditions in philosophy. However, it also had an unintended and unhappy side effect. If anyone raised a philosophical question inside, but particularly

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outside, of class, the typical response would be to catalog some of the various different answers the world has seen: There is the Aristotelian answer, the existentialist answer, the Cartesian answer, Heidegger's answer, perhaps the Buddhist answer, and so on. But the question "What is the truth about this matter?" was often greeted with disdain as unduly naive. There are all these different answers, all endorsed by people of great intellectual power and great dedication to philosophy; for every argument *for* one of these positions, there is another *against* it; would it not be excessively naive, or perhaps arbitrary, to suppose that one of these is in fact true, the others being false? Or, if even there really is a truth of the matter, so that one of them is true and conflicting ones false, wouldn't it be merely arbitrary, in the face of this embarrassment of riches, to *endorse* one of them as the truth, consigning the others to falsehood? How could you possibly know which was true?

A similar attitude is sometimes urged with respect to the impressive variety of religions the world displays. There are theistic religions but also at least some nontheistic religions (or perhaps nontheistic strands) among the enormous variety of religions going under the names Hinduism and Buddhism; among the theistic religions, there are strands of Hinduism and Buddhism and American Indian religion as well as Islam, Judaism, and Christianity; and all differ significantly from each other. Isn't it somehow arbitrary, or irrational, or unjustified, or unwarranted, or even oppressive and imperialistic to endorse one of these as opposed to all the others? According to Jean Bodin, "each is refuted by all";[1] must we not agree? It is in this neighborhood that the so-called problem of pluralism arises. Of course, many concerns and problems can come under this rubric; the specific problem I mean to discuss can be thought of as follows. To put it in an internal and personal way, I find myself with religious beliefs, and religious beliefs that I realize aren't shared by nearly everyone else. For example, I believe both

(1) The world was created by God, an almighty, all-knowing, and perfectly good personal being (one that holds beliefs; has aims, plans, and intentions; and can act to accomplish these aims).

(2) Human beings require salvation, and God has provided a unique way of salvation through the incarnation, life, sacrificial death, and resurrection of his divine son.

Now there are many who do not believe these things. First, there are those who agree with me on (I) but not (2): They are non-Christian theistic religions. Second, there are those who don't accept either (1) or (2) but nonetheless do believe that there is something beyond the natural world, a something such that human well-being and salvation depend upon standing in a right relation to it. Third, in the West and since the Enlightenment, anyway, there are people—*naturalists*, we may call them—who don't believe any of these three things. And my problem is this: When I become really aware of these other ways of looking at the world, these other ways of responding religiously to the world, what must or should I do? What is the right sort of attitude to take? What sort of impact should this awareness have on the beliefs I hold and the strength with which I hold them? My question is this: How should I think about the great religious diversity the world in fact displays? Can I sensibly remain an adherent of just one of these religions, rejecting the others? And here I am thinking specifically of *beliefs*. Of course, there is a great deal more to any religion or religious practice than just belief, and I don't for a moment mean to deny it. But belief is a crucially important part of most religions; it is a crucially important part of *my* religion; and the question I mean to ask here is, What does the awareness of religious diversity mean or should mean for my religious beliefs?

Some speak here of a *new* awareness of religious diversity and speak of this new awareness as constituting (for us in the West) a crisis, a revolution, an intellectual development of the same magnitude as the Copernican revolution of the sixteenth century and the alleged discovery of evolution and our animal origins in the nineteenth.[2] No doubt there is at least some truth to this. Of course, the fact is all along many Western Christians and Jews have known that

there are other religions and that not nearly everyone shares *their* religion. The ancient Israelites—some of the prophets, say—were clearly aware of Canaanite religion; and the apostle Paul said that he preached "Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to the Greeks" (1 Corinthians 1:23). Other early Christians, the Christian martyrs, say, must have suspected that not everyone believed as they did; and the church fathers, in offering defenses of Christianity, were certainly apprised of this fact. Thomas Aquinas, again, was clearly aware of those to whom he addressed the *Summa Contra Gentiles*; and the fact that there are non-Christian religions would have come as no surprise to the Jesuit missionaries of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries or to the Methodist missionaries of the nineteenth. To come to more recent times, when I was a child, *The Banner*, the official publication of my church, contained a small column for children; it was written by "Uncle Dick" who exhorted us to save our nickels and send them to our Indian cousins at the Navaho mission in New Mexico. Both we and our elders knew that the Navahos had or had had a religion different from Christianity, and part of the point of sending the nickels was to try to rectify that situation.

Still, in recent years, probably more of us Christian Westerners have become aware of the world's religious diversity; we have probably learned more about people of other religious persuasions, and we have come to see that they display what looks like real piety, devoutness, and spirituality. What is new, perhaps, is a more widespread sympathy for other religions, a tendency to see them as more valuable, as containing more by way of truth, and a new feeling of solidarity with their practitioners.

Now there are several possible reactions to awareness of religious diversity. One is to continue to believe—what you have all along believed; you learn about this diversity but continue to believe that is, take to be true—such propositions as (1) and (2) above, consequently taking to be false any beliefs, religious or otherwise, that are incompatible with (1) and (2). Following current practice, I will call this *exclusivism*; the exclusivist holds that the tenets or some of the tenets of *one* religion—Christianity, let's say—are in fact true; he adds, naturally enough, that any propositions, including other religious beliefs, that are incompatible with those tenets are false. And there is a fairly widespread apprehension that there is something seriously wrong with exclusivism. It is irrational, or egotistical and unjustified,[3] or intellectually arrogant,[4] or elitist,[5] or a manifestation of harmful pride,[6] or even oppressive and imperialistic.[7] The claim is that exclusivism as such is or involves a vice of some sort: It is wrong or deplorable. It is this claim I want to examine. I propose to argue that exclusivism need not involve either epistemic or moral failure and that, furthermore, something like it is wholly unavoidable, given our human condition.

These objections, of course, are not to the *truth* of (1) or (2) or any other proposition someone might accept in this exclusivist way (although objections of that sort are also put forward); they are instead directed to the *propriety or rightness* of exclusivism. There are initially two different kinds of indictments of exclusivism: broadly moral, or ethical, indictments and other broadly intellectual, or epistemic, indictments. These overlap in interesting ways as we will see below. But initially, anyway, we can take some of the complaints about exclusivism as *intellectual* criticisms: It is *irrational* or *unjustified* to think in an exclusivistic way. The other large body of complaint is moral: There is something *morally* suspect about exclusivism—it is arbitrary, or intellectually arrogant, or imperialistic. As Joseph Runzo suggests, exclusivism is "neither tolerable nor any longer intellectually honest in the context of our contemporary knowledge of other faiths."[8] I want to consider both kinds of claims or criticisms; I propose to argue that the exclusivist as such is not necessarily guilty of any of these charges.

MORAL OBJECTIONS TO EXCLUSIVISM

I turn to the moral complaints: that the exclusivist is intellectually arrogant, or egotistical or self-servingly arbitrary, or dishonest, or imperialistic, or oppressive. But first, I provide three qualifications. An

exclusivist, like anyone else, will probably be guilty of some or of all of these things to at least some degree, perhaps particularly the first two. The question, however, is whether she is guilty of these things just by virtue of being an exclusivist. Second, I will use the term *exclusivism* in such a way that you don't count as an exclusivist unless you are rather fully aware of other faiths, have had their existence and their claims called to your attention with some force and perhaps fairly frequently, and have to some degree reflected on the problem of pluralism, asking yourself such questions as whether it is or could be really true that the Lord has revealed Himself and His programs to us Christians, say, in a way in which He hasn't revealed Himself to those of other faiths. Thus, my grandmother, for example, would not have counted as an exclusivist. She had, of course, *heard* of the heathen, as she called them, but the idea that perhaps Christians could learn from them, and learn from them with respect to religious matters, had not so much as entered her head; and the fact that it *hadn't* entered her head, I take it, was not a matter of moral dereliction on her part. This same would go for a Buddhist or Hindu peasant. These people are not, I think, properly charged with arrogance or other moral flaws in believing as they do.

Third, suppose I am an exclusivist with respect to (1), for example, but nonculpably believe, like Aquinas, say, that I have a knock-down, drag-out argument, a demonstration or conclusive proof of the proposition that there is such a person as God; and suppose I think further (and nonculpably) that if those who don't believe (1) were to be apprised of this argument (and had the ability and training necessary to grasp it and were to think about the argument fairly and reflectively), *they* too would come to believe (1)? Then I could hardly be charged with these moral faults. My condition would be like that of Gödel, let's say, upon having recognized that he had a proof for the incompleteness of arithmetic. True, many of his colleagues and peers didn't believe that arithmetic was incomplete, and some believed that it was complete; but presumably Gödel wasn't arbitrary or egotistical in believing that arithmetic is in fact incomplete. Furthermore, he would not have been at fault had he nonculpably but *mistakenly* believed that he had found such a proof. Accordingly, I will use the term *exclusivist* in such a way that you don't count as an exclusivist if you nonculpably think you know of a demonstration or conclusive argument for the beliefs with respect to which you are an exclusivist, or even if you nonculpably think you know of an argument that would convince all or most intelligent and honest people of the truth of that proposition. So an exclusivist, as I use the term, not only believes something like (1) or (2) and thinks false any proposition incompatible with it; she also meets a further condition *C* that is hard to state precisely and in detail (and in fact any attempt to do so would involve a long and presently irrelevant discussion of *ceteris paribus* clauses). Suffice it to say that *C* includes (a) being rather fully aware of other religions, (b) knowing that there is much that at the least looks like genuine piety and devoutness in them, and (c) believing that you know of no arguments that would necessarily convince all or most honest and intelligent dissenters.

Given these qualifications then, why should we think that an exclusivist is properly charged with these moral faults? I will deal first and most briefly with charges of oppression and imperialism: I think we must say that they are on the face of it wholly implausible. I daresay there are some among you who reject some of the things I believe; I do not believe that you are thereby oppressing me, even if you do not believe you have an argument that would convince me. It is conceivable that exclusivism might in some way *contribute* to oppression, but it isn't in itself oppressive.

The more important moral charge is that there is a sort of self-serving arbitrariness, an arrogance or egotism, in accepting such propositions as (1) or (2) under condition *C*; exclusivism is guilty of some serious moral fault or flaw. According to Wilfred Cantwell Smith, "…except at the cost of insensitivity or delinquency, it is morally not possible actually to go out into the world and say to devout, intelligent, fellow human beings: '… we believe that we know God and we are right; you believe that you know God, and you are totally wrong.'"[9]

So what can the exclusivist have to say for himself Well, it must be conceded immediately that if he believes (1) or (2), then he must also believe that those who believe something incompatible with them are mistaken and believe what is false. That's no more than simple logic. Furthermore, he must also believe that those who do not believe as he does—those who believe neither (1) nor (2), whether or not they believe their negations—*fail* to believe something that is deep and important and that he *does* believe. He must therefore see himself as *privileged* with respect to those others—those others of both kinds. There is something of great value, he must think, that *he* has and *they* lack. They are ignorant of something—something of great importance—of which he has knowledge. But does this make him properly subject to the above censure?

I think the answer must be no. Or if the answer is yes, then I think we have here a genuine moral dilemma; for in our earthly life here below, as my Sunday School teacher used to say, there is no real alternative; there is no reflective attitude that is not open to the same strictures. These charges of arrogance are a philosophical tar baby: Get close enough to them to use them against the exclusivist and you are likely to find them stuck fast to yourself. How so? Well, as an exclusivist, I realize that I can't convince others that they should believe as I do, but I nonetheless continue to believe as I do. The charge is that I am, as a result, arrogant or egotistical, arbitrarily preferring my way of doing things to other ways.[10] But what are my alternatives with respect to a proposition like (1)? There seem to be three choices. I can continue to hold it; I can withhold it, in Roderick Chisholm's sense, believing neither it nor its denial, and I can accept its denial. Consider the third way, a way taken by those pluralists who, like John Hick, hold that such propositions as (1) and (2) and their colleagues from other faiths are literally false, although in some way still valid responses to the Real. This seems to me to be no advance at all with respect to the arrogance or egotism problem; this is not a way out. For if I do this, I will then be in the very same condition as I am now: I will believe many propositions others don't believe and will be in condition *C* with respect to those propositions. For I will then believe the denials of (1) and (2) (as well as the denials of many other propositions explicitly accepted by those of other faiths). Many others, of course, do not believe the denials of (1) and (2) and in fact believe (1) and (2). Further, I will not know of any arguments that can be counted on to persuade those who do believe (1) or (2) (or propositions accepted by the adherents of other religions). I am therefore in the condition of believing propositions that many others do not believe and furthermore am in condition *C*. If, in the case of those who believe (1) and (2), that is sufficient for intellectual arrogance or egotism, the same goes for those who believe their denials.

So consider the second option: I can instead *withhold* the proposition in question. I can say to myself: "The right course here, given that I can't or couldn't convince these others of what I believe, is to believe neither these propositions nor their denials." The pluralist objector to exclusivism can say that the right course, under condition *C*, is to abstain from believing the offending proposition and also abstain from believing its denial; call him, therefore, "the abstemious pluralist." But does he thus really avoid the condition that, on the part of the exclusivist, leads to the charges of egotism and arrogance in this way? Think, for a moment, about disagreement. Disagreement, fundamentally, is a matter of adopting conflicting propositional attitudes with respect to a given proposition. In the simplest and most familiar case, I disagree with you if there is some proposition p such that I believe p and you believe $-p$. But that's just the simplest case; there are also others. The one that is presently of interest is this: I believe p and you withhold it, fail to believe it. Call the first kind of disagreement "contradicting"; call the second "dissenting."

My claim is that if contradicting others (under the condition *C* spelled out above) is arrogant and egotistical, so is dissenting (under that same condition). Suppose you believe some proposition p but I don't; perhaps you believe that it is wrong to discriminate against people simply on the grounds of race, but I, recognizing that there are many people who disagree with you, do not believe this proposition. I don't disbelieve it either, of course, but in the circumstances I think the right thing to do is to

abstain from belief. Then am I not implicitly condemning your attitude, your *believing* the proposition, as somehow improper—naive, perhaps, or unjustified, or in some other way less than optimal? I am implicitly saying that my attitude is the superior one; I think my course of action here is the right one and yours somehow wrong, inadequate, improper, in the circumstances at best second-rate. Of course, I realize that there is no question, here, of *showing* you that your attitude is wrong or improper or naive; so am I not guilty of intellectual arrogance? Of a sort of egotism, thinking I know better than you, arrogating to myself a privileged status with respect to you? The problem for the exclusivist was that she was obliged to think she possessed a truth missed by many others; the problem for the abstemious pluralist is that he is obliged to think that he possesses a virtue others don't or acts rightly where others don't. If, in condition *C*, one is arrogant by way of believing a proposition others don't, isn't one equally, under those reflective conditions, arrogant by way of withholding a proposition others don't?

Perhaps you will respond by saying that the abstemious pluralist gets into trouble, falls into arrogance, by way of implicitly saying or believing that his way of proceeding is better or wiser than other ways pursued by other people; and perhaps he can escape by abstaining from *that* view as well. Can't he escape the problem by refraining from believing that racial bigotry is wrong and also refraining from holding the view that it is *better*, under the conditions that obtain, to withhold that proposition than to assert and believe it? Well, yes he can; then he has no *reason* for his abstention; he doesn't believe that abstention is better or more appropriate; he simply does abstain. Does this get him off the egotistical hook? Perhaps. But then he can't, in consistency, also hold that there is something wrong with *not* abstaining, with coming right out and *believing* that bigotry is wrong; he loses his objection to the exclusivist. Accordingly, this way out is not available for the abstemious pluralist who accuses the exclusivist of arrogance and egotism.

Indeed, I think we can show that the abstemious pluralist who brings charges of intellectual arrogance against exclusivism is hoist with his own petard, holds a position that in a certain way is self-referentially inconsistent in the circumstances. For he believes

(3) If S knows that others don't believe *p* and that he is in condition *C* with respect to *p*, then *S* should not believe *p*.

This or something like it is the ground of the charges he brings against the exclusivist. But the abstemious pluralist realizes that many do not accept (3); and I suppose he also realizes that it is unlikely that he can find arguments for (3) that will convince them; hence, he knows that condition obtains. Given his acceptance of (3), therefore, the right course for him is to abstain from believing (3). Under the conditions that do in fact obtain—namely, his knowledge that others don't accept it and that condition *C* obtains—he can't properly accept it.

I am therefore inclined to think that one can't, in the circumstances, properly hold (3) or any other proposition that will do the job. One can't find here some principle on the basis of which to hold that the exclusivist is doing the wrong thing, suffers from some moral fault—that is, one can't find such a principle that doesn't, as we might put it, fall victim to itself.

So the abstemious pluralist is hoist with his own petard; but even apart from this dialectical argument (which in any event some will think unduly cute), aren't the charges unconvincing and implausible? I must concede that there are a variety of ways in which I can be and have been intellectually arrogant and egotistic; I have certainly fallen into this vice in the past and no doubt am not free of it now. But am I really arrogant and egotistic just by virtue of believing what I know others don't believe, where I can't show them that I am right? Suppose I think the matter over, consider the objections as carefully as I can, realize that I am finite and furthermore a sinner, certainly no better than those with whom I disagree; but suppose it still seems clear to me that the proposition in question is true. Can I really be behaving immorally in continuing to believe it? I am dead sure that it is wrong to try to advance my career by telling lies about my colleagues; I realize there are those who disagree; I also realize that in all likelihood there is no way I can find to show them that they

are wrong; nonetheless I think they are wrong. If I think this after careful reflection, if I consider the claims of those who disagree as sympathetically as I can, if I try my level best to ascertain the truth here, and it *still* seems to me sleazy, wrong, and despicable to lie about my colleagues to advance my career, could I really be doing what is immoral by continuing to believe as before? I can't see how. If, after careful reflection and thought, you find yourself convinced that the right propositional attitude to take to (1) and (2) in the face of the facts of religious pluralism is abstention from belief, how could you properly be taxed with egotism, either for so believing or for so abstaining? Even if you knew others did not agree with you?

EPISTEMIC OBJECTIONS TO EXCLUSIVISM

I turn now to *epistemic* objections to exclusivism. There are many different specifically epistemic virtues and a corresponding plethora of epistemic vices. The ones with which the exclusivist is most frequently charged, however, are *irrationality* and *lack of justification* in holding his exclusivist beliefs. The claim is that as an exclusivist he holds unjustified beliefs and/or irrational beliefs. Better, *he* is unjustified or irrational in holding these beliefs. I will therefore consider those two claims, and I will argue that the exclusivist views need not be either unjustified or irrational. I will then turn to the question whether his beliefs could have *warrant*—that property, whatever precisely it is, that distinguishes knowledge from mere true belief—and whether they could have enough warrant for knowledge.

Justification

The pluralist objector sometimes claims that to hold exclusivist views, in condition *C*, is *unjustified—epistemically* unjustified. Is this true? And what does he mean when he makes this claim? As even a brief glance at the contemporary epistemological literature will show, justification is a protean and multifarious notion. There are, I think, substantially two possibilities as to what he means. The central core of the notion, its beating heart, the paradigmatic center to which most of the myriad contemporary variations are related by way of analogical extension and family resemblance, is the notion of *being within one's intellectual rights*, having violated no intellectual or cognitive duties or obligations in the formation and sustenance of the belief in question. This is the palimpsest, going back to Rene Descartes and especially John Locke, that underlies the multitudinous battery of contemporary inscriptions. There is no space to argue that point here; but chances are, when the pluralist objector to exclusivism claims that the latter is unjustified, it is some notion lying in this neighborhood that he has in mind. (Here we should note the very close connection between the moral objections to exclusivism and the objection that exclusivism is epistemically unjustified.)

The duties involved, naturally enough, would be specifically *epistemic* duties: perhaps a duty to proportion degree of belief to (propositional) evidence from what is *certain*, that is, self-evident or incorrigible, as with Locke, or perhaps to try one's best to get into and stay in the right relation to the truth, as with Chisholm, the leading contemporary champion of the justificationist tradition with respect to knowledge. But at present there is widespread (and as I see it, correct) agreement that there is no duty of the Lockean kind. Perhaps there is one of the Chisholmian kind; but isn't the exclusivist conforming to that duty if, after the sort of careful, indeed prayerful consideration I mentioned in the response to the moral objection, it still seems to him strongly that (1), say, is true and he accordingly still believes it? It is therefore very hard to see that the exclusivist is necessarily unjustified in this way.

The second possibility for understanding the charge—the charge that exclusivism is epistemically unjustified—has to do with the oft-repeated claim that exclusivism is intellectually *arbitrary*. Perhaps the idea is that there is an intellectual duty to treat similar cases similarly; the exclusivist violates this duty by arbitrarily choosing to believe (for the moment going along with the fiction that we *choose* beliefs of this sort) (1) and (2) in the face of the

plurality of conflicting religious beliefs the world presents. But suppose there is such a duty. Clearly you do not violate it if you nonculpably think the beliefs in question are not on a par. And as an exclusivist, I *do* think (nonculpably, I hope) that they are not on a par: I think (1) and (2) *true* and those incompatible with either of them *false*.

The rejoinder, of course, will be that it is not alethic parity (their having the same truth value) that is at issue: it is *epistemic* parity that counts. What kind of epistemic parity? What would be relevant, here, I should think, would be *internal* or internalist epistemic parity: parity with respect to what is internally available to the believer. What is internally available to the believer includes, for example, detectable relationships between the belief in question and other beliefs you hold; so internal parity would include parity of propositional evidence. What is internally available to the believer also includes the *phenomenology* that goes with the beliefs in question: the *sensuous* phenomenology but also the nonsensuous phenomenology involved, for example, in the belief's just having the feel of being *right*. But once more, then, (1) and (2) are not on an internal par, for the exclusivist, with beliefs that are incompatible with them. (1) and (2), after all, seem to me to be true; they have for me the phenomenology that accompanies that seeming. The same cannot be said for propositions incompatible with them. If, furthermore, John Calvin is right in thinking that there is such a thing as the *Sensus Divinitatis* and the Internal Testimony of the Holy Spirit, then perhaps (1) and (2) are produced in me by those belief-producing processes and have for me the phenomenology that goes with them; the same is not true for propositions incompatible with them.

But then the next rejoinder: Isn't it probably true that those who reject (1) and (2) in favor of other beliefs have propositional evidence for their beliefs that is on a par with mine for my beliefs? And isn't it also probably true that the same or similar phenomenology accompanies their beliefs as accompanies mine? So that those beliefs really are epistemically and internally on a par with (1) and (2), and the exclusivist is still treating like cases differently? I don't think so; I think there really are arguments available for (1), at least, that are not available for its competitors. And as for similar phenomenology, this is not easy to say; it is not easy to look into the breast of another; the secrets of the human heart are hard to fathom; it is hard indeed to discover this sort of thing even with respect to someone you know really well. I am prepared, however, to stipulate both sorts of parity. Let's agree for purposes of argument that these beliefs are on an epistemic par in the sense that those of a different religious tradition have the same sort of internally available markers—evidence, phenomenology and the like—for their beliefs as I have for (1) and (2). What follows?

Return to the case of moral belief. King David took Bathsheba, made her pregnant, and then, after the failure of various stratagems to get her husband Uriah to think the baby was his, arranged for him to be killed. The prophet Nathan came to David and told him a story about a rich man and a poor man. The rich man had many flocks and herds; the poor man had only a single ewe lamb, which grew up with his children, "ate at his table, drank from his cup, lay in his bosom, and was like a daughter to him." The rich man had unexpected guests. Rather than slaughter one of his own sheep, he took the poor man's single ewe lamb, slaughtered it, and served it to his guests. David exploded in anger: "The man who did this deserves to die!" Then, in one of the most riveting passages in all the Bible, Nathan turns to David and declares, "You are that man!" And then David sees what he has done.

My interest here is in David's reaction to the story. I agree with David: Such injustice is utterly and despicably wrong; there are really no words for it. I believe that such an action is wrong, and I believe that the proposition that it *isn't* wrong—either because really *nothing* is wrong, or because even if some things are wrong, *this* isn't—is false. As a matter of fact, there isn't a lot I believe more strongly. I recognize, however, that there are those who disagree with me; and once more, I doubt that I could find an argument to show them that I am right and they wrong. Further, for all I know, their conflicting beliefs have for them the same internally available epistemic markers, the same phenomenology, as mine have for me. Am I then being arbitrary, treating similar cases differently in continuing

to hold, as I do, that in fact that kind of behavior *is* dreadfully wrong? I don't think so. Am I wrong in thinking racial bigotry despicable, even though I know that there are others who disagree, and even if I think they have the same internal markers for their beliefs as I have for mine? I don't think so. I believe in serious actualism, the view that no objects have properties in worlds in which they do not exist, not even nonexistence. Others do not believe this, and perhaps the internal markers of their dissenting views have for them the same quality as my views have for me. Am I being arbitrary in continuing to think as I do? I can't see how.

And the reason here is this: in each of these cases, the believer in question doesn't really think the beliefs in question *are* on a relevant epistemic par. She may agree that she and those who dissent are equally convinced of the truth of their belief and even that they are internally on a par, that the internally available markers are similar, or relevantly similar. But she must still think that there is an important epistemic difference, she thinks that somehow the other person has *made a mistake,* or *has a blind spot*, or hasn't been wholly attentive, or hasn't received some grace she has, or is in some way epistemically less fortunate. And, of course, the pluralist critic is in no better case. He thinks the thing to do when there is internal epistemic parity is to withhold judgment; he knows that there are others who don't think so, and for all he knows that belief has internal parity with his; if he continues in that belief, therefore, he will be in the same condition as the exclusivist; and if he doesn't continue in this belief, he no longer has an objection to the exclusivist.

But couldn't I be wrong? Of course I could! But I don't avoid that risk by withholding all religious (or philosophical or moral) beliefs; I can go wrong that way as well as any other, treating all religions, or all philosophical thoughts, or all moral views as on a par. Again, there is no safe haven here, no way to avoid risk. In particular, you won't reach a safe haven by trying to take the same attitude toward all the historically available patterns of belief and withholding; for in so doing, you adopt a particular pattern of belief and withholding, one incompatible with some adopted by others. "You pays your money and you takes your choice," realizing that you, like anyone else, can be desperately wrong. But what else can you do? You don't really have an alternative. And how can you do better than believe and withhold according to what, after serious and responsible consideration, seems to you to be the right pattern of belief and withholding?

Irrationality

I therefore can't see how it can be sensibly maintained that the exclusivist is unjustified in his exclusivist views; but perhaps, as is sometimes claimed, he or his view is *irrational*. Irrationality, however, is many things to many people; so there is a prior question: What is it to be irrational? More exactly, precisely what quality is it that the objector is attributing to the exclusivist (in condition *C*) when the former says the latter's exclusivist beliefs are irrational? Since the charge is never developed at all fully, it isn't easy to say. So suppose we simply consider the main varieties of irrationality (or, if you prefer, the main senses of "irrational") and ask whether any of them attach to the exclusivist just by virtue of being an exclusivist. I believe there are substantially five varieties of rationality, five distinct but analogically connected senses of the term *rational*; fortunately not all of them require detailed consideration.

Aristotelian Rationality This is the sense in which man is a rational animal, one that has *ratio*, one that can look before and after, can hold beliefs, make inferences and is capable of knowledge. This is perhaps the basic sense, the one of which the others are analogical extensions. It is also, presumably irrelevant in the present context; at any rate I hope the objector does not mean to hold that an exclusivist will by that token no longer be a rational animal.

The Deliverances of Reason To be rational in the Aristotelian sense is to possess reason: the power or thinking, believing, inferring, reasoning, knowing. Aristotelian rationality is thus *generic*. But there is an important more specific sense lurking in the neighborhood; this is the sense that goes with reason taken more narrowly, as the source of a priori

knowledge and belief. An important use of *rational* analogically connected with the first has to do with reason taken in this more narrow way. It is by reason thus construed that we know *self-evident* beliefs —beliefs so obvious that you can't so much as grasp them without seeing that they couldn't be false. These will be among the *deliverances of reason*. Of course there are other beliefs—38 × 39 = 1482, for example—that are not self-evident but are a consequence of self-evident beliefs by way of arguments that are self-evidently valid; these too are among the deliverances of reason. So say that the deliverances of reason is the set of those propositions that are self-evident for us human beings, closed under self-evident consequence. This yields another sense of rationality: a belief is *rational* if it is among the deliverances of reason and *irrational* if it is contrary to the deliverances of reason. (A belief can therefore be neither rational nor irrational, in this sense.) This sense of *rational* is an analogical extension of the fundamental sense, but it is itself extended by analogy to still other senses. Thus, we can broaden the category of reason to include memory, experience, induction, probability, and whatever else goes into science; this is the sense of the term when reason is sometimes contrasted with faith. And we can also soften the requirement for self-evidence, recognizing both that self-evidence or a priori warrant is a matter of degree and that there are many propositions that have a priori warrant, but are not such that no one who understands them can fail to believe them.[11]

Is the exclusivist irrational in *these* senses? I think not; at any rate, the question whether he is isn't the question at issue. His exclusivist beliefs are irrational in these senses only if there is a good argument from the deliverances of reason (taken broadly) to the denials of what he believes. I do not believe that there are any such arguments. Presumably, the same goes for the pluralist objector: at any rate, his objection is not that (1) and (2) are demonstrably false or even that there are good arguments against them from the deliverances of reason; his objection is instead that there is something wrong or subpar with believing them in condition *C*. This sense too, then, is irrelevant to our present concerns.

The Deontological Sense This sense of the term has to do with intellectual *requirement*, or *duty*, or *obligation*; a person's belief is irrational in this sense if in forming or holding it she violates such a duty. This is the sense of *irrational* in which according to many contemporary evidentialist objectors to theistic belief, those who believe in God without propositional evidence are irrational. Irrationality in this sense is a matter of failing to conform to intellectual or epistemic duties; the analogical connection with the first, Aristotelian sense is that these duties are thought to be among the deliverances of reason (and hence among the deliverances of the power by virtue of which human beings are rational in the Aristotelian sense). But we have already considered whether the exclusivist is flouting duties; we need say no more about the matter here. As we say, the exclusivist is not necessarily irrational in this sense either.

Zweckrationalität A common and very important notion of rationality is *means-end rationality*—what our continental cousins, following Max Weber, sometimes call *Zweckrationalität*, the sort of rationality displayed by your actions if they are well calculated to achieve your goals. (Again, the analogical connection with the first sense is clear: The calculation in question requires the power by virtue of which we are rational in Aristotle's sense.) Clearly, there is a whole constellation of notions lurking in the nearby bushes: What would *in fact* contribute to your goals? What you *take* it would contribute to your goals? What you *would* take it would contribute to your goals if you were sufficiently acute, or knew enough, or weren't distracted by lust, greed, pride, ambition, and the like? What you would take it would contribute to your goals if you weren't thus distracted and were also to reflect sufficiently? and so on. This notion of rationality has assumed enormous importance in the last 150 years or so. (Among its laurels, for example, is the complete domination of the development of the discipline of economics.) Rationality thus construed is a matter of knowing how to get what you want; it is the cunning of reason. Is the exclusivist properly charged with irrationality in this sense? Does his believing in the way he does interfere

with his attaining some of his goals, or is it a markedly inferior way of attaining those goals?

An initial *caveat*: It isn't clear that this notion of rationality applies to belief at all. It isn't clear that in *believing* something, I am acting to achieve some goal. If believing is an action at all, it is very far from being the paradigmatic kind of action taken to achieve some end; we don't have a choice as to whether to have beliefs, and we don't have a lot of choice with respect to which beliefs we have. But suppose we set this *caveat* aside and stipulate for purposes of argument that we have sufficient control over our beliefs for them to qualify as actions. Would the exclusivist's beliefs then be irrational in this sense? Well, that depends upon what his goals are; if among his goals for religious belief is, for example, not believing anything not believed by someone else, then indeed it would be. But, of course, he needn't have that goal. If I do have an end or goal in holding such beliefs as (1) and (2), it would presumably be that of believing the truth on this exceedingly important matter or perhaps that of trying to get in touch as adequately as possible with God, or more broadly with the deepest reality. And if (1) and (2) are *true*, believing them will be a way of doing exactly that. It is only if they are *not* true, then, that believing them could sensibly be thought to be irrational in this means-ends sense. Because the objector does not propose to take as a premise the proposition that (1) and (2) are false—he holds only that there is some flaw involved in *believing* them—this also is presumably not what he means.

Rationality as Sanity and Proper Function One in the grip of pathological confusion, or flight of ideas, or certain kinds of agnosia, or the manic phase of manic-depressive psychosis will often be said to be irrational; the episode may pass, after which he has regained rationality. Here *rationality* means absence of dysfunction, disorder, impairment, or pathology with respect to rational faculties. So this variety of rationality is again analogically related to Aristotelian rationality; a person is rational in this sense when no malfunction obstructs her use of the faculties by virtue of the possession of which she is rational in the Aristotelian sense. Rationality as sanity does not require possession of particularly exalted rational faculties; it requires only normality (in the nonstatistical sense) or health, or proper function. This use of the term, naturally enough, is prominent in psychiatric discussions—Oliver Sacks's male patient who mistook his wife for a hat, for example, was thus irrational. This fifth and final sense of rationality is itself a family of analogically related senses. The fundamental sense here is that of sanity and proper function, but there are other closely related senses. Thus, we may say that a belief (in certain circumstances) is irrational, not because no sane person would hold it, but because no person who was sane and had also undergone a certain course of education would hold it or because no person who was sane and furthermore was as intelligent as we and our friends would hold it; alternatively and more briefly, the idea is not merely that no one who was functioning properly in those circumstances would hold it, but rather no one who was functioning *optimally*, as well or nearly as well as human beings ordinarily do (leaving aside the occasional great genius) would hold it. And this sense of rationality leads directiy to the notion of *warrant*; I turn now to that notion; in treating it, we will also treat *ambulando*—this fifth kind of irrationality.

Warrant

So we come to the third version of the epistemic objection: that at any rate the exclusivist doesn't have warrant, or anyway *much* warrant (enough warrant for knowledge) for his exclusivistic views. Many pluralists—for example, Hick, Runzo, and Cantwell Smith—unite in declaring that, at any rate, the exclusivist certainly can't *know* that his exclusivistic views are true. But is this really true? I will argue briefly that it is not. At any rate, from the perspective of each of the major contemporary accounts of knowledge, it may very well be that the exclusivist knows (1) or (2) or both. First, consider the two main internalistic accounts of knowledge: the justified true belief accounts and the coherentist accounts. As I have already argued, it seems clear that a theist, a believer in (1) could certainly be *justified* (in the primary sense) in believing as she does: she could be flouting no intellectual or cognitive duties or obligations. But then on the most straightforward justified true belief account of knowledge, she can also *know* that it is

true—if, that is, it *can* be true. More exactly, what must be possible is that both the exclusivist is justified in believing (1) and/or (2) and they be true. Presumably, the pluralist does not mean to dispute this possibility.

For concreteness, consider the account of justification given by the classical foundationalist Chisholm. On this view, a belief has warrant for me to the extent that accepting it is apt for the fulfillment of my epistemic duty, which (roughly speaking) is that of trying to get and remain in the right relation to the truth. But if after the most careful, thorough, open, and prayerful consideration, it still seems to me—perhaps more strongly than ever—that (1) and (2) are true, then clearly accepting them has great aptness for the fulfillment of that duty.

A similarly brief argument can be given with respect to *coherentism*, the view that what constitutes warrant is coherence with some body of belief. We must distinguish two varieties of coherentism. On the one hand, it might be held that what is required is coherence with some or all of the other beliefs I actually hold; on the other, that what is required is coherence with my *verific* noetic structure (Keith Lehrer's term): the set of beliefs that remains when all the false ones are deleted or replaced by their contradictories. But surely a coherent set of beliefs could include both (1) and (2) together with the beliefs involved in being in condition *C*, what would be required, perhaps, would be that the set of beliefs contain some explanation of why it is that others do not believe as I do. And if (1) and (2) are true, then surely (and a fortiori) there can be coherent verific noetic structures that include them. Hence, neither of these versions of coherentism rule out the possibility that the exclusivist in condition *C* could know (1) and/or (2).

And now consider the main externalist accounts. The most popular externalist account at present would be one or another version of *reliabilism*. And there is an oft-repeated pluralistic argument that seems to be designed to appeal to reliabilist intuitions. The conclusion of this argument is not always clear, but here is its premise, in Hick's words:

> For it is evident that in some ninety-nine percent of cases the religion which an individual professes and to which he or she adheres depends upon the accidents of birth. Someone born to Buddhist parents in Thailand is very likely to be a Buddhist, someone born to Muslim parents in Saudi Arabia to be a Muslim, someone born to Christian parents in Mexico to be a Christian, and so on.

As a matter of sociological fact, this may be right. Furthermore, it can certainly produce a sense of intellectual vertigo. But what is one to do with this fact, if fact it is, and what follows from it? Does it follow, for example, that I ought not to accept the religious views that I have been brought up to accept, or the ones that I find myself inclined to accept, or the ones that seem to me to be true? Or that the belief-producing processes that have produced those beliefs in me are unreliable? Surely not. Furthermore, self-referential problems once more loom; this argument is another philosophical tar baby.

For suppose we concede that if I had been born of Muslim parents in Morocco rather than Christian parents in Michigan, my beliefs would have been quite different. (For one thing, I probably wouldn't believe that I was born in Michigan.) The same goes for the pluralist. Pluralism isn't and hasn't been widely popular in the world at large; if the pluralist had been born in Madagascar, or medieval France, he probably wouldn't have been a pluralist. Does it follow that he shouldn't be a pluralist or that his pluralist beliefs are produced in him by an unreliable belief-producing process? I doubt it. Suppose I hold the following, or something similar:

(4) If *S*'s religious or philosophical beliefs are such that if *S* had been born elsewhere and else when, she wouldn't have held them, then those beliefs are produced by unreliable belief producing mechanisms and hence have no warrant.

Once more I will be hoist with my own petard. For in all probability, someone born in Mexico to Christian parents wouldn't believe (4) itself. No matter what philosophical and religious beliefs we hold and withhold (so it seems), there are places and times such that if we have been born there and then, then we would not have displayed the pattern of holding and withholding of religious and philosophical beliefs we *do* display. As I said, this can

indeed be vertiginous; but what can we make of it? What can we infer from it about what has warrant and how we should conduct our intellectual lives? That's not easy to say. Can we infer *anything at all* about what has warrant or how we should conduct our intellectual lives? Not obviously.

To return to reliabilism then: For simplicity, let's take the version of reliabilism according to which *S* knows *p* if the belief that *p* is produced in *S* by a reliable belief producing mechanism or process. I don't have the space here to go into this matter in sufficient detail, but it seems pretty clear that if (1) and (2) are true, then it *could* be that the beliefs that (1) and (2) be produced in me by a reliable belief-producing process. For either we are thinking of *concrete* belief-producing processes, like your memory or John's powers of a priori reasoning (tokens as opposed to types), or else we are thinking of types of belief-producing processes (type reliabilism). The problem with the latter is that there are an enormous number of *different* types of belief-producing processes for any given belief, some of which are reliable and some of which are not; the problem (and a horrifying problem it is) is to say which of these is the type the reliability of which determines whether the belief in question has warrant. So the first (token reliabilism) is a better way of stating reliabilism. But then clearly enough if (1) or (2) are true, they could be produced in me by a reliable belief-producing process. Calvin's *Sensus Divinitatis*, for example, could be working in the exclusivist in such a way as to reliably produce the belief that (1) is true; Calvin's Internal Testimony of the Holy Spirit could do the same for (2). If (1) and (2) are true, therefore, then from a reliabilist perspective there is no reason whatever to think that the exclusivist might not know that they are true.

There is another brand of externalism which seems to me to be closer to the truth than reliabilism; call it (*faute de mieux*) "proper functionalism." This view can be stated to a first approximation as follows: *S* knows *p* if (1) the belief that *p* is produced in *S* by cognitive faculties that are functioning properly (working as they ought to work, suffering from no dysfunction), (2) the cognitive environment in which *p* is produced is appropriate for those faculties, (3) the purpose of the module of the epistemic faculties producing the belief in question is to produce true beliefs (alternatively, the module of the design plan governing the production of *p* is aimed at the production of true beliefs), and (4) the objective probability of a belief's being true, given that it is produced under those conditions, is high. All of this needs explanation, of course; for present purposes, perhaps, we can collapse the account into the first condition. But then clearly it could be, if (1) and (2) are true, that they are produced in me by cognitive faculties functioning properly under condition *C*. For suppose (1) is true. Then it is surely possible that God has created us human beings with something like Calvin's *Sensus Divinitatis*, a belief-producing process that in a wide variety of circumstances functions properly to produce (1) or some very similar belief. Furthermore it is also possible that in response to the human condition of sin and misery, God has provided for us human beings a means of salvation, which he has revealed in the Bible. Still further, perhaps he has arranged for us to come to believe what he means to teach there by way of the operation of something like the Internal Testimony of the Holy Spirit of which Calvin speaks. So on this view, too, if (1) and (2) are true, it is certainly possible that the exclusivist know that they are. We can be sure that the exclusivist's views are irrational in this sense, then, only if they are false; but the pluralist objector does not mean to claim that they are false; this version of the objection, therefore, also fails. The exclusivist isn't necessarily irrational, and indeed might *know* that (1) and (2) are true, if indeed they *are* true.

All this seems right. But don't the realities of religious pluralism count for anything at all? Is there nothing at all to the claims of the pluralists? Could that really be right? Of course not. For many or most exclusivists, I think, an awareness of the enormous variety of human religious response functions as a *defeater* for such beliefs as (1) and (2)—an *undercutting defeater*, as opposed to a rebutting defeater. It calls into question, to some degree or other, the sources of one's belief in (1) or (2). It doesn't or needn't do so by way of an *argument*; and indeed there isn't a very powerful argument from the proposition that many apparently devout people around the world

dissent from (1) and (2) to the conclusion that (1) and (2) are false. Instead, it works more directly; it directly reduces the level of confidence or degree of belief in the proposition in question. From a Christian perspective, this situation of religious pluralism and our awareness of it is itself a manifestation of our miserable human condition; and it may deprive us of some of the comfort and peace the Lord has promised his followers. It can also deprive the exclusivist of the *knowledge* that (1) and (2) *are* true, if even they are true and he *believes* that they are. Because degree of warrant depends in part on degree of belief, it is possible, though not necessary, that knowledge of the facts of religious pluralism should reduce an exclusivist's degree of belief and hence of warrant for (1) and (2) in such a way as to deprive him of knowledge of (1) and (2). He might be such that if he *hadn't* known the facts of pluralism, then he would have known (1) and (2), but now that he *does* know those facts, he doesn't know (1) and (2). In this way, he may come to know less by knowing more.

Things *could* go this way with the exclusivist. On the other hand, they *needn't* go this way. Consider once more the moral parallel. Perhaps you have always believed it deeply wrong for a counselor to use his position of trust to seduce a client. Perhaps you discover that others disagree; they think it more like a minor peccadillo, like running a red light when there's no traffic; and you realize that possibly these people have the same internal markers for their beliefs that you have for yours. You think the matter over more fully, imaginatively recreate and rehearse such situations, become more aware of just what is involved in such a situation (the breach of trust, the breaking of implied promises, the injustice and unfairness, the nasty irony of a situation in which someone comes to a counselor seeking help but receives only hurt), and come to believe even more fully that such an action is wrong—and indeed to have more warrant for that belief. But something similar can happen in the case of religious beliefs. A fresh or heightened awareness of the facts of religious pluralism could bring about a reappraisal of one's religious life, a reawakening, a new or renewed and deepened grasp and apprehension of (1) and (2). From Calvin's perspective, it could serve as an occasion for a renewed and more powerful working of the belief-producing processes by which we come to apprehend (1) and (2). In that way, knowledge of the facts of pluralism could initially serve as a defeater, but in the long run have precisely the opposite effect.

NOTES

1. *Colloquium Heptaplomeres de Rerum Sublimium Arcanis Abditis*, written by 1593 but first published in 1857. English translation by Marion Kuntz (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1975), p. 256.
2. Joseph Runzo: "Today, the impressive piety and evident rationality of the belief systems of other religious traditions, inescapably confronts Christians with a crisis and a potential revolution." "God, Commitment, and Other Faiths: Pluralism vs. Relativism," *Faith and Philosophy* 5, no. 4 (October 1988): 343f. (Reading IX.5 in this book.)
3. Gary Gutting: "Applying these considerations to religious belief, we seem led to the conclusion that, because believers have many epistemic peers who do not share their belief in God…, they have no right to maintain their belief without a justification. If they do so, they are guilty of epistemological egoism." *Religious Belief and Religious Skepticism* (Notre Dame, Ind.: Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 1982), p. 90 (but see the following pages for an important qualification).
4. Wilfred Cantwell Smith: "Here my submission is that on this front the traditional doctrinal position of the Church has in fact militated against its traditional moral position, and has in fact encouraged Christians to approach other men immorally. Christ has taught us humility, but we have approached them with arrogance.… This charge of arrogance is a serious one." *Religious Diversity* (New York: Harper & Row, 1976), p. 13.
5. Runzo: "Ethically, Religious Exclusivism has the morally repugnant result of making those who have privileged knowledge, or who are intellectually astute, a religious elite, while penalizing those who

happen to have no access to the putatively correct religious view, or who are incapable of advanced understanding." Op. cit., p. 348.

6. John Hick: "But natural pride, despite its positive contribution to human life, becomes harmful when it is elevated to the level of dogma and is built into the belief system of a religious community. This happens when its sense of its own validity and worth is expressed in doctrines implying an exclusive or a decisively superior access to the truth or the power to save." "Religious Pluralism and Absolute Claims," *Religious Pluralism* (Notre Dame, Ind.: Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 1984), p. 197.
7. John Cobb: "I agree with the liberal theists that even in Pannenberg's case, the quest for an absolute as a basis for understanding reflects the long tradition of Christian imperialism and triumphalism rather than the pluralistic spirit." "The Meaning of Pluralism or Christian Self-Understanding," *Religious Pluralism*, ed. Leroy Rouner (Notre Dame, Ind.: Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 1984), p. 171.
8. "God, Commitment, and Other Faiths: Pluralism vs. Relativism" *Faith and Philosophy* 5, no. 4 (October 1988):357.
9. Smith, op. cit., p. 14.
10. John Hick: "… the only reason for treating one's tradition differently from others is the very human but not very cogent reason that it is one's own!" *An Interpretation of Religion*, loc. cit.
11. *An Interpretation of Religion* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale Univ. Press, 1989), p. 2.

IX.3

Hick's Religious Pluralism and "Reformed Epistemology"—A Middle Ground

DAVID BASINGER

David Basinger is professor of philosophy at Roberts Wesleyan College in Rochester, New York, and is the author of several works in the philosophy of religion. His goal in this article is to analyze comparatively the influential argument for religious pluralism offered by John Hick and the argument for religious exclusivism (sectarianism) that can be generated by proponents of what has come to be labeled "Reformed epistemology." He argues that while Hick and the Reformed exclusivist appear to be giving us incompatible responses to the same question about the true nature of "religious" reality, they are actually responding to related but distinct questions, each of which must be considered by those desiring to give a religious explanation for the phenomenon of religious diversity. Moreover, he concludes that the insights of neither ought to be emphasized at the expense of the other.

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No one denies that the basic tenets of many religious perspectives are, if taken literally, quite incompatible. The salvific claims of some forms of Judeo-Christian thought, for example, condemn the proponents of all other perspectives to hell, while the incompatible salvific claims of some forms of Islamic thought do the same.

Such incompatibility is normally explained in one of three basic ways. The nontheist argues that all religious claims are false, the product perhaps of wish fulfillment. The religious pluralist argues that the basic claims of at least all of the major world religions are more or less accurate descriptions of the same reality. Finally, the religious exclusivist argues that the tenets of only one religion (or some limited number of religions) are to any significant degree accurate descriptions of reality.

The purpose of this discussion is to analyze comparatively the influential argument for religious pluralism offered by John Hick and the argument for religious exclusivism which can be (and perhaps has been) generated by proponents of what has come to be labeled "Reformed Epistemology." I shall argue that while Hick and the Reformed epistemologist appear to be giving us incompatible responses to the same question about the true nature of "religious" reality, they are actually responding to related, but distinct questions, each of which must be considered by those desiring to give a religious explanation for the phenomenon of religious diversity. Moreover, I shall conclude that the insights offered by both Hick and the Reformed epistemologist are of value and, accordingly, that those of neither ought to be emphasized at the expense of the other.

JOHN HICK'S THEOLOGICAL PLURALISM

Hick's contention is not that different religions make no conflicting truth claims. In fact, he believes that "the differences of belief between (and within) the traditions are legion," and has often in great detail discussed them. His basic claim, rather, is that such differences are best seen as "different ways of conceiving and experiencing the one ultimate divine Reality."

However, if the various religions are really "responses to a single ultimate transcendent Reality," how then do we account for such significant differences? The best explanation, we are told, is the assumption that "the limitless divine reality has been thought and experienced by different human mentalities forming and formed by different intellectual frameworks and devotional techniques." Or, as Hick has stated the point elsewhere, the best explanation is the assumption that the correspondingly different ways of responding to divine reality "owe their differences to the modes of thinking, perceiving and feeling which have developed within the different patterns of human existence embodied in the various cultures of the earth." Each "constitutes a valid context of salvation/liberation; but none constitutes the one and only such context."

But why accept such a pluralistic explanation? Why not hold, rather, that there is no higher Reality beyond us and thus that all religious claims are false—i.e., why not opt for naturalism? Or why not adopt the exclusivistic contention that the religious claims of only one perspective are true?

Hick does not reject naturalism because he sees it to be an untenable position. It is certainly *possible*, he tells us, that the "entire realm of [religious] experience is delusory or hallucinatory, simply a human projection, and not in any way or degree a result of the presence of a greater divine reality." In fact, since the "universe of which we are part is religiously ambiguous," it is not even *unreasonable* or *implausible* "to interpret any aspect of it, including our religious experience, in non-religious as well as religious ways."

However, he is quick to add, "it is perfectly reasonable and sane for us to trust our experience"—including our religious experience—"as generally cognitive of reality except when we have some reason to doubt it." Moreover, "the mere theoretical possibility that any or all [religious experience] may be illusory does not count as a reason to doubt it." Nor is religious experience overturned by the fact that the great religious figures of the past,

including Jesus, held a number of beliefs which we today reject as arising from the now outmoded science of their day, or by the fact that some people find "it impossible to accept that the profound dimension of pain and suffering is the measure of the cost of creation through creaturely freedom."

He acknowledges that those who have "no positive ground for religious belief within their own experience" often do see such factors as "insuperable barriers" to religious belief. But given the ambiguous nature of the evidence, he argues, it cannot be demonstrated that all rational people must see it this way. That is, belief in a supernatural realm can't be shown to be any less plausible than disbelief. Accordingly, he concludes, "those who actually participate in this field of religious experience are fully entitled, as sane and rational persons, to take the risk of trusting their own experience together with that of their tradition, and of proceeding to live and to believe on the basis of it, rather than taking the alternative risk of distrusting it and so—for the time being at least—turning their backs on God."

But why choose pluralism as the best religious hypothesis? Why does Hick believe we ought not be exclusivists? It is not because he sees exclusivism as incoherent. It is certainly possible, he grants, that "one particular 'Ptolemaic' religious vision does correspond uniquely with how things are." Nor does Hick claim to have some privileged "cosmic vantage point from which [he can] observe both the divine reality in itself and the different partial human awarenesses of that reality." But when we individually consider the evidence in the case, he argues, the result is less ambiguous. When "we start from the phenomenological fact of the various forms of religious experience, and we seek an hypothesis which will make sense of this realm of phenomena" from a religious point of view, "the theory that most naturally suggests itself postulates a divine Reality which is itself limitless, exceeding the scope of human conceptuality and language, but which is humanly thought and experienced in various conditioned and limited ways."

What is this evidence which makes the pluralistic hypothesis so "considerably more probable" than exclusivism? For one thing, Hick informs us, a credible religious hypothesis must account for the fact, "evident to ordinary people (even though not always taken into account by theologians) that in the great majority of cases—say 98 to 99 percent—the religion in which a person believes and to which he adheres depends upon where he was born." Moreover, a credible hypothesis must account for the fact that within all of the major religious traditions, "basically the same salvific process is taking place, namely the transformation of human existence from self-centeredness to Reality-centeredness." And while pluralism "illuminates" these otherwise baffling facts, the strict exclusivist's view "has come to seem increasingly implausible and unrealistic."

But even more importantly, he maintains, a credible religious hypothesis must account for the fact, of which "we have become irreversibly aware in the present century, as the result of anthropological, sociological and psychological studies and the work of philosophy of language, that there is no one universal and invariable" pattern for interpreting human experience, but rather a range of significantly different patterns or conceptual schemes "which have developed within the major cultural streams." And when considered in light of this, Hick concludes, a "pluralistic theory becomes inevitable."

THE REFORMED OBJECTION

There are two basic ways in which Hick's pluralistic position can be critiqued. One "appropriate critical response," according to Hick himself, "would be to offer a better [religious] hypothesis." That is, one way to challenge Hick is to claim that the evidence he cites is better explained by some form of exclusivism.

But there is another, potentially more powerful type of objection, one which finds its roots in the currently popular "Reformed Epistemology" being championed by philosophers such as Alvin Plantinga. I will first briefly outline Plantinga's latest version of this epistemological approach and then discuss its impact on Hick's position.

According to Plantinga, it has been widely held since the Enlightenment that if theistic beliefs—e.g.,

religious hypotheses—are to be considered rational, they must be based on propositional evidence. It is not enough for the theist just to refute objections to any such belief. The theist "must also have something like an argument for the belief, or some positive reason to think that the belief is true." But this is incorrect, Plantinga maintains. There are beliefs which acquire their warrant propositionally—i.e., have warrant conferred on them by an evidential line of reasoning from other beliefs. And for such beliefs, it may well be true that proponents need something like an argument for their veridicality.

However, there are also, he tells us, *basic* beliefs which are not based on propositional evidence and, thus, do not require propositional warrant. In fact, *if* such beliefs can be affirmed "without either violating an epistemic duty or displaying some kind of noetic defect," they can be considered *properly* basic. And, according to Plantinga, many theistic beliefs can be properly basic: "Under widely realized conditions it is perfectly rational, reasonable, intellectually respectable and acceptable to believe [certain theistic tenets] without believing [them] on the basis of [propositional] evidence."

But what are such conditions? Under what conditions can a belief have positive epistemic status if it is not conferred by other propositions whose epistemic status is not in question? The answer, Plantinga informs us, lies in an analysis of belief formation.

> [We have] cognitive faculties designed to enable us to achieve true beliefs with respect to a wide variety of propositions—propositions about our immediate environment, about our interior lives, about the thoughts and experiences of other persons, about our universe at large, about right and wrong, about the whole realm of *abstracta*—numbers, properties, propositions, states of affairs, possible worlds and their like, about modality—what is necessary and possible—and about [ourselves]. These faculties work in such a way that under the appropriate circumstances we form the appropriate belief. More exactly, the appropriate belief is *formed in us*; in the typical case we do not *decide* to hold or form the belief in question, but simply find ourselves with it. Upon considering an instance of *modus ponens*, I find myself believing its corresponding conditional; upon being appeared to in the familiar way, I find myself holding the belief that there is a large tree before me; upon being asked what I had for breakfast, I reflect for a moment and find myself with the belief that what I had was eggs on toast. In these and other cases I do not *decide* what to believe; I don't total up the evidence (I'm being appeared to redly; on most occasions when thus appeared to I am in the presence of something red, so most probably in this case I am) and make a decision as to what seems best supported; I simply find myself believing.

And from a theistic point of view, Plantinga continues, the same is true in the religious realm. Just as it is true that when our senses or memory are functioning properly, "appropriate belief is formed in us," so it is that God has created us with faculties which will, "when they are working the way they were designed to work by the being who designed and created us and them," produce true theistic beliefs. Moreover, if these faculties are functioning properly, a basic belief thus formed has "positive epistemic status to the degree [the individual in question finds herself] inclined to accept it."

What, though, of the alleged counter-evidence to such theistic beliefs? What, for example, of all the arguments the conclusion of which is that God does not exist? Can they all be dismissed as irrelevant? Not immediately, answers Plantinga. We must seriously consider potential defeaters of our basic beliefs. With respect to the belief that God exists, for example, we must seriously consider the claim that religious belief is mere wish fulfillment and the claim that God's existence is incompatible with (or at least improbable given) the amount of evil in the world.

But to undercut such defeaters, he continues, we need not engage in positive apologetics: produce

propositional evidence for our beliefs. We need only engage in negative apologetics: refute such arguments. Moreover, it is Plantinga's conviction that such defeaters do normally exist. "The non-propositional warrant enjoyed by [a person's] belief in God, for example, [seems] itself sufficient to turn back the challenge offered by some alleged defeaters"—e.g., the claim that theistic belief is mere wish fulfillment. And other defeaters such as the "problem of evil," he tells us, can be undercut by identifying validity or soundness problems or even by appealing to the fact that "experts think it unsound or that the experts are evenly divided as to its soundness."

Do Plantinga or other proponents of this Reformed epistemology maintain that their exclusivistic religious hypotheses are properly basic and can thus be "defended" in the manner just outlined? I am not *certain* that they do. However, when Plantinga, for example, claims that "God exists" is for most adult theists properly basic, he appears to have in mind a classical Christian conception of the divine—i.e., a being who is the triune, omnipotent, omniscient, perfectly good, *ex nihilo* creator of the universe. In fact, given his recent claim that "the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit… is a source of reliable and perfectly acceptable beliefs about what is communicated [by God] in Scripture," and the manner in which most who make such a claim view the truth claims of the other world religions, it would appear that Plantinga's "basic" conception of God is quite exclusive.

However, even if no Reformed epistemologist actually does affirm an exclusivistic hypothesis she claims is properly basic, it is obvious that the Reformed analysis of belief justification can be used to critique Hick's line of reasoning. Hick claims that an objective inductive assessment of the relevant evidence makes his pluralistic thesis a more plausible religious explanation than any of the competing exclusivistic hypotheses. But a Reformed exclusivist could easily argue that this approach to the issue is misguided. My affirmation of an exclusivistic Christian perspective, such an argument might begin, is not evidential in nature. It is, rather, simply a belief I have found formed in me, much like the belief that I am seeing a tree in front of me or the belief that killing innocent children is wrong.

Now, of course, I must seriously consider the allegedly formidable defeaters with which pluralists such as Hick have presented me. I must consider the fact, for example, that the exclusive beliefs simply formed in most people are not similar to mine, but rather tend to mirror those beliefs found in the cultures in which such people have been raised. But I do not agree with Hick that this fact is best explained by a pluralistic hypothesis. I attribute this phenomenon to other factors such as the epistemic blindness with which most of humanity has been plagued since the fall.

Moreover, to defend my position—to maintain justifiably (rationally) that I am right and Hick is wrong—I need not, as Hick seems to suggest, produce objective "proof" that his hypothesis is weaker than mine. That is, I need not produce "evidence" that would lead most rational people to agree with me. That would be to involve myself in Classical Foundationalism, which is increasingly being recognized as a bankrupt epistemological methodology. All I need do is undercut Hick's defeaters—i.e., show that his challenge does not require me to abandon my exclusivity thesis. And this I can easily do. For Hick has not demonstrated that my thesis is self-contradictory. And it is extremely doubtful that there exists any other non-question-begging criterion for plausibility by which he could even attempt to demonstrate that my thesis is less plausible (less probable) than his.

Hick, of course, believes firmly that his hypothesis makes the most sense. But why should this bother me? By his own admission, many individuals firmly believe that, given the amount of seemingly gratuitous evil in the world, God's nonexistence is by far most plausible. Yet this does not keep him from affirming theism. He simply reserves the right to see things differently and continues to believe. And there is no reason why I cannot do the same.

Moreover, even if what others believed were relevant, by Hick's own admission, the majority of theists doubt that his thesis is true. Or, at the very least, I could rightly maintain that "the experts are evenly divided as to its soundness." Thus, given the criteria for defeater assessment which we Reformed exclusivists affirm, Hick's defeaters are clearly undercut. And, accordingly, I remain perfectly

justified in continuing to hold that my exclusivity thesis is correct and, therefore, that all incompatible competing hypotheses are false.

A MIDDLE GROUND

It is tempting to see Hick and the Reformed exclusivist as espousing incompatible approaches to the question of religious diversity. If Hick is correct—if the issue is primarily evidential in nature—then the Reformed exclusivist is misguided and vice versa. But this, I believe, is an inaccurate assessment of the situation. There are two equally important, but distinct, questions which arise in this context, and Hick and the Reformed exclusivist, it seems to me, each *primarily* address only one.

The Reformed exclusivist is primarily interested in the following question:

Q1. Under what conditions is an individual within her epistemic rights (is she rational) in affirming one of the many mutually exclusive religious diversity hypotheses?

In response, as we have seen, the Reformed exclusivist argues (or at least could argue) that a person need not grant that her religious hypothesis (belief) requires propositional (evidential) warrant. She is within her epistemic rights in maintaining that it is a *basic* belief. And if she does so, then to preserve rationality, she is not required to "prove" in some objective manner that her hypothesis is most plausible. She is fulfilling all epistemic requirements solely by defending her hypothesis against claims that it is less plausible than competitors.

It seems to me that the Reformed exclusivist is basically right on this point. I do believe, for reasons mentioned later in this essay, that attempts by any knowledgeable exclusivist to define her hypothesis will ultimately require her to enter the realm of positive apologetics—i.e., will require her to engage in a comparative analysis of her exclusivistic beliefs. But I wholeheartedly agree with the Reformed exclusivist's contention that to preserve rationality, she need not actually demonstrate that her hypothesis is most plausible. She need ultimately only defend herself against the claim that a thoughtful assessment of the matter makes the affirmation of some incompatible perspective—i.e., pluralism or some incompatible exclusivistic perspective—the only rational option. And this, I believe, she can clearly do.

What this means, of course, is that if Hick is actually arguing that pluralism is the only rational option, then I think he is wrong. And his claim that pluralism "is considerably more probable" than exclusivism does, it must be granted, make it appear as if he believes pluralism to be the only hypothesis a knowledgeable theist can justifiably affirm.

But Hick never actually calls his opponents irrational in this context. That is, while Hick clearly believes that sincere, knowledgeable exclusivists are *wrong*, he has never to my knowledge claimed that they are guilty of violating the basic epistemic rules governing rational belief. Accordingly, it seems best to assume that Q1—a concern with what can be rationally affirmed—is not Hick's primary interest in this context.

But what then is it with which Hick is concerned? As we have seen, Q1 is defensive in nature. It asks for identification of conditions under which we can justifiably continue to affirm a belief we *already* hold. But *why* hold the specific religious beliefs we desire to defend? Why, specifically, choose to defend religious pluralism rather than exclusivism or vice versa? Or, to state this question of "belief origin" more formally:

Q2. Given that an individual can be within her epistemic rights (can be rational) in affirming either exclusivism or pluralism, upon what basis should her actual choice be made?

This is the type of question in which I believe Hick is primarily interested.

Now, it might be tempting for a Reformed exclusivist to contend that she is exempt from the consideration of Q2. As I see it, she might begin, this question is based on the assumption that individuals consciously choose their religious belief systems. But the exclusivistic hypothesis which I affirm was not the result of a conscious attempt to choose the most plausible option. I have simply discovered this exclusivistic hypothesis formed in me in much the same fashion I find my visual and moral beliefs

just formed in me. And thus Hick's question is simply irrelevant to my position.

But such a response will not do. There is no reason to deny that Reformed exclusivists do have, let's say, a Calvinistic religious hypothesis just formed in them. However, although almost everyone in every culture does in the appropriate context have similar "tree-beliefs" just formed in them, there is no such unanimity within the religious realm. As Hick rightly points out, the religious belief that the overwhelming majority of people in any given culture find just formed in them is the dominant hypothesis of that culture or subculture. Moreover, the dominant religious hypotheses in most of these cultures are exclusivistic—i.e., incompatible with one another.

Accordingly, it seems to me that Hick can rightly be interpreted as offering the following challenge to the knowledgeable Reformed exclusivist (the exclusivist aware of pervasive religious diversity): I will grant that your exclusivistic beliefs were not originally the product of conscious deliberation. But given that most sincere theists initially go through a type of religious belief-forming process similar to yours and yet usually find formed in themselves the dominant exclusivistic hypotheses of their own culture, upon what basis can you justifiably continue to claim that the hypothesis you affirm has some special status just because you found it formed in you? Or, to state the question somewhat differently, Hick's analysis of religious diversity challenges knowledgeable Reformed exclusivists to ask themselves why they now believe that their religious belief-forming mechanisms are functioning properly while the analogous mechanisms in all others are faulty.

Some Reformed exclusivists, as we have seen, have a ready response. Because of "the fall," they maintain, most individuals suffer from religious epistemic blindness—i.e., do not possess properly functioning religious belief-forming mechanisms. Only our mechanisms are trustworthy. However, every exclusivistic religious tradition can—and many do—make such claims. Hence, an analogous Hickian question again faces knowledgeable Reformed exclusivists: Why do you believe that only those religious belief-forming mechanisms which produce exclusivistic beliefs compatible with yours do not suffer from epistemic blindness?

Reformed exclusivists cannot at this point argue that they have found this belief just formed in them for it is *now* the reliability of the belief-forming mechanism, itself, which is being questioned. Nor, since they are anti-foundationalists, can Reformed exclusivists argue that the evidence demonstrates conclusively that their religious position is correct. So upon what then can they base their crucial belief that their belief-forming mechanisms *alone* produce true beliefs?

They must, it seems to me, ultimately fall back on the contention that their belief-forming mechanisms can alone be trusted because that set of beliefs thus generated appears to them to form the most plausible religious explanatory hypothesis available. But to respond in this fashion brings them into basic methodological agreement with Hick's position on Q2. That is, it appears that knowledgeable Reformed exclusivists must ultimately maintain with Hick that when attempting to discover which of the many self-consistent hypotheses that *can* rationally be affirmed is the one that *ought* to be affirmed, a person must finally decide which hypothesis she believes best explains the phenomena. Or, to state this important point differently yet, what Hick's analysis of religious diversity demonstrates, I believe, is that even for those knowledgeable Reformed exclusivists who claim to find their religious perspectives just formed in them, a conscious choice among competing religious hypotheses is ultimately called for.

This is not to say, it must again be emphasized, that such Reformed exclusivists must attempt to "prove" their choice is best. But, given the culturally relative nature of religious belief-forming mechanisms, a simple appeal to such a mechanism seems inadequate as a basis for such exclusivists to continue to affirm their perspective. It seems rather that knowledgeable exclusivists must ultimately make a conscious decision whether to retain the religious hypothesis that has been formed in them or choose another. And it further appears that they should feel some prima facie obligation to consider the available options—consciously consider the nature

of the various religious hypotheses formed in people—before doing so.

Now, of course, to agree that such a comparative analysis should be undertaken is not to say that Hick's pluralistic hypothesis, is, in fact, the most plausible alternative. I agree with the Reformed exclusivist that "plausibility" is a very subjective concept. Thus, I doubt that the serious consideration of the competing explanatory hypotheses for religious phenomena, even by knowledgeable open-minded individuals, will produce consensus.

However, I do not see this as in any sense diminishing the importance of engaging in the type of comparative analysis suggested. For even if such comparative assessment will not lead to consensus, it will produce two significant benefits. First, only by such assessment, I feel, can a person acquire "ownership" of her religious hypothesis. That is, only by such an assessment can she insure herself that her belief is not solely the product of environmental conditioning. Second, such an assessment should lead all concerned to be more tolerant of those with whom they ultimately disagree. And in an age where radical religious exclusivism again threatens world peace, I believe such tolerance to be of inestimable value.

This does not mean, let me again emphasize in closing, that the consideration of Q1—the consideration of the conditions under which a religious hypothesis can be rationally affirmed—is unimportant or even less important than the consideration of Q2. It is crucial that we recognize who must actually shoulder the "burden of proof" in this context. And we need to thank Reformed exclusivists for helping us think more clearly about this matter. But I fear that a preoccupation with Q1 can keep us from seeing the importance of Q2—the consideration of the basis upon which we choose the hypothesis to be defended—and the comparative assessments of hypotheses to which such consideration leads us. And we need to thank pluralists such as Hick for drawing our attention to this fact.

IX.4

Buddhism, Christianity, and the Prospects for World Religion

DALAI LAMA

Dalai Lama, originally Tenzin Gyatso (1935–), the spiritual and temporal head of Tibet, was born in China. In 1937 he was designated the fourteenth Dalai Lama, but his right to rule was delayed until 1950. An ardent advocate of nonviolent liberation, he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Peace in 1989. In this selection he responds to questions from José

Reprinted from *The Bodhgaya Interviews*, ed. Jose Ignacio Cabezon (Snow Lion Publications, 1988) by permission.

Ignacio Cabezon on the possibility of a religious integration of Buddhism and Christianity. The Dalai Lama (referred to as "His Holiness") doesn't think such an integration is possible, for there are unique features in these religions that cannot be compromised without loss of identity. But he argues that all the major religions have much in common. They aim at the same goal of permanent happiness, and all encourage moral integrity. These common concerns should enable people of all faiths to find common ground in building a better world of peace and justice.

Question: Do you see any possibility of an integration of Christianity and Buddhism in the West? An overall religion for Western society?

His Holiness: It depends upon what you mean by integration. If you mean by this the possibility of the integration of Buddhism and Christianity within a society, where they co-exist side by side, then I would answer affirmatively. If, however, your view of integration envisions all of society following some sort of composite religion which is neither pure Buddhism nor pure Christianity, then I would have to consider this form of integration implausible.

It is, of course, quite possible for a country to be predominantly Christian, and yet that some of the people of that country choose to follow Buddhism. I think it is quite possible that a person who is basically a Christian, who accepts the idea of a God, who believes in God, could at the same time incorporate certain Buddhist ideas and techniques into his/her practice. The teachings of love, compassion, and kindness are present in Christianity and also in Buddhism. Particularly in the Bodhisattva vehicle there are many techniques which focus on developing compassion, kindness, etc. These are things which can be practiced at the same time by Christians and by Buddhists. While remaining committed to Christianity it is quite conceivable that a person may choose to undergo training in meditation, concentration, and onepointedness of mind, that, while remaining a Christian, one may choose to practice Buddhist ideas. This is another possible and very viable kind of integration.

Question: Is there any conflict between the Buddhist teachings and the idea of a creator God who exists independently from us?

His Holiness: If we view the world's religions from the widest possible viewpoint, and examine their ultimate goal, we find that all of the major world religions, whether Christianity or Islam, Hinduism or Buddhism, are directed to the achievement of permanent human happiness. They are all directed toward that goal. All religions emphasize the fact that the true follower must be honest and gentle, in other words, that a truly religious person must always strive to be a better human being. To this end, the different world's religions teach different doctrines which will help transform the person. In this regard, all religions are the same, there is no conflict. This is something we must emphasize. We must consider the question of religious diversity from *this* viewpoint. And when we do, we find no conflict.

Now from the philosophical point of view, the theory that God is the creator, is almighty and permanent, is in contradiction to the Buddhist teachings. From this point of view there is disagreement. For Buddhists, the universe has no first cause and hence no creator, nor can there be such a thing as a permanent, primordially pure being. So, of course, doctrinally, there is conflict. The views are opposite to one another. But if we consider the purpose of these different philosophies, then we see that they are the same. This is my belief.

Different kinds of food have different tastes: one may be very hot, one may be very sour, and one very sweet. They are opposite tastes, they conflict. But whether a dish is concocted to taste sweet, sour or hot, it is nonetheless made in this way so as to taste good. Some people prefer very spicy hot foods with a lot of chili peppers. Many Indians and Tibetans have a liking for such dishes. Others are very fond of bland tasting foods. It is a wonderful thing to have variety. It is an expression of individuality; it is a personal thing.

Likewise, the variety of the different world religious philosophies is a very useful and beautiful thing. For certain people, the idea of God as creator and of everything depending on his will is beneficial and soothing, and so for that person such a doctrine is worthwhile. For someone else, the idea that there is no creator, that ultimately, one is oneself the creator—in that everything depends upon oneself—is more appropriate. For certain people, it may be a more effective method of spiritual growth, it may be more beneficial. For such persons, this idea is better and for the other type of person, the other idea is more suitable. You see, there is no conflict, no problem. This is my belief.

Now conflicting doctrines are something which is not unknown even within Buddhism itself. The Mādhyamikas and Cittamātrins, two Buddhist philosophical subschools, accept the theory of emptiness. The Vaibhāṣikas and Sautrāntikas, two others, accept another theory, the theory of selflessness, which, strictly speaking, is not the same as the doctrine of emptiness as posited by the two higher schools. So there exists this difference, some schools accepting the emptiness of phenomena and others not. There also exists a difference as regards the way in which the two upper schools explain the doctrine of emptiness. For the Cittamātrinsamātrins, emptiness is set forth in terms of the non-duality of subject and object. The Mādhyamikas, however, repudiate the notion that emptiness is tantamount to idealism, the claim that everything is of the nature of mind. So you see, even within Buddhism, the Mādhyamikas and Cittamātrins schools are in conflict. The Mädhyamikas are again divided into Prāsaṅgikas and Svātantrikas, and between these two sub-schools there is also conflict. The latter accept that things exist by virtue of an inherent characteristic, while the former do not.

So you see, conflict in the philosophical field is nothing to be surprised at. It exists within Buddhism itself.…

Question: I would like to know the role that consciousness plays in the process of reincarnation.

His Holiness: In general, there are different levels of consciousness. The more rough or gross levels of consciousness are very heavily dependent upon the physical or material sphere. Since one's own physical aggregate (the body) changes from birth to birth, so too do these gross levels of consciousness. The more subtle the level of consciousness, however, the more independent of the physical sphere and hence the more likely that it will remain from one life to the next. But in general, whether more subtle or more gross, all levels of consciousness are of the same nature.

Question: It is generally said that teachers of other religions, no matter how great, cannot attain liberation without turning to the Buddhist path. Now suppose there is a great teacher, say he is a Śaivite, and suppose he upholds very strict discipline and is totally dedicated to other people all of the time, always giving of himself. Is this person, simply because he follows Śiva, incapable of attaining liberation, and if so, what can be done to help him?

His Holiness: During the Buddha's own time, there were many non-Buddhist teachers whom the Buddha could not help, for whom he could do nothing. So he just let them be.

The Buddha Śākyamuni was an extraordinary being, he was the manifestation (*nirmāṇakāya*), the physical appearance, of an already enlightened being. But while some people recognized him as a Buddha, others regarded him as a black magician with strange and evil powers. So, you see, even the Buddha Śākyamuni himself was not accepted as an enlightened being by all of his contemporaries. Different human beings have different mental predispositions, and there are cases when even the Buddha himself could not do much to overcome these—there was a limit.

Now today, the followers of Śiva have their own religious practices and they reap some benefit from engaging in their own forms of worship. Through this, their life will gradually change. Now my own position on this question is that Śivaji's followers should practice according to their

own beliefs and traditions, Christians must genuinely and sincerely follow what they believe, and so forth. That is sufficient.

Question: But they will not attain liberation!

His Holiness: We Buddhists ourselves will not be liberated at once. In our own case, it will take time. Gradually we will be able to reach *mokṣa* or *nirv̄na*, but the majority of Buddhists will not achieve this within their own lifetimes. So there's no hurry. If Buddhists themselves have to wait, perhaps many lifetimes, for their goal, why should we expect that it be different for non-Buddhists? So, you see, nothing much can be done.

Suppose, for example, you try to convert someone from another religion to the Buddhist religion, and you argue with them trying to convince them of the inferiority of their position. And suppose you do not succeed, suppose they do not become Buddhist. On the one hand, you have failed in your task, and on the other hand, you may have weakened the trust they have in their own religion, so that they may come to doubt their own faith. What have you accomplished by all this? It is of no use. When we come into contact with the followers of different religions, we should not argue. Instead, we should advise them to follow their own beliefs as sincerely and as truthfully as possible. For if they do so, they will no doubt reap certain benefit. Of this there is no doubt. Even in the immediate future they will be able to achieve more happiness and more satisfaction. Do you agree?

This is the way I usually act in such matters, it is my belief. When I meet the followers of different religions, I always praise them, for it is enough, it is sufficient, that they are following the moral teachings that are emphasized in every religion. It is enough, as I mentioned earlier, that they are trying to become better human beings. This in itself is very good and worthy of praise.

Question: But is it only the Buddha who can be the ultimate source of refuge?

His Holiness: Here, you see, it is necessary to examine what is meant by liberation or salvation. Liberation in which "a mind that understands the sphere of reality annihilates all defilements in the sphere of reality" is a state that only Buddhists can accomplish. This kind of *mokṣa* or *nirv̄na* is only explained in the Buddhist scriptures, and is achieved only through Buddhist practice. According to certain religions, however, salvation is a place, a beautiful paradise, like a peaceful valley. To attain such a state as this, to achieve such a state of *mokṣa*, does not require the practice of emptiness, the understanding of reality. In Buddhism itself, we believe that through the accumulation of merit one can obtain rebirth in heavenly paradises like Tuṣita….

Question: Could you please give us some brief advice which we can take with us into our daily lives?

His Holiness: I don't know, I don't really have that much to say—I'll simply say this. We are all human beings, and from this point of view we are the same. We all want happiness, and we do not want suffering. If we consider this point, we will find that there are no differences between people of different faiths, races, color or cultures. We all have this common wish for happiness.

Actually, we Buddhists are supposed to save all sentient beings, but practically speaking, this may be too broad a notion for most people. In any case, we must at least think in terms of helping all human beings. This is very important. Even if we cannot think in terms of sentient beings inhabiting different worlds, we should nonetheless think in terms of the human beings on our own planet. To do this is to take a practical approach to the problem. It is necessary to help others, not only in our prayers, but in our daily lives. If we find we cannot help another, the least we can do is to desist from harming them. We must not cheat others or lie to them. We must be honest human beings, sincere human beings.

On a very practical level, such attitudes are things which we need. Whether one is a believer, a religious person, or not, is another matter. Simply

as an inhabitant of the world, as a member of the human family, we need this kind of attitude. It is through such an attitude that real and lasting world peace and harmony can be achieved. Through harmony, friendship, and respecting one another, we can solve many problems. Through such means, it is possible to overcome problems in the right way, without difficulties.

This is what I believe, and wherever I go, whether it be to a communist country like the Soviet Union or Mongolia, or to a capitalist and democratic country like the United States and the countries of Western Europe, I express this same message. This is my advice, my suggestion. It is what I feel. I myself practice this as much as I can. If you find you agree with me, and you find some value in what I have said, then it has been worthwhile.

You see, sometimes religious persons, people who are genuinely engaged in the practice of religion, withdraw from the sphere of human activity. In my opinion, this is not good. It is not right. But I should qualify this. In certain cases, when a person genuinely wishes to engage in intensive meditation, for example when someone wishes to attain *śamatha*, then it is alright to seek isolation for certain limited periods of time. But such cases are by far the exception, and the vast majority of us must work out a genuine religious practice within the context of human society.

In Buddhism, both learning and practice are extremely important and they must go hand in hand. Without knowledge, just to rely on faith, faith and more faith is good but not sufficient. So the intellectual part must definitely be present. At the same time, strictly intellectual development without faith and practice, is also of no use. It is necessary to combine knowledge born from study with sincere practice in our daily lives. These two must go together….

Question: The Christian notion of God is that He is omniscient, all-compassionate, all-powerful, and the creator. The Buddhist notion of Buddha is the same, except that He is not the Creator. To what extent does the Buddha exist apart from our minds, as the Christians believe their God to?

His Holiness: There are two ways of interpreting this question. The general question is whether the Buddha is a separate thing from mind. Now in one sense, this could be asking whether or not the Buddha is a phenomenon imputed or labelled by mind, and of course all phenomena in this sense must be said to be labelled by name and conceptual thought. The Buddha is not a separate phenomenon from mind because our minds impute or label Him by means of words and conceptual thought.

In another sense, the question could be asking about the relationship of buddhahood to our own minds, and in this sense we must say that buddhahood, or the state of a buddha, is the object to be attained by us. Buddhahood is the resultant object of refuge. Our minds are related to buddhahood (they are not separate from buddhahood) in the sense that this is something that we will gradually attain by the systematic purification of our minds. Hence, by purifying our minds step by step, we will eventually attain the state of buddhahood. And that buddha which we will eventually become is of the same continuity as ourselves. But that buddha which we will become is different, for example, from Śākyamuni Buddha. They are two distinct persons. We cannot attain Śākyamuni Buddha's enlightenment, because that is His own individual thing.

If instead the question is referring to whether or not our minds are separate from the state of buddhahood, and if we take buddhahood to refer to the essential purity of the mind, then of course this is something which we possess even now. Even today, our minds have the nature of essential purity. This is something called the "buddha nature." The very nature of the mind, the mere quality of knowledge and clarity without being affected by conceptual thoughts, that too we may call "buddha nature." To be exact, it is the innermost clear light mind which is called the "buddha nature."

Question: When creating merit, one must acknowledge that Christians create merit as well as Buddhists, so that the whole source of merit cannot reside solely in the object, i.e., Buddha or God, to which one is making offerings. This leads me to think that the source of merit is in our own minds. Could you please comment on this?

His Holiness: The main thing is motivation, but probably there is some difference in regard to the object to which one makes offering and so forth. The pure motivation must, however, be based on reasoning, that is, it must be verified by valid cognition; it must be unmistaken. But no doubt that the main point is the motivation.

For example, when we generate great compassion we take as our object sentient beings. But it is not due to anything on the side of sentient beings, on the part of sentient beings, that great compassion is special. It is not due to any blessing from sentient beings that great compassion is special. Nonetheless, when we meditate in this way on great compassion and we generate it from our hearts, we know that there is a tremendous amount of benefit that results from this. This is not, however, due to anything from the side of sentient beings, from the object of the great compassion. It is simply by thinking of the kindness of sentient beings and so forth that we generate great compassion and that benefit comes, but not due to the blessing of (or anything inherent in) sentient beings themselves. So strictly from the point of view of motivation, from one's own motivation, a great amount of benefit can result, isn't it so?

Likewise, when we take the Buddha as our object, if our motivation is that of great faith, of very strong faith, and we make offerings and so forth, then again, great benefit can result from this. Although a suitable object is necessary, that is, an object which, for example, has limitless good qualities, nonetheless the principal thing is our motivation, i.e., the strong faith. Still there is probably some difference as regards the kind of object to which one is making these offerings.

From one point of view, were sentient beings not to exist, then we could not take them as our object, and great compassion could not arise. So from this perspective, the object is, once again, very important. If suffering sentient beings did not exist, compassion could never arise. So from that point of view, the object, sentient beings, is a special one….

Question: To what do you attribute the growing fascination in the West, especially in America, with Eastern religions. I include many, many cults and practices which are becoming extremely strong in America. To what do you attribute, in this particular age, the reasons for this fascination, and would you encourage people who are dissatisfied with their own Western way of life, having been brought up in the Mosaic religions (Christianity, Judaism and Islam), dissatisfied with their lack of spiritual refreshment, would you encourage them to search further in their own religions or to look into Buddhism as an alternative?

His Holiness: That's a tricky question. Of course, from the Buddhist viewpoint, we are all human beings and we all have every right to investigate either one's own religion or another religion. This is our right. I think that on the whole a comparative study of different religious traditions is useful.

I generally believe that every major religion has the potential for giving any human being good advice; there is no question that this is so. But we must always keep in mind that different individuals have different mental predispositions. This means that for some individuals one religious system or philosophy will be more suitable than another. The only way one can come to a proper conclusion as to what is most suitable for *oneself* is through comparative study. Hence, we look and study, and we find a teaching that is most suitable to our own taste. This, you see, is my feeling.

I cannot advise everyone to practice Buddhism. That I cannot do. Certainly, for some people the Buddhist religion or ideology is most suitable, most effective. But that does not mean it is suitable for *all*.

IX.5

God, Commitment, and Other Faiths: Pluralism versus Relativism

JOSEPH RUNZO

Joseph Runzo (1948–) is professor of philosophy at Chapman University in Orange, California, and the author of several works in the philosophy of religion. In this paper, Runzo identifies and evaluates six different responses to the problem of religious pluralism, and ultimately defends a view that he calls 'Christian relativism'.

Crises in religion historically precipitate revolutions in religious thought. Today, the impressive piety and evident rationality of the belief systems of *other* religious traditions, inescapably confronts Christians with a crisis—and a potential revolution. How should Christians respond responsibly to the conflicting claims of other faiths? More pointedly, should Christians abjure traditional claims to the one truth and the one way to salvation? As even Descartes (rather quaintly) observes in his *Discourse on Method*,

> … I further recognised in the course of my travels that all those whose sentiments are very contrary to ours are yet not necessarily barbarians or savages, but may be possessed of reason in as great or even a greater degree than ourselves. I also considered how very different the self-same man, identical in mind and spirit, may become, according as he is brought up from childhood amongst the French or Germans, or has passed his whole life amongst Chinese or cannibals.

Religious beliefs, like many philosophical orientations, seem largely an accident of birth. If you are born in India, you are likely to be a Hindu; if born in France, you are likely to be a Christian. Moreover, on their own grounds, Buddhists and Muslims and adherents of other great religious faiths, seem rationally justified in their beliefs. This raises the *problem of religious pluralism*: the mutually conflicting systems of truth-claims of the world's religions, if taken separately, appear rationally justified—but are they *correct?* Is only one system of religious truth-claims correct, is more than one system correct, or are all religious systems mistaken?

Descartes, concluding from the diversity of opinion which he observed that "it is much more custom and example that persuade us than any certain knowledge," attempts to arrive at a method for attaining certainty, despite the fact that "there is nothing imaginable so strange or so little credible that it has not been maintained by one philosopher or other." Likewise, is there one correct religious system, and can we know what it is? Or is the search for universal or certain truth in religious

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matters as overambitious as Descartes was philosophically overly ambitious?

A major problem with the desire for a comforting certainty in religious matters is identified in Tillich's observation that the church has become all too insular: "theologians have become careless in safeguarding their idea of a personal God from slipping into 'henotheistic' mythology (the belief in *one* god who, however, remains particular and bound to a particular group)." But if henotheism poses a danger on one side, a too ready acceptance of pluralism in religion poses a danger on the other side. For an uncritical pluralism undermines the strength of commitment of faith. How then can we both remain fully committed to our most basic truth-claims about God, and at the same time take full account of religious pluralism? Christians today must be responsive to other faiths, but responsive *within* the Christian vision expressed in the Vatican II Declaration *Nostra Aetate*: "… all peoples comprise a single community, and have a single origin … God … One also is their final goal: God."

After explaining why the problem of religious pluralism is a problem of conflicting truth-claims, I will set out six possible responses, religious and nonreligious, to the conflicting *truth*-claims of the world's religions. Then I will assess each response in turn from an external, religious (but not necessarily Christian) point of view, ultimately focusing on the Pluralist and Relativist responses. I will end by defending the Relativist response from an internal, Christian perspective, and explain how it incorporates strengths, without some of the salient weaknesses, of other possible responses to the conflicting truth-claims of the world religions.

I

In the *Dynamics of Faith*, Tillich suggests that "The conflict between religions is not a conflict between forms of belief, but it is a conflict between expressions of our ultimate concern…. All decisions of faith are existential, not thoeretical, decisions." It *would* be a gross distortion of faith to reduce it to merely theoretical concerns or to questions of belief. But in avoiding this intellectualist distortion of faith Tillich is mistaken to suggest that the conflict between religions is not a conflict between truth-claims. True, a religious way of life importantly involves such elements as ritual and symbols, and a moral ordering of one's life. But our beliefs, or more comprehensively, our worldviews—i.e., the total cognitive web of our interrelated concepts, beliefs, and processes of rational thought—determine the very nature of our ultimate concern. For all experience, understanding, and praxis—whether it concerns the mundane or the *mysterium tremendum*—is structured by our worldviews. Consequently, conflicts between religious traditions fundamentally stem from conflicts of belief, conflicts over specific claims about how meaning and value are to be achieved, and what is the desired telos for humankind.

In assessing the conflict of truth-claims among world religions it must be kept in mind that a religion is not itself true or false any more than any other human institution such as art, government, or law, is in and of itself true or false. A total institution—aesthetic, political, legal, or religious—is only more or less expedient, only more or less effective in meeting its intended goals. What is true or false, and what is most fundamentally in conflict between such systems, are the underlying, specific truth-claims within the systems. Now, in the conflict of religious truth-claims, all of the world's major religions agree that the divine, or the Absolute, or the Real, is One, transcends the natural order, and is ultimately inexpressible. As *Ecclesiastes* puts it, God "has put eternity into man's mind, yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end." (Eccles. 3:11, RSV) But though they have this general point of agreement, and though each religious tradition includes truth-claims and even scriptural material which is expendable, there is a fundamental or "vital core" of beliefs in each religion which is definitive of that very tradition. And it is particular elements of this "vital core" of beliefs that are incompatible among world religions.

For instance, there is no intractable conflict between claims in the Muslim tradition that Mahdis

will periodically appear to revive faith in God, and orthodox Christian claims that Jesus represents the final prophetic revelation of God. For Christians could come to accept, and Sunnis could come to reject, further prophetic revelations from God *via* Mahdis, without impugning the respective orthodox status of Jesus or Mohammed. But traditionally it *is* essential to monotheistic traditions, like Christianity, Islam, Judaism and Ramanujan Hinduism, that the correct human perception of the divine is the perception of a personal deity. In contrast, on a Hinayana (Theravada) Buddhist view, God does not exist, and in much of the Hindu tradition, the notion of a personal deity is talk about an illusory state of affairs bound to this life. Or, to take another trenchant conflict among religious truth-claims, consider some of the diverse notions of the relation of humanity to Ultimate Reality. In Hinayana Buddhism there is no real question of one's relation to ultimate reality, for the goal of liberation is the complete extinction of the ego; in Islam the basic human relation to God is one of slave to master; in orthodox Judaism the central relation is one of a servant to his or her God.

Thus, because they make essentially different truth-claims, different religious traditions are structured by *essentially* different worldviews, offering *essentially* different paths to what is perceived as Ultimate Reality. Since a person's worldview, then, is inherently constitutive of their religious way of life, the question is whether the differences in *truth-claims* among the world religions, and the consequent differences in the (putative) paths to Ultimate Reality, are significant or ultimately irrelevant.

We can also see that the conflict among the world religions is fundamentally a conflict of *truth-claims* if we consider the meaning of "faith" and of "religion." Faith is the more encompassing notion. Faith can be either religious or non-religious: we speak of faith in the progress of science or in the inevitableness of dialectical materialism, as much as of Christian or Muslim faith. Therefore, I will use the term "faith" to refer to a person's fundamental commitment to any worldview, a commitment which is a total dispositional state of the person involving affective, conative, and cognitive elements.

Religion, on the other hand, involves a particular form of faith, focused within a specific religious tradition. To distinguish religious from non-religious faith, I will define a religion or religious tradition as a set of symbols and rituals, myths and stories, concepts and truth-claims, which a community believes gives ultimate meaning to life, *via* its connection to a transcendent God or Ultimate Reality *beyond* the natural order. Thus religion is a *human* construct (or institution) which fundamentally involves beliefs at two levels: (I) it involves the meta-belief that the religion in question does indeed refer to a transcendent reality which gives meaning to life, and (II) it involves specific beliefs—including vital core beliefs—about the nature of that ultimate reality and the way in which it gives meaning to life. The first sort of belief, (I), is shared by the world religions. The second sort of belief, (II), is the point of conflict among the world religions.

II

There are six possible responses, religious and non-religious, to the conflicting truth-claims of vital core beliefs among the world religions:

1. *Atheism*: all religions are mistaken.
2. *Religious Exclusivism*: only one world religion is correct, and all others are mistaken.
3. *Religious Inclusivism*: only one world religion is fully correct, but other world religions participate in or partially reveal some of the truth of the one correct religion.
4. *Religious Subjectivism*: each world religion is correct, and each is correct insofar as it is best for the individual who adheres to it.
5. *Religious Pluralism*: ultimately all world religions are correct, each offering a different, salvific path and partial perspective *vis-a-vis* the one Ultimate Reality.
6. *Religious Relativism*: at least one, and probably more than one, world religion is correct, and the correctness of a religion is relative to the worldview(s) of its community of adherents.

One obvious response to the conflicting truth-claims of the world's religions is the Atheist response, (1). Is it not most plausible, given the enormity of the conflict among truth-claims, that all religious traditions are simply false in different ways, rather than that one is correct, or that several are correct in different ways? In the absence of a generally acceptable deductive proof or inductive proof with a high probability, for the existence of God or the Absolute, there is no incontrovertible reply to this query. Indeed, there are important sociological and psychological arguments, like those of Feuerbach and Freud, which lend support to the Atheist response.

At stake here is the basic religious presupposition that only reference to a transcendent divine or ultimate reality gives ultimate meaning to human life. This meta-belief (I) is supported in the various religious traditions by appeals to religious experience, purported transformations of people's lives, the claimed necessity of a "leap of faith," and so on. These are internal considerations which will not, of course, prove that the Atheist response (1) must be mistaken. But in this discussion we can set aside the Atheist response if we take the basic religious meta-belief (I) as a presupposition.

Turning to the second response, Exclusivism in its strongest form is exemplified by the traditional Roman Catholic dogma, *Extra ecclesiam nulla salus*. Exclusivism is the view that salvation can only be found either (as in the dogma just cited) inside a particular *institutional* structure, or on the basis of a specified tradition of religious beliefs, symbols, and rituals—e.g., as Karl Barth says of Christianity, "the Christian religion is true, because it has pleased God, who alone can be the judge in this matter, to affirm it to be the true religion." But such unqualified Exclusivism seems untenable in the face of the problem of religious pluralism. In Ernst Troeltsch's words, regarding Christianity,

> a study of the non-Christian religions convinced me more and more that their naive claims to absolute validity are also genuinely such. I found Buddhism and Brahminism especially to be really humane and spiritual religions, capable of appealing in precisely the same way to the inner certitude and devotion of their followers as Christianity,…

Principal considerations against Exclusivism within any religious tradition include the following: Historically, it is largely a matter of geographical accident whether one grows up as a Hindu or Buddhist, Christian or Muslim, etc. Theologically, a strict reading of Exclusivism condemns the vast majority of humanity to perdition, which certainly appears contrary to the notion of a loving God, as well as seeming to contradict the idea of an Absolute which is the telos of all humankind. Ethically, Religious Exclusivism has the morally repugnant result of making those who have privileged knowledge, or who are intellectually astute, a religious elite, while penalizing those who happen to have no access to the putatively correct religious views, or who are incapable of advanced understanding. Sociologically, Exclusivism is a concomitant of sectarianism, serving as a rationale for enforcing discipline and communal cohesion. Epistemologically, one could not *know* with certainty that there is only one correct set of religious truth-claims or only one institutional structure providing a path to salvation—a consideration exacerbated by the fact that all religions at some point make Exclusivist claims. And religiously, Exclusivism is highly presumptuous, ignoring the fact that religious truth-claims are human constructs, human attempts to know Ultimate Reality, subject to the limitations and fallibility of the human mind.

It is of course possible that the Exclusivism of some particular religious tradition is correct. But given these weighty considerations against Exclusivism, we must turn to responses (3)-(6), responses that hold that in some form each of the great world religions is at least in part correctly directed toward the divine or Absolute. The problem is how to avoid the serious moral, theological, empirical, and epistemological deficiencies of Exclusivism without dissipating the very cohesiveness and vitality of one's own religious tradition which Exclusivism properly seeks to protect.

III

A natural alternative to take to meet these concerns is Inclusivism. This has become an especially prominent view in Roman Catholic theology since Vatican II. Religious Inclusivists jointly hold two theses: That other religions convey part of the truth about Ultimate Reality and the relation of humanity to Ultimate Reality, but that only one's own tradition most fully provides an understanding of Ultimate Reality, and most adequately provides a path to salvation. Thus, *Nostra Aetate* states both that "The Catholic Church rejects nothing which is true and holy in [other] religions," and that the cross of Christ "is the sign of God's all-embracing love" and "the fountain from which every grace flows."

From these foundations, Christian Inclusivism has been developed in considerable detail by Karl Rahner, who suggests that those in the non-Christian traditions can be "anonymous" Christians. Since, Rahner suggests, "we have to keep in mind … the necessity of Christian faith *and* the universal salvific will of God's love and omnipotence,"

> we can only reconcile them by saying that somehow all men must be capable of being members of the Church; and this capacity must not be understood merely in the sense of an abstract and purely logical possibility, but as a real and historically concrete one.

In the same vein, R. C. Zaehner offers an historical argument for Inclusivism:

> The drive towards the integration of … the personal and the collective, has been characteristic of the most original thinkers in [all religions] during the first two-thirds of the twentieth century…. This unity in diversity is the birthright of the Catholic Church… all the other religions, in their historical development, grow into 'other Catholic Churches'… [For while one God] is the inspiration of all religions and peculiar to none … The only religion that has from the beginning been both communal and individual is Christianity.

Inclusivism is typically based on the notion that one's own religion most fully possesses a particular element which is most essential to religion. Zaehner looks to the integration of the personal and collective; Kant holds that true religiosity is identical to the moral life; Schleiermacher proposes that underlying genuine religion is "the feeling of absolute dependence"; Rudolph Otto emphasizes a numinous sense of the holy, a sense of the *mysterium tremendum*; *Nostra Aetate* declares that "from ancient times down to the present, there has existed among diverse peoples a certain perception of that hidden power which hovers over the course of things and over the events of human life"; and John Baillie suggests that all humans have a knowledge of God through a felt presence of the divine such that all people "already believe in him."

That other religious traditions, in accordance with the religious meta-belief (I), might provide some apprehension of Ultimate Reality, is not at issue here. Rather, Inclusivism supposes that a *particular* sort of apprehension and understanding of Ultimate Reality is elemental to all religion. However, in the first place we could not *know* that all humans have the same sort of elemental apprehension of Ultimate Reality. Second, the empirical evidence supports precisely the opposite supposition. Even in the broadest terms, the notion of an elemental apprehension of Ultimate Reality is understood in personal terms in the monotheistic traditions, while it is *non-personal* in Confucianism and in Hindu and Buddhist traditions. And third, each religion tends to see itself as the culmination of *the* elemental apprehension of Ultimate Reality: "other religions can have their own fulfillment theology. Sri Aurobindo sees the world religious process converging on Mother India rather than the Cosmic Christ, and Sir Muhammad Iqbal sees it converging upon a kind of ideal Islam."

So when Rahner, for example, says that the Christian has, "other things being equal, a still greater chance of salvation than someone who is merely an anonymous Christian," this can only be a statement

of faith, not one of certain knowledge. Yet the strength of Inclusivism is this unequivocal faith—*within* an acceptance of other traditions—that one's own religion is salvific. Inclusivism expresses an appropriate religious disposition. But Inclusivism ultimately fails as a warranted epistemological thesis. This failure leads us to the pluralistic types of responses to the problem of religious pluralism.

IV

Subjectivism, Pluralism, and Relativism are all pluralistic responses to the conflicting truth-claims of world religions. All three views share a basic *idealist epistemology*: i.e., they share the basic assumption that the world we experience and understand is not the world independent of our perceiving but a world at least in part structured by our minds. Thus these pluralistic views share the epistemic view expressed in the Kantian dictum that "[sensible] intuitions without concepts are blind," a view sometimes expressed in the contemporary notion that all experiencing is experiencing-*as*. But further, they share the assumption that there is more than one set of human concepts—more than one worldview—which is valid for understanding the world. Thus they share the sort of *pluralist* epistemology expressed by William James in *The Varieties of Religious Experience*: "why in the name of common sense need we assume that only one … system of ideas can be true? The obvious outcome of our total experience is that the world can be handled according to many systems of ideas,…" The three pluralistic religious responses all hold that one's perception of religious truth is in some sense relative to one's worldview. Typically this view is supported on the grounds of the ineluctable enculturation or the historicity of all thought and experience, or, as in the Whorf hypothesis, by suggesting a necessary connection between language, which varies from community to community, and truth, which consequently varies.

The most radical of the pluralistic responses to the conflicting truth-claims of the world religions is Subjectivism, where religious truth and salvation are literally as varied as individuals are diverse. As a general view in epistemology, subjectivism is a form of relativism about truth. It is the extreme epistemological position that truth is relative to each individual's idiosyncratic worldview. Thus, on a Religious Subjectivist's view, religion is a radically private affair, often understood as purely a matter of one's individual relation to the divine or Absolute. But subjectivism, and therefore Religious Subjectivism, is conceptually incoherent. Truth bearers are statements or propositions. Statements or propositions are comprised of concepts. And precisely what Wittgenstein's "private-language" argument demonstrates is that concepts are social constructions and cannot be purely private, individual understandings. Thus, since statements and propositions are comprised of concepts, and concepts are social constructs, truth cannot be idiosyncratically individualistic. Religious Subjectivism, then, must be rejected.

The two remaining pluralistic views, Religious Pluralism and Religious Relativism, are often conflated. John Hick offers a concise description of Pluralism as the view that "There is not merely one way but a plurality of ways of salvation or liberation … taking place in different ways within the contexts of all the great religious traditions." Pluralism holds that there is only one Ultimate Reality, but that Ultimate Reality is properly, though only partially, understood in different ways. Following a metaphor which Hick employs, just as the historian does not have direct access to figures of history, and consequently different historians develop different perspectives on historical figures like Genghis Khan or Sun Yat-Sen because of historians' different methods of inquiry, cultural backgrounds, etc., so too, different religious traditions or different theologies, not having direct access to the divine, offer different enculturated "images" of the one Ultimate Reality. On the Pluralist account, there is no ultimate conflict between these different perspectives, since there still remains one set of truths, even if those truths are imperfectly and only partially understood within each perspective. Religious

Pluralism, then, focuses on the viability of different religious *perspectives* on Ultimate Reality.

Religious Relativism, in contrast, is directly a thesis about differences of religious *truth-claims*. The Religious Relativist minimally holds the general epistemic view, which I shall designate as "conceptual relativism," that first-order truth-claims about reality—e.g., that persons or that subatomic particles or that God exists—are relative to the worldview of a particular society. More precisely, a conceptual relativist definitively holds that, corresponding to differences of worldview, there are mutually incompatible, yet individually adequate, sets of conceptual-schema-relative truths. Thus for the Religious Relativist, unlike the Pluralist, truth itself is relative and plural.

However, Religious Pluralism and Religious Relativism do share two underlying Kantian theses. They share the Kantian metaphysical division (though the Kantian terminology may not be employed) between noumena and phenomena, distinguishing between God in Himself or the Absolute in itself, and God or the Absolute as humanly experienced. And as we have seen, they share the Kantian epistemic notion that all experience, and so all religious experience, is structured by the (culturally and historically conditioned) worldview of the percipient. Thus, Religious Pluralism and Religious Relativism hold that differences of religious perception cannot just be treated as a matter of some people simply being wrong about the nature of the divine Reality, but rather that such differences of perception are inherent to religious perception and conception. Given these points of fundamental agreement, which position, Pluralism or Relativism, better accounts for the conflicting truth-claims of the world religions?

V

An important exponent of religious Pluralism is Wilfred Cantwell Smith. Cantwell Smith argues that the notions of "religion" and of "a religion" are obsolete. He holds that only God and humanity are "givens"—global universals—and that the centrality given to religion is misguided and the conception of a religion as a belief system mistaken. Rather than starting from a particular religious tradition and then considering God and humanity, one should start from God and humanity and consider particular religious traditions from this global perspective. Smith reaches the Pluralist conclusion that the one truth about the religious life of humankind is conveyed in the various Buddhist, Christian, Islamic, and so on, forms.

Quite correctly, I think, Smith is attempting to circumvent the obstacles which *religion often* places between humans and their response to the divine. But there are several problems with his approach. First, he suggests replacing the worldview(s) of particular religious traditions with another worldview on which it is presupposed that God and humanity are givens in the experience of all humans. This is neither a neutral worldview, nor one which will be shared by all religious persons. Many adherents of particular religious worldviews would reject the generalized approach to the divine Cantwell Smith proposes as so amorphous that it fails to capture *their* religious beliefs. Second, Smith's position rests on the dubious thesis, which we have already addressed, that there is a universal, innate experience or conception of the divine. Smith himself effectively argues against *Christian* Exclusivism by asking: "how could one possibly know?" that only the Christian faith is correct. But the same argument is equally applicable to Smith's own position: how could one possibly *know* that there is a global, innate apprehension or "givenness" of God and humanity? If anything, the evidence most strongly supports the conclusion that all humankind does not share the same innate concept or primal experience of Ultimate Reality, much less of the nature of God, or even of humanity, *per se*.

John Hick has developed another, rather impressive and comprehensive, Pluralist approach, in part by following out a key aspect of Cantwell Smith's work, viz. the rejection of the idea that a religion is fundamentally a set of beliefs. Proposing instead that religion definitively concerns "the

transformation of human existence from self-centeredness to Reality-centeredness," Hick essentially argues that the apparently conflicting truth-claims of the world's religions are, in the final analysis, irrelevant, and that the world religions can be reconciled, and the integrity of each preserved, through this more fundamental shared goal of moving from self- to Reality-centeredness.

Hick explicitly employs the two Kantian theses underlying both Pluralism and Relativism. He employs the Kantian thesis that all experience is structured by the mind by suggesting that specific forms of religious awareness "are formed by the presence of the divine Reality,… coming to consciousness in terms of the different sets of religious concepts and structures of religious meaning that operate within the different religious traditions," i.e., as divine *personae* (e.g., Yahweh, Allah, etc.) for theists and *as* divine *impersonae* (e.g., Brahman, the Dharma, the Tao, etc.) for non-theists. Regarding the phenomenal/noumenal distinction, he supports the distinction between personal and non-personal divine phenomena and the Eternal noumenon, on the basis of what he takes to be strong inductive evidence from religious experience. And indeed we do find consistent differentiation in the world religions between Ultimate Reality as we experience it and as it is in itself. There is the Hindu distinction between *saguna* Brahman and *nirguna* Brahman; the Jewish Cabalistic distinction between the God of the Bible and En Soph; and in the Christian tradition, Eckhart's distinction between God *qua* Trinity and the Godhead itself, and more recently, Tillich's notion of "the God above the God of theism," and so on.

Hick does allow for the logical possibility that only one religion might be correct, but he thinks that the overwhelming facts of religious diversity make Religious Pluralism the most plausible response to the conflicting truth-claims of world religions. A comprehensive Religious Pluralism like Hick's fully confronts the diversity of religious truth-claims. As such, it is an admirable and helpful response to the challenge which these conflicting claims presents. But even so, Religious Pluralism has significant shortcomings.

VI

Religious Pluralism fails to adequately account for the necessary, central role of cognition in religious faith. Hick suggests that differences of belief among the world religions are of great philosophical importance as elements within our respective theories about the universe; but they are not of great religious, i.e. soteriological, importance. For different groups can hold incompatible sets of theories all of which constitute intellectual frameworks within which the process of salvation/liberation can proceed.

Of course, even incompatible theories can serve as guides to the same religious goal. But from this it neither follows that systems of belief and theory are irrelevant to guiding one to that goal, nor that it is unimportant which particular belief system one holds for reaching that end. Rather, the cognitive content of religious faith is essential for providing a coherent and sufficiently comprehensive view of reality as a basis for purposive action and an effective, directive guide to "salvation/liberation." Further, the *specific* cognitive content of one's faith is of paramount importance since it is precisely what delimits one's specific path to salvation/liberation. And the specific path to salvation/liberation is not just a means to an end but is itself an integral part of the goal of salvation/liberation. This is expressed in the New Testament in the idea that the Kingdom of God is not future but begins in the lives of those who enter the new covenant now: "asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom was coming, he [Jesus] answered them, 'The kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed; … the kingdom of God is in the midst of you.'" (Luke 17:20-21, RSV) Consequently, since the specific path to salvation/liberation is itself part of that very salvation/liberation, a specific religious worldview is importantly constitutive of what makes a way of life a (particular) *religious* way of life.

Indeed, it would seem that specific religious cognitive content is essential to making it meaningful even to be committed at all to a religious way of life. True, de-emphasizing specific doctrines—such

as the idea that the Christ-event is the definitive self-revelation of the divine—makes it easier to reconcile apparently conflicting religious truth-claims, especially the notion of a personal God with the notion of a non-personal Absolute. But the more such specific doctrines are set aside, the more questionable it becomes whether a *religious*, as opposed to a non-religious, commitment is what gives life ultimate significance. Insofar as the specificity of religious doctrines is de-emphasized, the basic religious meta-belief (I) that religion does indeed refer to a transcendent Reality which gives meaning to life becomes less plausible. The plausibility of (I) rests in large part on the evidence of religious experience. But as any hypothesis about the nature of reality is made more indefinite, the available inductive evidence to support that hypothesis is not increased, as for example Hick's defense of Religious Pluralism seems to suggest, but decreased. For evidence for an indefinite hypothesis is correspondingly indefinite or ambiguous.

Another difficulty with Religious Pluralism is this. Exactly what a recognition of pluralism in general seems to acknowledge is that humans, and human conceptions, fundamentally differ. But then, to the extent that the differences of human conception embedded in the world religions are regarded as inconsequential, the dignity of the individual and the value of each distinct community of faith is lessened.

To see how this applies to Christianity, consider Maurice Wiles' observation that, "there are two fundamental characteristics of the conception of God … it must be a profoundly personal concept,… And secondly it is God in relation to us with which we have to do." The Christian understanding that the universe is under the providence of a God who has revealed Himself as a personal being—One who understands and loves humanity—is and must be a conception of God as He manifests Himself to us. Yet this conception of an essentially *personal* God is not incidental but central to both corporate and individual Christian faith. Hick attempts to account for this by suggesting that among the world religions the Real is experienced as *either* personal or non-personal. While this Religious Pluralist view properly acknowledges that theistic understanding is an understanding of Ultimate Reality not *an sich* but *as* it confronts us in history, it obviates the significance of the Christian understanding of a personal God as *somehow* correctly revealing the nature of Ultimate Reality in itself. A personal reality might have non-personal aspects, but it could not be identical to something which is non-personal. Hence, this Pluralist account entails that the monotheist's experience of a *personal* divine reality *cannot*, to that extent, correctly represent the nature of the Real in itself.

Finally, Religious Pluralism is deficient insofar as it unintentionally undermines the sense of the reality of God. It is part of the fundamental meta-belief (I) of religion that the God or the Absolute of which humans speak is real and not a metaphysical illusion or psychological delusion. But if the God of which monotheists speak is only an "image," only a perspective on an unknowable, noumenal reality, then the God of history will not be a real God. I will address this last point more fully below.

These deficiencies must be met if a pluralistic resolution to the conflicting truth-claims of the world religions is to be successful. Yet despite these shortcomings, Religious Pluralism has an obvious strength which must be retained for any successful pluralistic resolution. Religious Pluralism offers a reconciliation of the disparate world religious traditions which avoids the theologically unacceptable and epistemically unsupportable religious imperialism which we find in Exclusivism, and even in Inclusivism.

VII

If, then, we reject the religious imperialism of the Exclusivist and Inclusivist views that one's own tradition must be either the sole or at least the fullest arbiter of truth about the divine, we have two choices about how to deal with the irreducible plurality of religious conception and experience. We can either take the approach of Pluralism, treat the incompatible beliefs among differing religious worldviews as ultimately inessential, and conclude that the

great world religions simply offer different perspectives on Ultimate Reality. Or we can accept the doctrines which adherents of different world religions so ardently profess and passionately follow as *essential* to their faith. I have suggested that the former approach runs the danger of undermining the basic religious meta-belief (I), and reducing the substance of religious worldviews to vacuity, obviating just those differences in the path to salvation/liberation which give significance to each individual religious tradition. If I am right about this, we are led to conclude that different religions have different constitutive sets of truth-claims, and that while these sets of core truth-claims are mutually incompatible—each set of truth-claims is probably adequate in itself.

This is the Religious Relativist response to the problem of religious pluralism. Granted, the different religious worldviews among the world's great religious traditions are complementary insofar as they have a commonality in the religious experiences and perceptions of humankind. But different religious worldviews are, ultimately, irreducibly plural, with features that are incompatible if not contradictory *vis-a-vis* other religious worldviews. Further, corresponding to each distinct religious worldview, there is a different set of possible religious *experiences*. For what can be experienced depends on what *can* be real or unreal, and what can be real—i.e., what is possible—is determined by the percipient's worldview. This means that each distinct religious worldview delineates a distinct possible divine reality—though just to the extent that religious worldviews "overlap," characteristics of these distinct possible divine realities will overlap.

For instance, monotheistic truth-claims will be most directly about God as humans experience Him, for they are most directly above divine reality *relative to* a particular theistic worldview. But then each theology, as a product of human constructive reasoning, will delimit only one *possible* divine reality. There will be other *contrasting*—though not totally mutually exclusive—valid theologies, held by other sincere women and men of faith, delimiting other possible divine phenomenal realities.

Importantly, on this Religious Relativist account, "The" God of history, delimited by the strictures of a particular theology is *not*, if He exists, somehow unreal *vis-a-vis* the noumenal. God *qua* noumenal lies "behind," so to speak, the possible plurality of real phenomenal divine realities, delimited by different monotheistic worldviews. But noumenal and phenomenal reality are two different categories of reality. And just as there is nothing unreal about nuclear weapons or pains or piano concertos because they are part of phenomenal reality, "The" God of history, "The" God one confronts, is not less real, if He exists, just because He is not in the category of the noumenal. What could be *more* real than that which we do experience? And to try to transcend our experience for something putatively "untainted" by human thought is not only the worst sort of degenerate Platonism, it is to turn away from the means we *do* have in experience for understanding the divine and our own humanity in relation to the divine.

Among the possible responses to the problem of religious pluralism, this Religious Relativist account of a possible plurality of phenomenal divine realities seems to offer the best explanation of the differing experiences and incompatible conceptions of the great religious traditions. The Atheist response to the problem of religious pluralism is ruled out if we presuppose the religious metabelief (I). Religious Exclusivism is neither tolerable nor any longer intellectually honest in the context of our contemporary knowledge of other faiths. Religious Subjectivism is conceptually incoherent. Religious Inclusivism does not go far enough toward solving the problem of religious pluralism. And Religious Pluralism has serious deficiencies which Religious Relativism avoids.

First, Religious Relativism reasserts the central role which cognition has in a religious life. The path to salvation is itself part of the salvific process. And one's religious worldview, as a guide for attitudes and actions, is inseparable from the path. Moreover, if all experience is conceptualized, then one will quite literally not be able to have any experience of the divine without a worldview which, e.g., enables one to experience the world as under the providence of God, or as an environment for working out one's *Karma*, etc. But then, as Religious

Relativism asserts, *specific* truth-claims are essential to a religious tradition and way of life, and the conflict among the claims of the world religions cannot be resolved by de-emphasizing those conflicting claims.

Second, it follows from this that Religious Relativism treats adherents of each religious tradition with fullest dignity. Regarding Christianity, we could say, as the Pluralist must, that the doctrine of the Incarnation cannot be taken literally and cannot mean for *any* Christian that Jesus uniquely manifests the presence of God. Or, we can allow that on some worldviews this would be a perfectly rational view, delineating a world where Jesus *is* the definitive self-manifestation of God. Ironically, we fall back into a certain measure of the old absolutism that undergirds Exclusivism if we take the inflexible, even though Pluralist, first course. In contrast, Relativism not only allows with Pluralism that the world's great religions could have the same telos, it allows for the likelihood that more than one of the conflicting sets of *specific* truth-claims, which adherents of the differing world religions themselves regard as vital to their faith, is correct.

Third, that it is essential for the direct object of theological conception to be a *real* God seems to leave a Pluralist view like Hick's caught between two problematic options. As in his earlier work, the God of theology can be characterized as an "image" of God. But then the God of theology does not have the ontological status of an existent entity with causal properties in the phenomenal world. This will unintentionally reduce the sense of the reality of God, for what theology would then be most directly referring to would not be *God*, but a human *idea* of the noumenal. So to speak about *God*, would be to speak about something noumenal about which we can only know that we do not know its true character. In contrast, on Religious Relativism the God of theology can be a *real* God, not just a conception of or perspective on the divine. God *qua* phenomenal is not just, in Tillich's phrase, "a symbol for God."

On the other hand, the Pluralist might hold, as Hick does in his more recent work, that the divine phenomena just *are* the divine noumenon as experienced by humans via their particular religio-cultural perspectives. While this does indicate a more substantive ontological status for divine personae and impersonae, it threatens to collapse the phenomena/noumena distinction and runs counter to the basic idealist epistemology which underlies both Pluralism and Relativism. First, this suggests that the divine noumenon is itself experienced. One can postulate an unexperienced divine noumenon, and one can talk about divine phenomena which are (putatively) experienced. But this cannot amount to talk about the same thing—even if in different ways—for that would effectively be to eliminate the divine noumenon. And given an idealist epistemology, one cannot claim that the divine noumenon is experienced insofar as it appears to us in various ways, *even though* we cannot characterize the noumenal. For the conceptualization of all experience implies that what we experience can, in principle, be characterized.

Second, that a particular divine phenomenon somehow manifests the divine noumenon is a matter of faith. And while it could be a matter of reasonable faith for an individual to claim that the divine phenomenon which they experience somehow manifests Ultimate Reality in itself, it would not make sense to say that it was a matter of one's *faith* that the various divine phenomena, which adherents of all the great world religions feel that they experience, all *do* manifest Ultimate Reality. Rather this would amount to a hypothesis or theory about the world religions. And I do not see how we could know that this hypothesis is true; how could we know that the divine phenomena of all the great world religions *are* (or most probably are) the divine noumenon as experienced by humans? One's faith warrants one's own religious commitment; it cannot warrant the mutually conflicting commitments of others.

In contrast, on a Religious Relativist account, what is putatively experienced is not the noumenal Ultimate Reality, but e.g., the *real* God of history. Now, I do think that it is a mistake to suppose that one can *know* that specific claims which we make about phenomenal divine reality are also true of the divine noumenon, since this would obviate the very point of the noumena/phenomena distinction.

But I think it is perfectly sensible to make the bare claim that there is a noumenal—*whatever* its character—which, so to speak, "lies behind" the phenomenal reality which we experience. Presumably there is no one-to-one correspondence between phenomena and noumena and hence no *direct* check from our successes and failures to the nature of the noumenal. But the greater the correspondence between our conception of the phenomenal and the character of the noumenal (whatever it is), the more our purposive activity, carried out within phenomenal reality as we understand it, will be successful and the closer—in principle—our understanding of the phenomenal will correspond to the noumenal. For the monotheist it is a matter of faith that, in this manner, one's *own* experience of the presence of "The" God of history does increase, on the whole, one's understanding of God in Himself.

VIII

One obvious point of resistance to this Religious Relativist account is the notion that there may be more than one phenomenal reality, and more than one phenomenal divine reality. But this notion initially seems strange only because we are used to thinking in terms of that one possible world which we regard as *the* (unique) actual world. Commonly, we treat any other conception of the actual world as simply false or mistaken. But if one accepts the idea that phenomenal reality is relative to a worldview, and that therefore there is a plurality of actual worlds corresponding to the plurality of distinct worldviews, that does not undermine or alter what we call the actual world—i.e., the world delimited by our schemas.

Recognizing that others might be responding to a different phenomenal God is like recognizing that others might rationally claim to discern a cyclical recurrence of events in history where you discern none. One can accept that there *could* be states of affairs which others but not you experience, without thereby committing yourself to the existence of any *particular* such state of affairs. To have faith in only one real (phenomenal) God is to say that for *oneself* there is only one real God who lives and moves and has His being; for others there may be other real entities which are "The" God of *their* history. But just as any actual event or state of affairs is by definition an event or state of affairs in your actual world, any actual event which you acknowledge as an act of God is an act of the real God who confronts you within (your) history….

X

While the Pluralist attempts to solve the problem of religious pluralism by setting aside conflicting truth claims and emphasizing a universality and unity to all religions, the Religious Relativist can resolve the problem of religious pluralism by accepting these conflicting truthclaims as an appropriate manifestation of divine/human interaction. In the spirit of the Leibnizian notion that not just the quantity of good, but the variety of good things makes this "the best of all possible worlds"—the world that a good God would create—we *should expect* correct religious beliefs and veridical religious experiences to be as richly varied as human needs and human individuality. Contrary to the Pluralist conception, an ultimate uniformity of the central elements of all religious traditions is not an ultimate value. Where Pluralism tends to homogenize religion, if one believes that God indeed has providence over the world, then precisely what the evidence of the world we find ourselves in indicates is that a diversity of religious truth-claims is intrinsically valuable, and divinely valued. Rather than a problem to be solved, the conflicting truth-claims of the great religious traditions, and even conflicting systems *within* traditions, can be accepted as a profound indication of God's manifest love and delight in the diverse worlds of His creatures.

That our religious beliefs have a correlation to the transcendent divine reality is a matter of faith. Since our perception and understanding are ineluctably limited to our worldview, even if what we believe is true about God *qua* phenomenal turns out to be true also of God *qua* noumenal, we could

never *know* that that was so. We cannot *know* that we possess the requisite conceptual resources to apply to God in Himself, or *know* that we have formed ideas which are true of God *qua* noumenal, or *know* that our ideas do properly refer to the noumenal God. But just because we cannot know these things to be true *vis-a-vis* the noumenal God, this clearly does not entail that they are not the case. I do not see how it could be shown that it is *impossible* that our concepts or beliefs do in fact correctly refer to the noumenal. Quite the contrary, it is a matter of reasonable faith that Christian religious experience and theological conception *do* provide the basis for proper reference and proper talk about God in Himself. Yet to acknowledge that we cannot transcend our worldviews, and that they in turn are inescapably structured by our limiting socio-historical perspective, is to recognize the fundamental fallibility and finitude of even our noblest conceptions and highest values. There is thus a religiously appropriate humbleness which Religious Relativism brings to our claims to religious truth.

Faced with the inescapable challenge of the claims of other faiths, it may now be time for Christians to move toward a Christian Relativism. A Christian Relativism would combine the strengths of Exclusivism and Inclusivism, and of Pluralism, without their respective disadvantages. A Christian Relativism would enable us to say, on the one hand, that salvation through Christ is definitive, without committing us, on the other hand, to the unsupportable view that salvation is exclusively Christian. A Christian Relativism would sustain Christian commitment and support Christian claims to truth, without claiming to be the only truth.

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