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# REIDIANISM IN CONTEMPORARY ENGLISH-SPEAKING RELIGIOUS EPISTEMOLOGY

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**Abstract.** This paper explores the main contours of recent work in English-speaking philosophy of religion on the justification of religious belief. It sets out the main characteristics of the religious epistemologies of such writers as Alston, Plantinga, and Swinburne. It poses and seeks to answer the question of how far any or all of these epistemologies are indebted or similar to the epistemology of the Scottish Enlightenment thinker Thomas Reid. It concludes that while there are some links to Reid in recent writing, contemporary approaches depart from Reid's views on the specific topic of the justification of religious belief.

## INTRODUCTION

My aim in this paper is to present a survey of the contemporary debate as to 'positive epistemic status' and religious belief highlighting (as much as I can) the use of Reid and Scottish philosophy in contemporary philosophy of religion.

There is a great deal that can be done by way of fulfilling this aim, since Reid is referred to frequently by important protagonists in contemporary English-speaking religious epistemology – though *only* Reid: I have come across no mention in this literature to other Scottish philosophers (except of course for David Hume).

The most important figures in debates about the rationality and justification of religious belief in the last 20 years have been William Alston, Alvin Plantinga and Richard Swinburne. Nicholas Wolterstorff also deserves a mention here, but though he is not in any sense a follower of Plantinga, his work tends (unfairly) to be regarded as a supplement

to Plantinga's. Alston, Plantinga and Wolterstorff are regarded as representatives of so-called Reformed epistemology. This is misleading because Alston was not a Reformed thinker but an Episcopalian (i.e. US Anglican). All three evince an approach to justification, rationality or warrant in religious belief that is either anti-evidentialist or that plays down the importance of backing religious beliefs by evidence in granting them positive epistemic status.

Swinburne's contribution to religious epistemology is by contrast one that makes great play with finding evidence for religious beliefs. He has constructed a complex apologetic for the Christian creed. It commences with an inductive, evidential case for truth of the bare claim that there is a God and then proceeds to an evidential case for specifically Christian claims about God.

There is a relation between Swinburne and 18th century British philosophy but it is not with North Britain. Swinburne evidently stands in a tradition that includes Joseph Butler and his *Analogy of Religion*. His appeal to natural theology and to probability as the basis of religious assent is Butlerian. There are also notable links between his case for the rationality of assent to revelation and that which is contained in Locke's writings.

The differences between Plantinga and co., on the one hand, and Swinburne, on the other, might seem to be great. Swinburne is an evidentialist in epistemology and also an internalist. The Reformed epistemologists are anti-evidentialist and move towards the application of externalist epistemologies to religious belief. (This latter move is notable in Plantinga's three books on warrant and in Alston's appeal to doxastic practices as the locus of justified belief.) It must be said, however, that there are areas of agreement between these apparently divergent approaches to religious epistemology. It is notable that in *Perceiving God*<sup>1</sup> Alston can appeal to natural theology as a supplement to the justification of religious beliefs provided by the fact that they are generated by a doxastic practice whose reliability has not been refuted. There is also a significant fact about Swinburne's apologetic scheme that places him closer to the Reformed epistemologists. In Chapter 13 of *The Existence of*

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<sup>1</sup> William Alston, *Perceiving God* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1991)

God<sup>2</sup> he places great weight on religious experience as 'evidence' for the truth of his core theism. But his use of religious experience is in fact not evidential in the strict sense. He contends that claims to experience God are to be considered as analogous to ordinary sense-perceptual claims and these claims are non-inferentially justified in the circumstances that give rise to them. Sense-perceptual beliefs for Swinburne are not justified through being the product of good inferences from further data. They are basic beliefs, innocent until proved guilty. And in this he is close to Plantinga, the first phase of whose Reformed epistemology can be seen as based on an appeal to religious experience.

Thus our contrast between an anti-evidentialist movement in Reformed epistemology and an evidentialist rearguard action in Swinburne is too simple. The Reformed epistemologists may see some role for the evidences for God collected in traditional natural theology. Swinburne is one of many contemporary philosophers of religion who appeal to religious experience but do so in a non-evidentialist way, on the basis of a direct realist theory of perception. He thus takes a stance toward religious experience that puts him in the company of Alston and the others.

Where does Reid come into the picture sketched thus far? There is a direct link to him. Alston, Plantinga and Wolterstorff<sup>3</sup> all write about him and cite him as a source for their general epistemological strategies. There is also an indirect link. The views about the justification and character of sense-perceptual beliefs that have become an orthodoxy in so much contemporary religious epistemology are Reidian. They are strikingly similar to the relevant parts of Reid in *An Inquiry Into the Human Mind on the Principles of Common Sense* and the *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man*. But we shall see that the coincidence of these views on perception with Reid's does not demonstrate a real indebtedness to Reid. We shall also point out that Reid's own views on the justification of religious belief are not at all similar to those of the Reformed epistemologists.

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<sup>2</sup> Richard Swinburne, *The Existence of God* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2nd edn 2004)

<sup>3</sup> Wolterstorff has a monograph on Reid: *Thomas Reid and the Story of Epistemology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001)

## I. REFORMED EPISTEMOLOGY AND REID

'Reformed epistemology' is a label given to a loosely-connected group of thinkers who have challenged a long-established orthodoxy in religious epistemology. The orthodoxy states that if religious beliefs are to be rational, they must be based on evidence. Both Plantinga and Wolterstorff began to question this orthodoxy in articles and books in the 1970's (in fact in Wolterstorff's case as early as 1967 in *Reason within the Bounds of Religion*<sup>4</sup>). Plantinga's way of formulating the critique became the most famous<sup>5</sup>.

According to Plantinga, the orthodoxy rests upon the key premise that religious beliefs cannot be properly basic beliefs. A basic belief is construed by analogy with a basic action, where the latter is an action I perform without doing anything else in order to perform it. A basic belief is one I hold while not inferring it from any other beliefs. It is properly basic belief if I am justified, rational, warranted, etc., in so holding it. The orthodoxy about religious beliefs and evidence is held to flow from Locke and to have been established in religious epistemology since. The only reason to hold to the orthodoxy Plantinga can think of is 'classical foundationalism'. This epistemological stance maintains that the only properly basic beliefs are those which are self-evident in themselves ('All bachelors are unmarried') or self-evident to me ('I seem to see a desk before me'). Such propositions are indubitable and incorrigible. All other propositions that I believe with justification are deductive or inductive inferences therefrom. Propositions like 'God spoke to me in prayer' and 'God exists' are not thus self-evident, indubitable and incorrigible, are not properly basic and therefore need to be supported by deductive or inductive inferences from those that are. Thus is launched a familiar task of seeking the 'evidences' for theistic and Christian beliefs in modern philosophy of religion. The door for philosophical scepticism regarding

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<sup>4</sup> Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Reason within the Bounds of Religion* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmann, 1967)

<sup>5</sup> Plantinga's early papers in religious epistemology include: 'Is Belief in God Rational?' in *Rationality and Religious Belief*, ed. C. Delaney (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1979); 'Is Belief in God Properly Basic?', *Nous*, vol. 15/1, 1981; 'The Reformed Objection to Natural Theology' in *Rationality in the Calvinian Tradition* eds H. Hart, J. van der Hoeven, N. Wolterstorff (Lanham: University Press of America, 1983); 'Reason and Belief in God', in *Faith and Rationality* eds A. Plantinga and N. Wolterstorff (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1983).

those beliefs is thereby opened. This scepticism is equally characteristic of modern philosophy of religion – since it is easy to pick holes in the arguments of natural theology and press the weight of counter-evidence provided by such things as the problem of evil.

Plantinga thinks that classical foundationalism is easily refuted. First it is self-referentially incoherent and second it faces innumerable counter examples in the shape of properly basic beliefs that do not fit its criteria.

The first point above can be stated quite briefly: the proposition ‘All properly basic beliefs are self-evident to in themselves or self-evident to me’ is not self-evident in itself or self-evident to me [Alvin Plantinga!]. It therefore needs to rest on an inferential proof and Plantinga thinks no one has come up with a deductive or inductive argument that remotely comes near to being such a proof.

The second point in the Plantingian critique consists in maintaining that all manner of kinds of belief are properly basic that do not conform to the criteria of self-evidence, indubitability and incorrigibility. Thus: ‘I had an egg for breakfast this morning’ and ‘There is a greenfinch in my garden’ can *in appropriate circumstances* be justifiably believed by the subject even though they are in no sense inferred from other beliefs. They can be, instead, the direct deliverances of memory and sight, respectively.

Both Plantinga and Wolterstorff cite Reid as a source of the insight that classical foundationalism is false. The *Inquiry* and *Essays* are appealed to as an early, but neglected, proof of its limitations. Crucial for them is the way in which Reid attacks the Way of Ideas and its associated notion that ‘I see a greenfinch’ must really be an inference from the immediate perception of an impression of a greenfinch. They also cite Reid’s plea for acceptance of irreducibly diverse ways in which beliefs may be justifiably sourced. His attack on the philosophical sceptic is held to be a paradigmatic demonstration of the falsity of classical foundationalism.

Plantinga’s early forays in Reformed epistemology distinguished between *reasons* for beliefs and *grounds*. A non-basic belief (such as ‘Australia is an island’) is justified if it rests on other justified beliefs that are themselves justified. Properly basic beliefs end the chain of justification because they get their justification from the circumstances in which they arise or are maintained. ‘I see a greenfinch’ is not based on reasons, but, granted that I have normal eyesight, the light is good and I know the names of common British birds, may rest on perfectly adequate grounds.

For Plantinga the belief that there is God for the ordinary believer can get its justification from being the straightforward entailment of beliefs such as ‘God spoke to me in prayer last night’, ‘I felt God forgiving my sins.’ Such beliefs may themselves be grounded in surrounding circumstances in a way analogous to a straightforward perceptual claim. This grounding is fleshed out via the postulation of a *sensus divinitatis*. This is a faculty for being directly aware of God’s presence that, when excited by the requisite stimuli from God, produces appropriate beliefs in the subject. No wonder, then, that some commentators took Plantinga’s case for religious beliefs being properly basic to be an appeal to religious experience as the ground of religious beliefs.

If Reid was one direct influence upon Plantinga and Wolterstorff, so was Calvin (in the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*) and a number of 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century thinkers in the Dutch Reformed Church. Plantinga traces the notion of the *sensus divinitatus* back to Calvin (though we should note that there is critical literature questioning his fidelity to Calvin on this point). The Dutch Reformers influencing our two authors plead for the autonomy of distinctively Christian modes of knowing and reasoning<sup>6</sup>.

Reformed epistemology in the hands of Plantinga is a thing that is subject to much change and development. The above gives the essence of his views in his early articles on the subject. Almost from the beginning he was pressed with an obvious objection to his plea for tolerance of many kinds of properly basic belief. The objection was that this introduces epistemic anarchy: anyone can claim that their foundational beliefs are properly basic once the criteria of classical foundationalism are abandoned. This came to be known as ‘the Great Pumpkin objection’ (a label which will make sense to all those familiar with the Peanuts cartoon series). Various strategies for dealing with this objection emerged from the keyboard of Plantinga. One was to the effect that we might use an inductive procedure to determine canons of proper basicity. Instead of laying down criteria for proper basicity *a priori*, we might look at those forms of belief we pre-theoretically agree are properly basic and then work out what set of properties (presumably a disjunctive set)

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<sup>6</sup> See for example: Cornelius van Til, *Common Grace* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1947)

they have in common. This suggestion rapidly proved worthless, since it struck the obstacle that there is no pre-theoretic agreement on what beliefs count as properly basic.

The introduction of the *sensus divinitatus* can be seen as another attempt to defeat the Great Pumpkinites. Properly basic beliefs need grounding in appropriate justificatory circumstances. So a claim that a given class of beliefs is properly basic needs to come with an account of the relevant circumstances. The *sensus divinitatis* story does just that. But note that we will only accept the story if we accept the truth of certain Christian beliefs. Great Pumpkin rears its ugly head again at this point: we can easily imagine other belief systems, world-views, coming equipped with their own anthropologies. These will in turn enable such a world-view to tell a story about how its foundational beliefs are properly basic beliefs. Rose Ann Christian's 1992 paper on Plantinga<sup>7</sup> makes this point very clearly and shows that it is not just a notional one (being exemplified in certain Hindu and Buddhist philosophical systems – see p. 568 of Christian).

This is the charge then that Plantinga's appeal to a Reidian pluralism over sources of properly basic belief faces: it gives rise to relativism and subjectivism in epistemology. Much of the critical literature on Plantinga's early articles in Reformed epistemology can be seen as, in effect, trying to circumvent his refutation of classical foundationalism. He affirms that only classical foundationalism will justify the insistence that rational religious beliefs must be based on evidence. His critics were charging that other reasons can be given for denying proper basicity to religious beliefs. Notably, what was being pressed was that religious belief is not the direct, unmediated outcome of 'the standard package' of cognitive faculties: memory, sense-perception, rational intuition and the like. What is distinctive about items in the standard package? – They are all faculties that we expect *any* compos mentis, adult human being to have. Once we allow a *sensus divinitatis* to play the same role as memory, sense-perception and the like, what is indeed to stop us allowing a *sensus pumpkinitatis* to do a corresponding job for followers of Snoopy? Here is a question about the direction in which a Reidian, moderate, pluralist

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<sup>7</sup> Rose Ann Christian, 'Plantinga, Epistemic Permissivism and Metaphysical Pluralism', *Religious Studies* vol. 28/4, 1992

foundationalism leads. Some would answer: To a defence of items in the standard package against the scepticism implicit in the Way of Ideas but not to Plantinga's religious epistemology. (We will see below that Alston addresses this same issue about the universality of approved belief-forming mechanisms.)

Plantinga's work in religious epistemology soon moved in a direction that in essence meant he could leave behind many facets of the debate on proper basicity he found himself embroiled in. He moved to an externalist stance on epistemology and upon the epistemology of religious belief in *Warrant: the Current Debate*<sup>8</sup>, *Warrant and Proper Function*<sup>9</sup> and *Warranted Christian Belief*<sup>10</sup>. A number of features of this later stance distinguish it from the earlier attack on classical foundationalism and the defence of the properly basic status of religious belief. They include:

- Removal of notions of justification and rationality from centre stage.
- Their replacement by the notion of warrant, warrant being whatever must be added to a true belief that will make into knowledge.
- An externalist view of the property of warrant. Warrant is essentially that property of a belief which ensures that it has been produced by a truth-tracking mechanism in the environment in which the subject finds him/herself. The subject need not be aware of the nature of this mechanism or that his/her beliefs have warrant in order for them to have warrant.
- An account of warrant in terms of 'proper function': a belief has warrant if and only if it is the product of cognitive faculties that are functioning properly in an environment that enables them to deliver true beliefs (or: more true beliefs than false). In addition, the relevant faculties have to be the product of a design plan that means that they do produce true beliefs in the environment in question. The design plan has to be a good one, ensuring that there is a high statistical probability that true beliefs will be produced by these faculties in this environment.

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<sup>8</sup> Alvin Plantinga, *Warrant: The Current Debate* (NY: Oxford University Press, 1993)

<sup>9</sup> Alvin Plantinga, *Warrant and Proper Function* (NY: Oxford University Press, 1993)

<sup>10</sup> Alvin Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief* (NY: Oxford University Press, 2000)

The account of warrant in terms of proper function seems to me to be at root a refinement on reliabilism: true beliefs are knowledge if they are produced by reliable cognitive faculties.

The reasons why the warrant epistemology of late Plantinga leaves behind the earlier debates we have documented can now be spelled out. Notice that he now has an overwhelming reason to reject classical foundationalism. That view was part of an attempt to seek some internal (i.e. open to conscious reflection) property of beliefs that would enable us to tell when our beliefs are rationally held. Externalism sweeps this attempt aside. Plantinga's warrant approach entails straight off that we cannot do epistemology independent of some anthropology or other. We need an account of what cognitive faculties there are, how they function and who or what designed them. This means, as he is fond of stressing, that we cannot tell whether Christian beliefs are warranted without telling whether they are true. If Christian beliefs are true, then they can be warranted for Plantinga. If Christianity is true it will provide an account of human nature and associated matters that will yield the result that we have cognitive faculties enabling us to reliably form beliefs about God. The *sensus divinitatis* is wheeled out again and supplemented by other 'Christian' cognitive faculties (in particular, our receptivity to the instigations of the Holy Spirit). These faculties, if real, would enable us to form Christian beliefs in response to appropriate stimuli. Faculties of inference then enable us to deduce further Christian truths from those produced by stimulation of the distinctively Christian epistemic suite that we possess. In a way, these parts of Plantinga's theory tell us that our epistemology simply cannot be neutral as between our religious beliefs, so that the aim of seeking agreed criteria of proper basicity is now seen as deluded.

The warrant books have one further trick up their sleeve. In *Warrant and Proper Function* Plantinga has an extended argument that, in effect, can be seen as a final attempt to defeat the Great Pumpkinites. He contends across chapters 11 and 12 that only a theistic account of human nature can provide an account of proper function. Only if our cognitive faculties are the product of a design plan, and one that is good, can they yield warranted beliefs. So there is no proper basicity (to use the old terminology), and thus no basis for inferred beliefs, unless some version of theism is true.

Plantinga claims that Reid is one of the sources of the warrant epistemology. There are references throughout *Warrant: the Current Debate* to Reid. He is cited as one source of externalism in epistemology (p. v) and Plantinga refers to 'the debt my views owe to Thomas Reid' (p. vii). Similar references can be found in *Warrant and Proper Function*. I take it that the source for this attribution of externalism to Reid includes such passages as the famous one about the 'mint of Nature' in *IHM* VI, XX. Reid is asked by the sceptic 'Why do you believe the existence of the external object which you perceive?' He replies

The belief, sir, is none of my manufacture; it came from the mint of Nature; it bears her image and superscription; and, if it is not right, the fault is not mine: I even took it upon trust, and without suspicion.

Reid is taken by externalists such as Plantinga to be sharing in their basic assumption that a belief may be warranted even though the subject cannot articulate the ground on which it rests. It is warranted in virtue of being the product of cognitive faculties that are functioning well. The answer to the sceptic does not appeal to reasons or evidence in favour of our belief in the external object but to the fact that we are constructed in such a way that this belief arises in us. Moreover, we must have confidence that the faculties that give rise to such a belief are well-designed and thus are to be trusted<sup>11</sup>.

## II. ALSTON

William Alston is another writer on religious epistemology who claims descent from Reid. In *Perceiving God* he offers an account of the epistemic force of religious experience. The account is structured around the notion of a doxastic practice. According to Alston's general epistemology, our beliefs across a broad range of subject matters are formed within doxastic practices. These are shared and socially established practices in which are enshrined distinctive ways human beings have of moving from various kinds of 'inputs' (stimuli) to beliefs. Examples of such doxastic practices include: sense-perception, rational intuition, introspection and memory.

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<sup>11</sup> An interpretation of Reid along these lines is defended in Falkenstein 'Nativism and the Nature of Thought in Reid's Account of Our Knowledge of the External World' in the *Cambridge Companion to Thomas Reid*, eds T. Cuneo and R. van Woudenburg, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 156-79.

These practices are irreducibly various and they have to be taken on trust for the most part. That is to say, it is difficult, if not impossible, to give them a cogent external justification. Much of *Perceiving God* is devoted to showing that ‘sense-perceptual practice’ (the doxastic practice of forming beliefs about the material world on the basis of sensory experience) cannot be externally justified (see chapter 3 of Alston). Sense-perceptual practice cannot be shown to be reliable on external grounds. This doxastic practice exhibits what is styled ‘significant self-support’ (roughly: beliefs generated by sense perception strongly support each other). However, there is no way in which it can be proved to be reliable when faced with external rivals such as Cartesian scepticism or Berkeleyan idealism. We take it to be reliable and we are entitled so to do – because it is a socially established practice and no one has come up with a refutation of its reliability. Well-established doxastic practices are innocent until proved guilty. Alston contends that the practice, within Christianity, of forming beliefs about God on the basis of apparent perceptions of him, is just such another socially established doxastic practice. It is like others insofar as its reliability cannot be proved on external grounds. It is like others insofar as that reliability has to be conceded unless there is proof positive that it is not reliable.

There are clear links between Alston and Plantinga. Plantinga’s early papers on proper basicity share Alston’s emphasis on religious experience as an immediate ground for religious beliefs. Alston states that many of the beliefs generated by Christian mystical practice will be properly basic: the subject will be entitled to hold them in the absence of inference from other justified beliefs. Alston also rejects classical foundationalism as an exhaustive account of the criteria for properly basic beliefs. (Alston makes these links on pp. 173-75 of *Perceiving God*.)

There is another clear connection between the two authors. Alston’s doxastic practice approach to epistemology is, broadly, an externalist one. On p. 75 he rejects the key requirement of internalism on justified belief that “the justificational status of a belief is, at last typically, open to the reflective grasp of the subject”. In particular, Alston denies the condition that a subject who has an adequate ground for his/her belief must be justified in supposing that the ground is adequate. This particular condition generates a vicious infinite regress. Alston does make some concessions to internalism, but it will be seen that epistemic subjects can

have justified beliefs for him if those subjects form them within socially established, and presumed reliable, doxastic practices while simply taking those practices on trust in an unreflective way. So, he too has a general and a religious epistemology that is removed from evidentialism.

As with Plantinga, so with Alston: Reid is cited as a prime source for the doxastic practice approach to epistemology. Alston in fact links Reid with Wittgenstein (the Wittgenstein of *On Certainty*). These are the two authors from whose writings he has derived the doxastic practice approach. Alston thinks he has support in Reid for the notion that doxastic practices are irreducibly plural. Where Reid speaks of a variety of evidences for beliefs, Alston speaks of a variety of doxastic practices (p. 164). Reid is one with Alston in protesting against the likes of Plato and Descartes and their insistence that nothing counts as knowledge unless it meets the highest conceivable standards and in the counter-insistence that the sources of knowledge are irreducibly plural (pp. 234-35). Alston quotes the Reid passage given above appealing to Nature, and another passage from *IHM* V, VII, in reply to the sceptic as indicating that Reid thinks with Alston that our established doxastic practices have to be relied on because

they are firmly established doxastic practices, so firmly established that 'we cannot help it'; and we have exactly the same basis for trusting sense-perception, memory, nondeductive reasoning, and other sources of belief for which Descartes and Hume were demanding an external validation. (p. 151).

What impresses Alston in Reid, and what he wishes to endorse in his own epistemology, is what he sees as Reid's insistence on: the *givenness* of our routine modes of forming beliefs on the basis of external and internal stimuli; the variety of these modes; the impossibility of trying to get behind these modes and provide them with an external justification; the manner in which the sceptic must rely on these modes even as s/he seeks to question them; and thus the futility of the traditional epistemological debates between sceptic and defender of common sense beliefs.

Alston does note differences between his doxastic approach and Reid's. For example, he remarks on the fact that Reid does not stress the context of belief formation in our practices: 'Reid's perspective is that of a purely cognitive, mentalistic psychology' (p. 165) – and thus contains

little emphasis on the social dimension of epistemology. Alston further remarks on the way in which Reid only endorses ways of forming beliefs from stimuli that are universal to the human race, such as memory and sense-perception (p. 169). It is crucial to Alston's defence of Christian mystical practice as a *prima facie* reliable doxastic practice that we accept as reliable practices that, though well established, are only engaged in by a percentage of the population. His apologetic on behalf of Christian religious experience is peppered with references to other non-universal sensitivities to features of the world – such as the refined palate of the wine connoisseur or the refined ear of the musicologist.

### III. SWINBURNE

In Swinburne will be found a more old fashioned religious epistemology. As indicated at the start of this paper, Swinburne assembles a body of evidence for a core theism, and then proceeds to marshal further evidence for specifically Christian claims about God, God's providence and human destiny. He also gives an account of, and defends, the canons of right reason that must be used to show that this body of evidence shows Christian claims to be more probable than not. Great reliance is placed on Bayes's theorem as giving an account of the correct way of assessing the interplay between evidence for an hypothesis, our background knowledge and the prior probability of that hypothesis. There is a rich interplay between inductive and *a priori* considerations in Swinburne's apologetic. In *The Existence of God* the traditional starting points of natural theological arguments (such as: that there is a universe, that it is ordered) are treated as so many pieces of inductive evidence for the claim that there is a God. But these are combined with wholly *a priori* epistemological principles, notably the principle that 'the simple is more likely to be true than the complex' (a synthetic *a priori* truth according to Swinburne<sup>12</sup>).

In contrast to Plantinga in particular, Swinburne maintains that, though there are many notions of justification, the important form of justification we need for religious beliefs is of an internalist kind.

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<sup>12</sup> See his *Simplicity as Evidence for Truth* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1997)

In his critical notice of *Warranted Christian Belief* in *Religious Studies*<sup>13</sup> Swinburne does not so much deny the truth of Plantinga's account of warrant as declare that it dodges the key question that the religious sceptic asks and the religious believer must answer. This question is: 'Are religious beliefs justified given our evidence and in the light of reflection on that evidence and the inductive standards we use to appraise it?' Only internalism asks the right questions and can thus provide the right answers. Swinburne writes:

Despite what Planting seems to say, there is a clear and all-important question about whether a belief is rational (or justified) which has nothing to do with whether it is justified by the believer's own lights or with whether it is produced by 'properly functioning' processes. In a strong internalist sense, a belief of a person S is rational if it is rendered (evidentially) probable by S's evidence. Evidently – scientists, historians, judges and juries ask this question about their hypotheses. (p. 207)

Swinburne has many specific criticisms of Plantinga's warrant epistemology (see his *Epistemic Justification*<sup>14</sup> for these), but his main criticism of its use in the religious sphere is that it simply ignores the main problem. I would put that problem this way: warrant epistemology (and its predecessor's appeal to proper basicity) opts for a defensive strategy rather than offensive one. The offensive strategy of showing the truth of theistic/Christian claims to those not antecedently convinced is required. Only this will suit a world in which there is much religious diversity. Warrant epistemology only serves to show at best that the believer is entitled to his/her beliefs and that Christian belief is warranted *if it is true*. Exactly the same point can be, and has been, made in critique of Alston<sup>15</sup>. Swinburne states the importance of internalist justification for belief quite clearly on p. 7 of *Epistemic Justification*: 'it is only in so far as the justification of a belief is internally accessible that it can guide a person in deciding what to do'.

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<sup>13</sup> 'Plantinga on Warrant', *Religious Studies*, vol. 37/2, 2001, pp. 202-214. Plantinga responds in the same number, 'Rationality and Public Evidence: A Reply to Richard Swinburne', *Religious Studies* vol. 37/2, 2001, pp. 215-222.

<sup>14</sup> Richard Swinburne, *Epistemic Justification* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001)

<sup>15</sup> See the brilliant paper by N. Kretzman: 'Mystical Perception', in ed. A. Padgett, *Reason and the Christian Religion* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994)

For all Swinburne's defence of internalism as the only *relevant* stance in religious epistemology, there are strong affinities between Swinburne, on the one hand, and Alston and the early Plantinga, on the other. These lie, as indicated at the start of this paper, in the area of religious experience. A crucial portion of the evidence for God's existence in Swinburne's *The Existence of God* is provided by purported experiences of God. It is a striking feature of Swinburne's use of 'the argument from religious experience' that he does not present it as an inference to best explanation. The bulk of chapter 13 presents the argument as an analogical one. The use of sense experience to ground beliefs about the material world is non-inferential for Swinburne. He employs a direct realist theory of sense perception. Statements such as 'I see a tree' do not rest on tacit inferences from facts about sense data. Such a statement is innocent until proved guilty. It is to be treated as justified in the typical circumstances of appearing to see something – unless specific reasons can be found to doubt it. It is justified in a non-inferential way, but it is defeasible. Swinburne appeals to a 'principle of credulity': we are to trust the deliverances of our senses unless facts indicate otherwise. (NB this is not Reid's principle of credulity. That relates to our right to trust the testimony of others. Swinburne has a very Reid-like view of the independent and original warrant to be found in reliance on human testimony, but his phraseology is different.) Swinburne then proceeds to argue that there is good reason to treat experiences of God as analogous to sense-perceptual experiences. They too are innocent until proved guilty. They too provide good non-inferential grounds for believing in their apparent object, provided only that specific reasons for discounting them are not established. They too are governed by the principle of credulity.

All the above is very similar to Alston on religious experience and early Plantinga on properly basic belief. The similarity is marked by Alston (p. 195 of *Perceiving God*). There is no appeal to doxastic practices by Swinburne in his support of the principle of credulity. Rather, like his principle of simplicity, he contends that we have no alternative but to take our sense experiences on initial trust. If we did not do so, we would never get started in the construction of belief systems and would have to surrender ourselves to extreme scepticism. The principle of credulity is another *a priori* epistemic truth. Swinburne's use of religious experience in his apologetics is also bound up from the start with his cumulative,

natural theological argument for God's existence. One reason for doubting an experiential report is a knowledge that it is highly improbable that the thing apparently experienced actually exists. Thus we need to establish that 'God exists' has some minimal probability (meaning: it is not too close to 0.0) in order for the principle of credulity to apply in this case. It is important that the appeal to religious experience in *The Existence of God* comes after such arguments as the cosmological and teleological arguments have added to the probability of 'God exists'. But notice here that there is no complete contrast with Alston. For he too has a role for natural theology in adding to the justification for religious belief provided by Christian mystical practice (see *Perceiving God* p. 295).

Swinburne's use of religious experience within the context of a direct realist, non-inferential theory of perception is typical of many writers in contemporary religious epistemology. This approach to the argument from religious experience has wholly changed the character of debates about its cogency. The general approach to perception and perceptual belief at work here is, of course, very similar to that of Reid's. The approach is fully in line with Reid's attack on the Way of Ideas. We find, however, no references to Reid in Swinburne. This is for the good reason that he is not indebted to him. The philosophy of perception and perceptual belief that Swinburne is working with is derived not from Reid but from post-War philosophers such as David Armstrong and Roderick Chisholm. Their ideas are in turn part of a discussion independent of Reid that grows out of a reaction to the sense-datum and phenomenalist theories of logical positivists and of other 20<sup>th</sup> century epistemologists such as Russell. I don't believe knowledge of Reid is a significant factor in that reaction. (I would hazard that the work of Armstrong, Chisholm and others – consider here John Austin's *Sense and Sensibilia* – predates by a long way the 'rediscovery' of Reid in recent English-speaking philosophy.)

Swinburne's appeal to religious experience shows, then, that there is a strain of anti-evidentialism in his religious epistemology, one that softens the contrast between him and the Reformed epistemologists. There is still a significant divide between the main actors in our story. That is the divide between internalism and externalism in general epistemology and in religious epistemology.

## IV. REID'S RELIGIOUS EPISTEMOLOGY

We have seen that both Plantinga and Alston advance religious epistemologies that they claim have a provenance in Reid. In their opinion, not only does Reid provide objections to the Cartesian/Lockean foundationalism that favours the demand that religious beliefs be based on evidence anyone could recognise, he also supports the externalist approaches to epistemology that allow Alston to claim there is a distinctive doxastic practice of religious forming beliefs and Plantinga to claim that there is a distinctive set of mechanisms that generate them. We have had occasion to note above Alston's lament that Reid only allows universal practices/processes in non-inferential belief formation. We can take this point of difference further. Reid is no Reformed epistemologist. In the *Inquiry* and the *Essays* there is not so much as a mention of distinctive religious epistemic practices or mechanisms. Nor does Reid appeal to religious experience, in the manner of either Alston or Swinburne. If Dale Tuggy's account of Reid's lectures on religion is correct<sup>16</sup>, Reid answered the religious sceptic not by appealing to Nature and its dictates to us, but rather by good old-fashioned appeals to natural theology. He endorses the Samuel Clarke version of the cosmological proof and, in particular, the argument from design. Tuggy (p. 295) quotes Reid as stating

there is as much reason to believe that there is a supreme being, as that there are minds besides our own. From the actions of a human being conducted with wisdom and design we conclude that this being has an intelligent mind, and that this is all the evidence we have of it ... even in the formation of a human body, there is much more design displayed than in any human action. In both cases we see not the cause, but trace it out by its effects.

What the above remarks of Reid show is not a parallel to the Plantinga of *Warranted Christian Beliefs*, but to Plantinga's first foray into religious epistemology: *God and Other Minds*<sup>17</sup>.

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<sup>16</sup> In 'Reid's Philosophy of Religion', *The Cambridge Companion to Thomas Reid*, T. Cuneo and R. van Woudenberg eds (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) pp. 289-213.

<sup>17</sup> Alvin Plantinga, *God and Other Minds* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1969)

I think we can find a parallel (not perhaps all that close) to Plantinga's appeal to mechanisms that provide (some of) us with a belief in God and a right to have that belief in a thinker of early modernity. The parallel is with Lord Herbert of Cherbury's innatist account of belief in a supreme deity in *De Veritate* (of 1624)<sup>18</sup>. Herbert's answer to the question of why we believe in God is that this belief has been implanted in us. The notion of God was placed in our minds when He stocked our faculty of Natural Instinct with all sorts of common notions. Like Plantinga, Herbert's response to the religious sceptic consists in a story of how God has framed our epistemic constitution. But that is not the character of Reid's response at all.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Edward Herbert, *De Veritate*, trans. M. H. Carré (Bristol: University of Bristol, 1937)

<sup>19</sup> After completing this paper my attention was drawn to a discussion of the same topic by Terence Penelhum: 'Thomas Reid and Contemporary Apologetic', *Reid Studies*, vol. 2/1, 1998, pp. 3-14.

# FIRST PERSON AND THIRD PERSON REASONS AND RELIGIOUS EPISTEMOLOGY

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**Abstract.** In this paper I argue that there are two kinds of epistemic reasons. One kind is irreducibly first personal – what I call deliberative reasons. The other kind is third personal – what I call theoretical reasons. I argue that attending to this distinction illuminates a host of problems in epistemology in general and in religious epistemology in particular. These problems include (a) the way religious experience operates as a reason for religious belief, (b) how we ought to understand religious testimony, (c) how religious authority can be justified, (d) the problem of religious disagreement, and (e) the reasonableness of religious conversion.

## I. THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN FIRST PERSON AND THIRD PERSON REASONS

### 1.1.

I assume that believing *p* is a state in which I have settled for myself whether *p*. An epistemic reason is something on the basis of which I can settle for myself whether *p* in so far as my goal is truth, not benefit or some other practical or moral aim. I want to argue that there are two kinds of epistemic reasons, one irreducibly first personal, the other third personal, and that attending to the distinction illuminates a host of philosophical problems, including several that have special importance for philosophy of religion.

What I mean by *theoretical reasons* for believing *p* are facts that are logically or probabilistically connected to the truth of *p*. They are facts

(or propositions) about states of the world or experiences which, taken together, give a cumulative case for or against the fact that *p* (or the truth of *p*).<sup>1</sup> They are not intrinsically connected to believing. We call them reasons because a reasonable person who comes to believe them and grasps their logical relations to *p* will see them as reasons for *p*. They can be shared with others – laid out on the table, so they are third personal. They are relevant from anyone’s point of view. In fact, they do not require a point of view to be reasons. The connections between theoretical reasons and what they are reasons for are among the facts of the universe. Theoretical reasons aggregate and can be used in Bayesian calculations. What we call evidence is most naturally put in the category of theoretical reasons, although the notion of evidence is multiply ambiguous.<sup>2</sup> But when I mention evidence in this paper, I will mean facts that are in the category of theoretical reasons.

In contrast, what I mean by *deliberative reasons* have an essential connection to *me and only to me* in my deliberations about whether *p*. Deliberative reasons connect *me* to getting the truth of *p*, whereas theoretical reasons connect facts about the world with the truth of *p*. Deliberative reasons do not simply provide me a weightier reason for *p* than they provide others. They are not reasons for other persons at all. They are irreducibly first personal.

To see the distinction I have in mind, consider experience as a reason for belief. If you have an experience, the *fact* that you have it is a theoretical reason for believing a variety of propositions. You can tell me about your experience, and if I believe what you tell me, I can then refer to the fact that you had the experience as a reason to believe whatever it supports. You and I can both refer to the fact that you had the experience as a reason to believe something, and so can anybody else who is aware of the fact that you had the experience. The fact that the experience occurred is therefore a theoretical reason. It is on the table for all to consider, and all can consider its logical and probabilistic connections to other facts about the world.

However, you are in a different position than I am with respect to your experience because you not only grasp the fact that you had the experience;

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<sup>1</sup> In this paper I do not distinguish facts from true propositions. If there is a difference, the argument of this paper can be easily amended.

<sup>2</sup> For an excellent survey of the different senses of evidence, see Thomas Kelly’s entry, “Evidence,” in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries>).

in addition, you and you alone *had* the experience. That experience affects many of your reasoning processes, emotional responses, and the way you come to have or give up certain beliefs directly, and that is quite proper. In contrast, the fact that you had the experience is something you and I and many other people can come to believe. My way of describing the contrast is that your experience gives you a deliberative reason to form certain beliefs, whereas the fact that the experience occurred gives anybody a theoretical reason to form certain beliefs.<sup>3</sup> Anybody can form the belief that you had the experience, thereby accessing that fact, but nobody but you can have your experience.

Another type of deliberative reason is what are loosely called intuitions in one of its senses. I will not attempt an account of intuition, but what I have in mind is, very roughly, something internal to the mind that responds with an answer to a question, often as a response to a concrete case. For example, if a fat man is stuck in the mouth of a cave, is it morally permissible to blow him out of the cave to save yourself and the other spelunkers from drowning in the rising tide? My intuition might be no, but perhaps yours is yes. I have no position on the strength of an intuition of this kind as a reason to believe what the intuition supports. Maybe it is strong, maybe it is not. But in so far as it is a reason at all, it is a deliberative reason. My intuitions are mine alone, and they give me but not you a particular kind of reason for certain beliefs. But again, the fact that I have an intuition can be put out on the table. I can tell you that my intuition is such and such, and that then becomes a theoretical reason supporting some position. So the fact that most people think that Gettier cases are not cases of knowledge is a reason for anyone to reject a theory that has the consequence that the believer knows in a Gettier situation, but your own intuition about such cases is a reason for you alone to draw certain conclusions. Intuitions, then, are like experiences. The intuition and the experience provide the agent with first person reasons to believe something, but the fact that the experience occurred or that the intuition is what it is can be treated as evidence, as a theoretical reason for the truth of some proposition.

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<sup>3</sup> My use of the terms “theoretical” and “deliberative” is not essential to the contrast I am making, but the terms call attention to a difference in function that I find helpful.

I propose that there is another important deliberative reason that is more basic for us than any theoretical reasons we can identify. We can see the need for such a reason by reflecting on the need for a link between third person reasons and something in myself. Theoretical reasons do not operate as reasons for me to believe anything until I take them on board. But *my taking* a certain set of theoretical reasons for *p* as reasons to believe *p* is not sufficient in itself to make it likely that *p* is true. That is because my taking a set of theoretical reasons to be reasons to believe *p* is irrelevant to the actual connection between those reasons and *p* unless I have taken them properly – properly identified the facts, figured out the correct logical and probabilistic relations between those facts and *p*, have appreciated the significance of individual facts, and have not left anything out. But my reasons to believe *that* depend upon the more basic belief that my faculties are trustworthy. And that raises the question of what reasons I have to believe that my faculties are trustworthy. It has been pointed out by others that any such reasons are circular. I have no way of telling that my faculties in general get me to the truth without using those faculties.

A reasonable response to the phenomenon of epistemic circularity is epistemic self-trust.<sup>4</sup> I am not arguing here that no other response is reasonable (although it is my position that no other response is *as* reasonable). But I am claiming that it is reasonable to believe my faculties are generally trustworthy, and it is reasonable to dispel doubt about the trustworthiness of my faculties or hold such doubt at bay, a doubt that naturally arises upon reflection about the phenomenon of epistemic circularity. I think that means that in addition to including the belief that I am generally trustworthy, self-trust includes an affective component, a component of feeling trusting. That is because doubt is partly affective, and it takes an affective state to dispel it. It is in virtue of self-trust – a state that is partly affective, that I take theoretical reasons I identify to point to the truth of some proposition *p*, and I am reasonable in doing so.

I said above that a reason to believe *p* is a state in virtue of which it is reasonable to think some proposition *p* is true. It so, self-trust

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<sup>4</sup> See Richard Foley, *Intellectual Trust in Oneself and Others* (Cambridge University Press, 2001) and William Alston, *Beyond Justification: Dimensions of Epistemic Evaluation*, (Cornell University Press, 2005).

is a reason because it is in virtue of self-trust that I believe that what I take to be theoretical reasons for believing *p* are truth-indicators, and that is a reasonable thing to do. Self-trust *is* a reason, but a reason of a distinctively first personal kind. It is a second order reason because it is a reason to believe that I have properly identified theoretical reasons for a belief. The way self-trust gives me a deliberative reason to think I am properly connected to theoretical reasons shows that there are deliberative reasons that are more basic for me than any theoretical reasons I can identify. Of course, they are not more basic than theoretical reasons, which are facts of the universe. But they are more basic than my use of any theoretical reasons in deliberations about what the truth is.

Deliberative reasons can therefore be first order reasons like experience or intuition, or second order reasons like self-trust. I want to argue next that trust in myself (a deliberative reason) can give me a reason to trust others (another deliberative reason). So a deliberative reason can be a reason to have other deliberative reasons.

How does self-trust give me a reason to trust others? My position is that if, in believing in a way I trust, I come to believe that others have the same faculties I trust in myself, then given the *a priori* principle that I ought to treat like cases alike, I have a reason to trust their faculties. If I reasonably trust their faculties, I have a reason to believe the deliverances of their faculties. Trust in someone else gives me a deliberative reason to believe some proposition *p* because my reason is based on their similarity to *me* and my trust in myself.<sup>5</sup>

If I am right that trust is partly an affective state, and if I am also right that trust can give me a reason to believe *p*, then a state that is partly affective can give me a reason to believe *p*. This is an epistemic reason, not a practical or moral reason. I think that there are probably other affective states that are deliberative reasons for belief. One is the emotion of admiration. I may epistemically admire someone and trust that admiration upon reflection. Admiration for a person can give me a reason to think that she has the truth in some domain that includes *p*, and it can give me a reason to try to imitate her in a way that includes

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<sup>5</sup> I defend the argument of this paragraph in detail in *Epistemic Authority: A Theory of Trust, Authority, and Autonomy in Belief*, based on my 2010 Wilde Lectures and my 2011 Kaminski Lectures (manuscript in progress), chap. 3.

coming to believe *p*. In that case my admiration for her is a deliberative reason to believe *p*. There are no doubt theoretical reasons to admire her, but those are not the reasons for believing *p*.<sup>6</sup>

Deliberative reasons to believe *p* because of trust or admiration for another person are not necessarily reasons to think that the other person has theoretical reasons for *p*. Of course, it often happens that a person who has the truth whether *p* also has theoretical reasons to believe *p*, but my reason to think someone has the truth whether *p* is not the same as reason to think that she has theoretical reasons to believe *p*. Even if she has theoretical reasons for *p*, that is not what I have reason to believe. Deliberative reasons like trust and admiration are higher order reasons to think that I or someone else has the truth whether *p*, and therefore has reason to believe *p*, but the reason may be deliberative rather than theoretical.

We have looked at a number of kinds of deliberative reasons: an experience, an intuition, trust in myself, trust in others, admiration. The first two have a third person analogue that is a theoretical reason. The fact that someone had an experience, and the fact that someone has an intuition can be treated by anybody as a theoretical reason to believe *p*. Trust and admiration are different. The fact that you trust something or admire someone is not a theoretical reason. It is not the kind of reason that can be put out on the table for all to consider in favor of the truth of some proposition. It may, however, be a deliberative reason.

## 1.2.

There are important differences between theoretical and deliberative reasons that require us to think of them in distinct categories. First, deliberative reasons and theoretical reasons do not aggregate. That follows from the first person character of deliberative reasons and the third person character of theoretical reasons. They cannot aggregate because nobody has figured out how to put the first person and third

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<sup>6</sup> The fact that there are theoretical reasons to admire someone in the domain of her believing *p* is not sufficient to give me a theoretical reason to believe *p* because reasons are not transitive. If *A* is a reason for *B* and *B* is a reason for *C*, it does not follow that *A* is a reason for *C*. So if *A* is a set of theoretical reasons to admire Sarah, and admiring Sarah is a reason to imitate her in believing *p*, it does not follow that theoretical reasons *A* gives me reason to believe *p*.

person points of view together. Deliberative reasons neither increase nor decrease the theoretical case for some proposition *p*. My deliberative reasons are not facts of the universe that affect the theoretical case for *p*, and I can grasp that even if *I* am the one giving the theoretical case. So suppose I am giving the case for the proposition that driving while talking on a mobile phone is dangerous. I would point to the studies by reliable researchers that show that people who talk on the phone while driving have reduced peripheral vision, slower response time, and a higher accident rate than people who do not, but I would not add that I trust the people who did the studies and they believe its conclusion (studies of that sort rarely even mention the personal conclusion drawn by the researchers). The fact that people I trust believe what they believe or have certain epistemic qualities does not make the relationship between the data in the studies and the conclusion stronger. To refer to it when giving the evidence linking mobile phone use and auto safety is beside the point. If driving while on the phone is dangerous, it does not matter what anybody anywhere thinks about it. Of course, I might cite my experience while driving on the phone as a reason for me to believe it is unsafe, and you could cite the fact that I had that experience when giving your theoretical reasons for the same conclusion. But when you cite the fact that I had the experience as a theoretical reason for believing that talking on the phone while driving is unsafe, you are not referring to the same thing to which I refer when I cite my experience.

Although deliberative reasons and theoretical reasons do not aggregate, they are both kinds of reasons to think some proposition is true. Together they can increase or decrease my confidence that *p*. So if I believe *p* based on theoretical reasons and then find out that you believe *p* too, that increases my confidence that *p*. But while it is true that finding out that you believe *p* increases my confidence in myself in the way I come to believe *p*, and therefore increases my confidence in *p*, it is not additional theoretical evidence for *p*. If we were listing the facts of the universe that indicate the dangers of driving on the phone, we would not list the people who believe that it is dangerous.

Reasons do not aggregate in the other direction either. I might believe *p* because of deliberative reasons – say, it is because I epistemically trust you and you believe *p*. Then I get a piece of evidence that *p* and that increases my confidence that *p*. In that case it might appear that

the theoretical reason increases the force of my deliberative reason; it increases my trust in you. But that also is a mistake. Getting a piece of evidence for *p* does not support my trust in you when you believe *p*. It shows that your conclusion is more likely to be correct, and so I am more confident in *p*, but even if I got heaps of evidence for *p*, that should not increase my confidence that you are trustworthy in the way you came to your belief *p*. I could get evidence that you are trustworthy, but that is not part of the theoretical case for *p*. It is part of the theoretical case that you are trustworthy.

I am not claiming that the beliefs of others cannot be treated as evidence. I could get evidence that you are reliable in some domain and evidence that you have a belief in that domain. That would give me a theoretical reason to have the belief. It could be put out on the table as inductive evidence for the truth of the belief. That is not the same as the trust I have in you that can give me a deliberative reason to believe what you believe or what you tell me. I have described trust as a state that is partly epistemic and partly affective, and trust in others arises because it is a commitment of my attitude towards myself. A judgment of reliability is a third person judgment that involves nothing about personal relations or agency. In a judgment of reliability a person is treated no differently than a thermometer or a calculator.

Theoretical reasons aggregate with each other since they are third-personal. Deliberative reasons can affect other deliberative reasons, but your deliberative reasons do not aggregate with mine. Nonetheless, your deliberative reasons can affect mine. If I trust you and you tell me that you trust someone else or some authoritative body, I might take that as a reason to trust that person or body. But if I do not trust you and you tell me you trust yourself or someone else, your trust is irrelevant to me. Your deliberative reasons are relevant to me only in so far as they connect with *my* deliberative reasons.

There is another interesting difference between theoretical reasons and deliberative reasons. I have no control at all over the relation between theoretical reasons for *p* and *p*, but I exercise executive control over deliberative reasons. It is because of my deliberative reasons that what

I believe is up to me.<sup>7</sup> I am not suggesting that deliberative reasons are voluntary, but my agency is involved in deliberative reasons, whereas it is irrelevant to theoretical reasons. By the nature of deliberative reasons, they connect me and the exercise of my reflective faculties with the aim I have in exercising those faculties in the domain of belief. For present purposes I am assuming the aim is truth, although we can also have deliberative reasons to think that our faculties connect us to other epistemic ends such as understanding.

To summarize what I have said so far:

- Theoretical reasons are 3<sup>rd</sup> personal, deliberative reasons are 1<sup>st</sup> personal.
- Theoretical reasons have no essential connection to belief; deliberative reasons are essentially connected to my deliberations about what to believe.
- Theoretical and deliberative reasons do not aggregate. Deliberative reasons for me to believe p do not increase the theoretical case for p. Theoretical reasons for p do not increase my deliberative reasons for believing p.
- There are deliberative reasons that are always more basic than any theoretical reasons I can identify.
- I have no control over theoretical reasons, whereas deliberative reasons are reasons for me as an agent and I use them as an agent.

Both theoretical and deliberative reasons are reasons, and they are truth-directed. They are epistemic, not practical. Theoretical reasons are facts that support the truth of the proposition p. Deliberative reasons are reasons that support my believing p in so far as my aim is truth. They are reasons that support *my* believing p rather than your believing p. Both deliberative reasons and the theoretical reasons I identify increase my confidence in my belief p.

The distinction I am proposing is not the same as the distinction between first order and second order epistemic reasons. There are both first order and second order theoretical reasons and first order and second order deliberative reasons. As I have said, the fact that an

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<sup>7</sup> For a different kind of defense of the position that what I believe is “up to me,” see Richard Moran in *Authority and Estrangement: An Essay on Self-Knowledge* (Princeton University Press, 2001).

experience occurred is a first order theoretical reason for various beliefs; the experience is a first order deliberative reason. The fact that a certain person is reliable is a second order theoretical reason to believe what she believes; my epistemic trust in that person is a second order deliberative reason.

The distinction between agent-relative and agent-neutral reasons in ethics is closer to the distinction I am drawing here.<sup>8</sup> There are different ways to characterize agent-relative reasons, but sometimes an agent-relative reason is treated as a reason other persons can have, but it has a different force for the agent than for others. For example, everyone has a reason to prevent murders, but the agent has a special reason not to commit a murder herself. In contrast, what I mean by a deliberative reason is a reason only a certain person can have.<sup>9</sup>

In addition, agent-relative reasons are generally treated as reasons that, while applying in a special way to a particular agent, are reasons for that agent because of some general principle. In this way of looking at reasons, agent-relative reasons are recognizable by persons other than the agent as reasons for that agent independent of the agent's deliberations. So, for example, my agent-relative reason not to commit a murder is not dependent upon my view of the matter. Everyone knows in advance that I have such a reason, and it is not up to me whether that reason applies to me. In contrast, I have proposed that deliberative reasons are connected with the agent's agency, and it is possible that whether something is a deliberative reason for her in some situation is up to her.

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<sup>8</sup> Thomas Nagel is generally credited with introducing a form of this distinction in *The Possibility of Altruism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970), where he distinguished subjective and objective reasons for action. Derek Parfit introduced the terms "agent-relative" and "agent-neutral" reasons in *Reasons and Persons* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), and Nagel subsequently adopted this usage. For an overview of different approaches to this distinction and their respective merits, see Michael Ridge, "Reasons for Action: Agent-Neutral vs. Agent-Relative," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries>).

<sup>9</sup> Derek Parfit refers to this difference as the difference between Nagel's distinction and his own very similar distinction. Parfit says: "Nagel's subjective reasons are reasons only for the agent. I call these agent-relative. When I call some reason agent-relative, I am not claiming that this reason cannot be a reason for other agents. All that I am claiming is that it may not be." (Parfit, 1984, p. 143). In this respect my distinction is more like Nagel's than Parfit's.

That is a substantive claim about deliberative reasons that might not affect the way the distinction is made, so perhaps the terminology of agent-relative and agent-neutral epistemic reasons is an appropriate usage for the distinction I have described in this paper. I have no objections to using that terminology, provided that the differences between my way of characterizing the two kinds of reasons and its usage by other authors is recognized.

## II. APPLYING THE DISTINCTION TO PROBLEMS IN RELIGIOUS EPISTEMOLOGY

### 2.1.

The distinction between theoretical and deliberative reasons makes it easier to understand a number of epistemic phenomena. First, it explains *the puzzle of how experience can be a reason for belief*, the enduring problem of the foundation of empirical knowledge. The problem is that the relation between my experience and a proposition I come to believe based on that experience is different in kind from the relation between one of my beliefs and another. There is no way to solve this problem by turning experiences into facts or propositional beliefs in an attempt to make all reasons theoretical. The fact that I have a certain sensory experience of seeing yellow gives me a theoretical reason to believe there is something yellow there, but my grasp of the fact that I have the experience of seeing yellow must itself be justified by the experience of seeing yellow. The foundation of empirical knowledge is not a propositional belief, much less some neutral fact about the universe, but something of an entirely different kind, and the relation between an instance of that kind and a propositional belief differs qualitatively from the relation between one propositional belief and another.

The distinction between two kinds of epistemic reasons can be used to explain this difference. An experience is a deliberative reason for the person who has the experience to form certain beliefs. Those beliefs then give her theoretical reasons to form certain other beliefs when she grasps the relation between those reasons and what they are reasons for. Since we already know that the link between experience and belief has to be different in kind from the link between one belief and another, we seek

an explanation for the difference, and the difference between first person and third person reasons gives us such an explanation.

This distinction is important for the rationality of religious belief based on religious experience. A religious experience gives the subject an irreducibly first person reason for belief, one that differs qualitatively from the relation between the fact that the experience occurred and a belief it supports, a relation to which anyone has access, in principle. The distinction between the two kinds of reasons is particularly important for religious experience because religious experience may be uncommon within a population, and that makes it difficult for many people to access the fact that a religious experience has occurred. It is not unreasonable for someone to be skeptical about the evidential support given to a religious belief by the fact that someone else had a religious experience if experiences of that kind are qualitatively different from any experiences that person has had. We usually think that a religious experience is a stronger reason for religious belief for the person who has the experience than for other persons, but I think it is important to recognize a qualitative difference, not merely a difference in degree. In my opinion, discussion of religious experience as grounds for religious belief is advanced by focusing on the way deliberative reasons operate in a rational person. The process is very different when the only relevant reasons are theoretical.

## 2.2.

The distinction between the two kinds of reasons also makes it easier to understand the *practice of testimony*, which can be interpreted either as giving the recipient a theoretical reason for a belief or as giving her a deliberative reason. Most of the literature on testimony treats it as giving the recipient a theoretical reason. According to the reductionist model, the recipient makes an inductive inference from the evidence that a testifier is reliable in the relevant domain and that she has testified that p, to the conclusion that p. Anything can be treated as evidence, and there is nothing preventing a person from making such an inference. When she does so, she has a third person reason to believe what another persons says. Many so-called non-reductionists also see testimony as giving the subject evidence for belief, only they think the evidence is direct rather

than inferential.<sup>10</sup> In these evidence models, the testifier is treated the same way we treat a computer or a clock. The testifier gives anybody in similar circumstances a reason to believe the testimony.

But given what I have said, I cannot consistently treat other persons as simply sources of evidence (theoretical reasons) for me. It is because of trust in myself that I must trust them. When I trust someone else and they believe in a way I trust, I have a deliberative reason to believe the same thing. The person I trust may tell me what she believes in a way that expresses an intention that I believe it too. When she does so, she is asking me for trust, and if I grant it, I come to believe what she tells me on her word. There is a relationship between the testifier and myself in which each of us plays a role. The testifier assures me, the recipient, that *p* is true and that she has taken the responsibility to make the belief justified (or in my preferred terminology, epistemically conscientious). I rely upon her for the conscientious formation of the belief and defer to her if challenged.<sup>11</sup> Since telling involves an interpersonal relationship on this model, there is a sense in which belief on testimony is within the control of the recipient. The evidence view of testimony cannot explain that. The evidential view makes it a mystery how asking for trust and granting it can provide a *reason* for anybody to believe something. It does not seem to be in the right category to be a reason for belief.<sup>12</sup> But we can see why the evidence view of testimony exists. It is the view a person is forced to have if the only epistemic reasons she recognizes are theoretical.

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<sup>10</sup> This is a point made by Benjamin McMyler, *Testimony, Trust, and Authority*, forthcoming, Oxford University Press, 2011, chaps 2 and 3. McMyler argues that testimony gives the recipient a second-person reason to believe what is testified. I have no objection to calling trust in others a second person epistemic reason for belief. Trust in *you* as a reason to believe something includes an irreducible reference to *me*. The important point for my argument here is that trust in others is clearly distinguishable from theoretical reasons, and it has the properties of first person, deliberative reasons.

<sup>11</sup> This model is close to the Assurance model of testimony of Richard Moran, "Getting Told and Being Believed," in *The Epistemology of Testimony*, edited by J. Lackey and E. Sosa (Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 272-306.

<sup>12</sup> As Richard Moran says, it seems as if my recognizing the speaker's intention ought to be pointless. It does not add to my evidence as interpreter to learn that in addition to his believing *p*, the speaker also has the intention that I should believe *p*. See "Getting Told and Being Believed," p. 15. Moran mentions Paul Grice's much earlier use of that point.

The interpretation of the practice of testimony is important for religious epistemology because divine revelation is testimony from God. On the evidence model of testimony, divine testimony gives the recipient either direct or inferential evidence for the content of the testimony. So belief on revelation can be interpreted as based on an inference that the source of some putative revelation is divine and hence reliable, the position of John Locke.<sup>13</sup> Alternatively, divine testimony can be interpreted as direct evidence for the content of the testimony. Anti-reductionists about testimony typically follow Thomas Reid, who thought of belief on testimony as directly justified in the way he thought perceptual beliefs are directly justified by perceptual experience. On this model, the recipient of divine testimony has direct evidence for the truth of the testimony. Notice that the adherent of this approach agrees with Locke that a revelatory event is evidence for the recipient. The difference is that this view makes the evidence non-inferential, whereas Locke makes it inferential.

But if central cases of testimony give the recipient deliberative rather than theoretical reasons for belief, it seems to me that revelation should be treated differently. The ground of belief in revelation is trust in God, and that gives me a deliberative reason to believe what God tells me. When God tells me that *p*, God takes responsibility for the truth of *p* for me and for all other intended recipients of his revelation. God intends that I believe him, and he acknowledges that we who are the recipients place epistemic trust in him by believing him. Our responsibility is to trust appropriately. It is God's responsibility to make the belief true.

There are a number of different ways trust can be an appropriate deliberative reason to believe testimony from God. Some people's trust is grounded in other deliberative reasons such as religious experience or the admiration they have for the Scriptural message.

My view is that trust in another person is justified by my conscientious judgment that trusting that person will survive my own conscientious

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<sup>13</sup> See Locke, "Of Faith and Reason, and Their Distinct Provinces," in *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Bk. IV, Ch. 18, Sec. 7. See also Locke's posthumously published essay, "A Discourse of Miracles."

self-reflection.<sup>14</sup> Believing a person who is currently speaking to me or who has written a book or sent me an email is not very mysterious, but believing God requires a theory of revelation to explain how communication between God and me can succeed. My point here is not to give a theory of revelation, but to point out that a theory of revelation must respect the way in which testimony operates between two persons. If testimony involves a personal request for trust and a granting of trust, that element must be a component of an account of divine revelation.

### 2.3.

The distinction between theoretical and deliberative reasons also helps us avoid confusion in framing the currently popular topic of *reasonable disagreement*. Suppose I believe *p* and you believe not *p*. We get together and compare our evidence, so now we have all the same evidence. Our evidence can include the facts that we have each had certain experiences. We now have the same theoretical reasons. A problem arises when, in addition to the evidence on the table, I know that you believe not *p* and I trust you in the way you acquired your belief not *p*. I now seem to have a weaker case for *p* than I had before.

This situation is not especially problematic if we think of the conflict as arising within one's theoretical reasons. Theoretical reasons may or may not include facts about people's beliefs. Let us suppose first that they do. The issue, then, is that one reliable person who happens to be me believes *p*, but another reliable person who happens to be you believes not *p*. This conflict is no different than the conflict that arises when neither of the persons with conflicting beliefs is myself. It is the common problem of a clash in evidence, and it is presumably resolved by awaiting more evidence. In any case, there is no *special* problem when the disagreement between myself and another is interpreted as this sort of conflict within theoretical reasons.

There is another way the person who sees the problem as a conflict within theoretical reasons can look at the situation. They might exclude from the evidence the fact that the believers have the beliefs they have. The idea is that persons are simply conduits for communicating evidence

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<sup>14</sup>I defend this idea as the ground for epistemic trust and belief on the authority of individuals and communities in *Epistemic Authority*, cited in note 3.

to each other. Once the evidence is on the table, it does not matter what anybody believes. What someone believes is a fact about what they do with the evidence; it is not evidence. It might appear that we are forced to draw this conclusion because we do not treat our own belief as evidence. If I am considering the case for and against  $p$ , once I start to believe  $p$ , I do not think that then I have additional evidence for  $p$ . My believing  $p$  does not increase my theoretical case for  $p$ . But if *my* believing  $p$  has no effect on the case for  $p$ , *your* believing  $p$  should have no effect either. What people believe is not part of the theoretical reasons for belief. On this approach disagreement is not a problem.

If the only reasons for belief are theoretical, then, disagreement is a problem of evidence pointing in conflicting directions, which is not mysterious or surprising, or it is no problem at all. But reasonable people do experience their disagreement with other reasonable people as a problem, and it is necessary to explain that. Suppose I believe  $p$  and I have certain theoretical reasons upon which I base my belief. As I have argued, my confidence in  $p$  is not determined solely by those reasons because those reasons by themselves are not sufficient to justify me in believing  $p$  in a non-circular way. I must also trust that my faculties have properly handled the evidence, which means not only that I have figured out the correct logical and probabilistic relations between the evidence and  $p$ , but that I appreciate the significance of individual pieces of evidence, and that I have not left anything out. I need to trust that I have used my faculties well and have the relevant intellectual virtues. But given that my confidence in my belief  $p$  depends upon the above, and given that my trust in myself commits me to trust others who are relevantly like myself, the fact that someone else who is relevantly like me believes not  $p$  gives me a reason to trust his belief not  $p$  and to distrust my belief  $p$ . The problem of reasonable disagreement is therefore a problem that arises among my deliberative reasons.

When we consider deliberative reasons for belief, that gives us a different response to the argument that your belief should not count as evidence for me unless mine does also. If a belief is formed in a way I trust, that *does* give me a deliberative reason to believe it. The perhaps surprising conclusion that if *I* form a belief  $p$  in a way I trust, that gives me a deliberative reason to (continue to) believe  $p$ , just as *your* believing not  $p$  in a way I trust gives me a deliberative reason to believe not  $p$ .

The objector who claims that your belief does not give me a reason to believe anything unless mine does also is correct. There is a symmetry between your belief and mine as reasons for belief. Neither belief gives me a theoretical reason to believe. Both beliefs give me a deliberative reason to believe. The problem of disagreement arises when I trust both myself and someone else who has a conflicting belief.

Religious disagreement was recognized as a problem for religious belief well before the topic of reasonable disagreement drew attention from epistemologists. What people did *not* do was to reason as follows: I and my co-religionists are reliable people and we believe p. The believers in these other religions are also reliable people and they believe not p. If that was what they were thinking, the conflict in their evidence would not have been very interesting, as I said. But people also did not take the other approach to disagreement within theoretical reasons mentioned above. That is, they did not say that the conflicting beliefs of other people are irrelevant because beliefs are not evidence. They were presumably worried about something else. Many people found that their experiences of close association with persons in other religious communities led them to place a substantial amount of trust in those persons, and consequently in their beliefs. They interpreted their trust in those others as giving them a *reason* to believe what the others believed, a reason that conflicted with the reasons they already had to believe in their own religion due to trust in themselves. It is very difficult to explain why this kind of experience leads to a clash of reasons for belief unless we are talking about deliberative reasons.

#### 2.4.

The difference between theoretical and deliberative reasons also explains the primary feature of *acting or believing on authority*. According to Joseph Raz, the distinguishing feature of authoritative directives is that they give the subject a pre-emptive reason to obey the authority, where a pre-emptive reason is a reason that replaces the subject's other reasons for and against performing the act. For instance, if I stop at a red light on the authority of the law, then the fact that the law requires me to stop is my reason for stopping, a reason that replaces any other reasons

I have for and against stopping at the light.<sup>15</sup> I will not argue here that acting on authority in this way can be justified. My point is only that acting on authority is something people do, and what they are doing is to treat their reasons for acting as the authority dictates in a certain way, one in which the authority's directive becomes *the* reason for the act, replacing other reasons. But it is very hard to see how one reason can replace another when both reasons are theoretical. In order to let one reason replace others, I, the subject, must take the authority's directive as having a certain force for me. I am free to take it as authoritative or not. I therefore exercise the executive function of an agent when I act on authority. My reason to do so must therefore be deliberative.

I argue that the same point applies to believing on authority as to acting on authority. My position is that the belief or testimony of another person whom I conscientiously take to be more trustworthy than myself in some domain can give me a pre-emptive reason to believe what the authority believes or testifies.<sup>16</sup> The distinction between theoretical and deliberative reasons makes it easier to see how this can happen. The fact that the authority has a belief *p* pre-empts my theoretical reasons for and against *p*. But pre-emption seems strange if all epistemic reasons are theoretical.

The rationality of taking religious beliefs on authority gets very little attention in religious epistemology and I would like to see that change. I believe that it can be reasonable to take a religious belief pre-emptively out of trust in a religious authority. My reason to take a belief on authority is deliberative. It depends upon a certain connection between the authority and myself, and I exercise the control of an agent when I do so.

The erosion of trust in authority in modern life includes the loss of *reasons* to believe or act as the authority directs. Religious communities have much to contribute to our understanding of building and rebuilding the relationships that give persons deliberative reasons to trust authority. In fact, religious communities may be the most important kind of community in which trust in persons with whom one lacks a direct relationship still exists. I propose that an investigation of the reasons why members of religious communities accept authority in their community

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<sup>15</sup> Joseph Raz, *The Morality of Freedom* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988).

<sup>16</sup> I argue for this view in *Epistemic Authority*, chap. 5.

will lead nowhere if we expect the reasons to be theoretical, but will be enlightening if we attend to deliberative reasons.

## 2.5.

Finally, I think that *conversion* cannot be explained except by deliberative reasons. Rarely does anyone convert to a religion because of theoretical reasons he did not previously have. But conversion is sometimes the reasonable thing to do. Trust or admiration for another person or for a tradition or for the sacred texts of a religion is typically the reason for conversion, not just the cause. The fact that conversion can be reasonable is very difficult to explain without reference to deliberative reasons. Of course, someone who maintains that the only kind of epistemic reasons are theoretical will deny that it is ever rational to change one's epistemic stance towards a proposition (belief, disbelief, withholding belief) when one's apprehension and evaluation of the theoretical reasons do not change, but my purpose in this paper is not to convince anyone of the rationality of conversion. I mention conversion as an example of a phenomenon of change of belief that many people do find rational, which deserves more attention in the literature, and which I conjecture cannot be explained except by reference to deliberative reasons.<sup>17</sup>

## CONCLUSION

In this paper I have proposed that distinguishing first person from third person epistemic reasons permits us to get a better understanding of some important problems in epistemology in general and religious epistemology in particular. The problems I have mentioned have something in common. They reveal the way human agency operates in the attempt to get the truth, not just in human action in the overt sense of action. The nature of the self and its executive power to manage

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<sup>17</sup> For a classic historical account of the rise of conversion as a phenomenon in the West, see A.D. Nock, *Conversion* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 1998). Nock argues that in the ancient world people could be converted to philosophies such as Pythagoreanism, Platonism, Epicureanism, and Stoicism, but not to the ancient Greek or Roman religions. Conversion became important with the rise of Christianity because Christianity included answers to the ultimate questions posed by philosophers, yet it was also in competition with pagan religion since it required people to make a choice.

itself is such a difficult problem, it is unsurprising that epistemologists often prefer to bracket it off from the problems of direct interest to epistemology. But if I am right, we cannot do that without distorting the relationship between epistemic reasons and what they are reasons for. What *I* reasonably take to be reasons to believe some proposition *p* is not identical to the neutral facts that any reasonable person would take to be reasons supporting *p*. But as a reasonable person I must figure out how to combine theoretical and deliberative reasons in my epistemic psychology in a way that gives me a determinate answer to the question whether *p*. It is particularly important that we do not ignore the distinction between the two kinds of reasons in the domain of religious belief since religious belief is a particular person's answer to her own religious questions, yet its content is also the property of all reasonable persons in their common attempt to find the truth.

# HANS JONAS' FEEBLE THEODICY: HOW ON EARTH COULD GOD RETIRE?

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**Abstract.** In this paper, we criticize Hans Jonas' analogy between God's power and the operation of physical forces. We wonder why, if omnipotence had proved to be "a self-contradictory concept", does Jonas still need to invoke the occurrence of horrendous evils to support the view that "God is not all powerful". We suggest that "God's retreating into himself in order to give room to the world, renouncing his being and divesting himself of his deity" are beautiful but inconsistent metaphors of creation. Our central claim is that God's alleged retirement, even if it were conceivable, would not the least diminish his responsibility in the occurrence of evil.

## INTRODUCTION: WHAT JONAS DOES NOT ARGUE

Hans Jonas' famous *Concept of God after Auschwitz* (1984) is no doubt one of the most impressive philosophical reactions against the horrendous evils of the past century. On the one hand, Jonas presents his theodicy as a mythological scenario, in the mood of Plato's *Timaeus*. He describes it as "a piece of frankly speculative theology", and finally acknowledges it to be "but stammering". His lecture was conceived "like an answer [that could not be denied] to the long-gone cry [of victims] to a silent God". So, at first sight, Jonas' lecture does not seem to deserve any argumentative assessment. It looks like a moving tribute to the victims of Nazism, rather than like a conceptual analysis of how God's traditional attributes may or may not be jeopardized by the occurrence of horrendous evils. The reasons he gives for renouncing the omnipotence of God are more exciting reasons than justifying ones. I do not mean that exciting are

forcedly bad reasons. They may dictate our compassionate behaviour in circumstances of distress. But they do not allow us to make conclusive statements about God's inability to intervene.

Anyway, on the other hand, Jonas argues that "on a purely logical plane ... omnipotence is a self contradictory concept"; and that "God's goodness is compatible with the existence of evil only if God is not *all* powerful". This is enough to submit Jonas' lecture to a conceptual inquiry into the coherence of his views. Of course, one might feel very uneasy, especially here in Poland, to take the horrendous sufferings as examples or counter-examples in an academic disputation on the problem of evil. As Eleonor Stump recently put it: "some evils are not fit objects for the academic exploration of the problem of evil"<sup>1</sup>. I cannot be but impressed by the deep sense of respect involved in this claim. But who will draw the line between academically bearable and unbearable instances of suffering? I will not.

Let us quickly recall the core of Jonas' claim. Given "the event of which Auschwitz has become the symbol", Jonas raises the terrible question: "And God let it happen. What God could let it happen?"<sup>2</sup> At this stage, Jonas could have rephrased the traditional argument from horrendous evils: A perfectly good agent will prevent any evil unless it is morally permissible or unless he cannot prevent it.

- (1) Some evils that occurred during WWII are in no way morally permissible.
- (2) God did not prevent those non-permissible evils.
- (3) God is perfectly good.
- (4) God could not prevent those non-permissible evils.
- (5) God is not omnipotent.

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<sup>1</sup> Eleonor Stump, *Wandering in Darkness*, Oxford University Press, 2010, p. 16.

<sup>2</sup> *The Journal of Religion*, vol. 67, no. 1 (Jan 1987), Chicago University Press, p. 3. Jonas describes the destruction of human beings in the following terms: "Dehumanization by utter degradation and deprivation preceding their dying, no glimmer of dignity was left to the freights bound for final solution ..." Few reviews in the area of analytical philosophy. Huge influence in the Continental philosophy: E. Jüngel, *Gottes ursprüngliches Anfangen als schöpferische Selbstbegrenzung. Ein Beitrag zum Gespräch mit Hans Jonas über den "Gottesbegriff nach Auschwitz"*, in: H. Deuser u.a. (eds.), *Gottes Zukunft - Zukunft der Welt* (FS Jürgen Moltmann), München 1986, 265-275. See Hans Hermann Henrix: "Powerlessness of God? A Critical Appraisal of Hans Jonas's Idea of God after Auschwitz" in *Jewish Christian Relations* (<http://www.jcrelations.net/en/?item=757>)

This is not Jonas' strategy: because in order to perform it, he would have to justify premise (2). But he considers without discussion the premise (2) as obviously granted: this "wholesale annihilation, he says, [...] defied all possible endowment with meaning". "The victims, he adds, did not die for the sake of [anything]". Let's briefly comment upon this. Of course it would be shocking to claim that they died for the sake of the exercise of free-will, or that their death provided opportunities to show courage or patience. This kind of justification has become alien to contemporary sensitivity. But being shocking does not imply being false. Nevertheless, Jonas admits, without any further investigation, that some non-permissible evils have occurred, that ought to have been prevented, if only they could have been. This is of course begging the question. Clearly, Jonas does not make the shift of premises suggested by W. Rowe.<sup>3</sup>

Rowe construed the traditional argument from morally non-permissible evils 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) 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.<sup>4</sup>

Rowe claimed it should be replaced, or at least balanced by the following:

- (not-3) There exists an omnipotent, omniscient, wholly good being.

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<sup>3</sup> William Rowe, "The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism", *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 16:4 (1979), pp. 335-41.

<sup>4</sup> A more precise account of the traditional atheist argument is to be found in Richard Swinburne: *Providence and the Problem of Evil* (Oxford University Press, 1998, pp. 13-14), where premise (2) is rephrased in the following way: "A perfectly good being will never allow any morally bad state E to occur if he can prevent it, unless (i) allowing E to occur is something he has a right to do, (ii) allowing E (or a state of affairs as bad or worse) to occur is the only morally permissible way in which he can make possible the occurrence of a good state of affairs G, (iii) he does all else that he can to bring about G, and (iv) the expected value of allowing E, given (iii) is positive".

(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) Therefore, it is not the case that (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.

The general strategy of the shift consists in beginning the new argument with the denial of the conclusion of the preceding one, and keeping the second premise, so that the denial of the first premise appears as a sound conclusion (for if  $p \ \& \ q \rightarrow r$ , then  $\text{not-}r \ \& \ q \rightarrow \text{not-}p$ ). This shift was inspired by “the G.E. Moore shift” used in dealing with the arguments of the sceptics. For example:

- (1) We have no knowledge but of our impressions (as Hume puts it: “we never make a step beyond ourselves”).
- (2) If we have no knowledge but of our impressions, we have no true knowledge of the existence of this pencil.
- (3) We have no true knowledge of the existence of this pencil.

In this case, it will be easy to suggest that not-(3) is a more rational premise than (1). For one may argue that, if not-(3) is not granted, any higher –level knowledge such as (1) will *a fortiori* not hold. Or one may simply argue that not-(3) is a more basic belief anyway. Nevertheless, in the case of the argument from intense non-permissible sufferings, the G.E. Moore shift is not so easy to make. The existence of an omnipotent, omniscient and wholly good being is not a basic belief like, say, the belief that I have a true knowledge of the existence of this pencil. Defending the position of “friendly atheism” (that is of an atheist who does not take for definitely granted the existence of instances of intense suffering which an omnipotent, omniscient being could have prevented without thereby losing some greater good...) will not be so easy as making the G.E. Moore shift against skepticism. Indeed, skepticism about God’s goodness or omnipotence is indeed a different kettle of fish. It requires at least discussing whether all the instances of intense suffering may be related to the occurrence of greater goods or the prevention of evils at least as bad... This is the challenge that every attempt in the field of theodicy has to face. But, here we come again, this is not Jonas’ concern at all.

Instead of discussing whether or to what extent some evils that occurred are permissible, Jonas prefers falling back, as he puts it, “on a speculative attempt” he had once ventured, a “myth of his own invention” (p. 3)<sup>5</sup>. It is the famous scenario of God “effacing himself from the world”. This scenario is supposed to yield the general scheme of God’s non-intervention, for which there will be no other account left, except God’s absolute inability to intervene. Statement (6) is not, for Jonas, a conclusion to reach; it is a premise belonging to his conceptual scheme of God’s attributes. This has to be emphasized. In order to grasp Jonas’ theodicy, we have to realize that he is arguing from an emotivist point of view, which precludes in-principle every defence of God’s omnipotence. This emotivist point of view is not fully irrelevant. Suppose you are to announce to someone the sudden death of a beloved relative. You would certainly not say: “Well, surely it would have been possible to prevent this heart attack, or to save the person from the crash, but the surgeon has estimated he did not have to intervene at any cost, even if he could. He preferred to save a defibrillator”. On the contrary, you would probably say: “Sorry, the rescue team could not arrive in time. Then the surgeon did everything he could (which means: nobody could have done better)”. And such an answer is supposed to comfort the mourning of the relative by endowing the tragic event with a kind of necessity. From such an emotivist point of view, it is not surprising that Jonas never discusses to what extent some evils are morally permissible. The very occurrence of any horrendous evil is for Jonas sufficient evidence that it is in no way morally permissible. In his view “horrendous” entails “morally non-permissible”. So that the occurrence of any horrendous suffering or evil precludes, a priori, God’s omnipotence.

In the following, I am not presenting a theodicy, nor a defence, but only a peaceful counter-attack to Hans Jonas’ denial of God’s omnipotence. I will first examine in which terms Jonas conceives of God’s relationship to the world. I will then examine his so-called “logical and ontological objection”, according to which “omnipotence is a self-contradictory concept”. I will then turn to consider his so termed “more theological, genuinely religious objection”.

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<sup>5</sup> Jonas refers to the “imaginative but credible conjecture that Plato allowed for the sphere beyond the knowable” (p. 4).

## I. GOD AND THE WORLD : GENESIS REWRITTEN

Let's pick out some major features of Jonas' mythical scenario:

- (A) God chose to enter into the adventure of space and time.<sup>6</sup>
- (B) The world is left to itself; its laws brook no interference.
- (C) "In order that the world might be, and be for itself, God renounced his being, divesting himself of his deity".<sup>7</sup>

Let's comment on these claims.

Taken literally, the first claim (A) would mean: once upon a time God was timeless and not limited to spatial conditions, and then he became himself subject to time and space. As Jonas puts it: "the eternal has "temporalized" himself and progressively becomes different through the actualizations of the world process".<sup>8</sup> How can we make sense of this picture of a "becoming God" (p. 6)? Either God is supposed to be a temporal – though everlasting – being, in which case his being subject to time is in no way surprising. Changes would always have been possible in his internal or external operations (knowledge and actions). Otherwise,

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<sup>6</sup> "In the beginning, for unknowable reasons, the ground of being, or the Divine, chose to give itself over to the chance and risk and endless variety of becoming; And wholly so: entering into the adventure of space and time, the deity held back nothing of itself: no uncommitted or unimpaired part remained to direct, correct, and ultimately guarantee the devious working-out of its destiny in creation. On this unconditional immanence the modern temper insists. It is its courage or despair, in any case its bitter honesty, to take our being-in-the world seriously: to view the world as left to itself, its laws as brooking no interference, and the rigour of our belonging to it as not softened by extramundane providence." (p. 4)

<sup>7</sup> "The same our myth postulates for God's being in the world. Not, however, in the sense of pantheistic immanence: if world and God are simply the same, the world at each moment and in each state represents his fullness, and God can neither lose nor gain. Rather, in order that the world might be, and be for itself, God renounced his being, divesting himself of his deity – to receive it back from the Odyssey of time weighted with the chance harvest of unforeseeable temporal experience: transfigured or possibly even disfigured by it. In such self-forfeiture of divine integrity for the sake of unprejudiced becoming, no other foreknowledge can be admitted than that of possibilities which cosmic being offers in its own terms: to these, God committed his cause in effacing himself for the world." (p. 4)

<sup>8</sup> "Whatever the "primordial" conditions of the Godhead, he ceased to be self-contained once he let himself in for the existence of a world by creating such a world or letting it come to be" (p. 7).

God is supposed to be timeless, and it is hard to conceive of a timeless being who would really change, or become. If at  $t$ ,  $x$  becomes temporal,  $x$  was certainly mutable at least just before  $t$ , and if  $x$  is mutable,  $x$  is temporal. If  $x$  was not mutable before he became suddenly temporal, no change could occur to him. We may even, thanks to Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann, make sense of an omniscient eternal entity being aware of all temporal events at once, and nevertheless understanding that these events occur sequentially. But it seems hard to conceive of a genuinely immutable being deciding not to be immutable any more. It may seem easier to make sense of "God entering into the adventure of space", because becoming spatial could simply mean limiting one's causal power to a certain area. This does not necessarily mean that God would have an embodied existence after existing like a pure spirit. Nevertheless, statement (A) is far from being self-evident.

Then you get the view (B) that God cannot intervene in the course of worldly states of affairs. He neither allows, nor prevents, nor favours any event. He just passively attends the show that ends up turning into something horrific. Let us simply emphasize that this allegedly forced passiveness dismisses any inquiry into the question of why God allows evil. He is not in a position to allow or to prevent whatsoever.

Then there is the third claim, combining (A) and (B), i.e. (C): that the world could not exist or be "for itself" without God divesting his deity. Claim (C) seems to make a statement that God sustaining the world implies the non-existence of the world for itself, and then, the existence of the world for itself requires God stopping to sustain its existence. Here we meet some serious objections:

Firstly, how can a not-self-existing world acquire self-existence? If God exerts a creating, that is a generating and sustaining causal power, then he is constantly intervening, even if he chooses not to break the course of the laws of nature or of human acts of free-will. Autonomy of secondary causes does not entail self-existence. If, on the contrary, God does not sustain any existence any more, then the world has to exist on its own. But if the world has not always been self-existing, then something or someone must have made it self-existent. And then, owing its self-existence to something else, the world still depends on a maker of its self-existence.

Secondly, how can a creator and sustainer of everything that there is renounce his being and divest himself of his deity? How can we conceive of a retired creative power? Generally speaking, the framework of theistic metaphysics is the following: self-existence is denied to objects and persons, but the ultimate explanation of their being and operating is a self-existent agent, namely God. God is not only a generating, but also a sustaining cause of everything that there is. As James F. Ross puts it, “to create is to effect the being of other things.”<sup>9</sup> A most celebrated issue is to ask whether the created beings could continue to exist on their own. As long as creation is conceived analogically with human or physical production, it seems they can. Just like houses can survive architects and masons. But this analogy may prove to be false, since creation requires no pre-existent matter and does not require necessarily that the creatures exist after having not existed. As Philip Quinn puts it:

For God to create or conserve an individual at an instant is merely for him at that instant to bring about the existence of the individual at the instant ... Seen in this light, the question of whether the cosmos of contingent things was introduced into existence *ex nihilo* after a period of time when nothing contingent existed becomes relatively unimportant for theistic orthodoxy.<sup>10</sup>

How can we understand statement (C)? Either it belongs to God’s deity that he freely chooses to sustain or to annihilate the existence of creatures, in which case God divesting his deity or renouncing his being would mean the end of the world. Or, God’s sustaining the very existence of creatures is not essential to him, and then renouncing his being does not make any difference to us. In both cases, the world being left to itself is not a consistent view.

Thirdly, even if it were conceivable, it still would raise a problem of responsibility concerning the occurrence of evil... The fact that God cannot intervene is not as such enough to extinguish his responsibility. For either he would have freely chosen that things and persons should continue to exist and to operate by themselves, or not. Suppose now that

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<sup>9</sup> James F. Ross, “Creation”, in *The Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 77, no. 10, 1980, p. 626.

<sup>10</sup> Philip Quinn, “Divine Conservation, Continuous Creation, and Human Action”, in *The Existence and Nature of God*, ed. Alfred J. Freddoso (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), p. 70.

he has chosen not to be able to intervene any more. In this case, he will be like a man who has chosen to drink so much that he cannot feel responsible for anything anymore. Although he could not in any way come to the rescue, he would nevertheless remain responsible for whatever happens, even if he cannot exert any control on the situation. Of course, if God had no choice, if necessarily a world had to exist on its own, God is not responsible. But if the world is self-existent, there is no need for a God, and the problem of evil should be solved without this factor.

Jonas then explores the consequences “of the idea of the becoming God”:

[...] this caring God is not a sorcerer who, in the act of caring also provides the fulfilment of his concern: he has left something for other agents to do and thereby has made his care dependent on them. He is therefore also an endangered God, a God who runs a risk (pp. 7-8).

Well, it should be clear that leaving something for other agents to do does not imply that you *cannot* intervene, or that you cannot control the risk you have chosen to run. There is a classical issue, whether beyond God's conservation of created entities, a general concurrence with secondary causes is further required. Even if created substances are true causal contributors, since they are not self-existent, they can hardly be self-operating.<sup>11</sup> On the contrary, Jonas seems to imply that God cannot intervene any more at all. So he has not only left something, but *everything* for other agents to do. Surely, such a God would not be “a sorcerer who, in the act of caring also provides the fulfilment of his concern”. But he would be a *sorcerer's apprentice*, who has lost all control of the situation. Once again, although he would not be in charge of the situation anymore, he would nevertheless remain responsible for it.

How does Jonas justify his view? As he puts it: “Clearly that must be so, or else the world would be in a condition of permanent perfection” (p. 8). So, for Jonas, God's omnipotence is necessarily bound with the world being in a perfect condition. And, since the occurrence of evil is interpreted as a not permissible imperfection, God's omnipotence is ipso facto denied.

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<sup>11</sup> Alfred J. Freddoso, *God's General Concurrence with Secondary Causes: Why Conservation is not Enough*, in James E. Tomberlin, ed., *Philosophical Perspectives*, 5, *Philosophy of Religion*, Atascadero, Calif.: Ridgeview Publishing, 1991. Freddoso explains precisely how concurrentism is neither occasionalism nor mere conservatism.

## II. OMNIPOTENCE AS A SELF-CONTRADICTIONARY CONCEPT

Let's now turn to the second main consideration. Jonas vindicates what he labels "the most critical point in [his] speculative, theological venture: this is not an omnipotent God". But quite surprisingly, the first attack against God's omnipotence is not an argument from evil. Jonas pretends to "argue, on a purely logical plane, by pointing out the paradox in the idea of absolute power" (p. 8). (It should not be a surprise anymore, if I am right in supposing that Jonas never argues from evil to God's limited power, but reacts emotionally against the non-intervention of a good being). "From the very concept of power, it follows that omnipotence is a self-contradictory, self-destructive, indeed, senseless concept." How does Jonas elaborate this point?

Absolute, total power means power not limited by anything, not even by the mere existence of something other than the possessor of that power; for the very existence of such another would already constitute a limitation, and the one would have to annihilate it so as to save its absoluteness. Absolute power then, in its solitude, has no object on which to act. But as objectless power it is a powerless power, cancelling itself out: "all" equals "zero" here. The existence of another object limits the power of the most powerful agent at the same time that it allows it to be an agent. In brief, power as such is a relational concept and requires relation. (p. 8)

Seemingly, Jonas mingles here two different concepts of power. Jonas misses the distinction between what we should term a metaphysical creative power: the ability to bring about any logically contingent state of affairs, and what we should term a physical comparative power: the capacity to overcome the strength of something already existing. The very fact that an external operation usually requires an object upon which you act does not necessarily imply that the object will resist your action. And in the case of creation *ex nihilo*, there is nothing upon which the creator exerts his creative power. Effecting the very being of other things is not affecting some already available substratum, as P. Geach's famous definition of creation clearly emphasizes:

God creates  $x$  = Def (God brings about that  $(\exists x) (x \text{ is an } A)$ )  
& Not  $(\exists x)$  God brings about that  $(x \text{ is an } A)$ ).<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> P. T. Geach, *God and the Soul*, "Causality and Creation" (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul), 1969, p. 83.

But if one defines power like Jonas does, God could not even create. In fact, as we shall notice, Jonas admits that God cannot create without ipso facto losing his creative power! Jonas elaborates this view further: "Again, power meeting no resistance in its relatum is equal to no power at all: power is exercised only in relation to something that itself has power".<sup>13</sup> Jonas' conception rests upon an analogy:

Just as, in physics, force without resistance – that is, counterforce – remains empty, so in metaphysics does power without counterpower, unequal as the latter may be.

He then combines the notion of power and the concept of existence by itself:

That, therefore, on which power acts must have a power of its own, even if that power derives from the first and was initially granted to it, as one with its existence, by a self-renunciation of limitless power – that is, in the act of creation.

Jonas concludes:

In short, it cannot be that all power is on one side of one agent only. Power must be divided so that there be any power at all. (p. 9)

We could argue that Jonas' conception of absolute power is resting on a false analogy between the metaphysical power of an agent, and the physical concept of force. But even if this analogy could hold, we could make an answer inspired by Swinburne's solution to the Paradox of the Stone. True, if God created a stone that he subsequently could not lift, there would be a task he cannot perform. And then it would be pointless to argue that the phrase "such a stone created by God as he cannot subsequently lift it" has no reference, because this phrase has necessarily no reference *only under the presupposition that God is omnipotent*. And nevertheless, creating such a stone is not something God has to do in order to prove his omnipotence. It is sufficient that he can, it is not required that he will. If he did it, he would certainly compromise his ability "to bring about any logically contingent state of affairs". As Swinburne puts

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<sup>13</sup> Power, unless otiose, consists in the capacity to overcome something; and something's existence as such is enough to provide this condition. For existence means resistance and thus opposing force. (p. 9)

it: "In creating the universe, God is merely exercising his omnipotence, yet not in a way so as to limit his future exercise of it".<sup>14</sup>

Well it seems that in Jonas' view, creating the world is like creating only stones that he will not be able to lift. This view is shared by many philosophers, like Sartre who considers that a created being is a contradiction. In order to exist truly, anything has to exist independently from its creator:

If being exists as over against God, it is its own support, it does not preserve the least trace of divine creation [...] This is equivalent to saying that being is uncreated.<sup>15</sup>

One may of course disagree with such a prejudicial view that is heavily begging the question of whether anything could truly exist while owing its existence to a creator.

### III. A MORE THEOLOGICAL, GENUINELY RELIGIOUS OBJECTION

Then Jonas purports, he says, "a more theological, genuinely religious objection to the idea of absolute and unlimited divine omnipotence". Does it mean that the so called purely logical objection was not relevant? Jonas claims, very traditionally, that

Goodness is inalienable from the concept of God and not open to qualification. But God's [...] goodness must be compatible with the existence of evil, and this is only if he is not *all* powerful. (p. 9)

Here we meet a problem: if the concept of absolute power had already proved to be self-contradictory, surely it would no longer be worth assessing whether the occurrence of some evils is compatible with God's omnipotence. Whatever evils might occur, God could not be all powerful anyway. In fact, even in a perfect peaceful world, there would be no place for an omnipotent agent. So our question is: why does Jonas pretend that the three attributes of absolute goodness, absolute power, and intelligibility "stand in such a logical relation to one another that the

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<sup>14</sup> R. Swinburne, *The Coherence of Theism*, Oxford University Press, revised edition, 1993, p. 163.

<sup>15</sup> Introduction to *Being and Nothingness*, transl. H. E. Barnes 1958, University Paperbacks, Routledge 2000, p. xl.

conjunction of any two of them excludes the third", if absolute power is already excluded?

The preceding strategy argued that omnipotence is self-contradictory. But now, Jonas seems to fall back to his mythical framework: omnipotence would imply a perfect world. The world is not perfect, so God is not omnipotent. How can we make sense with these two incompatible strategies?

Jonas seems to suppose that God's non-omnipotence does exempt him from any responsibility towards horrendous evils. But not being omnipotent is not as such a sufficient excuse for not preventing certain evils. One could conceive of a limited power which would remain able to prevent any non permissible bad state of affairs. Conversely, one could conceive of an omnipotent being that could not prevent the occurrence of morally non permissible evils (given that these evils would be logically necessary states). So the issue of whether omnipotence is or is not a self-contradictory power is not always relevant concerning the problem of non permissible evils.

Only if God is fully unable to intervene will he have a cast-iron alibi. Because Jonas does not want to discuss to what extent some horrendous evils could have nevertheless been permitted (not prevented), he prefers to annihilate God's power to intervene. As Plato put it: "*Theos anaitios*" (God is not responsible anymore).

God's power [is seen] as limited by something whose being in its own right and whose power to act on its own authority he himself acknowledges [...] We have the choice to interpret this as a voluntary concession on God's part, which he is free to revoke at will – that is, as the restraint of power that he still and always possesses in full but, for the sake of creation's own autonomous right, chooses not fully to employ.

This interpretation seems to me to be the appropriate framework for a correct defence. But this is not Jonas' interpretation. He argues on the contrary that if God were still endowed with omnipotence, he could not have chosen the restraint of his power for the sake of creation's own autonomous right. According to Jonas, God had no choice: in order that the world might be, he had to renounce his omnipotence (although it is difficult to conceive of the world's self-sustaining and self-generating). But, one could argue, didn't he still have the choice to create the world

or not? Then he remains chiefly responsible for everything that occurs subsequently, including the misuse of free-will. Let us turn to how Jonas describes God's retirement:

Somehow he has, by an act of either inscrutable wisdom or love or whatever else the divine motive may have been, forgone the guaranteeing of his self-satisfaction by his own power, after he has first, by the act of creation itself, forgone being "all in all". (p. 8)<sup>16</sup>

Two different topics should be disentangled here. First, it is not clear at all that creation in itself entails a forgoing to be all in all. For the phrase "all in all" does not refer to the same reality, given the creation or not. If no world is created, God is the sole being. He is. We may say that he is all in all. This may refer to the doctrine of God being his attributes, or simply to the fact that there is nothing but God. He is all that there is. That's all. Given a created world, are we to say that God is not "all in all" anymore? Not at all, if I may say. God is not anymore everything that exists, but there is no reason why he shouldn't remain the same as he was. He is at least everything that used to exist before or apart from the creation of the world. Maybe creating the world adds something to his attributes (as an extrinsic property - there is a traditional issue whether creation represents a change in God, which of course is connected with other issues like divine immutability or divine timelessness). But why should creation imply a loss of God's power or existence? Jonas nevertheless steadily sticks to it: "divine-self restriction" is a necessary condition of the being of "self-determined creatures". Jonas develops this view:

self-limitation [of a unique divine principle] permits (gives 'room' to) the existence and autonomy of a world [...] Creation was that act of absolute

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<sup>16</sup> Jonas seems to imply that only a becoming God, a suffering God, can be said to take care of human existence "the relation of God to the world from the moment of the creation, and certainly from the creation of man on, involves suffering from the part of God." This view "bound up with the concepts of a suffering and a becoming God is that of a *caring* God - a God not remote and detached and self-contained but involved with what he cares for". (p. 7) Cf. p. 8: "He is therefore also an endangered God, a God who runs a risk. Clearly that must be so, or else the world would be in a condition of permanent perfection. The fact that it is not bespeaks one of two things: that either the One God does not exist (though more than one may), or that the One has given to an agency other than himself, though created by him, a power and right to act on its own and therewith a scope for at least codetermining that which is a concern of his."

sovereignty with which it consented, for the sake of self-determined finitude, to be absolute no more – an act, therefore, of divine self-restriction. (p. 11) By forgoing its own inviolateness, the eternal ground allowed the world to be. To this self-denial all creation owes its existence and with it has received all there is to receive from beyond. (p.12)

All this refers to the cosmogonic concept of Lurianic Kabbalah (Tzim-Tzum), which Jonas summarizes in the following terms:

To make room for the world, the *En-Sof* (Infinite; literally, No End) of the beginning had to contract himself so that, vacated by him, empty space could expand outside of him: the “Nothing” in which and from which God then could create the world. Without this retreat into himself, there could be no “other” outside God, and only his continued holding-himself-in preserves the finite things from losing their separate being again into the divine “all in all”. (p. 12)<sup>17</sup>

Here we find a picturesque metaphor of creation, but it rests once more on a fallacious analogy between the bringing about of the very existence of things, and the normal condition of production for embodied persons or material processes. Making something exist is described in terms of the separate locating of creator and creature. The effecting of the very existence of creatures is viewed as letting someone entering a lift and being obliged to renounce occupying the whole room of the lift.

The cosmogonic concept of Tzim-Tzum supposes that an  $x$  different from God may exist if  $x$  is outside God. Since God is supposed to have occupied all the space before  $x$  came to be, God has then to evacuate enough place, so that some new separate creature may move into the empty space, released by his departure. Well, if God is not a spatial being, he has no need to retreat in himself in order to make room for whatever he creates. But even if God were a spatial being, occupying the whole space at some time, he could create other spatial beings. He could make

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<sup>17</sup> Sometimes Jonas argues another way that: “the mere permitting of human freedom involved a renouncing of sole divine power henceforth”. (p. 11) But as we have already noticed, renouncing to exert one’s power on certain occasions does not imply being divested of this power. The statement according to which God, “for the time of the ongoing world process – has divested himself of any power to interfere with the physical course of things” (p. 10) rather expresses Jonas’ (and our) difficulty to bear the divine permission of horrendous suffering.

things exist endowed with extension, that is to say he could make things and room, without having to make room for things to exist. If God is able to bring about the very existence of creatures, surely he is able to make an empty space in which he will locate them, or if space is relative to objects, creating them will be ipso facto creating their spatial or extensional relations. So there is no need to claim that creation entails the retirement of the creator. As long as something does not exist on its own, it needs a sustaining cause. And, once more, how could anything get rid of its sustaining cause of existence?

The conceptual framework of Tzim-Tzum, as presented by Hans Jonas<sup>18</sup>, is surely fascinating, but it does not hold. It may express metaphorically the discretion of a God who endows his creatures with a large autonomy, but it does not describe the true metaphysical structure of a created world.

Let's now turn to the last point. In order to emphasize his denial of God's omnipotence, Jonas argues from the quantity of evil:

in view of the enormity of what [...] some [men] inflict on innocent others, one would expect the good God at times to break his own, however stringent, rule of restraint and intervene with a saving miracle.

Curiously, Jonas seems not to exclude any more such an intervention:

an occasional miracle, i. e., extramundane intervention in the closed causality of the physical realm, is not incompatible with the general validity of the laws of nature (rare exceptions do not void empirical rules) and might even, by all appearances, perfectly conform to them. (p. 10, footnote)  
But no saving miracle occurred. [...] God remained silent [...] God was silent. [...] Not because he chose not to, but because he could not intervene did he fail to intervene. (p. 10)

So Jonas seems to argue from the enormity of suffering to God's inability to intervene. This raises once more a terrible problem of drawing a line. There is no reason why God should intervene for, let's say, 6 million victims of Nazism but not for 5.9. And if 5.9 million victims would have justified a saving miracle, why should not 5.5? What makes the difference? And

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<sup>18</sup> Yehuda Gellmann kindly suggests to me that the true Lurianic account does not extinguish every link between creator and created world, which is a more consistent view. But here I am just considering Hans Jonas' use of the Tzim-Tzum.

so on. I beg your pardon for this terrific calculus. It is a macabre instance of the Sorites paradox. Of course, each additional victim increases the magnitude of evil. But does it change the case for God's omnipotence? Surely God's non-intervention, for example in cases involving the cruel murdering of babies, is shocking. But is there a line to be drawn, beyond which we are justified to say: beyond this limit, God's non-intervention entails his powerlessness to intervene? It does not seem so. There is no critical number of cries for help beyond which you may conclude: if God remains silent, then he must be mute (or dumb). My suggestion is: if God intervenes, (and surely he does, since sometimes horrendous murdering projects seem to have been stopped by supernatural means) it cannot be just for numerical reasons. Either God has a morally sufficient reason to allow such grievous evils, or not.

There is also another problem, connected with Robert Kane's objection to Frankfurt examples: how could God intervene in due time?<sup>19</sup> Those who claim that God's not preventing the occurrence of a horrendous murdering is evidence for God's limited power should tell us when God ought to have intervened in order to prevent the murdering. Either God lets most people exert their free-will, despite some awful consequences, and then, in order to save God's goodness and omnipotence, you will have to explain to what extent some horrendous evils may be nevertheless considered to be morally permissible (although emotionally unbearable). Or, you

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<sup>19</sup> Cf. R. Kane's so called "Indeterministic World Objection": "Suppose Jones's choice is undetermined up to the moment when it occurs, [...]. Then a Frankfurt controller, such as Black, would face a problem in attempting to control Jones's choice. For if it is undetermined up to the moment when he chooses whether Jones will choose A or B, then the controller Black cannot know before Jones actually chooses what Jones is going to do. Black may wait until Jones actually chooses in order to see what Jones is going to do. But then it will be too late for Black to intervene. Jones will be responsible for the choice in that case, since Black stayed out of it. But Jones will also have had alternative possibilities, since Jones's choice of A or B was undetermined and therefore it could have gone either way. Suppose, by contrast, Black wants to ensure that Jones will make the choice Black wants (choice A). Then Black cannot stay out of it until Jones chooses. He must instead act in advance to bring it about that Jones chooses A. In that case, Jones will indeed have no alternative possibilities, but neither will Jones be responsible for the outcome. Black will be responsible since Black will have intervened in order to bring it about that Jones would choose as Black wanted" (R. Kane, *Free Will and Values*, Albany, NY: SUNY Press 1985, p. 51).

pretend that God's goodness and omnipotence can only be saved if he prevents these horrendous murders. But in order to prevent an event, you have to be sure that it will occur anyway if you do not intervene (or rather that it would occur if you did not intervene), which implies that the world is deterministic, at least concerning some events that we suppose are connected with moral responsibility. So either you have to wait for a "flicker of freedom" to occur, and then your intervention will destroy the effectiveness of moral responsibility, or you have to grant that there is no free-will anyway. Either God is Black (the Frankfurt controller), or God is out. Instead of this black/out dilemma, I stick to the suggestion that God's non-intervention is no evidence for his inability to intervene. May I add that I can hardly conceive of a true hope in salvation, if a tired or a retired God is supposed to do the job.

To conclude: the way that Jonas argues against God's omnipotence shows much compassion, but is not convincing. Creating the world is not like exerting a force upon something already existing. Second, it is hard to conceive of a retired creative power. How on earth could God, the very sustaining cause of everything what there is, retire? Thirdly, even if He could, this would not the least diminish his responsibility in the occurrence of evil. If, at some time, God was the generating and sustaining cause of the universe, then he remains chiefly responsible for every subsequent state of affairs, even when some of these states are brought about through the misuse of free-will.

In contemporary theodicies, God's retirement has become a stock excuse, but it remains a specious one. God's absence note is not acceptable.

# WITTGENSTEIN AND MAIMONIDES ON GOD AND THE LIMITS OF LANGUAGE

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**Abstract.** The purpose of this paper is to bring together two thinkers that are concerned with the limits of what can be said, Wittgenstein and Maimonides, and to explore the sense of the good life and of the mystical to which their therapeutic linguistic work gives rise. I argue that despite the similarities, two different senses of the “mystical” are brought to light and two different “forms of life” are explicated and recommended. The paper has three parts. In the first part, I discuss certain key components in Wittgenstein’s early philosophy and the sense of the mystical to which they give rise. In the second part, I discuss Maimonides’ negative theology and its implications for his conception of the *via mystica*. I end, with a discussion of the relation between the two ideals and its significance.

## I. SEEING THE WORLD RIGHTLY IN THE EARLY WITTGENSTEIN

Wittgenstein describes the ideal toward which he aims to lead his readers in perceptual terms, as involving a right way of seeing. Using the famous metaphor of the ladder, he states:

My propositions are elucidatory in this way: he who understands me finally recognizes them as senseless, when he has climbed out through them, on them, over them. (He must so to speak throw away the ladder, after he has climbed up on it.) He must surmount these propositions; then he sees the world rightly. (T 6.54).<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The following abbreviations of Wittgenstein’s works will be used within the text: LE: Ludwig Wittgenstein, “Lecture on Ethics”, *Philosophical Occasions 1912-1951* (Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1993), pp. 37-44;

Diagnosing the problems of philosophy as resting on “the misunderstanding of the logic of our language”, the *Tractatus* presents itself as providing us a ladder that consists of logical clarifications, through which a limit is drawn “to thinking, or rather – not to thinking, but to the expression of thoughts” (T, p. 27).

The world that the early Wittgenstein constructs is a world that consists of facts, which are determinate concatenations of objects. Objects are the simple elements from which the world is built. Objects, however, are given to us only in their relation to other objects in atomic facts. Wittgenstein emphasizes that, “it is essential to a thing that it can be a constituent part of an atomic fact” (T 2.011). Language and the world have a common logical form by means of which our propositions can represent states of affairs in the world. Names correspond to objects; elementary propositions to atomic facts and complex propositions to complex facts. Complex propositions are truth functions of elementary ones.

Language, for the early Wittgenstein, consists of propositions; it is essentially representational. Thus, what can be said in language, i.e., represented by language, are facts, contingent, insignificant and valueless states of affairs, which can be true or false. What cannot be said or represented by means of language is the logical form that the world and language have in common, by means of which language can represent the world. The world of meaning and sense extends between the elementary proposition and the complex proposition, which is its truth function. A boundary to the “expressions of thought”, a boundary to what can be said is, thereby, established.

How can the *Tractarian* utterances, which are concerned with the logical form that language and the world have in common, by means of which language can represent the world, and which are professedly nonsense, provide us with logical elucidations? How can they draw a limit to the expressions of thought? To put it slightly differently,

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NB: Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Notebooks 1914-1916* 2nd edition Eds. G. H. von Wright and G. E. M. Anscombe, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984); T: Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, [1922] trans. C. K. Ogden (London and New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1988); PI: Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* Trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co. Inc., 1968).

given that what is gained by climbing up the *Tractarian* ladder cannot be understood in terms of the acquisition of certain truths that can be stated in meaningful propositions and given that the purpose of the *Tractatus* cannot be understood in terms of the acquisition of ineffable non-propositional truths either, how can the *Tractatus'* admittedly nonsensical utterances bring about any perceptual transformation at all?<sup>2</sup> And, what exactly is the nature of the perceptual transformation that the *Tractatus* seeks to bring about?<sup>3</sup> I propose that we employ the later Wittgenstein's concept of "perspicuous representation" to address the former set of questions, and his distinction between saying and showing to address the latter. I cannot offer, in this context, a detailed argument for the relevance of Wittgenstein's concept of "perspicuous representation" to the *Tractatus*. I shall merely gesture at the possible advantages that "perspicuous representation" may have, when used as an exegetical tool for approaching the problematic status of *Tractarian* utterances.

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<sup>2</sup> For the "ineffable truths" conception and its variants, see, e.g., P. M. S. Hacker, *Insight and Illusion: Themes in the Philosophy of Wittgenstein*, revised edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986); G. E. M. Anscombe, *An Introduction to Wittgenstein's Tractatus*, (London: Hutchinson, 1971). The fact that, given the *Tractarian* perspective, there can be no ineffable truths has been recognized by numerous interpreters. See, e.g., Michael Morris and Julian Dodd, "Mysticism and Nonsense in the *Tractatus*", *European Journal of Philosophy* 17/2 (2007), pp. 247-276. Appealing to the distinction between "saying" (what cannot be said) and "thinking" or "imagining" (what cannot be said) provides no way out of this difficulty. Given the *Tractarian* perspective, thinking and imagining is a kind of language. Nothing is, therefore, achieved when we push language back into the head. Thus, there cannot be thoughts or truths or imaginings that cannot be uttered by means of propositions.

<sup>3</sup> The path toward the realization of the ideal of "seeing rightly" and its very fulfillment cannot be understood in propositional terms. Since the path toward the realization of the *Tractarian* ideal of "seeing rightly" and its very fulfillment cannot be understood in propositional terms, as involving "knowledge that..." philosophers were tempted to characterize it in terms of "knowledge how..." Kremer, adopting the so-called resolute reading of the *Tractatus*, argues that *Tractarian* nonsense affords its readers with "knowledge how", which does not necessarily involve propositional knowledge, and is irreducible to "knowledge that". He explicates such "knowledge how" as knowledge how to live. See Michael Kremer, "The Purpose of *Tractarian* Nonsense" *Nous* 35/1 (2001), pp. 39-73. As Morris and Dodd point out, since Wittgenstein uses "seeing" and not "knowing", a more accurate analysis of the *Tractatus* will pay attention to Wittgenstein's selection of words, and construe it in terms of perception rather than in terms of "knowing how".

The early Wittgenstein believed that our language disguises thought: Language disguises the thought; so that from the form of the clothes one cannot infer the form of the thought they clothe, because the external form of the clothes is constructed with quite another object than to let the form of the body be recognised (T 4.002).

It may seem that the philosophical work of the early Wittgenstein primarily involves undressing the clothing of language to facilitate a clearer view of the genuine body of thinking underlying it. I wish to propose a different, and a more helpful metaphor to describe the *Tractarian* methodology – that of placing different clothed bodies side by side, thereby bringing to light the diverse relations between the different clothes and the different bodies. This methodology, which was employed by the later Wittgenstein, may shed light on the manner in which nonsense can be illuminating.

In his later philosophy, Wittgenstein emphasizes the significance of finding a “perspicuous representation” by means of “reminders”, connecting links or intermediate cases:

A main source of our failure to understand is that we do not *command a clear view* of the use of our words. – Our grammar is lacking in this sort of perspicuity. A perspicuous representation produces just that understanding which consists in ‘seeing connexions.’ Hence the importance of finding and inventing *intermediate cases*. The concept of perspicuous representation is of fundamental significance for us. It earmarks the form of account we give, the way we look at things (Is this a ‘*Weltanschauung*’?) (PI, §122)

The later Wittgenstein believed that we do not need a general theory concerning “meaning”, “thought”, “sense” or “nonsense”, to acquire understanding of their nature(s). What we need is a method that “puts everything before us, and neither explains nor deduces anything. – Since everything lies open to view there is nothing to explain” (PI, §126). What we need is a description rather than an (historical, logical, biological, psychological or any other) explanation, which uses *external* concepts and categories in its attempt to shed light on a particular phenomenon. The description consists of “assembling reminders for a particular purpose” (PI, §127). Simply by pointing to various facts and by suggesting certain comparisons or analogies, the logical features of various phenomena may be revealed in their complexity, the emptiness of various explanations

may be exposed, and various philosophical puzzles may be dispelled. We may then acquire a clearer view of the use of our words.

The various types of nonsense in the *Tractatus* may be seen as “reminders” in a perspicuous representation. Although they cannot be illuminating in virtue of their having a certain sense, as proponents of the so-called resolute reading of the *Tractatus* argue<sup>4</sup>, they may be illuminating in virtue of their manner of functioning in their specific context, i.e., *qua* reminders of “nonsense” in a perspicuous representation. When a particular specimen of nonsense is used as a connecting link with another specimen of nonsense, we may be able to see the formal connection between them and, thereby, notice something about sense and nonsense. Such a methodology, in a sense, “undresses” language, revealing its limits.

Anti-metaphysical consequences do not necessarily result from the employment of this methodology. Reminders are always selected from a particular perspective. Since what is judged nonsense in the *Tractatus* is not empirically self-evident, the *Tractarian* perspective appears to betray certain philosophical commitments concerning language and its relation to the world.<sup>5</sup> Our most appropriate source of information concerning what these are is the *Tractatus* itself and what it contains concerning language, and its conditions. Thus, using “perspicuous representation” as an exegetical tool to address the possibility of illuminating nonsense does not entail an anti-metaphysical reading of the *Tractatus*; rather, it allows for a reading in which both the picture theory of the proposition and the distinction between saying and showing are endorsed.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> See, e.g., Cora Diamond, “Frege and Nonsense”, *The Realist Spirit: Wittgenstein, Philosophy and the Mind* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: The MIT Press, 1995), pp. 73-93; Cora Diamond, “What Nonsense Might Be”, *The Realist Spirit: Wittgenstein, Philosophy and the Mind* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: The MIT Press, 1995), pp. 95-114.

<sup>5</sup> This point is made in Michael Morris and Julian Dodd, “Mysticism and Nonsense in the *Tractatus*”, *European Journal of Philosophy* 17/2 (2007), pp. 247-276.

<sup>6</sup> “Perspicuous representation” and the saying/showing distinction are intrinsically related to one another: “perspicuous representation” is a method of showing something that cannot be said. The *Tractatus* teaches us that sometimes, it is only by saying what *cannot* be said that one can show something, i.e., provide a perspicuous representation. To put it slightly differently, in his saying what cannot be said, in his nonsensical utterances, Wittgenstein is showing (i.e., perspicuously representing) “something” concerning

In what follows, I shall, indeed, assume that Wittgenstein is committed to both.<sup>7</sup>

Like other traditional interpreters of the *Tractatus*, I maintain that Wittgenstein's commitment to the distinction between saying and showing shows itself in the *Tractatus* and in his correspondence with Russell and others, concerning the *Tractatus* and its purpose. Wittgenstein states in the *Tractatus*: "What *can* be shown *cannot* be said" (T 4.1212), thereby committing himself to this distinction. A letter to Russell supports that supposition. In a 1919 letter, he stated that the main point of the *Tractatus* is "the theory of what can be expressed by prop[osition]s, i.e., by language – (and, which comes to the same, what can be *thought*) and what cannot be expressed by prop[osition]s, but only shown".<sup>8</sup>

By means of the *Tractarian* distinction between saying and showing Wittgenstein implicitly sets up a corresponding distinction between two different types of seeing: ordinary seeing, which focuses on facts, contingent and insignificant states of affairs, which can be stated in propositions, and investigated by science, and a different type of perception that focuses on that, which shows itself in facts and propositions. This latter form of perception focuses on the logical structure of reality; Wittgenstein characterizes it as "transcendental", "mystical" and of absolute value: "The contemplation of the world *sub specie aeterni* is its contemplation as a limited whole. The feeling of the world as a limited whole is the mystical feeling" (T 6.45).

"Seeing mystically", "seeing rightly", however, cannot be separated from our ordinary manner of seeing. When we "see mystically", we see

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language and its relation to the world. "Perspicuous representation" is used as a way of bringing about, what the later Wittgenstein had called, "the dawning of an aspect" (PI, Part II, xi). What is perspicuously represented, or shown, bears directly on the type of life that Wittgenstein considers good or right. As I pointed out, the *Tractarian* ideal of "seeing rightly" is a perceptual ideal; the good life that follows from the realization of the *Tractarian* ideal too, is characterized by a certain way of perceiving the world. When it is realized, we turn our gaze in the right direction, and find God or the mystical.

<sup>7</sup>The implications of this methodology to the metaphysical and/or anti-metaphysical components of the *Tractatus* require further clarification. Much more needs to be said about the application of this methodology to *Tractarian* nonsense and about the specific manners in which *Tractarian* nonsense may be exposed as such, as well.

<sup>8</sup>Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Cambridge Letters*, eds. B. F. McGuinness and G. H. von Wright (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), p. 124.

ordinary objects of perception, although we perceive them *sub specie aeterni*. There is no separate realm of mystical objects that are perceived. Thus, seeing mystically is contemplating that which shows itself in the ordinary and trivial, in the insignificant and banal. It is focusing on an aspect of ordinary states of affairs, perceived by ordinary sense organs.

Such a mode of perception, however, is obscure within the *Tractatus*. Wittgenstein is aware of the obscurity. He insists that there is an experience of logic; at the same time he states that the term “experience” is inappropriate: “The ‘experience’ which we need to understand logic is not that such and such is the case, but that something is; but that is no experience.” (T 5.552). Logic *per se* is not a direct object of perception. Logic is not a separate subject matter that is susceptible to a separate examination. Tautologies and contradictions have no meaning and logical constants do not represent. Yet Wittgenstein insists that logic shows itself, that it is seen, experienced through the contingent, through the facts of language and the world, which are *per se*, of no value and importance.

In his “Lecture on Ethics” of 1929, Wittgenstein mentions three experiences, analogous to the “experience” of logic in their seemingly transcendental non-factual nature. He notes that the term “experience” is unsuitable to characterize them too. He mentions the “experience” of feeling absolutely safe, no matter what happens, the “experience” of wonder at the existence of the world and the “experience” (feeling) of guilt. Wittgenstein recognizes that such experiences present themselves as bearers of absolute value; he nevertheless insists that as bearers of absolute value they cannot amount to genuine experiences, since all experiences are contingent and, as such devoid of value. Wittgenstein, however, affirms the existence of such “experiences”, insisting that they cannot be uttered in language:

Now the three experiences, which I have mentioned to you (...) seem to those who have experienced them... to have in some sense an intrinsic absolute value. But when I say they are experiences, surely they are facts... and consequently are describable. And so... I must admit it is nonsense to say they have absolute value. And I will make my point still more acute by saying ‘It is the paradox that an experience, a fact, should seem to have supernatural value.’ (LE, p. 43)

Wittgenstein does not give up on either horn of his dilemma, explicitly committing himself to a paradox and depicting our inability to speak of such experiences as a cage. He recognizes that the *Tractarian* ladder does not lead away from the world, into another supernatural realm but rather takes us back into the straight jacket of language. The dilemma that such “experiences” embody is, therefore, internal to Wittgenstein’s early philosophy and must not be explained away. It is only in his later remarks on the seeing of aspects that Wittgenstein was able to allow for, and shed light on such experiences, on such perceptions, insisting on the logical relation between them and our pattern of responses.

Despite these fatal difficulties, a meaningful ideal of “seeing rightly” or “seeing mystically” emerges, in his early thought. The Wittgensteinian ideal has various dimensions: aesthetic, ethical, psychological and religious. I shall briefly remark on each of these dimensions, starting with the aesthetic dimension of Wittgenstein’s ideal.

When we “see mystically” we come to see the facts of the world as works of art, be they products of an assembly line, industrial waste or surfaces of exquisite colour and shape. Wittgenstein uses the metaphors of “perceiving together with space and time” and “perceiving with the whole world as background” as explications of this mode of perceiving. In a *Notebooks* comment from October 1916, he states:

The work of art is the object seen *sub specie aeternitatis*, and the good life is the world seen *sub specie aeternitatis*. This is the connection between art and ethics. The usual way of looking at things sees objects as it were from the midst of them, the view *sub specie aeternitatis* from outside. In such a way that they have the whole world as background. (NB, p. 83)

Such an aesthetic-mystical manner of seeing has ethical and psychological dimensions. Although, like other contingent modes of perception, it is devoid of absolute value, since “in the world everything is as it is and happens as it does happen. *In* it there is no value – and if there were, it would be of no value” (T 6.41), seeing the world rightly liberates the observer from the contingency of the world and from the misery that it may bring about. Wittgenstein seems to believe that the person that is capable of seeing the world *sub specie aeterni*, sees it “with a happy eye” (NB, p. 86). He asks: “Is it the essence of the artistic way of looking at things, that it looks at the world with a happy eye?” (NB, p. 86). He seems

to believe that when one recognizes the manner in which the sublime and the trivial are intertwined with one another, when one climbs the *Tractarian* ladder and assents to the world, one transcends the world of facts and the laws that govern them, and finds enduring happiness, which does not result from the fulfilment of one's heart's desires.

The path towards such a conception of "happiness" and its relation to willing can be traced back to a *Notebooks* comment from July 1916. Wittgenstein ponders:

Is it possible to will good, to will evil, and not to will? Or is only he happy who does not will? To love one's neighbour would mean to will! But can one want and yet not be unhappy if the want does not attain fulfilment? (And this possibility always exists). Is it, according to common conceptions, good to want nothing for one's neighbour, neither good nor evil? And yet in a certain sense it seems that not wanting is the only good. (NB, p. 77)

Slightly later Wittgenstein asks "How can man be happy at all, since he cannot ward off the misery of this world?" (NB, p. 81). "Through a life of knowledge" (NB, p. 81), he answers, stating: "The life of knowledge is the life that is happy in spite of the misery of the world." (NB, p. 81).

The salvific life of knowledge, which is one and the same with the good life, the happy life and the mystical life, cannot be understood in propositional terms. Contingent, insignificant propositional knowledge, which can be uttered in language, does not liberate. Feeling absolutely safe, no matter what, cannot be the result of the acquisition of certain *necessary* truths about God or the meaning of life, either. Such truths could not be meaningfully stated. Wittgenstein insists that the person who climbs the *Tractarian* ladder, climbs *over* his *meaningless* utterances. Given the meaninglessness of *Tractarian* utterances, the life of knowledge cannot be characterized in terms of a certain body of doctrine that one comes to acquire. True knowledge, for the early Wittgenstein, is a matter of perception, acquired by a perspicuous representation. Its attainment is the observer's self-transformation. The world remains unaltered. The one who sees it rightly, however, is liberated from it and from the desire to control it.

The person who climbs up the *Tractarian* ladder and "sees rightly" sees the world as a gestalt picture; he perceives it as a world in which

“everything is as it is and happens as it does happen”, as a world in which “there is no value” (T 6.41), but also as a world in which “There is indeed the inexpressible. This shows itself; it is the mystical” (T 6.522). He is able to see every contingent and insignificant fact as a revelation of the sublime, as a window that reveals the transcendental logical form of the universe, as a miracle.<sup>9</sup> Reason has an important role to play in the Wittgensteinian logical-spiritual exercises. It is, nevertheless, a preliminary role, directed at perception. Without the perceptual climax, the *Tractatus* collapses into opaque nonsense.

The transition from reason to perception is clearly evident in another thinker that was concerned with the limits to what can be said. For Maimonides too, the preliminary logical work is designed to culminate in contemplation. I shall now turn to Maimonides’ conception of the limit to the expressions of thought and to the perceptual dimension in the religious ideal that he envisages, examining the relationship between knowledge, perception, providence and happiness in his *Guide of the Perplexed*.

## II. MAIMONIDES ON GOD AND THE LIMITS OF LANGUAGE

Similarly to the *Tractatus*, the *Guide of the Perplexed* too does not aim at conveying a certain set of ineffable truths about God or the sublime. Maimonides insists that such “truths” could be neither thought nor stated in language. Rather, the *Guide* attempts to bring about a perceptual transformation in the course of which one can “turn his gaze in the right direction” and “see mystically”.<sup>10</sup> The individual of perfect apprehension

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<sup>9</sup> See Ludwig Wittgenstein, “Lecture on Ethics”, in *Philosophical Occasions 1912-1951*, eds. James Klagge and Alfred Nordmann (Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1993); Ludwig Wittgenstein, “Lectures on Religious Belief” in *Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology and Religious Belief*, ed. Cyril Barrett (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1966). For a detailed discussion of seeing aspects in Wittgenstein’s philosophy, see N. K. Verbin, “Religious Beliefs and Aspect Seeing”, *Religious Studies* 36 (2000), pp. 1-23.

<sup>10</sup> The expression “turn his gaze in the right direction” is taken from Simone Weil. See Simone Weil, “The Love of God and Affliction”, *Waiting on God* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1951), pp. 63-78.

must climb through and over the *Guide*, which is concerned with what *cannot* be said, surmount its propositions and come to “see rightly”.<sup>11</sup>

Maimonides attempts to set a limit to what we may say about God. He provides several arguments for the limit that he sets, which have to do with his conceptions of logic, language and their relation to the world. Maimonides believes that an attribute may be one of two things:

It is either the essence of the thing of which it is predicated, in which case it is an explanation of a term... Or the attribute is different from the thing of which it is predicated, being a notion superadded to that thing. This would lead to the conclusion that that attribute is an accident belonging to that essence. (I/51, p. 113)<sup>12</sup>

For Maimonides, the essence of a thing, which gives us its definition, provides the explanation of an item in terms of its location in the inventory of beings. It always involves genus and specific difference. It involves reference to the item's causes. Maimonides, thus, concludes:

This kind of attribute should be denied to God according to everybody. For He, may He be exalted, has no causes anterior to Him that are the cause of His existence and by which, in consequence, He is defined. For this reason it is well known among all people engaged in speculation, who understand what they say, that God cannot be defined (I/52, pp. 114-115).

An attribute that signifies an essential or accidental quality of an item too, cannot be attributed to God since “if He has a part of an essence, His essence must be composite” (I/52, p. 115); if He has accidental qualities superadded to His essence “He would be a substratum of accidents” I/52,

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<sup>11</sup> The mystical interpretation of Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed* is the minority interpretation. For a prominent proponent of this interpretation, see David R. Blumenthal, *Philosophic Mysticism: Studies in Rational Religion* (Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan University Press, 2006). Blumenthal characterizes the post-rationalist phase in Maimonides' *Guide* as “philosophic mysticism”. He states: “Reason is the way to post-rational experience” (p. 40) and “Philosophy ... is the prelude to religious experience...” (p. 41). For more on the history of the *Guide's* mystical interpretation, see Chapter 1 of Blumenthal's *Philosophic Mysticism*. See also Menachem Lorberbaum, *Dazzled by Beauty: Theology as Poetics in Hispanic Jewish Culture* (Jerusalem: Ben-Zvi Institute, 2011), [in Hebrew] p. 33 fn 74.

<sup>12</sup> All references within the text to the *Guide of the Perplexed* are to Moses Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, trans. Shlomo Pines (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963).

p. 15) and as such composite and changing. The most central types of predication are thereby rejected.<sup>13</sup> God cannot be defined. Neither essential nor accidental attributes can be ascribed to Him.

As a faithful Jew, committed to Scripture, Maimonides had to contend with the seemingly positive information that Scripture contains about God's nature and actions. Maimonides insists that all biblical attributes (including "existence") apply to God in a completely equivocal manner:

Similarly the terms "knowledge", "power", "will" and "life", as applied to Him, may He be exalted, and to those possessing knowledge, power, will and life, are purely equivocal, so that their meaning when they are predicated of Him is in no way like their meaning in other applications. Do not deem that they are used amphibolously. For when terms are used amphibolously they are predicated of two things between which there is a likeness in respect of some notion... Accordingly ... the meaning of the qualificative attributions ascribed to Him and the meaning of the attributions known to us have nothing in common in any respect or in any mode; these attributions have in common only the name and nothing else (I/ 56, p. 131).

This austere view concerning religious language appears to be somewhat modified. Maimonides interprets Scripture's references to God's nature as references to His manner of acting, thereby allowing "attributes of action". According to Maimonides, "Every attribute that is found in the books of the deity, may He be exalted, is ... an attribute of His action and not an attribute of His essence..." (I/53, p. 121). The seemingly positive depictions of God's nature in the bible are not to be taken at face value.

Since Maimonides also denies the application of relational attributes to God, insisting that God cannot be related to a time or a place, his "attributes of action" cannot and, indeed, do not refer to God's own manner of acting in the world.<sup>14</sup> By "attributes of action", Maimonides means our human and perspectival tendency to interpret and describe

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<sup>13</sup>Maimonides also discusses relational predication, involving, e.g., an item's relation to a particular place or a particular time. He denies a relation between God and the world, thereby denying relational predication too. He, nevertheless, views relational predication as less problematic since "it does not entail the positing of a multiplicity of eternal things or the positing of alteration taking place in His essence..." (I/52, p. 118).

<sup>14</sup>See *The Guide of the Perplexed* I/52

certain worldly *realia* as effects, brought about by an agent. When we perceive embryos of living beings and the manners in which they are cared for by their caregivers, we tend to say of God that He is merciful. When we perceive calamities annihilating whole tribes or regions, exterminating both young and old, we tend to say that God is jealous and avenging. Maimonides insists, however, that no conclusions concerning God's nature can be drawn, on the basis of what we tend to identify as the effects of His agency.

Given the dangerous ramifications of the use of "attributes of action", namely, the temptation to draw certain conclusions concerning the causal agent's essence from discernable mundane states (conceived of as effects) Maimonides calls for further purification of our idea of God. He calls for negating in thought and speech what God is not:

Know that the description of God, may He be cherished and exalted, by means of negations is the correct description – a description that is not affected by an indulgence in facile language and does not imply any deficiency with respect to God in general or in any particular mode (I/58, p. 134).

Maimonides' negative theology introduces a new "language game" into the life of faith. We do not merely negate various attributes (deficiencies) when using his *via negativa*, stating, for example, that God is not many, or that God is not finite. We also deny the appropriateness of applying attributes, any attribute whatsoever, to God. His *via negativa* involves double negations that cannot be replaced by positive utterances. It involves double negations that undo themselves. His *via negativa* suggests that it is not possible to know God's nature, to entertain thoughts and utter statements *about* Him:

As everyone is aware that it is not possible, except through negation, to achieve an apprehension of that which is in our power to apprehend and that, on the other hand, negation does not give knowledge in any respect of the true reality of the thing with regard to which the particular matter in question is negated – all men, those of the past and those of the future, affirm clearly that God, may He be exalted, cannot be apprehended by the intellects, and that none but He Himself can apprehend what He is, and that apprehension of Him consists in the inability to attain the ultimate term in apprehending Him (I/59, p. 139).

Maimonides' *via negativa*, therefore, culminates in silence:

The most apt phrase concerning this subject is the dictum occurring in the *Psalms*, *Silence is praise to Thee*, which interpreted signifies: silence with regard to You is praise (I/59, p. 139).

Maimonides, however, was not silent, nor did he make do with negative statements only. What is the status of those utterances of the *Guide*, in which Maimonides makes various statements that betray his underlying commitments concerning God's nature: His impassibility, simplicity, unity etc., and which play a part in his argumentation? Are we to view such utterances as false, or are we to judge them meaningless?

Acknowledging the resemblance between Maimonides and the early Wittgenstein, Seeskin maintains that Maimonides does not perceive his own positive utterances about God as nonsense:

In some respects, Maimonides' view of language resembles the one expressed by Wittgenstein at the end of the *Tractatus*... Obviously Maimonides would not say that every claim we make about God is nonsensical. But he would say that the claims we make about God are best understood as steps on the way to something higher: a perspective from which we see that strictly speaking nothing we say about God can be true. After reflecting on the deficiencies of religious language, Maimonides also encourages the reader to pass over the subject in silence, quoting Psalm 65:2: 'Silence is praise to thee'.<sup>15</sup>

It is far from obvious that "Maimonides would not say that every claim we make about God is nonsensical".<sup>16</sup> If we take seriously what Maimonides claims about the radical difference between God and the world, which entails that even "existence" cannot be attributed to God, then the statements of the *Guide*, cannot be merely false. Their failure, and the failure of each and every utterance about God (if it is to be understood as truly about *God*) is categorical and, as such, deeper than the failure of mere falsity. The predicates by means of which we describe the things of this world cannot, in principle, apply to God. Forcing God and our

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<sup>15</sup> Kenneth Seeskin, *Searching for a Distant God: The Legacy of Maimonides* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 35.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

human predicates together in a single utterance is not merely false; it is incoherent nonsense.

Similarly to Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*, such nonsense plays a pedagogical role in the *Guide*. It is "illuminating nonsense". Maimonides calls us to use his "illuminating nonsense" as a ladder, to climb over and discard. Discarding the ladder is, among other things, resisting our desire to speak *about* God and passing over to silence. The Maimonidean silence, similarly to the Wittgensteinian silence, marks the point at which reason stops, language halts and something new may dawn.

When we realize that we can neither speak about the sublime nor acquire any knowledge of it, when we give up the quest for propositional knowledge about God, and recognize the limits of reason, of thinking and saying, then and only then, may we be able to come to see. At the top of the ladder, beyond propositional knowledge, after reason is used to set its own limits, and undo itself, awaits perception for the philosopher/mystic. Something shows itself; something becomes manifest. Maimonides states that it is a dazzling and beautiful apprehension:

Thus, all the philosophers say: We are dazzled by His beauty, and He is hidden from us because of the intensity with which He becomes manifest, just as the sun is hidden to eyes that are too weak to apprehend it (I/59, p. 139).

Like the perception of aspects, it is a fleeting perception:

Sometimes truth flashes out to us so that we think it is day, and then matter and habit in their various forms conceal it so that we find ourselves again in an obscure night, almost as were at first. (I/Introduction, p. 7)

The *Guide* aims to cleanse the mind from various mistakes, and prepare it to the flashing of that "dazzling truth". It aims to produce a certain type of seeing. When successful, it produces a life that bears certain distinct characteristics, despite the fleeting nature of the dazzling perceptions. It is a good and happy life. It is also a life that enjoys God's providence. I shall end this section with a few remarks on the relation between "seeing mystically" and God's providence.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> It may appear that Maimonides' discussion of divine providence is related to the workings of the intellect rather than to perception. Maimonides' description of the climactic moment of the deaths of Moses, Aaron and Miriam reveals that providence too, is a matter of non-propositional "knowledge".

Similarly to Wittgenstein, for Maimonides too the capacity to go beyond propositional knowledge and “see mystically” can liberate us from the contingency of the world, and transform us into free and happy human beings. Maimonides believed that a life characterized by this capacity is a good and happy life. He understood divine providence in terms of that capacity, thereby affirming an internal connection between “divine providence”, “happiness”, and “apprehension”.

There are, however, two conceptions of divine providence in the *Guide*: providence as protection from all types of physical harm, e.g., hunger, poverty, injury or sickness, and providence as protection from the agony that such ills as poverty, injury or sickness ordinarily bring about, but not necessarily from the ills themselves. Such a contemplative conception of divine providence does not involve divine intervention in the ordinary state of things nor does it guarantee protection against physical harm. In what follows, I shall assume that it is the latter, contemplative conception of divine providence that represents Maimonides’ views about God’s providence.<sup>18</sup>

Maimonides affirms the existence of divine providence insisting that it proceeds according to the principles of justice. Understanding God’s nature as “intellect” and our being created in God’s image in terms of our “intellect”, Maimonides perceives the nature of God’s providence over humanity, too, in terms of the workings of the intellect.

[P]rovidence can only come from an intelligent being... Accordingly everyone with whom something of this [intellectual] overflow is united will be reached by providence to the extent to which it is reached by intellect (III/17, p. 474).

Divine providence, according to Maimonides “is consequent upon the intellect and attached to it” (III/17, p. 474).

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<sup>18</sup> The question of Maimonides’ ultimate views concerning the nature of God’s providence has troubled his contemporaries too. Shmuel Ibn Tibbon, Maimonides’ contemporary and first Hebrew translator, has written to Maimonides asking for clarification concerning Maimonides’ theory of providence. He suggested several possible interpretations of Maimonides’ views on providence and asked for his judgment concerning the most appropriate. No answer, however, has survived. See Zvi Diesendruck, “Samuel and Moses Ibn Tibbon on Maimonides’ Theory of Providence”, *Hebrew Union College Annual* 11 (1936), pp. 341-356.

This famous Maimonidean principle is explicated in several manners, in the *Guide*: 1) Maimonides insists that divine providence watches only over the individuals belonging to the human species since only they are endowed with intellect; 2) He insists on a correspondence between the degree of one's intellectual perfection and the degree to which one enjoys God's providence; 3) He maintains that divine providence is absent when the individual's intellect does not focus on God although "its withdrawal then is not like its withdrawal from those who have never had intellectual cognition" (III/51, p. 625), and, 4) Maimonides insists that the nature of the distraction has a bearing upon the nature of the harm that befalls on the one who is distracted. He concludes:

If a man's thought is free from distraction, if he apprehends Him, may He be exalted, in the right way and rejoices in what he apprehends, that individual can never be afflicted with evil of any kind. For he is with God and God is with him. When, however, he abandons Him, may He be exalted, and is thus separated from God and God separated from him, he becomes in consequence of this a target for every evil that may happen to befall him. For the thing that necessarily brings about providence and deliverance from the sea of chance consists in that intellectual overflow (III/51, p. 625).

Providence guarantees deliverance from the sea of chance. When one apprehends the sublime, one is free from the sea of chance and its ills. When one, however, focuses on the contingent and insignificant, when one is immersed in the sea of chance one is, by definition, distracted and separated from God. Such a state is, in and of itself, an undesirable, miserable one, in which the perceiver is vulnerable to the accidents of the world.

Maimonides understands Job's suffering in such a manner, i.e., as manifesting ignorance. In his commentary on Job, Maimonides makes the following statements:

The most marvellous and extraordinary thing about this story is the fact that knowledge is not attributed in it to Job. He is not said to be a wise or a comprehending or an intelligent man. Only moral virtue and righteousness in action are ascribed to him. For if he had been wise, his situation would not have been obscure for him... (III/22, p. 487).

Job's afflictions do not render divine providence impossible or improbable. Job denied God's providence when he had been unwise. After the divine revelations, after he came to acquire wisdom, after he came to *see* with his own eyes, to see rightly or mystically, he ceased to complain:

When he knew God with a certain knowledge, he admitted that true happiness, which is the knowledge of the deity, is guaranteed to all who know Him and that a human being cannot be troubled in it by any of all the misfortunes in question. While he had known God only through the traditional stories and not by the way of speculation, Job had imagined that the things thought to be happiness, such as health, wealth, and children, are the ultimate goal. For this reason he fell into such perplexity and said such things as he did (III/23, pp. 492-493).

Realizing that property, good health and social status are insignificant, the Maimonidean sage is not pained by their loss. "Seeing mystically" allows the sage to transcend the world, while remaining susceptible to the laws that govern it. The manner of dying of such a sage too, reveals his intellectual perfection – the sage dies "by a kiss", "by the mouth of God", as the Deuteronomistic text reads. Referring to the manner in which Moses, Aaron and Miriam had died, Maimonides states: "The three of them died in the pleasure of this apprehension [of God] due to the intensity of passionate love." (III/51, p. 628). Maimonides characterizes such a manner of dying as "salvation from death" (III/51, 628).<sup>19</sup> The sage who receives God's providence to its fullest is wholly protected from the sea of chance, from every type of harm, including death. Nothing can undo him.

What is the nature of the intellectual apprehension of God that guarantees God's providence, protection from the ills of this world and from death itself? Given his discussion of the divine attributes in the first part of the *Guide*, "intellectual apprehension" cannot be conceived of in terms of propositional knowledge that shows itself in true utterances about God and God's nature. The "supreme pleasure of apprehension due to the intensity of passionate love" ascribed to Moses, Aaron and Miriam clearly marks a state that goes beyond reason and beyond the fruits of reason, i.e., beyond what can be stated in propositions. It involves

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<sup>19</sup> I am grateful to Ron Margolin who pointed out to me the significance of these statements.

contemplation of the sublime, an experience of something that shows itself, a type of seeing.

Divine providence, for Maimonides, does not involve a deity who intervenes or interferes in the contingent world but a creator who installs reason and the capacity to use it and to go beyond it, into some of His creatures. It involves a creator who installs, in some of His creatures, the capacity to go beyond the world, toward that which shows itself but cannot be uttered in propositions. Providence, non-propositional intellectual apprehension and happiness are manifestations of one and the same thing, in Maimonides.

To summarize, the person who fulfils the Wittgensteinian ideal sees the world *sub specie aeterni*, sees it rightly, is the one who, for Maimonides, transcends the world; he is guarded against harm and enjoys God's providence to the fullest. The capacity for liberation or salvation is a perceptual capacity. It does not produce propositional knowledge nor is it the direct outcome of propositional knowledge. For both Maimonides and Wittgenstein, the life of knowledge involves "illuminating nonsense", incommunicable "knowledge", a mystical mode of contemplation.

I have so far emphasized the similarities between Maimonides and Wittgenstein. I would like to end with a few brief comments about some of the differences between them. It is on account of these differences that we may conclude that, despite appearances, two fundamentally different conceptions of the sublime and two different models of the "mystical life" are established by Maimonides and by the early Wittgenstein.

### III. REFERRING TO GOD

In chapter 61 of the *Guide*, Maimonides appears to distinguish between sense and reference. After insisting that we can neither understand God nor speak *about* God, Maimonides points out that we can nevertheless *refer* to God:

All the names of God, may He be exalted, that are to be found in any of the books derive from actions. There is nothing secret in this matter. The only exception is one name: namely *Yod, He, Vav, He*. This is the name of God, may He be exalted, that has been originated without any derivation, and for this reason, it is called the *articulated name*. This means that this name gives a clear unequivocal indication of His essence, may He be exalted...

There can be no doubt about the fact that this great name, which as you know is not pronounced except in the *Sanctuary* by the *sanctified Priests of the Lord* and only in the *benediction of the Priests* and by the *High Priest* upon the *day of fasting*, is indicative of a notion with reference to which there is no association between God, may He be exalted, and what is other than He. Perhaps it indicates the notion of a necessary existence, according to the [Hebrew] language, of which we today know only a very scant portion and also with regard to its pronunciation. Generally speaking, the greatness of this name and the prohibition against pronouncing it are due to its being indicative of the essence of Him, may He be exalted, in such a way that none of the created things is associated with Him in this indication. As the Sages, *may their memory be blessed* have said of it: *My name that is peculiar to Me.* (I/61, pp. 147-148)

The negative results of the preceding discussion of chapters 51-60 are not the end of the matter. Maimonides maintains that although we cannot know God's nature, nor speak about Him, we can nevertheless refer to Him. It appears that after the appropriate philosophical preparation, we may use the divine name to "gesture at" the sublime, to transpose ourselves by means of language, or to be more precise, by means of the divine name that transcends language, beyond language and beyond this world.

Benor believes that it is by means of negative theology that we can refer to God, in the *Guide*:

I propose that Maimonides found in negative theology a method of uniquely identifying the ground of all being, and thus a method of determining the reference of the name 'God', without forming any conception of what God is.<sup>20</sup>

The *Guide*, however, does not assign any such role to its negative theology.<sup>21</sup> Reference to God is *not* made possible by negative theology, which is, after all, of this world, but rather, by God's *own* revelation

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<sup>20</sup> Ehud Z. Benor, "Meaning and Reference in Maimonides' Negative Theology", *Harvard Theological Review* 88/3 (1995), p. 347.

<sup>21</sup> Contrary to Lorberbaum, I maintain that reference to God, in the *Guide* is not made possible by the philosophical oxymoronic construct "necessary existent" either. For more on Lorberbaum's position, see, Menachem Lorberbaum, *Dazzled by Beauty: Theology as Poetics in Hispanic Jewish Culture* (Jerusalem: Ben-Zvi Institute, 2011) [in Hebrew].

of His divine name. Maimonides' negative theology is a necessary preliminary philosophical exercise that cleanses the mind, and prepares it for the contemplation of the divine name. It is a therapeutic phase by means of which the mind is cleared of its erroneous ideas about God, and thereby protected against the temptations of idolatry. Such a phase is necessary if we are to be able to combat the ideas or pictures that may occur to us, when we contemplate the divine name. Negative theology, however, does not determine the reference of the name "God". It is God Himself who guarantees the reference of His unique name.<sup>22</sup> The divine name "which has originated without any derivation" is a trans-linguistic phenomenon; it is a divine revelation, which as such, belongs within the Holy of Holies.

Lorberbaum too, emphasizes the significance of the Tetragrammaton in the *Guide*:

Maimonides formed a process that removes consciousness and its projections on God from the world; it does so through a critique of the positive attributes ascribed to God, while focusing consciousness on God by means of YHWH, God as a necessary being...<sup>23</sup>

Lorberbaum also maintains that the contemplation of the divine name YHWH culminates in a non-propositional, supra-rational perception or apprehension:

At the climax of the religious process that Maimonides envisages is a moment of enlightenment. The intellectualist mysticism of Maimonides resembles both the Plotinian mysticism and the Sufi mysticism of Rabbi Bahya Ibn Paquda.<sup>24</sup>

Thus, the Maimonidean "*via mystica*" consists of two components: 1) preliminary philosophical phase that is directed at cleansing the mind of its erroneous, idolatrous ideas about God. This phase involves one's ascent from the lower, idolatrous literary reading of the canonical

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<sup>22</sup> I, therefore, also reject Benor's thesis concerning Maimonides' constructivist theology. Given the divine name YHWH, and its role, there is no need for such theology. I am, therefore, committed to a more austere interpretation of Maimonides' rejection of predication.

<sup>23</sup> Lorberbaum, *Dazzled by Beauty*, p. 121 (my translation).

<sup>24</sup> Ibid. Lorberbaum, therefore, similarly to Blumenthal, takes the *Guide's* philosophy as "philosophical mysticism".

texts, into their reading in terms of God's attributes of action, then proceeding to use negative attributes and ending with silence, i.e., with the realization that God's nature cannot be grasped and, that we cannot, therefore, say anything about God, and 2) a positive mystical phase of contemplation of the divine name, YHWH, designed to lead us toward a "moment of enlightenment", toward non-propositional knowledge, toward a super-rational perception or apprehension.

The extraordinary nature of the divine name and its extraordinary contemplative role colour the Maimonidean ladder with transcendentalist colours. It takes the Maimonidean contemplation beyond the Wittgensteinian gestalt awareness of the sublime nature of the contingent. In other words, while the *Tractarian* "mystical feeling" involves the perception of the *world*, this world, under its sublime, logically necessary aspect, the Maimonidean mysticism may be said to involve a *sensus divinitatis* that facilitates, by means of the divine name, our ascent toward that which transcends the world and its logic.

Not only does the Maimonidean "*via mystica*" offer a different type of liberation, but it also offers experiences of beauty, happiness and safety that go beyond the *Tractatus'* *amor fati*. The Maimonidean philosopher/mystic does not merely see the world and every banal and insignificant fact within it as a work of art. He is dazzled by *His* beauty; not merely by the beauty of the universe. He does not merely cease to bend the world according to his will, nor does he merely cease to will. The Maimonidean philosopher/mystic wills passionately. He bends his whole being toward God; he enjoys the pleasure of the apprehension of God; he is in a state of intense passionate love (III/51). In his pleasure of apprehension, he transcends the contingent world; he transcends illness and death, and finds happiness, for "he is with God and God is with him" (III/51, p. 625).

Thus, while the early Wittgenstein's ladder takes us nowhere, abandoning us into paradox, to run against the walls of our cage (LE, p. 44), against the boundaries of language, unable to reach the sublime, the Maimonidean ladder provides us with a positive way out of our cage: we are able to say "YHWH" even if we cannot say anything about YHWH. We are able to direct ourselves at that which is beyond this world. Our ability to meditate on the divine name introduces

something “wholly other” into our limited, corporeal lives, something that takes us away from our all-too-human cage.

Whether we are in a cage or somewhere along a ladder that may transpose us beyond the world, toward a “dazzling truth”, is a question that this paper cannot answer.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> I am grateful to Menachem Lorberbaum for enlightening conversations on Maimonides’ intellectual mysticism, for his friendship and support.



# DO THE RESULTS OF DIVINE ACTIONS HAVE PRECEDING CAUSES?

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**Abstract.** If God brings about an event in the universe, does it have a preceding cause? For example, if the universe began with the Big Bang and if God brought it about, did the Big Bang then have a preceding cause? The standard answer is: yes, it was caused by a divine willing. I propose an alternative view: God's actions, unlike human actions, are not initiated by willings, undertakings, or volitions, but God brings about the intended event directly. Presenting a solution to the dilemma of free will I explain what 'bringing about directly' means and show that the question of what an action begins with is distinct from the question whether it is a basic action.

## I. THE DIVINE WILLING VIEW

Assume that the universe had a beginning and that that beginning was caused by God. Was there then an event that caused the beginning of the universe? More generally, *if God causes an event E in the universe beginning at t, is there then an event C beginning before t which causes E?* The usual answer is yes, I shall argue that the true answer is no. God can bring about events in the universe in a certain sense 'directly' so that they have no preceding cause.

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<sup>1</sup> I am grateful to Rolfe King as well as to an anonymous referee for many helpful comments. A part of the work for this article was carried out in project Fondecyt 1100608 funded by the Chilean institution Conicyt.

The usual view we find, for example, in Hofmann and Rosenkrantz's book *Divine Attributes* (2002):

Necessarily, if an agent, A, intentionally [...] brings about an event [...], then A performs such an action either by deciding (or choosing) to do so or by endeavoring (or willing) to do so. Thus, if God exists, then he performs actions [...] via his decisions or endeavorings. (Hoffman and Rosenkrantz 2002, p. 103)

The authors proceed to argue that to endeavour something is to engage in a 'volitional activity', and 'a volitional activity of God would be an *intrinsic change* in him' (p. 103 f). Only things in time can change, therefore God is in time.

Richard Swinburne gives a similar argument for God being in time: God's 'acting must be prior to the effects that his action causes' (Swinburne 1993, p. 216), because causes are earlier than their effects. Also Quentin Smith assumes that there would be divine willings if there were a God, when he investigates 'the relation between [God's] act of willing (an event) and the beginning of the universe (another event)' (Smith 1996, p. 170).

These authors assume that every action, at least every free action, involves an action event in the agent's mind which causes the intended event. Defenders of agent causation call it an 'undertaking' (Chisholm 1976) or 'trying' (Swinburne 1997, p. 93), others call it a 'volition', 'endeavouring', or 'willing'. From this assumption it follows that *if God acts, then there are divine undertakings which cause the events which God brings about*. I call this the *divine willing view*. On this view, if the universe began with the Big Bang, then there is a divine undertaking which began before the Big Bang and which caused the Big Bang.

In this article I propose an alternative to this view. To explain and defend it, I shall first present a solution to the dilemma of free will. Then I shall distinguish the question of what an action process begins with from the question of whether an action is 'basic'. I shall investigate, for human as well as for divine actions, what the action process begins with and which actions are basic. I shall defend the view that there are no divine willings and that the beginning of the universe had no preceding cause. More generally, my thesis is that God can bring about events in the universe so that they have no preceding cause. This thesis is independent

from the assumption that the universe began with the Big Bang and that the universe had a beginning.

I am presupposing that God is in time and that there was a time before the beginning of the universe. (As for example defended by Swinburne 1993, ch. 12.) On the view that God is outside of time, it would be clear that an event brought about by God does not have a preceding cause. Further, I presuppose that if event  $x$  caused event  $y$ , then  $x$  began earlier than  $y$ . Therefore saying that the Big Bang had no preceding cause is equivalent to saying that it had no event cause.

## II. THE DILEMMA OF FREE WILL

The dilemma of free will is that the following two sentences seem to be true:

- (A) If an action has a deterministic cause (and thus is the result of a deterministic process), then it is not free, because it is determined and thus the agent has no control over it.
- (B) If an action does not have a deterministic cause, then it is not free either, because then it happens by chance and is therefore not under the control of the agent.

By a 'deterministic' cause one usually understands one which necessitates its effect. (A) means that if an action was the result of a deterministic causal process and thus necessitated by preceding events, then it was not free. The agent could not intervene, he 'had no choice', as we say. That is just the sort of scenario we mean when we say that someone is not free. (B) applies the principle that an event is either the result of a deterministic process or the result of an indeterministic, chancy process. By a free action we mean one which has its origin in the agent, the agent chooses which action occurs, motivated through reasons or inclinations. If an action was the result of an indeterministic process, then it occurred by chance and thus it was not up to the agent which action would occur. The agent did not have *control* over the occurrence of the action. If both, (A) and (B), were correct, then free actions would be impossible, as many have claimed (e.g. Hobbes 1654, p. 32; Honderich 2002; Strawson 2002).

Compatibilists reject (A). They hold that free will is compatible with the doctrine of determinism that every event is necessitated by preceding events and so is the result of a deterministic causal process.

Many compatibilists believe in determinism, that is part of their motivation for embracing compatibilism. Another possible motivation for compatibilism is assumption (B) that if an action is not the result of a deterministic process, then it is the result of an indeterministic process and hence occurs by chance and is not under the control of the agent and is not done for reasons. My view is that (A) is true and that there is a satisfactory reply to (B). So I shall now present an incompatibilist solution of the dilemma which rejects (B) and in this respect makes the refuge to compatibilism unnecessary. My view is *incompatibilist* in the usual sense that it describes free actions as something that is incompatible with determinism as usually understood as the Hobbesian<sup>2</sup> doctrine that every event is necessitated by preceding events. However, I have argued elsewhere (Wachter 2009, ch. 7.6) that the usual notion of determinism describes something that is impossible and that there is another view which can adequately be called 'determinism' and which is compatible with free will. Likewise, there is a more useful meaning for 'deterministic' than the usual one.

The dilemma of free will arises through the assumption, which we can call *mechanicism*, that an event is either the result of a deterministic process so that it is necessitated by preceding events, or the result of an indeterministic, chancy process. We should reject this assumption. We see why if we consider what a free action would be. A free action of a man (or of any agent with a body) which changes some physical state in the universe involves a physical causal process. The intended event is the result of a causal process in the brain, nerves, and muscles. We can call this the action process. If the action process goes back for ever, then the action is not free because it is not under the control of the agent and the agent is forced to do it (regardless of whether he feels forced or free). So the action process must have a beginning, the 'initial event'. The initial event is a complete cause of the intended result of the action. A part of the initial event may be the result of a causal process, but at least a part of it must be not the result of a causal process, neither a deterministic nor a chancy one. We can call this event the 'initiating event'. How does the initiating event occur?

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<sup>2</sup> As Hobbes (1656, § 2.9.5) said, all events 'have their necessity in things antecedent.'

Some philosophers hold that it must be the result of a process which is indeterministic at some stage. Randolph Clarke argues that it has to be caused indeterministically: 'When a decision is freely made [...] there remained until the making of that decision a genuine chance that the agent would not make that decision.' (Clarke 2000, p. 21, similarly Balaguer 2009, p. 4) Others hold that in a free action the decision is caused deterministically but the process of deliberation leading to the decision is indeterministic. (Dennett 1978; Fischer and Ravizza 1992; Mele 1995)

It is true that if an action process were indeterministic, in one of these two ways, then it would be in some sense true that it was possible, until the action occurred, that another action would occur instead of the one that did occur. In this sense it is true that the agent could have acted differently. But this is not what we are getting at when we say that a free agent 'could have done otherwise'. If it is a matter of indeterminacy which action occurs, then it is not up to the agent what he does. An action that occurs by chance is not a free action, because the agent lacks control over which action occurs. If an action is the result of an indeterministic process, then the agent has as little control over it as an agent has over an action that occurs as the result of a deterministic process.

So how does the initiating event occur? If the action is free, then it is neither the result of a deterministic process, nor the result of an indeterministic process. It is not the result of a causal process at all. Is there another way how an event can come about? Yes, the agent might bring about the event directly. That means that the event had no preceding cause, but its occurrence was due to the agent. The agent made it pop up. It would be misleading to say that it was caused by the agent's decision or choice, because that sounds as if the decision was a preceding event which caused it. But we can say that it was the agent's decision or choice. The agent may or may not have intended to bring it about. He must have had some intention governing the action, but perhaps he was not aware of this event at all. We can call an event which in this sense has no preceding cause but is due to an agent a *choice event*. (I have defended this solution already in Wachter 2003b.)

Human actions involve mental events that are suitably called 'willing', 'tryings', or 'undertakings'. If I try to raise my arm but the arm does not move because it is paralysed, then there is still the trying, which is

a mental event of a certain type. If I try to raise my arm successfully, then there is an event of the same type. It initiates the causal process leading to the rising of the arm. In human actions the choice events seem to be always tryings. When a man intentionally moves a part of his body, then the action process starts with and through the trying, which lasts until the end of the action, and at all stages the trying has no preceding cause but is a choice event.

Choice events will seem mysterious to many philosophers, because it has become an unquestioned dogma that there is only one way how an event can come about, namely by being caused through preceding events and thus through being the result of a causal process. But there is nothing incoherent or mysterious about choice events. The question is just whether there are choice events, but it is not our task here to examine the evidence for this. Choice events are only mysterious from the point of view that every event occurs through being caused by preceding events. In itself they are no more mysterious than events that are caused by preceding events.

### III. IS THIS 'AGENT CAUSATION'?

One might think that this solution of the dilemma of free will is the same as what some authors have called 'agent causation', but this is not so. Roderick Chisholm and Richard Swinburne, in their defence of 'agent causation', say that an action is free if the 'undertaking' or 'trying' has 'no sufficient causal condition' (Chisholm 1976, p. 201) or if it is not 'causally necessitated' (Swinburne 1997, p. 231) or not 'fully caused by earlier events' (Swinburne 1994, p. 25). That leaves open the possibility that it is a chance event, over which the agent would have no control. In my view, we must dismiss all approaches which assume that chance is a condition for freedom, because chance would diminish control.

Randolph Clarke defends 'agent causation' in the following way: 'There is a relation of producing, bringing about, or making happen in which one event stands to another when the first directly causes the second. For an agent to directly cause an event (such as an action) is for that agent – an enduring substance – to stand in that relation to that event.' (Clarke 2005, p. 411) But he also says that a free action is 'caused by the agent and [!] nondeterministically caused by events such as the

agent's having certain reasons. [...] The action caused by the agent is said to be also caused by the indicated events.' (p. 410)

Does that mean that the action is overdetermined? If not, then there are not two ways how an event can come about, event causation *and* agent causation. Either the action (or the beginning of the action process) is the result of a causal process, or it is brought about by the agent in the sense of being a choice event. Of course, if the action (or the event with which the action process begins) were the result of a causal process, then it would still be true to *say* that the agent did it or brought it about, but that does not mean that the action came about in a special way, distinct from event causation. Clarke might mean by 'There is agent causation' just that sentences of the form 'Miller brought about *x*' cannot be analysed in terms of sentences of the form 'Event *x* caused event *y*', but this provides no solution for the dilemma of free will at all.<sup>3</sup>

If, on the other hand, the action is overdetermined and thus also a choice event, then the agent could have brought about another action instead, one which is not also caused by preceding events. Clarke probably has in mind that human actions are *always* 'caused by the agent and nondeterministically caused by events', but why should that be so? Why and how should the agent and the events be so connected that every action is overdetermined?

I suspect that Clarke accepts the mechanistic doctrine that every event is the result of a (deterministic or indeterministic) causal process. But then there is no good reason for saying that there is agent causation, besides event causation, as another way how an event can come about. In any case Clarke's theory does not claim that the action has a beginning that has no preceding cause, and therefore, in my view, it does not solve the dilemma of free will.

Timothy O'Connor states in his agent causation theory that the agent has it 'directly within his power to cause any of a range of states of intention.' (O'Connor 2000, p. 72) So there is a causal relation between the agent and some event. However, I cannot find anywhere that he says that this event has no preceding cause.

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<sup>3</sup> Chisholm 1978, p. 622 f and Lowe 2008, p. 123 explicitly understand 'agent causation' in this sense. Wachter 2003a, p. 187 criticises this.

E. J. Lowe's theory of agent causation is closer to mine. When a human agent, *A*, caused by acting an event *e*, such as motion in his hand, then that is an instance of agent causation. For Lowe this leaves open whether some prior events were causes of *e*, but he finds it 'perfectly conceivable' that '*e* occurred as a consequence of *A*'s agency and yet *e* was not causally determined by prior events (nor, we may suppose, did *e* have the probability of its occurrence fully determined by prior events).' (p. 29) In another passage he calls agents 'unmoved movers' (p. 12) and 'initiators of new causal chains.' His solution to the dilemma of free will therefore seems to me to be in essence similar to mine, although he says that the agent's causing *e* has no cause at all (p. 129) because it is no event at all (p. 131), and although he objects to calling agents 'causes' of their volitions (in a yet unpublished article).

I conclude that, with the exception of Lowe, the contemporary authors who have called their view 'agent causation' do not solve the dilemma of free will because they fail to claim that there is another way how an event can come to occur and that an event brought about in this way by an agent has therefore no preceding cause.

#### IV. GOD DOES NOT NEED UNDERTAKINGS

So a human action always starts with a choice event that is a trying. Are divine actions like this? Was the Big Bang caused by a trying in God's mind? Imagine someone locked into a room with a switchboard. Pressing buttons on the switchboard makes some machines, which the person can observe through a window, behave in certain ways. All the person can do outside his room, he can do by pressing certain buttons on the switchboard, and he can do it only in this way. Pressing buttons starts certain causal processes which lead to certain behaviours of the machines. He does not know what these processes are, but he knows which buttons he has to press in order to achieve which results.

Similarly, we can act only in certain ways. When you try to raise your arm, then a certain action process is started automatically. We can change the material world only through our body, and we can move our body only through these mental events which we can call tryings or undertakings. The trying, which an identity theorist would take to be identical to a brain event, causes certain events in your nerves and

muscles. There is no way you can cut short this process, e.g. by directly making your muscles contract, without there occurring the brain events which usually make your muscles contract when you raise your arm. We may have several possibilities for moving a certain stone, e.g. by pushing it with our hand or by using a stick, but we (or most of us) cannot, for example, just focus on it and move it in the immediate way in which we can move our arms.

God, being almighty and having no body, is not constrained like this. There is no thing which he always has to use in order to bring something about. He does not have to use anything in order to bring about a certain event. He can bring about any event *directly*. God can move a stone by moving some other stone, which then pushes it. But he can also move the stone without using another material object. The movement of the stone then has no preceding physical cause. In the latter case he brings about the intended event more *directly* than in the former.

The divine willing view assumes that the most direct way in which God can bring about an event in the universe, like the beginning of the universe or a miracle, is through an undertaking. But why should God, in order to create a universe, first bring about an event in his mind, an undertaking, which then causes the universe? For us men all choice events are undertakings, which, if the action succeeds, initiate a causal process leading to the intended event. But that is a limitation of power. God can bring about the universe straight away, without delay, as a choice event. God can bring about any event as a choice event. That is what his omnipotence consists in. God is entirely aware of the action, and he brings about the choice event consciously, but there is no event in his mind that is a preceding cause and hence an event cause of the intended event in the universe. We can call this view the 'direct divine action' view. To have a body – more precisely, to be able to act only through a body – is a limitation of one's power. We can make a difference to the world around us only through the chunk of matter which is our body, and we can direct our body only through tryings. But God has unlimited power and thus no body; he can make a difference to the world other than through certain events in his mind and a particular chunk of matter. Whatever God chooses to happen happens without having a preceding cause.

How is this view compatible with the plausible assumption that divine actions can be explained through God's having certain reasons and

aims in mind? The defender of the divine willing view can assume that the undertaking or volition contains an intention and an awareness of reasons. He could even hold that the undertaking or volition has divine mental events such as awareness of reasons as preceding *causes*. But in my view this is a false conception of acting for a reason. In acting for a reason we look at a reason in our mind and then respond to it by acting. If some state of our mind or of our brain pushes us to act, then that is not a reason motivating an action, because then the action is not an active response to a reason but a passive effect.<sup>4</sup> If someone does something for a reason, then neither the reason nor the belief in or awareness of the reason is an event cause of the action. The ‘acting on’ is not reducible to some other relation. It is something mental, something to which the subject has privileged access. If someone saw a reason (or believed to see it) and acted on it, that explains the action. In a very wide sense, such as the meaning of the Greek notion *αἰτία*, you can still call the reason or the awareness of it a ‘cause’ of the action, but not in the sense of efficient causation or event causation or law-governed causation. So according to the direct divine action view, God performs his actions with intentions and in the light of reasons, but his having an aim in mind and his being aware of reasons do not cause his action.

## V. BASIC ACTIONS

Is my claim that God can bring about any event as a choice event the same as William Alston’s suggestion that any action of God may be basic? And if not (as I shall suggest), are both claims true? We find Alston’s suggestion in his article ‘Can We Speak Literally of God?’ (1981):

[The general concept of a basic action is] the concept of an action that is not performed *by* or *in* (simultaneously) performing some other action. It is just a fact about human beings (*not* a general constraint on action or basic action) that only movements of certain parts of their bodies are under their direct voluntary control and that anything else they bring off, they must accomplish *by* moving their bodies in certain ways. If *I* am to knock over a vase or make a soufflé or communicate

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<sup>4</sup> As argued also by Lowe 2008, ch. 8 and Wachter 2009, § 8.4.

with someone, I must do so by moving my hands, legs, vocal organs, or whatever. But that is only because of my limitations. We can conceive of agents, corporeal or otherwise, such that things other than their bodies (if any) are under their direct voluntary control. Some agents might be such that they could knock over a vase or bring a soufflé into being without doing something else in order to do so. (Alston 1981, p. 61)

[A]ll God's actions might be basic actions. If any change whatsoever could conceivably be the core of a basic action, and if God is omnipotent, then clearly, God *could* exercise direct voluntary control over every change in the world which he influences by his activity. (Alston 1981, p. 61 f)

[An omnipotent deity] could ordain that intentions can directly cause a parting of waters. (Alston 1981, p. 62)

The last sentence implies that if God lets the waters part in the most direct way, the parting of the waters is caused by his 'intentions'. Presumably 'intentions' are events in God's mind. So Alston does *not* put forward my claim that God can bring about any event, e.g. the parting of waters, as a choice event. Let us have a closer look at what a basic action is and how this relates to choice events. Roughly, to say that Miller's doing *x* was more basic than his doing *y* means that it is true to say that Miller did *y* by doing *x*. To say that Miller's doing *x* was a basic action means that Miller did not do *x* by doing something else, he just did it. (Below, I shall modify this definition with respect to 'doing' and 'trying'.) So being a basic action and *x* being a more basic action than *y* applies to actions under a certain *description*. Therefore one can also call one description of an action more basic than another one. It makes no sense to point at someone's moving finger and say 'That was a basic action'. If the person was pointing towards the Sun by moving his finger, then his moving his finger was a basic action, but his pointing towards the Sun was not. To take another example, 'If I sign my name, *that* is done by moving my hand in a certain way, so the action is not basic; but if moving my hand is *not* done *by* doing something else, it will count as a basic action.' (Alston 1981, p. 55) What is this relationship between the moving the hand and the signing? In some sense these are identical. They are somehow two descriptions referring to the same object or the same action. But they are descriptions of a certain kind. 'Webster caused the movement of neuron B in his brain' (so that his arm rose) is not a more basic action than 'Webster raised his

arm', because although both are somehow descriptions of the same event, it is not true in the sense in question that Webster *moved B*.

Richard Swinburne (1997, p. 87, following Danto 1965 and Baier 1971) distinguishes *teleologically* from *causally* basic actions. That an action under description B is *teleologically* more basic than an action under description A, means that the agent does A following the recipe 'Do B', whilst he does B naturally, not following a recipe. That an action under the description B is *causally* more basic than an action under description A means that the agent does A by doing B with the intention that B has certain effects.

Both these kinds of basicity as well as Alston's notion of a basic action concern the *intention* governing an action. The reason wherefore 'Webster caused the movement of neuron B in his brain' (so that his arm rose) is not a more basic action than 'Webster raised his arm' is that Webster had no intention to move neuron B, he did not think of neuron B in any way. With action descriptions of the form 'Webster did so-and-so' we not only describe who caused what but also an aspect of the intention. The intentions governing our actions cover a certain range, or they have a width, so that several descriptions apply to them. An action description does not describe what this range is but captures only one aspect of the intention. Therefore we sometimes give several descriptions of an action. 'Jones shot a moose yesterday' does not entail 'Jones bent his forefinger', nor does the latter entail the former. Jones could have shot by bending his middle finger, and he could have bent his forefinger in order to switch on the light. Further, the descriptions of the physical events do not entail with which intention the agent acted. Assume that the bullet first killed a sparrow and then a fly sitting on the moose. To say that Jones intentionally killed the sparrow but did not intentionally kill the fly (because he did not even see it) would then provide additional information about the intention.

Swinburne's distinction between two kinds of basicity reflects two aspects or dimensions in intentions. One is that in some actions we follow, as Swinburne says, a 'recipe'. One could include here also recipes of the form 'Do B, then C, then D'. In order to make a soufflé, crack four eggs, whip the egg whites, add a bit of lemon juice, etc. But then my raising my arm 2 cms would be more basic than my raising my arm 10 cms, and there would be no basic action. We better call B, C, and D just 'parts' of the

action and restrict teleological basicity to actions where we know that doing B constitutes doing A. For example, in order to enter into a contract, you have to write your name at the right place on a piece of paper with the text of the contract. That an agent follows a recipe of this kind means that he does certain things with certain intentions. In this case certain action descriptions apply so that some are 'teleologically' more basic than others.

'Causal' basicity reflects a different aspect of an intention. Jones killed the moose by bending his finger, believing that this would *cause* the bullet to fly to the moose, enter into his body, and damage the organs so that the moose would die. If an intention contains such a belief about what is likely to cause what, then certain action descriptions apply so that some are 'causally' more basic than others.

Now we see that the question of which action description in an action is most basic (in each of the senses defined) is different from the question of what event an action process begins with and which event is a choice event. The former question is about the structure and the content of the intention governing the action, the latter question is about what event the action process begins with. Alston does not distinguish between these questions. He says some things about the action process, but the question he addresses is whether any action of God could be 'basic'. He says that God could bring about everything 'directly', but he does not claim anything equivalent to my claim that God can bring about any event as choice event, because he writes only that he 'could ordain that intentions can directly cause a parting of waters'. I take it that 'intentions' here refers to a kind of event in God's mind. So it entails that the parting of the waters is caused by an intention in God's mind and thus has a preceding cause. Thus also Alston presupposes the divine willing view and assumes that the Big Bang has an undertaking preceding cause.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> The following passage points towards rejecting the divine willing view: 'Of course, one can think of God as creating light by saying to himself, "Let there be light", or as parting the sea of reeds by saying to himself, "Let the sea of reeds be parted". In that case the basic actions would be mental actions. But [...] we are not conceptually required to postulate this mental machinery. We could think just as well of the coming into being of light or of the parting of the sea of reeds as directly under God's voluntary control' (p. 61) But Alston then spells this out as intentions causing a parting of waters. This suggests that he does not endorse my claim that a parting of waters can be a choice event and thus have no preceding cause at all.

Having distinguished the question about basic actions from the question about choice events, we can now answer both questions for man and for God.

## VI. HUMAN BASIC ACTIONS

One might want to say that all human basic actions are *tryings*, because it is true to say that 'I raise my arm by trying (undertaking) to raise my arm'. But there is a good reason for not saying this and for taking my raising my arm to be a basic action (as Alston does). 'I raised my arm' and 'I tried (undertook) to raise my arm' are not only rightly called the same action, but unlike 'I killed him' and 'I bent my finger' they also refer to the same aspect of my intention. They are like 'He raised his arm' and 'He performed a raising of his arm'. Therefore it is adequate to say that *in human actions involving body movements, the basic actions are not tryings but body movements*.

In human mental actions, i.e. actions that do not involve a body movement, the basic actions are of various kinds. I memorise a phone number by transforming it into a mnemotechnical code; I multiply 31 with 12 by first multiplying 31 with ten and then adding 31 multiplied with 2; I imagine the sound of the dominant seventh chord on A flat by first imagining the A flat, then the major third, then the perfect fifth, then the minor seventh.

Some human mental actions involve a trying, others do not. My calculating the square root of 961 involves a trying. If I fail to calculate it, I have still tried. However, if you make a New Year's resolution to give up drinking Coca Cola, then there is no mental event of trying or undertaking besides the making the resolution. Likewise when you promise to God that for the next seven days you shall get up every morning at 5.30 a.m. to read the Bible and pray, then there is no trying. You either do it, or you do not. You can think about doing it, but to undertake it is to do it.

## VII. WHAT DO HUMAN ACTIONS BEGIN WITH?

The action processes in human actions begin with tryings. The choice event in a human action process is a trying. The trying in a human action has no preceding cause and causes, perhaps together with certain brain

events, the intended result of the action. Perhaps the tryings are identical to or somehow linked with simultaneous brain events. Let us consider three possibilities of how the trying may be related to brain events. How these possibilities are to be described also depends on whether one means by an 'event', or a 'state of affairs', just the property of a thing at or during a certain time (or somehow the change of a property) *or* the property plus the (rest of the) thing. To sort this out is not our task here, I shall try to use formulations that are intuitively clear.

1. Maybe the trying is an event in an immaterial soul and neither identical to a brain event nor linked to a simultaneous brain event, and it is the complete cause of a subsequent change of the properties of some things in the brain (that is, the cause of something that happens with some things in the brain, e.g. a neuron firing), so that the new brain state,  $B_2$ , together with other (simultaneous) brain states,  $B_2^*$ , causes the intended result of the action. The things that are moved or changed by the trying, or the stuff which the trying affects, exist already before  $B_2$ . (A further possibility would be that the trying is the complete cause of some thing  $a$ 's being  $F$ , where  $a$  has not existed before but is completely new stuff.)
2. Maybe the trying is an event in an immaterial soul and neither identical to a brain event nor linked to a simultaneous brain event, and *together with simultaneous brain events*,  $B_1$ , it constitutes the initial stage of the action process and thus causes the intended result of the action. (If we want to exclude that possibility (2) is a special case of (1), we have to add that neither the trying nor  $B_1$  is the complete cause of any later event.)
3. Maybe the trying is identical to, or constituted by, or somehow necessarily linked to, a brain event, which together with other (simultaneous) brain events constitutes the initial stage of the action process and thus causes the intended result of the action.

We do not need to decide here which of these three possibilities is true. In either case, the trying is the choice event and at least a part of the initial stage of the action process. Let us now consider which divine actions are basic.

## VIII. DIVINE BASIC ACTIONS

Alston suggests, as we have seen, that ‘all God’s actions might be basic actions’ (Alston 1981, p. 61), but I shall argue that there are causally and teleologically non-basic divine actions.<sup>6</sup> God can choose to bring about an event by bringing about another event which then causes it. For example, God can choose to bring about a Big Bang so that, while God sustains it so that it itself becomes a cause (a so-called ‘secondary’ cause), it leads later to the existence of carbon atoms. Or he can bring about a storm in order to bring about a parting of waters. Like in human actions we can call the causal process leading to the intended result the ‘action process’. A difference to human actions is that God is aware of all events in the action process, whereas men are unaware of the events in their brain. Therefore *for each event in the action process it is true to say that God brought it about intentionally*. If A and B are events in the action process and A begins earlier than B, then God’s bringing about A is causally more basic than his bringing about B. For example, God’s bringing about the Big Bang was causally more basic than his creating the first carbon atom. *The causally most basic action is his bringing about the first event of the action process* (more precisely, his bringing about any event which begins with the action process). This event is a choice event; it has no preceding cause.

Occasionalists, like al-Ghazali, Nicholas of Autrecourt, and Nicholas Malebranche, hold that God brings about every event in the universe directly. There is no secondary causation, i.e. no causation through

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<sup>6</sup> Tanner (1988, p. 82 ff) claims that each event that is caused by God is brought about directly, as a basic action. Tracy (1994) objects that this excludes the causal activity of creatures and that indirect divine actions are also possible. Two further authors who claim that all God’s actions are in some sense basic are Jantzen (1984, p. 87) and Ellis (1984, p. 232). Kirkpatrick argues that divine acts need not all be basic. God might utilise ‘the causal mechanisms of the world’ (Kirkpatrick 1994, p. 191). That is easily granted, but Kirkpatrick also seems to suggest that there are no divine basic actions or no interventions (‘with the possible exception of the original creative act that brings into existence all the causal mechanisms by which all future acts will be carried out’ (p. 192)). ‘Might it not make more sense biblically and philosophically if we think of God’s acts as the utilization of various segments of the causal order in order to achieve divine ends?’ That applies to some cases, but it makes no sense, biblically or philosophically, to assume that God never brings about any event in the universe directly.

created things. On this view there are no causally non-basic actions. But if God sustains things in being so that they can cause something, then God can cause  $x$  intending that  $x$  shall cause  $y$ .

Are there *teleologically* non-basic actions of God? Yes, because some actions one can only do by doing something else. Even God cannot give a promise to Abraham without doing something else, namely speaking to him. Even God cannot punish a man without doing something else, for example ending his life or subjecting him to fire and brimstone. In some of these cases the teleologically most basic action is God's bringing about a certain physical event. However, it is not true to say that God's bringing about a certain physical event is always a teleologically basic action. God's bringing about a universe is not teleologically basic, because he does it by bringing about certain events. Because God is aware of all of the details of an event, his intention refers to them all. As no human description of an event captures all its details, no human description of a divine action ever describes a teleologically basic action. Even if the description were of infinite length, God's intention would contain a richer representation of the event. There are, however, descriptions of divine actions that are teleologically more basic than others.

That God knows all of the details of an event is only one reason why his intentions that govern his actions are much wider than ours. They are maximally wide. God is aware of all reasons for an action as well as of all probabilities of what will cause what. Therefore he does nothing unintentionally; *everything God does, he does intentionally*. Something I say in a talk might encourage someone in the audience to start to study the special theory of relativity in order to examine whether there is really evidence for assuming that the speed of light is always  $c$ . But I do not know the man and had not thought of encouraging anyone to do such a thing. It is then true to say that I unintentionally encouraged the man to examine the theory of special relativity. For God no such scenarios arise. Everything he does, he does intentionally. Therefore *by each action God does every action which it is possible that he does by it*. For each divine action the range of the teleologically less basic actions is maximal.

Because God knows all reasons for an action, all probabilities of what will cause what, and all states of affairs obtaining at the time of his action, the width of his intentions is also maximal with respect to causal basicity. In one sense every event in the universe can be said to be

brought about by God, because he at least sustained it and its causes. If doing  $x$  is causally basic with respect to doing  $y$ , then the agent believes that with a certain probability  $x$  will cause  $y$  (or the event bringing about which constitutes doing  $y$ ). However, that probability need not be the degree to which  $y$  was the motive for doing  $x$ . I might throw a lifebelt from the ship into the water hoping that the drowning woman will catch it. Even though the probability of her catching it because of the storm is low, rescuing her is my sole and whole motive.

Because God is perfectly rational, only reasons motivate him. The motive of an action of God is constituted by the sum of the motivating value (or 'force') of all states of affairs that may be brought about by the action. The motivating value of such a states of affairs is proportional to the product of its goodness (or badness) and the probability of it being caused by the action. If God's doing  $x$  causes an event  $y$ , then it is true to say that God's doing  $x$  was causally basic with respect to  $y$  to the degree corresponding to its motivating value. Also if God's doing  $x$  did not cause  $y$ , but there was a probability that it would, the probability of  $y$  was a part of God's motivation for doing  $x$  (according to the product of their goodness and their probability) – although it is not true to say that God brought about  $y$ .

Likewise actions of man are parts of God's motivation for doing the things which make these actions possible (sustaining certain things as well as intervening in certain ways). For good human actions, that is called God's *providence*. If a man does something, then it is normally not true to say that God did it. But it is true that God permitted the action through his sustaining the man, and it can be true that God somehow led him to do it, for example by giving him certain inclinations or insights or commands. Actual as well as possible human actions are parts of God's motivation for some of his actions in accordance to their value and their likelihood (which depends on man's recognition of reasons, his inclinations, his character, and the strength of his will). But, as I said, if it is true to say that  $x$  did  $y$ , then it is normally not true to say that God did  $y$ .

Now let us again consider the question of what God's actions begin with, which is distinct from the question of which divine actions are basic.

## IX. WHAT DO DIVINE ACTIONS BEGIN WITH?

The divine willing view rests on the thought: ‘An action is initiated by an undertaking (or “trying” or “willing”), an undertaking is a mental event, therefore God’s actions in the universe are initiated by undertakings, which are events in God’s mind.’ Of course, also if God acts, in some sense he ‘wills’ and ‘undertakes’ the action. But only if ‘willing  $x$ ’ and ‘undertaking  $x$ ’ are taken to mean ‘doing  $x$  intentionally’, and not if they are taken to mean, as I have defined it in accordance with what the defenders of the divine willing view mean, a mental event of the kind that occurs in human actions. A free action is initiated by a choice event, and that choice event may, but need not be, an undertaking in the mind of the agent. As God is omnipotent and has no body, he can bring about any physical event as a choice event, so that it has no preceding cause. ‘God brings about E directly’ is to be spelled out as God bringing about that event as a choice event. That event then, alone or together with other events, is the initial stage of the action process.

I conclude that God can bring about any event as a choice event, so that it has no preceding cause and thus no event cause. Therefore, if God brought about the Big Bang (and it was the beginning of the universe), then the Big Bang had no preceding cause. God brought it about directly.

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# AQUINAS AND NATURALISM

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**Abstract.** Aquinas's actual response to a naturalistic challenge at ST I.2.3 is one which most naturalists would find unimpressive. However, I shall argue that there is a stronger response latent in his philosophical system. I take Quine as an example of a methodological naturalist, examine the roots of his position and look at two critical responses to his views (those of Bonjour and Boghossian). If one adjusts some of the problematical aspects of their responses and establishes a hybrid position on the epistemology and metaphysics of an anti-naturalistic stance, it turns out to be the position Aquinas himself takes on meaning and knowledge.

## I. AQUINAS'S RESPONSE TO NATURALISM

Aquinas presents two objections to the existence of God in his celebrated five ways discussion. The first is the problem of evil, the second the problem of naturalism. As he states the second it sounds like an application of Ockham's razor, that is, a principle of intellectual parsimony. When causes fully account for something, we don't need to postulate more. But the natural world has natural causes and human intervention to explain all the phenomena contained in it, so no further cause is required. As Laplace would put it six centuries later 'we have no need of that hypothesis.' Aquinas's response is to argue that natural and human causation do not exhaust the causal story and one is led to a first cause which is unchanging and which of itself must be. The response connects directly to the corpus of the article, with its arguments for a first cause and with associated texts in the *Summa Contra Gentiles* and the *Commentary on Aristotle's Metaphysics*. But modern naturalists would

not be moved by this dialectical strategy, since basic to their position is a methodological objection to the possibility of making such a move as Aquinas's. There is not the possibility of an appeal to a higher science than those exhibited in the natural sciences and various arguments are presented to make this case. Simply asserting that there is such a science would be met with disbelief. Michael Rea, in a recent book on naturalism, notes that the majority of contemporary philosophers (at least in the English-speaking world) are naturalists, although exhibiting a high degree of variegation in how they view it; 'it enjoys the lofty status of academic orthodoxy'.<sup>1</sup>

Aquinas's views on the methods and nature of the sciences are contained in summary in ST question 1, in greater detail in his commentary on Boethius's *De Trinitate* and in the commentary on Aristotle's *Posterior Analytics*.<sup>2</sup> He endorses Aristotle's deductive method, defends a form of foundationalism, argues dialectically for the necessity of intellectual first principles, has a hierarchical conception of the sciences, distinguishes practical and speculative science, uses the idea of subalternated science, distinguished the formal and material aspects of scientific inquiry. Among the features I'd like to note includes the systematicity of his views. His account of cognition in the individual, the relation of sense to intellect, the different workings of the intellect, dovetail with the account of the differences between disciplines, but also with the way intellectual disciplines constitute habits of mind directed to the goals of human existence. Typically these issues are treated as distinct in subsequent discussions – indeed philosophy of science, epistemology, moral psychology and issues about human destiny are rarely considered together in contemporary academia.

The contemporary intellectual world is therefore less integrated than the one presented by Aquinas. But it also poses important challenges

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Rea, *World Without Design*, Oxford, OUP, 2002, p. 1

<sup>2</sup> Following standard convention I shall refer to Aquinas's *Summa Theologiae* by part, question and article. His views on *scientia* are in ST Ia q.1. The notes in the Blackfriars edition, Vol.1 edited by Thomas Gilby, are extensive and useful. The English translation by Timothy McDermott of *The Commentary on Boethius's De Trinitate* is excellent, in *Aquinas Selected Philosophical Writings*, Oxford: OUP, 1993 pp. 1-50. For a good English translation of the *Commentary on Aristotle's Posterior Analytics* see that by Richard Berquist, Notre Dame: Dumb Ox Books, 2007.

to the methodology used by him. Naturalism as a recognisable phenomenon clearly was a possibility considered by Aquinas, but it was the 19th century when it became a genuine contender as a worldview. The kind of skepticism about speculative reason exhibited by Hume, the advances in the physical sciences, the kind of ideology shown by Comte, all generated a momentum which flourished in the ideals of scientific philosophy expressed by Frege and Russell which were deepened and refined by Carnap and Quine. In this, Quine stands as a watershed. The development of cognitive science, the work of naturalists such as Dennett, the Churchlands, the Kitchers, Devitt, all flow from his conception of the lack of principled distinction between natural science and philosophical reason. This is a powerful current in contemporary philosophy and reverberates more broadly in the popular works of Dawkins and Dennett. So is Aquinas's work merely a chapter in the history of ideas or can it engage with contemporary naturalism? It seems to me that Aquinas has the resources to challenge some of the arguments of the naturalists and indeed various contemporary anti-naturalistic philosophers are developing positions which look curiously familiar to those who know Aquinas. In the following sections I shall discuss the naturalism of Carnap and Quine, especially in relation to the notion of analyticity, examine some responses to Quinean naturalism and then compare these to Aquinas's account of mind and language. His position is robust enough to work as a viable alternative to naturalism, and is not at all dissimilar to contemporary anti-naturalistic positions.

## II. CARNAP AND QUINE ON NATURALISM

If Quine is the most influential theorist of naturalism in the latter part of the twentieth century, Carnap is the most important influence on him. Recent studies of Carnap emphasize the neo-Kantian constitutive aspect of his work and play down the simple-minded verificationist caricature popularized by Ayer.<sup>3</sup> One can think of his work as a continuation of

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<sup>3</sup> See for example Michael Friedman, *Reconsidering Logical Positivism*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999; Alan Richardson, *Carnap's Construction of the World: The Aufbau and Emergence of Logical Empiricism*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997; Michael Friedman and Richard Creath, *The Cambridge Companion to Carnap*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.

the Neo-Kantian project to clarify the a priori aspects of inquiry in a linguistic register.<sup>4</sup> He was influenced by Frege to value formal language and the need for a perspicuous system of representation, believing that many problems of philosophy are spuriously generated by the illusions of language. Russell supplied him with the model of scientific philosophy, Wittgenstein with a linguistic account of logical truth and logical consequence. He was reacting against nineteenth century German Idealism, despairing that sentences such as ‘The Absolute is identical with itself’ could be clarified, argued about or given truth values. His early work was on the idea of space, making sense of the developments of relativity theory, followed by an attempt to work out rigorously, using the logic of *Principia Mathematica*, an account of sense knowledge on the model of Russell’s *Our Knowledge of the External World* – this was *The Logical Structure of the World* (1927). Following this was a turn to the nature of logical and mathematical truth in *The Logical Syntax of Language* (1934). Carnap defended the use of linguistic rules to constitute logical calculi, developing notions of truth, consequence and proof relative to these languages. The task of the philosopher is to develop this formal apparatus, which first order workers in mathematics, applied logic, philosophy of science and the sciences in general would use. Central to this project is the idea of analyticity. An analytic proposition is one made true by the rules of the linguistic framework, a synthetic one is made true by the world. Philosophy has a clear method – the use of linguistic frameworks, translating and analysing unclear natural language notions into highly tooled artificial concepts which can be applied scientifically. Philosophy doesn’t articulate truths about the world, but aids science in doing that. The constraints on the use of formal languages are pragmatic – what the working scientist finds congenial and helpful to use. A clear statement of this can be found in “Empiricism, Semantics and Ontology” (1950).<sup>5</sup> Carnap’s work has strands of empiricism, pragmatism and Neo-Kantianism woven together within the guiding principle of the linguistic

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<sup>4</sup> See his own account of the roots of his work in “Intellectual Autobiography” in *The Philosophy of Rudolf Carnap*, Schilpp P. (ed.), La Salle, Open Court, 1963, pp. 3-84.

<sup>5</sup> “Empiricism, Semantics and Ontology”, *Revue internationale de philosophie*, vol. 4 no. 11, (1950), pp. 20-40. (Reprinted as Appendix A to *Meaning and Necessity*, 2nd. edn., Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1956).

turn in philosophy. Unlike Wittgenstein's approach to language, Carnap was a technician, avoiding natural languages and seeing the core role of philosophy as the production of carefully honed linguistic frameworks which would facilitate the answering of those questions which can be answered, and the avoidance of those which cannot. But like Wittgenstein he thought that language leads one astray and that metaphysics is a linguistic fiction, mistaking the form of representation for the matter conveyed by that form.

Quine was an early advocate of Carnap's approach to philosophy, which seemed to fit well with American pragmatism.<sup>6</sup> He gave lectures in Harvard in the mid-1930's defending the approach which took analyticity as central. His "Truth by Convention" of 1936 is typically read in the light of his subsequent repudiation of analyticity, but is better seen as still internal to the analyticity project, dealing with internal tensions in it.<sup>7</sup> Particularly that paper probes the problem of how a notion of analyticity might ground logical truth without presupposing it. However, the main break comes with "Two Dogmas of Empiricism" (1950).<sup>8</sup> There, Quine examines the different possible ways analyticity might be explicated and finds them all wanting. He is dubious about the notion of meaning, construed as sense. One can work with an idea of reference, or extension, but intensions are opaque. Ideas of conceptual containment are merely metaphorical. Carnap's use of linguistic rules is rejected as ad hoc. Definitions rely on pre-existing linguistic practice and cannot themselves explain that practice.

There's much interpretative debate about Quine's exact target and his purpose in this celebrated paper.<sup>9</sup> It seems important to distinguish the

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<sup>6</sup> *Dear Carnap, Dear Van*, Creath, R., (ed.), Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990.

<sup>7</sup> "Truth by Convention", *Philosophical Essays for A.N. Whitehead*, Lee, O., (ed.), New York: Longmans, 1936, pp. 90-124. (Reprinted in *The Ways of Paradox and Other Essays*, New York: Random House, 1966, pp. 77-106).

<sup>8</sup> "Two Dogmas of Empiricism", *Philosophical Review* 60, (1951), pp. 20-43. (Reprinted in *From a Logical Point of View*, Cambridge, Ma: Harvard University Press, 1953, pp. 20-46).

<sup>9</sup> See for example, W.V. Quine "Two Dogmas in Retrospect", *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 21 no. 3, (1991), p. 265-274; H. Putnam, "Two Dogmas Revisited" in *Realism and Reason*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983.

semantic question about how to make the analytic/synthetic distinction, from the epistemological question of the a priori/a posteriori distinction, from the metaphysical question of the necessary/contingent distinction. These are often elided, but they are distinct. Quine attacks the semantic distinction between analytic and synthetic, but as a way of challenging the epistemological distinction between a priori and a posteriori. Analyticity seems the only way to explicate the a priori. An a priori proposition is one justified independently of the senses – analyticity explains how this is so using linguistic rules. Hence by attacking the analytic-synthetic distinction, Quine also attacked the a priori/a posteriori. Indeed the necessary-contingent also fell, since logical necessity rested also on analyticity.

By attacking the sharp analytic-synthetic distinction and replacing it with the idea of a continuum – sentences which are very closely linked to observation and sentences far removed from observation – Quine presented a different conception of philosophy to what had gone before. There are no neutral pure observation sentences, there are no pure theoretical observation-free sentences. By being linguistic, observation sentences are contaminated by theory. By being part of our web of belief, logical, mathematical and general scientific beliefs are connected to observation. We are reluctant to alter logical and mathematical beliefs because of the knock-on effect, but this is in principle possible (for example dropping some of the classical logical laws in discussing quantum phenomena might make for more elegant theories). Quine has articulated a picture of knowledge which is empiricist, coherentist, pragmatist and most importantly naturalist. There is no first philosophy which either gives a foundation to science or clarifies it from without. Philosophy is part of the ongoing quest for truth, but has no special method which distinguishes it from other parts of that question – it is self-reflective science (including the humanities and social sciences in this characterisation of science). He repeats Neurath's image of the human quest for knowledge as akin to sailors on a ship who are forced to continuously use the ship to stay afloat, but who can replace broken bits one at a time. For Quine, everything is revisable, but only against a critical mass of stability.

This kind of naturalism is primarily methodological. The methods by which truth is acquired are those of science broadly construed. There is

no pure a priori method which rivals that of science. Quine is a physicalist rather than a materialist. Physicalists accept the ultimate theory of the world to be that delivered by physics – so it is revisable and ongoing. Quine’s actual ultimate ontology is something like a neo-pythagorean picture, where mathematical sets provide the most tractable account of the world. But if science licenced clairvoyance or immortal souls, then these would be incorporated into the ontology. To look for a grounding for science is to seek what cannot be given, there is no Cartesian bedrock. While there are many debates about the details of Quine’s views<sup>10</sup>, this picture has proved enormously influential – pragmatic, fallibilist, fruitful in terms of the interactions of philosophers with psychologists, linguists, neurologists, biologists and so on. The contemporary explorations of consciousness which are multi-disciplinary are the fruit of such a view.

However, not everyone is sanguine about this development. Some worry about the further developments of Quine’s work. For example there is the doctrine of the indeterminacy of translation, that there are no facts of the matter about meaning. There is Quine’s famous dismissal of modal notions. His account of the mental is famously austere and behaviourist. Dennett mischievously defines the verb ‘to quine’ in his dictionary as to deny the existence of something obvious and important (self-consciously ironically, given Dennett’s Quinean view of consciousness).<sup>11</sup> I want to discuss two critical reactions to Quine’s work. The first, from Laurence Bonjour, worries that Quine presents a corrosive skepticism about reason; the second, from Paul Boghossian, worries that Quine presents an incoherent skepticism about meaning. Both suggest correctives to Quine. My argument is that there are problems with both of their positions, but adjusted and amalgamated they make an attractive response to Quine. However, this amalgam turns out to already exist and it is the position defended by Aquinas.

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<sup>10</sup> See for example, R.F. Gibson, *The Philosophy of W.V. Quine*, Tampa: University of South Florida Press, 1982; C. Hookway, *Quine*, Oxford: Polity Press, 1987, A. Orenstein, *W.V.O. Quine*, Chesham: Acumen, 2002; G. Kemp, *Quine: A Guide for the Perplexed*, London: Continuum, 2006; P. Hylton, *Quine*, London: Routledge, 2007.

<sup>11</sup> See <http://www.philosophicallexicon.com>. He also defines “*aquinas*, n.pl. (from a-, not, and quine) Philosophers who refuse to deny the existence or importance of something real or significant”.

### III. REACTIONS TO QUINE

Lawrence BonJour defended a robust conception of the a priori rooted in rational intuition against moderate and extreme empiricists in his *In Defence of Pure Reason* (1998).<sup>12</sup> For him, Carnap counts as a moderate empiricist and Quine as an extreme one. Moderate empiricists have an attenuated account of the a priori and modal knowledge by their doctrines of analyticity and conventionalism, whereas extreme ones reject any notion of the a priori. BonJour challenges various accounts of analyticity used to underpin the moderate empiricist position.<sup>13</sup> His fundamental problem is that the notion does not do the epistemological or metaphysical work required of it. Certain versions of it straightforwardly rely on a pre-existing account of logical truth (what he calls reductive accounts). Hence these cannot serve as explanations of logical truth. Other versions obfuscate and disguise their question-begging, relying on hidden appeals to the a priori or to necessity. He notes that conventionalism cannot explain logical truth (conventions are freely chosen, logic is not). Crucially he wonders about the very status of the moderate empiricist claim. Since it is not an empirical claim, is it therefore analytic and conventional? If so, what then is its dialectical force, since conventions are supposed to be harmless and noncontentious? Finding the moderate empiricist position unclear, unmotivated, and unimpressive, he turns then to the Quinean position.

It seems to him that Quine's rejection of analyticity is rooted in epistemology. Quine really wants to jettison the a priori, which he understands as defending the view that there are unrevisable true propositions. But BonJour wonders: why not allow for a fallible conception of the a priori? Consider complicated calculations. Anomalies occur, checking is carried out and the calculation is amended. Such a procedure is canonically a priori if anything is (since no empirical input is required), but is also corrigible. Given that Quine devotes much effort to attack unrevisability, BonJour seeks to separate the issue of the a priori (beliefs not justified by experience) from revisability. A different argument is to query the very status of the naturalistic claim. It can't be based on a priori

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<sup>12</sup> Lawrence BonJour, *In Defence of Pure Reason*, Cambridge: CUP, 1998 (hereafter DPR)

<sup>13</sup> DPR, pp. 28ff

reasoning, on pain of contradiction, but if it rests solely on assuming that reason consists in adjusting one's beliefs to experience, it assumes its conclusion illegitimately.

In opposing Quine, Bonjour defends the Aristotelian notion of *nous*, rational intuition (also defended by Russell). Part of his dialectical strategy is to dismiss alternative accounts. His positive account relies on the phenomenology of cases where one considers a fundamental logical or conceptual truth, and 'sees' its validity. This is direct, immediate, non-discursive. It can be assimilated with the idea of 'true-in-virtue of meaning' – except here the epistemological work is being done by appeal to a faculty of reason rather than the conventionalism of the logical empiricists. Bonjour argues that rational intuition of this kind yields insight into the nature of reality – the modal structure of the world. He explicitly acknowledges that this will require some account of intentionality in which concepts reflect the metaphysical structure of the world – and appeals to Aquinas as a model for such an account. I shall return to this below.

Paul Boghossian challenges Quine on different grounds, fearing that Quine's view results in a corrosive form of skepticism about meaning. Opposing Quine he defends a form of analyticity, articulating this position in his 1997 paper "Analyticity". Boghossian distinguishes different kinds of analyticity. Frege-Analyticity is that which assumes pre-existing logical truth (like Bonjour's reductive account). Carnap-Analyticity on the other hand doesn't rely on logical truth, but grounds logical truth itself. Boghossian holds that Quine's arguments are effective against Frege-Analyticity, but not Carnap-Analyticity. Carnap-Analyticity is a form of implicit definition, where the meanings of the terms are defined in use. But what of the conventionalism and anti-realism typically associated with such views? One sets up such definitions by social decision (conventionalism) and so it seems to be anchored in social practice rather in 'the world' (anti-realism). Boghossian denies that a defender of an implicit definition has to be necessarily committed to such views. Against conventionalism Boghossian holds the view that certain inferences are found to be primitively compelling, for example *modus ponens*. There is not a conventional free for all, but our practices are rationally constrained – to go against them is to be irrational. Against anti-realism is his claim that what grounds these implicit definitions is

reference to the logical objects which make such inferences valid. So, for example, the negation sign operates by referring to a certain kind of logical object, which governs the inferences we use. Whatever the details of Boghossian's exegesis of Quine and others, the position he defends is one which appeals to metaphysical objects to ground logical inference and to the reference relation as the link between mind and world. There is genuine a priori knowledge available through reflection on the conditions of meaning. He dismisses the approach to the a priori which relies on rational intuition as mystificatory and 'flash-grasping'.

BonJour and Boghossian have a number of things in common. They think that Quine's naturalistic position ends up in skepticism (about reason and about meaning, respectively). They believe there is genuine substantive a priori knowledge possible. A priori knowledge is realist, in that it connects up with the deep metaphysical structure of reality. They differ in their accounts of that deep metaphysical nature – BonJour being broadly Aristotelian and Boghossian being Platonist. They also differ in the mode of access to this reality. BonJour relies on rational intuition. Boghossian relies on basic inferential practices which confer meaning on the syncategorematic terms of our sentences. Boghossian is dismissive of rational intuition, relying on the Wittgensteinian notion of practice and the un-Wittgensteinian notion of logical object.<sup>14</sup>

The weak element of BonJour's case is the raw appeal to rational intuition which seems pre-linguistic and mystificatory. In a symposium discussion of his work this is a challenge which recurs – including a contribution by Boghossian.<sup>15</sup> The weak element in Boghossian's position is the *ad hoc* nature of his Platonism, the appeal to logical objects (and he faces the standard objections to metaphysical Platonism). So, perhaps a response to Quine is possible in which a) rational intuition is drawn closer to language and practice, and b) where the account of reference of basic logical terms is not Platonized? It seems that Aquinas's account of meaning supplies exactly this.

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<sup>14</sup> Wittgenstein described as the *Grundgedanke* (fundamental thought) of the *Tractatus* the claim that the logical connectives were not referring expressions – 4.0312.

<sup>15</sup> Book Symposium on BonJour's *In Defense of Pure Reason in Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 63 (3) (Nov 2001), p. 625ff

## IV. AQUINAS ON MEANING

In this section I wish to outline the elements of Aquinas's account of meaning, discuss how synonymy and analyticity can be accommodated within it, show how the basic explanatory work about conceptual connection is being done by real natures with their modal properties and draw comparisons with the views of Bonjour and Boghossian.

Aquinas inherits the Aristotelian account of the relationship of language, mind and reality.<sup>16</sup> A significant feature of this account is the linking together of semantics and cognition – the story about meaning is internally connected to the story about knowing and cannot be treated independently of each other. It is also a realist account, in that mind and world are closely connected, problems about piercing the veil of appearance, knowing other minds and skepticism about the external world do not arise. As in Putnam's brain in the vat challenge to skepticism, the conditions of meaning are intrinsically connected to the way the world is, such that skepticism cannot even be clearly articulated.<sup>17</sup> Hence a root assumption is that things in the environment of the thinker are capable of being known by her. Aquinas has a detailed account of how this happens, the details of which I shall pass over here. However, a key element in this account is that there is a metaphysical link between the structures which exist in the world and the person who knows them. That is, the forms which exist in the world come to exist in the soul of the person thinking about them. The same form exists in the world and in the thinker. He needs a psychological account of how this is possible and speaks of the *passiones animae* – the capacities in the soul and the processes it undergoes which allows for this kind of cognition. The process by which the soul grasps intelligible content from its environment is *intellectus*, a precondition for the further process of making propositions (compounding or dividing) called *ratiocinatio*.<sup>18</sup>

The relationship between the *passiones animae* and the forms in objects is natural and universal. It is a basic recognitional capacity which

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<sup>16</sup> For a thorough discussion see John P. O'Callaghan, *Thomist Realism and the Linguistic Turn*, Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2003, ch. 1.

<sup>17</sup> See *Reason, Truth and History*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981, ch. 1.

<sup>18</sup> For a clear statement of this see the 'Prooemium' to the *Commentary on Aristotle's Posterior Analytics*.

allows us to identify and individuate objects in our environment. But the use of names is conventional. Natural languages associate labels with *passiones animae*, by the process of imposition. So in any situation where I recognise, say, a cat, there is a natural psychological process by which I recognize the kind of thing it is and a simultaneous conventional element where I have been trained to associate a word with that recognition. The temptation here is to think of this as a three-part process. The thing in the world causes a *passio animae*, which is then labelled by the word. Classical empiricism had such an account in the theory of ideas, which existed as a representational third realm between mind and world. Such ideas seem to be in a realm of natural private language which is then translated into communicable public languages. Aquinas isn't committed to either a third realm or to private language. He says 'words refer to the things they signify through the mediation of a conception in the intellect.'<sup>19</sup> The crucial word here is '*ratio*' – conception. This is the intelligible content of the thought held by the thinker. It is the means by which the object in the world is thought by her. There are two elements in cognition – the object cognized and the cognizer. The alteration to the cognizer caused by the apprehension of the object has a kind of character, a way of being thought about. This is the *ratio* – so it is not a third thing itself, but rather is the way by which the cognizer grasps the thing known. The way in which a knower develops in cognition can parallel the grasp of natural language in the way developmental psychologists tell us. Knowledge is socially inculcated, involving training in recognizing and naming, with no need to postulate a private language. So knowing that the meaning of a term is linked to our capacity to recognize things in the world, doesn't entail the existence of mysterious mental items as a third realm between entities and minds and doesn't require a private language.

A key concept in explicating the notion of meaning for Aquinas is *significatio*. As P.V.Spade says, this notion is a causal psychological term of art.<sup>20</sup> Signification relates to the way in which things in the environment are knowable to the cognizer. Things in the environment exert a causal influence on the knower which leads to psychological

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<sup>19</sup> ST Ia q.13 a.1

<sup>20</sup> P.V. Spade 'The Semantics of Terms' in *The Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy*, N. Kretzmann, A. Kenny, J. Pinborg (eds), Cambridge: CUP, 1982.

change. Of course, causal here has multiple meanings. There is an element of efficient causation in terms of Quinean impingements on our sensory surfaces – but even that basic level is shot through with notions of formal causation – the transfer of formal structure from object to medium to sense to intellect. The signification of a term is expressed in the *ratio*. Hence signification has to do with the realm of form, essence, intelligible content.

A further term is *suppositio*, which is typically translated as reference. Standard accounts in the 13th century distinguished various kinds of supposition a term might have.<sup>21</sup> Aquinas doesn't engage with this detailed kind of distinction making, but does note an important way in which the supposition of subject and predicate terms differ from each other.<sup>22</sup> A noun in a subject place typically supposits, or stands for, an individual and so is concrete in its supposition. The predicate is held to operate more like a verb and so supposits some abstract quality which is applied to the subject. Thus the predicate typically supposits in an abstract way, requiring that there be a subject in which the quality inheres. By distinguishing the different modes of signification of subjects and predicates Aquinas can avoid the danger of Platonism, the hypostasizing of abstract qualities as concrete individuals – good conceptual therapy in the manner of Carnap or Wittgenstein.

The distinction between *res significata* and *modus significandi* does a lot of work for Aquinas. The *res significata* is typically the extra-mental object. The *modus significandi* is the way in which this is referred to in language. The same *res* may have different *modi significandi*, which includes both the conventional linguistic term and the universal *passio animae* associated with it. This distinction allows him to make intelligible, for example, the doctrine of divine simplicity – where a metaphysically simple reality is referred to using different *modi significandi*, yielding genuine, contentful, non-synonymous information about it. With this sketch in place of Aquinas's views on the conditions of meaning, let's now turn to questions about analyticity, modality and the a priori.

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<sup>21</sup> See, for example, Lambert of Auxerre's work, in *The Cambridge Translations of Later Medieval Philosophical Texts*, vol. 1, Norman Kretzmann and Eleanor Stump, (eds), 1988, p. 102ff.

<sup>22</sup> ST Ia q.13a.12

Quine makes a significant statement in “Two Dogmas of Empiricism”, when he asserts that meanings are what essences became when wedded to the word.<sup>23</sup> This is to dismiss meanings, since essences were clearly *outré* for him. However, after Putnam and Kripke it is once again respectable to allow real natural kinds with their own metaphysical natures which exert a causal influence on meaning. And meanings, rather than being free-floating conventions constituted by linguistic fiat, are shaped and governed by the deep structures of the things they are connected to. The conventional element is there in natural languages, but also non-conventional elements in our thinking about them, fixed by the real features of objects.

Aquinas discusses the ways in which subjects and predicates relate to each other in sentences. In some sentences there is an internal connection between subject and predicate, such that the *ratio* of the subject involves the *ratio* of the predicate. Recall that the *ratio* is the intelligible content of the term and that this is fixed by the real nature referred to. So whether the subject and predicate are linked or not is fixed by the world. Subjects may necessarily involve the predicate – if they are involved in their definition. Scott MacDonald usefully points out that definitions are not primarily linguistic, but are real structures in reality which get expressed linguistically.<sup>24</sup> Thus, for Aquinas, *scientia* or knowledge is both a propositional attitude of individuals and an objective set of propositions matching the real structure of the world. When in a sentence a subject includes its predicate within itself, this is a real, necessary, feature determined by the nature of the entity. If it excludes it this is also a necessary feature. Otherwise, there is a contingent connection between subject and predicate. (Note that this is not simply the distinction between substantial and accidental predication, since there can be necessary accidents.)

Also, there is a robust distinction drawn between the order of knowledge and the order of being. Whether or not subjects are necessarily connected to predicates holds whether or not this is known to us. So some propositions may be self-evident in themselves, in that the predicate is

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<sup>23</sup> W.V. Quine, “Two Dogmas of Empiricism”, p. 22.

<sup>24</sup> See Scott MacDonald, “Theory of Knowledge” in N. Kretzmann and E. Stump (eds), *The Cambridge Companion to Aquinas*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993.

objectively included in the subject, but unknown to us. Aquinas believes that God's existence is of this kind. God's existence is necessary and if we knew God's essence we would see this, but God's essence is in principle inaccessible to us. Knowledge of some necessary connections is yielded by empirical research into the real features of things – for example that water is H<sub>2</sub>O. Other necessary connections are revealed by reflection and dialectic and so are gained in an a priori fashion, but always rooted in a connection to real kinds.

Logical and mathematical knowledge is also necessary, but traces the connections between mental conceptions, or second intentions. But even these are rooted in the real metaphysical features of reality. The principle of non-contradiction, which is fundamental to our reasoning, relies on the non-compossibility of contradictories. This rests on the impossibility of being and not-being in the same respect at the same time. This principle cannot be argued for demonstratively on pain of circularity, but can be defended by showing the absurdity of denying it. So, necessary connections exist as a real feature of the concrete individuals of distinct kinds in the world. Necessary connections also exist in our thought about them insofar as our thought faithfully mirrors those real features and in the structural features of our thought, logic and mathematics. Thus the explanatory bedrock for Aquinas is his account of real kinds in reality which exhibit modal properties in themselves. Thought tracks these structures to the extent it can and the language we use reflects these structures. Analytic propositions are those whose subjects and predicates are connected by virtue of relations of second intention – logical and mathematical relations. Synthetic propositions are those whose subject and predicate are connected by relations of first intentions, relations of real kinds. Knowledge of the former is always by reflection. The latter may be by reflection or by empirical inquiry.

Thus, Aquinas gives a way of making the analytic-synthetic distinction, explains conceptual containment by reduction to real definitions and gives an account of intentionality based on formal identity. He avoids conventionalism and gives a realist grounding to definition, synonymy and linguistic usage. Like BonJour he appeals to rational intuition and defends it both through appeal to phenomenology and dialectically. But he also connects the cognitive grasp of logical primitives with their linguistic usage. Thus the direction of explanation is from intellect

to behaviour. Our primitive logical apparatus tracks genuine truth-preserving features exhibited by the formal aspects of thought. He is akin to Boghossian in treating language as important, but connecting it to cognition and avoiding platonistic metaphysics.

Opposition to this approach comes by claiming it is mystificatory.<sup>25</sup> Without the background conceptual scheme of a metaphysics using form and formal causation the story doesn't make a lot of sense - and such a conceptual scheme isn't very prevalent in contemporary discussions. However, recent work by John O'Callaghan and Jonathan Jacobs serves to make one reconsider the theoretical resources of such a position. O'Callaghan analyses and defends Thomas's semantic triangle and argues for its strength.<sup>26</sup> Jacobs argues that Aquinas's concept externalism has the resources for a non-skeptical solution to such issues as Quine's thesis of the indeterminacy of translation, Goodman's grue paradox and Kripke's plus-quus paradox.<sup>27</sup> In each case the puzzle arises about how to explain normativity about concept use and Jacobs argues that Aquinas avoids the skeptical pitfalls. Such engagements seem fruitful, working out in detail the ways in which Aquinas's position can tackle certain kinds of contemporary challenge.

## CONCLUSION

I began by saying that Aquinas's response to the problem of naturalism is to restate his account of the hierarchy of sciences and the need for metaphysics and that such a response would be underwhelming to naturalists. What I hope to have shown is that contemporary naturalism grew out of a debate about conceptual relations and a cluster of debates about linguistic rules, the foundations of logic and the relationship of language to the world and that Aquinas's views on these issues are germane to contemporary debates. Given his basic commitments to realism, natural kinds and externalism about mental content, his work can be seen

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<sup>25</sup> See for example the discussion in *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, vol. 63, no. 3 (Nov 2001), p. 625ff.

<sup>26</sup> See O'Callaghan op. cit. passim.

<sup>27</sup> Jonathan Jacobs, "Habits, Cognition and Realism" in John Haldane (ed.), *Mind, Metaphysics and Value in the Thomistic and Analytical Traditions*, Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2002, pp. 109-124.

as genuinely engaging with the type of philosophical problems central to contemporary discussion. His work has been relegated by those under the influence of Hume and Kant who reject such realism and externalism. Given the resurgence of metaphysics in the analytic tradition, these kinds of objection to his work seem less cogent.

What then of Aquinas's project of arguing for God's existence? In this paper I have shown that his work on cognition, on conceptual relations and on the analytic-synthetic distinction provide important ways of challenging an objection to this project. Whether his actual arguments for God's existence are in any way plausible is another issue. But the burden of this paper is to undermine one influential objection to even considering such a question.



# CLARIFYING THE CONCEPT OF SALVATION: A PHILOSOPHICAL APPROACH TO THE POWER OF FAITH IN CHRIST'S RESURRECTION

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**Abstract.** In this paper, I develop a philosophical clarification of the statement “faith in the resurrection of Christ saves men from sin”, using some of the main arguments and hypotheses of my recent book, *The Ways of Salvation (Les Voies du salut*, Paris, 2010). I begin with some remarks on the theme of salvation in contemporary language and philosophy. I then sketch a conceptual analysis of the concept of salvation, first in its general sense, then in its specifically Christian one. Finally, I offer a hypothesis on the *modus operandi* of salvation, or at least of one aspect of salvation as understood by Christianity.

## I. THE THEME OF SALVATION IN CONTEMPORARY DISCOURSE

The concept of salvation still occurs regularly in ordinary language. It also appears, typically without being defined clearly, in a number of contemporary philosophical works far removed from Christianity.

It is striking how commonly the notion of salvation and related words (the verb ‘to save’, the nouns ‘saviour’, ‘salvage’) are used in most European languages. In French, people greet one another with the word “*salut*,” in Italian they say “*salve*,” or “*ti saluto*,” in German they say “*salü*,” (or “*heil*,” “*heil dich*,” in the past). Though people using the word in such situations may not know it, this recalls an ancient practice of wishing an interlocutor ‘salvation’ upon meeting. For instance, Pythagorean philosophers appear to have greeted each other with the word ‘health!’ *ugiainein*, (a greeting also found in the *New Testament*, at the beginning of The Third Letter of John), and Seneca’s letters to Lucilius often begin

with the formula: “*Seneca Lucilio suo salutem dat.*” The themes of saviour, salvage, salvation, which are etymologically as well as conceptually related to that of salvation are also increasingly common in political discourse (such and such a person is considered the country’s saviour), economic discourse (the salvage of a corporation), as well as computer discourse (we save or salvage data). Finally, on a funnier, but no less meaningful note, French supermarkets sell a shower gel called “Axe. Difficult Morning, anti-hangover.” The product’s packaging states quite clearly that it is intended for people who have a hard time waking up after partying, while the label describes its properties in terms that could come straight from a theology class: “*miracle* shower gel [...] it will *save* your morning and *bring you back to life* after a short and restless night.”

Of course, the very frequency with which the concept of salvation is used means that in a certain way it is spent, close to losing its meaning from being used in too many contexts. But it might also be fair to ask whether this frequency of use doesn’t echo, albeit weakly, ancient questions, long-standing concerns. In fact, if someone wanted to develop a Christian apologetic on the basis of the contemporary world’s language use and dominant concerns, this theme of salvation would probably be an interesting starting point, a ‘good hold’ as people use the word ‘hold’ in rock-climbing.

All the more so because, while this notion of salvation retains, in its technical use at least, strongly religious and more specifically Christian connotations, it crops up in a surprising way in the writings of philosophers who are not particularly known for their support of Christianity, or are even quite critical of it.

Nietzsche is a striking if ambiguous example. As everyone knows, he sees himself as a fierce opponent of Christianity. But in several texts, he advocates a system of thought that, like Christianity, will lead to *salvation* – as long as we interpret salvation in accordance with its etymology, as a healing, the conclusion of a struggle against disease and weakness that yields ‘the great health.’<sup>1</sup> The word also occurs in Jean-Paul Sartre, in the famous last page of his autobiography *The Words*: “My sole concern has been to save myself – nothing in my hands, nothing up my sleeve – by work and faith. As a result, my pure choice did not raise me above anyone.

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, *Ecce Homo*, “Why I am so clever,” I; *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, I and II.

Without equipment, without tools, I set all of me to work in order to save all of me. If I relegate impossible Salvation to the prop-room, what remains?"<sup>2</sup> Similarly, in a rather mysterious footnote at the end of the section in *Being and Nothingness* called "Second attitude toward others: indifference, desire, hate, sadism", Sartre adds: "These considerations do not exclude the possibility of an ethics of deliverance and salvation. But this can be achieved only after a radical conversion which we can not discuss here."<sup>3</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, in a text from *Culture and Value* (1937), for his part, wrote: "If I am to be really saved [erlöst], what I need is certainty, not wisdom, dreams, or speculation [...] For it is my soul with its passions, as it were with its flesh and blood, that has to be saved [erlöst], not my abstract mind."<sup>4</sup> And finally, Michel Foucault declares, in a way that is both enigmatic and fascinating, "I know that knowledge has the power to transform us, that truth is not just a way of deciphering the world [...], but that, if I know the truth, then I will be transformed, maybe even saved. Or else I will die. But I believe, in any case, that for me these two are the same."<sup>5</sup>

These texts have three things in common: the theme of salvation is, for different reasons, unexpected; we understand, as we read them, that it is an important notion, one that reflects a concern essential to the author who uses it; but neither the context of these texts, nor, often, the entire corpus of their authors, give us a clear idea of how we should interpret 'salvation' or 'being saved'. Such conceptual blurriness, if not legitimate, is at least acceptable in the realm of ordinary language. But it is more problematic in a philosophical discourse that aims at conceptual clarity and rigor. To remedy this situation, I propose here a short clarification of the concept of salvation.

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<sup>2</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Words*, translated from the French by Bernard Frechtman, Vintage Books, 1981, p. 255

<sup>3</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, translated and with an introduction by Hazel E. Barnes, Washington Square Press, 1956, p. 534, n. 13

<sup>4</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, translated by Peter Winch, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1974), pp. 32-33

<sup>5</sup> "Interview," by Stephen Riggins (1982; *Dits et Ecrits*, Paris, Gallimard, 2001), II, 1354

## II. CLARIFICATION OF THE CONCEPT OF SALVATION

Historically, among the Greeks and Romans, the word *salvation* first meant the state of being or remaining whole and in good health, “safe and sound.” To be *saved*, then, was to be healed, and salvation, in the practical sense, meant health – not just physical, but also moral and spiritual health. In a more abstract sense, salvation meant both having reached a desirable way of life, as well as the process of attaining it, by being either removed from a situation or freed from a danger that somehow separated us from it. In a general sense, then, salvation can be understood as the return to a desirable former state that had been lost (as when one is saved from a sickness or a shipwreck), the safeguarding of this state against a threat (as one saves one’s freedom from a potential oppressor, or one’s life from a danger), or, finally, the improvement attaining this state represents. The meaning of the word salvation can, in short, be analyzed into two parts. Understood in its negative aspect, to be saved means to be delivered and freed, rescued and ripped away from a dangerous situation where looms a serious menace. Understood in its positive aspect, to be saved means being granted some good, reaching a state seen as beneficial or desirable, progressing from trials and wretchedness to a state of happiness and fulfilment. Therefore, I think we should find two elements in any soteriology.

(A) A pessimistic or lucid diagnosis of our present situation as one that is painful and dangerous, a state we are inevitably and structurally thrown into, and out of which we must claw our way. An optimistic theory that held that everything is naturally for the best and will continue that way could not be called a soteriology.

(B) A more optimistic assessment of whether it is possible to leave this grievous state behind. If a theory accepts the pessimistic diagnosis of the human condition described in (A), but judges that we are bound to remain in this state of wretchedness, decay, and misery, then it is not describing human existence from a soteriological point of view.

Within the framework of these two elements, we can highlight a number of criteria to distinguish different kinds of soteriologies. For instance, we can distinguish different types of soteriology based on:

(a) Whether salvation is achieved through oneself (auto-salvation) or through someone else, something external to the self (hetero-salvation). I will return to this distinction, which plays an essential

role in differentiating Christian soteriology from most other forms of soteriology developed in philosophical contexts.

(b) The manner of reaching salvation. Individualistic theories hold that it is individuals who reach salvation, and holistic views assume that salvation is achieved collectively, by a group (a community, a nation, a Church, humanity as a whole).

(c) How broadly the class of the saved is extended. Some theories include only a few or a small group among the saved, some include the greater part of humanity, and some universalist or even cosmic doctrines include all of humanity, or even the entire universe, among the saved.

(d) Where salvation will take place: immanent theories hold that salvation is attained in this world, while some reserve salvation for another world.

(e) The nature of the alleged saviour: it can be a god (theo-soteriology), a man or a group of men (anthropo-soteriology), or even something else (extra-terrestrial beings, etc.).

(f) What degree of salvation is attainable: some theories hold that salvation is partial, others that it is total, others integrate the two into a process of salvation in stages or degrees.

(g) The nature of salvation, its content: most often, it is happiness, but even if we leave aside the well-known difficulties in agreeing on a common definition of happiness<sup>6</sup>, there is no logical obstacle to imagining a different content for salvation.

Let us consider, for instance, how the Marxism of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, interpreted as a theory of salvation (or rather a secularized transposition of a theology of salvation)<sup>7</sup>, fits many of these categories. Marxism combines (a) auto-salvation (it is human beings who save themselves) and (e) anthropo-soteriology: it relies on a group of men (the proletariat, or its educated avant-garde) who hold the function of saviour in a period of transition (until the foundation of a classless society) to achieve a salvation which (c) all men or humanity as a whole share. This is (b) the conclusion of a collective process, which consists in (g) a happiness that is (f) complete and (d) obtained in this world.

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, I, 2

<sup>7</sup> See Karl Löwith, *Meaning in History: The Theological Implications of the Philosophy of History* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1949), ch. 2

### III. THE SPECIFICALLY CHRISTIAN CONCEPT OF SALVATION

The *New Testament* attests that Jesus, whose Hebrew name *Yeshoua* means ‘God saves,’ was quickly recognized by his disciples as the ‘saviour’ (*salvator, sôter*), the one who saves (*salvare, sôzô*) or brings salvation.<sup>8</sup> These early Christian texts use different themes, different images, to describe the status of the one who is saved, and the nature of salvation. The saved man is an invalid cured by Christ, a slave he frees, a debtor whose debt he forgives, a man possessed whose demonic bonds he looses, a man condemned whom he pardons, a dead man he brings back to life, etc.<sup>9</sup>

One feature distinguishes Christian soteriology very clearly from those that can be found in ancient wisdom, the philosophical classics (e.g., Spinoza)<sup>10</sup>, Nietzsche, even, when he advises “independents” to “get up on their own”<sup>11</sup>, and contemporary thought that emphasizes human or personal *autonomy*. Indeed, for all other soteriologies, salvation is something that man, or in some cases humanity understood collectively, can achieve on his own, by his own actions, by making the best use of his own strengths and natural powers – where the rational powers are often singled out – in a process that is clearly a form of auto-salvation. The end of chapter 9, book IV of *Epictetus’s Discourses* neatly synthesizes this conception of salvation: “Look, you have been dislodged though by no

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<sup>8</sup> See, for example, Acts of the Apostles, 4:12, and 13:23; I John, 4:14; Gospel of Luke, 2:11.

<sup>9</sup> For more fully developed typologies, as well as detailed studies on the theme of salvation in different New Testament texts, see, for example, *Le Salut Chrétien. Unité et diversité des conceptions à travers l’histoire*, ed. Jean-Louis Leuba (Paris, Desclée, 1995); *Salvation in the New Testament, Perspectives on Soteriology*, ed. Jan G. van den Watt (Leiden-Boston, Brill, 2005); Alloys Grillmeier, “Die Wirkung des Heilshandelns Gotte in Christus” in *Mysterium Salutis*, ed. Johannes Feiner and Dan Magnus Löhrer (Einsiedeln, Benziger, 1969), vol. III-2, pp. 327-390.

<sup>10</sup> See, for example, Jean Lacroix, *Spinoza et le problème du salut* (Paris, PUF, 1970). The explicit goal of Spinoza’s *Ethics* is to “lead, as if by the hand, to knowledge of the human mind and its supreme blessedness” (beginning of part II) which is identified as “salvation” (V, 36, scolie).

<sup>11</sup> Posthumous text cited in Didier Franck, *Nietzsche et l’ombre de Dieu* (Paris, PUF, 1998), p. 427. Cf. *Ecce Homo*, “Why I am so wise,” § 2: “I took myself in hand and I healed myself.” We can also remember the taunt “Save yourself” shouted at Christ on the cross according to the Gospels (Matthew 27:40).

one else but yourself. [...] Turn yourself away to return [...] to freedom [...]. And now, are you not willing to come to your own rescue? [...] If you seek something better, go ahead and continue what you are doing. Not even a god can save you.”<sup>12</sup>

Christian salvation, by contrast, is “salvation from elsewhere” (“hetero-salvation”). Man cannot reach it on his own, and it requires an external, divine and supernatural intervention: from a saviour, or else from a revelation – if by revelation we understand a body of knowledge that can neither be found in oneself nor gathered by human intellectual capacities alone, but must be received. The Christian approach to the concept of salvation, then, introduces a notion of, if not passivity, at least receptivity or dependence on an other (or an Other), that is, in the broad sense, a notion of heteronomy.

Salvation as understood by Christianity should therefore be defined as “movement from a negative to a positive state brought about by an external agent [which presupposes] three elements: a terminus, a starting point, and a transforming agent;”<sup>13</sup> or else, “a process whose beneficiaries are moved from a negative situation to a new fulfilled existence by the action of an external agent.”<sup>14</sup> In this case, the external agent is Jesus Christ, who, according to different acceptable translations of a series of Greek verbs used in the New Testament “frees,” (*eleutheroô*), “saves” (*sôzô*), “delivers” (*rhuomai*, *luô*), “tears away” (*exaireô*) humanity so that it can reach a new way of life.

That Christ is the saviour and that he saves men from sin is an idea that is so obvious to those who accept the Christian faith, that, unlike other concepts also central to Christianity (the trinity, Christ’s two natures, etc.), it has never been seriously contested or rejected by any important currents in Christian thought. As a consequence, the great councils that enabled Christians to clarify important but controversial aspects of their

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<sup>12</sup> I am following, with some modifications, W. A. Oldfather’s translation in *Epictetus, The discourses as Reported by Arrian, The Manual, and Fragments*, LOEB Classical Library, volume II, pp. 395-397.

<sup>13</sup> Paul-Évode Beaucamp, *Supplément au Dictionnaire de la Bible* (Paris, Letouzey et Ané), vol. 11, col. 516.

<sup>14</sup> The different components of this definition are taken from Raymond Winling, *La Bonne nouvelle du salut en Jésus-Christ. Sotériologie du Nouveau Testament* (Paris, Cerf, 2007).

faith, and thus to discriminate between orthodox and heretical theses, never made it the object of a dogmatic clarification.<sup>15</sup> The creed of the councils of Nicaea and Constantinople tells us only that Christ came « for us men and for our salvation » (Τὸν δι' ἡμᾶς τοὺς ἀνθρώπους καὶ διὰ τὴν ἡμετέραν σωτηρίαν κατελθόντα ἐκ τῶν οὐρανῶν / *Qui propter nos homines, et propter nostram salutem descendit de caelis*).

How the process of salvation works, its *modus operandi*, was thus left so open that it has given rise to a number of speculative accounts, about which it is not always easy to decide whether they are rivals, or whether they bring to light, without fully coordinating or synthesizing their incomplete accounts, different aspects of the concept of salvation. In Latin Christianity, for the last thousand years, the dominant answer to the question of how salvation works was the satisfaction theory proposed by Anselm of Canterbury in the *Cur Deus Homo*, and developed later, most notably by Thomas Aquinas and later Thomists.<sup>16</sup> I find this theory quite powerful, and I think that conceptually it is still relevant. But I don't want to ignore the fact that this explanation has become almost foreign, so to speak, or “inaudible” for many of our contemporaries. It has in fact become commonplace, for Christians and non-Christians alike, to reject the satisfaction theory of salvation as “judicial”, “sacrificial”, “vengeful”, and “vindictive”. Our contemporaries criticize its characterization of salvation as a “compensatory transaction”, and the way it seems to worship pain by concentrating all of Christ's saving work in his passion and the sufferings that accompany it.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, in focusing so exclusively on

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<sup>15</sup> Among Catholics, the “*schemata* from the preparatory sessions” of the first Vatican council (1869-70) had considered defining redemption, but the texts were neither discussed nor voted on by the council (which was cut short by the Italian army's arrival in Rome). See Jean Rivière, *Le Dogme de la rédemption* (Paris, Gabalda, 1931), pp. 116-120. There is also a mention (without definition) of the theme of “satisfaction” in a text from the 6<sup>th</sup> session of the council of Trent.

<sup>16</sup> See *Summa Theologiae*, III, questions 46-49; see also, for example, Eleonore Stump, “Atonement According to Aquinas” in *Oxford Readings in Philosophical Theology*, ed. Michael Rea, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2009), vol. 1, pp. 267-293.

<sup>17</sup> For this type of criticism among writers who attack Christianity, see for example Nietzsche, *The Antichrist*, § 41: “‘how could God allow it!’ [Jesus' death] To which the deranged reason of the little community [Jesus' disciples] formulated an answer that was terrifying in its absurdity: God gave his son as a sacrifice for the forgiveness of sins. At once there was an end of the gospels! Sacrifice for sin, and in its most obnoxious

the passion and death of Christ, this theory doesn't really assign to other aspects of his existence – his incarnation and even more importantly, his resurrection considered in themselves – any significant role in the work of salvation.

Therefore, without rejecting the fundamental importance of satisfaction and atonement in the concept of salvation, it is tempting to look for another explanation, or, more modestly, a complementary explanation of the *modus operandi* of Christian salvation understood as Christ's freeing us from sin.

#### IV. AN ATTEMPT TO EXPLAIN THE STATEMENT "FAITH IN THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST SAVES MEN FROM SIN"

It's just this type of explanation I'd like to offer. I have tried to take into account an important trend in contemporary theology, which is really a corollary of the current turn away from satisfaction theories: the rejection of an exclusively sacrificial or expiatory theory of salvation, and the desire to see that the thinking that focuses exclusively on Jesus's passion and marginalizes the resurrection stop dominating the discussion. This agenda, which has been, in a way, the height of fashion in European salvation theology since the 1950's<sup>18</sup>, has been clear in its critical project, clear about what it is rejecting. It has also been clear in its general theoretical aim: "to restore Christ's victory, and return Christ's resurrection to the central place in treatises on redemption it should never have lost"; "[to show that] the resurrection plays a fundamental

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and barbarous form: sacrifice of the innocent for the sins of the guilty! What appalling paganism!" And in a Christian author, see for example, René Girard, *Des choses cachées depuis la fondation du monde* (Paris, Grasset, 1978), p. 269: "God [would] not just be demanding a new victim, he [would] be demanding the most precious, most cherished victim: his own son. This claim has done more than anything else, no doubt, to discredit Christianity in the eyes of men of good will in the modern world. It might have been tolerable to the medieval mind, but it has become intolerable to ours, and has become the stumbling block *par excellence* for an entire world repelled by the concept of sacrifice."

<sup>18</sup> Examples of this tendency born in the inter-war period among Protestant theologians (like Karl Barth) include: François-Xavier Durrwell, Walter Kasper, Joseph Moingt, Jürgen Moltmann (at least in *Theology of Hope*), Wolhart Pannenberg, Karl Rahner, Bernard Sesboüe, Michel Deneken.

role in salvation.”<sup>19</sup> But when it comes to the constructive side of the agenda, to specific explanations in support of the general aim, the results have been more problematic, less successful. I am here attempting one such specific explanation of the statement “faith in the resurrection of Christ saves us from sin.”

Here, now, is a summary of the argument I have developed to provide a philosophical clarification of this proposition. I will present it in four parts, each one corresponding to a section in my book.

(1) The first section offers a defence of a pragmatic approach to belief: beliefs should be considered not only with respect to their truth value, but also with respect to their effects, how they transform the believer and the world in which he acts. I say “not only...but also” because I don’t think we should lose interest in the truth of beliefs, or reject Clifford’s principle with its stipulation that the fundamental maxim of the ethics of belief is “It is wrong always, everywhere, and for anyone, to believe anything upon insufficient evidence.” But nothing stands in the way of our connecting our interest in the truth of beliefs to a pragmatic investigation of beliefs. We will then supplement our interest in a belief’s orthodoxy (how is its content theoretically righteous, speculatively correct) with a further question about its *eudoxia* (how is it beneficial for the believer who accepts it?). I offer a set of criteria for classifying beliefs from this pragmatic perspective, among which the two most fundamental are the magnitude and the value of a belief’s effects. We can thus distinguish between weak beliefs, which have a minimal impact on the believer’s life (“beliefs with weak existential implications”), and highly effective ones, which have a significant impact on the life of those who come to believe them (“beliefs with strong existential implications”). We can also distinguish beliefs that produce correct or beneficial behaviour in those who accept them (*eupraxis* beliefs) from beliefs that produce incorrect or harmful behaviour (*dyspraxis* beliefs).

(2) Section II focuses on the notion of death. It takes as its starting point the classical view that any proposition about the nature of death (and more particularly of *my* death) can be an object of belief only,

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<sup>19</sup> In this order: Henri de Lubac, *Le Mystère du surnaturel*, ([1965], Paris, Cerf, 2000), p. 20; Bernard Sesboüe, *Jésus-Christ dans la tradition de l’Église* ([1982], Paris, Desclée de Brouwer, 2000), p. 238.

that positive knowledge or science about *my* death is impossible. If we accept this, then we are led to ask, even in this life: which among the available beliefs about death are beneficial and which are harmful? In the remainder of section II, I explain, without much original thought, that we spontaneously and naturally believe that death is the end of life, and that in most cases we are afraid of death so understood. As the expression ‘fear of death’ is a little bland and not always clear, I try to narrow it down by distinguishing different types or different degrees of fear of death. It ranges from the instinctual reaction we share with other animals, fleeing death as a fundamental threat, an annihilation of what we are insofar as we are alive, to highly intellectualized responses like the great artistic evocations of death (Mozart’s *Requiem*, Molière’s *Don Juan*) or philosophical investigations like Heidegger’s study of anxiety. The general idea underlying this section is that we are naturally fearful of a death we interpret as the end of life.

(3) Section III shows that this standard belief about death is fundamentally dyspraxic, that is, it leads the believer to behave in ways that are bad and harmful, and which depending on one’s lexical preferences, one can call faults, “bad deeds” or “sins”. I will call this thesis, that there is a causal connection between the fear of death and sin, “the Lucretius hypothesis” because the idea is expressed, albeit without any detail about the precise nature of the connection, at the beginning of book III of *De rerum natura*:

... and the old fear of Acheron driven headlong away, which utterly confounds the life of men from the very root, clouding all things with the blackness of death, and suffering no pleasure to be pure and unalloyed (...) Avarice and the blind craving for honours, which constrain wretched men to overleap the boundaries of right, and sometimes as comrades or accomplices in crime to struggle night and day with surpassing toil to rise up to the height of power—these sores in life are fostered in no small degree by the fear of death. For most often scorned disgrace and biting poverty are seen to be far removed from pleasant settled life, and are, as it were, a present dallying before the gates of death; and while men, spurred by a false fear, desire to flee far from them, and to drive them far away, they amass substance by civil bloodshed and greedily multiply their riches, heaping slaughter on slaughter. Hardening their heart they revel in a brother’s bitter death, and hate and fear their kinsmen’s board.

In like manner, often through the same fear, they waste with envy that he is powerful, he is regarded, who walks clothed with bright renown; while they complain that they themselves are wrapped in darkness and the mire. Some of them come to ruin to win statues and a name; and often through fear of death so deeply does the hatred of life and the sight of the light possess men, that with sorrowing heart they compass their own death, forgetting that it is this fear which is the source of their woes, which assails their honour, which bursts the bonds of friendship, and overturns affection from its lofty throne. For often ere now men have betrayed country and beloved parents, seeking to shun the realms of Acheron. For even as children tremble and fear everything in blinding darkness, so we sometimes dread in the light things that are no whit more to be feared than what children shudder at in the dark, and imagine will come to pass.<sup>20</sup>

In a number of analyses that I can't repeat here in any detail, I go on to show that the fear of death understood as the end of life leads to a series of evil actions: avarice or greed, gluttony, lust, homicide, disrespect to father and mother, and pride.

By way of example, here is how we can establish a connection between fear of death and avarice, using a text from Karl Marx as support:

That which is for me through the medium of money – that for which I can pay (i.e., which money can buy) – that am I myself, the possessor of the money. The extent of the power of money is the extent of my power. Money's properties are my – the possessor's – properties and essential powers. Thus, what I am and am capable of is by no means determined by my individuality. I am ugly, but I can buy for myself the most beautiful of women. Therefore I am not ugly, for the effect of ugliness – its deterrent power – is nullified by money [...] I am bad, dishonest, unscrupulous, stupid; but money is honoured, and hence its possessor. Money is the supreme good, therefore its possessor is good. Money, besides, saves me the trouble of being dishonest: I am therefore presumed honest. I am brainless, but money is the real brain of all things and how then should its possessor be brainless? Besides, he can buy clever people for himself, and is he who has power over the clever not more clever than the clever? Do not I, who thanks to money am capable of all that the human heart

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<sup>20</sup> Lucretius, *De natura rerum*, III, v. 37-90, trans. Cyril Bayley

longs for, possess all human capacities?[...]That which I am unable to do as a man, and of which therefore all my individual essential powers are incapable, I am able to do by means of money.<sup>21</sup>

The text reminds us of the specific function traditionally attributed to money: it is the universal mediator, the converter that makes all things commensurate by translating disparate realities and use-values into the same yard stick (the exchange value). To this classical analysis, Marx adds the idea that the act of buying, understood as an act of appropriation, causes the attributes of the property to be transferred to its owner. By merging the two driving ideas of this Marxist analysis, we can answer the question: in this mode of production and exchange, what is the object whose appropriation money fundamentally allows, and whose properties an owner claims for himself, at least at the level of fantasy?

It is time.

Wage-labour, after all, is the employer's use of his capital to "buy himself" his employees' time as well as the product of their work during that time. A commodity, likewise, is just the fruit of the work-time needed to produce it. It follows that buying and hoarding money (avarice in the strict sense), or objects (in particular, manufactured objects), in other words, being miserly in the broad sense, is really amassing human time, in so far as it is instantiated, and has been, in a certain sense, deposited in those objects. The more money we have, therefore, the more able we are to appropriate other people's time, buying it with wages, or buying it through the mediation of the commodities it has produced, and the more justified we feel in thinking of all this time as potentially our own.

Whether he consumes or saves, and whether his saving is an end in itself or the means to future consumption, the miser doesn't believe that "time is money"; he is rather moved by the belief that "money is time", that in the world in which he acts, having money means being able to acquire other people's time, literally, "saving time" or "buying time".

We can thus interpret the amassing of money as a more or less conscious fantasy promise of an indefinite heap of time, the illusory assurance that our existence will continue indefinitely, and so, as a fantasized attempt to escape our fear of death.

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<sup>21</sup> Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844. Third Manuscript*, tans. Martin Milligan.

This, then, is how a causal and explanatory connection can be established between the fear of death on the one hand, and avarice or greed on the other. Using a number of different theoretical tools, I try to show in section III of my book that the same connection can be established between fear of death understood as the end of life on the one hand, and gluttony, lust, homicide, disrespect to mother and father, and pride on the other.

Section III's general conclusion, then, is that the common belief about death has the characteristic effect of leading human beings to this type of evil act. The fear of death tends to land us in a kind of existential mediocrity, or, in the worst cases an existential incompetence. In other words, the standard belief about death is fundamentally and globally dyspraxic: it causes us to settle in a negative state that we can also call a state of sin, from which we need to be "saved", right now, in this life.

(4) In the fourth section, I finally turn to the question of salvation. To be saved from the negative state described in the previous section, one might adopt an orthopraxic belief about death – a belief that frees us from the evil acts we commit out of fear of death, and sets in motion a series of intellectual and emotional reactions that improve human existence. Here my remarks turn avowedly Christian: for I believe that the Christian belief that death has been defeated by Christ is such a belief, orthopraxic in the highest degree.

I do not discuss the question of the truth or epistemic reliability of this belief in my book: I have nothing new to say on this subject.<sup>22</sup> I accept this belief in a hypothetical way, following a method sometimes called philosophical theology. I ask: "If someone believes that Christ is resurrected, thereby signalling to us that death is not in fact the end of life, then what happens?"

All the elements I have discussed so far are falling into place to form a philosophical explication of how Christian salvation works. The belief in Christ's resurrection abolishes the ordinary representation of death as an absolute end, as well as the fearful relationship that follows.<sup>23</sup> This

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<sup>22</sup> On this theme, see, for example, Richard Swinburne, *The Resurrection of God Incarnate* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003).

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Athanasius of Alexandria, *The Incarnation of the Word*, 27 (Paris, Cerf, 1973, "Sources chrétiennes" no. 199), pp. 362-365: "Death has been destroyed, and the cross

belief, then, is able to free us from the morally bad consequences (the sins) of the ordinary representation of death and our reaction to it. Thus, going back to the definition already spelled out, salvation is:

*A process whose beneficiaries are moved from a negative situation...* That is, humanity's situation as depicted in section III: "led astray" by the ordinary representation of death, and with a propensity to morally undesirable acts.

*... to a new fulfilled existence...* A man who no longer acts as described in section III has settled into a better realm of existence, one that is qualitatively superior to his former existence, not only because he is now rid of certain negative features, but also because he finds himself in a new set of circumstances conducive to leading a new life, one where dynamisms and capacities that could not be developed in his former existence can flourish. Ancient authors summarized it this way: "Christ killed the death that was killing man"; "he cast death's tyranny out of our nature completely by rising from the dead."<sup>24</sup>

*... by the action of an external agent.* Salvation is brought about by the power of the belief in Christ's resurrection. From an objective or historical standpoint, the external agent, the saviour, can be identified as Jesus Christ. If, on the other hand, we focus on the information contained in the proposition "Christ is resurrected," then the external agency is a revealed body of faith. For this proposition cannot be deduced from natural principles of human knowledge, nor can it be demonstrated *a priori*, and it is no doubt quite different from an ordinary piece of historical or experiential knowledge. It must therefore be a "revelation", which means that it presents for belief a body of knowledge that does

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represents the victory won over it. It has no strength left, it is really dead. [...] Ever since the Saviour resurrected his own body, death is no longer frightening. All those who believe in Christ [...] really know that if they die, they do not perish but live."

<sup>24</sup> Melito of Sardis, *Peri Pascha* (Paris, Cerf, 1966 "Sources chrétiennes", no. 123), pp. 96-97; Nicholas Cabasilas, *The Life in Christ*, III, 7 (Paris, Cerf, 1989-1990 "Sources chrétiennes" no. 355 and 361), p. 243. The text of this 14<sup>th</sup> century Byzantine author deserves to be quoted more completely: "Thus, while men were cut off from God in three ways – through nature, through sin and through death – the saviour allowed them to meet him perfectly [...], by removing one by one all the obstacles that kept them apart: [he removed the obstacle of] nature by sharing in humanity, the obstacle of sin by dying on the cross, and the last obstacle, the tyranny of death, he completely expelled from our nature by rising from the dead."

not and cannot come from “me”, but is given from elsewhere. Of course it belongs to the world, it appears in it, but from a source that is divine, or claimed to be so.

To use a different language: all the analyses I’ve developed so far now make it possible to explain the proposition “faith in the resurrection of Christ frees men from sin”. If these earlier hypotheses are granted, then faith in the resurrection of Christ will, or should, set in motion in the individual who accepts it a series of intellectual and emotional transformations that improve his existence. If, as I have argued, the central problem of human life, what leads us astray and ruins our lives, is precisely a certain fearful relationship to death understood as the end of life, then the belief that death has been vanquished – a belief central and unique to Christianity<sup>25</sup> – must be an excellent way to reach salvation – where salvation is understood as an improvement of existence that begins in this life, not in its eschatological sense (though, of course I don’t reject that sense of the word).

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, let me make four qualifications to the thesis I am defending.

(a) I am not, of course, claiming that we are saved through knowledge, and that salvation is available only to the “experts” who think seriously about how salvation works. That would be Gnosticism, and I am not a Gnostic. It is faith that saves in my view, and it is “enough”, so to speak, to believe that Christ is resurrected to enter into the process of salvation I describe. Someone who thinks seriously about the problem just adds an explanation of how the dynamics works, or tries to make the process intelligible.

(b) The thesis I am defending does assert that salvation or “justification” is brought about *by faith*, or, more precisely, by faith in Christ’s resurrection with its message that death has been defeated.<sup>26</sup> I am here using the world faith in a strong sense, the sense of the *credere in*

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<sup>25</sup> See the famous claim by Paul of Tarsus in I Corinthians, 15:14: “if Christ had not been raised, then our proclamation has been in vain and your faith has been in vain.” (New Revised Standard Version)

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Saint Augustin, *Contra Faustum*, 16, 29, Migne PL, vol. 42, col. 336 : “The very resurrection in which we believe justifies us.”

*Deum*, of strong conviction, a deep and sincere adherence that causes noticeable changes in the believer's interactions with the world. It is faith used in this sense that has certain consequences for the believer's salvation in my remarks above. It is again, faith used in this strong sense that contemporary authors call performative: "the Christian message was not only 'informative' but 'performative'"; "is the Christian faith [...] 'performative' for us – is it a message which shapes our life in a new way, or is it just 'information' which, in the meantime, we have set aside and which now seems to us to have been superseded by more recent information?"<sup>27</sup> If, by 'performative' (in the broad sense)<sup>28</sup> we understand the property whereby certain beliefs not only represent a state of affairs ("information"), but also produce a change by forming or transforming other beliefs and behaviours, then we can indeed speak of the saving character of performative faith in Christ's resurrection: the belief that death has been defeated has the characteristic effect of producing salvation. Being freed from sin – that is, being less tempted, better able to resist temptation, committing fewer or even none of the morally reprehensible acts described above – flows directly from the radical modification in the meaning of death that comes from accepting the belief in Christ's resurrection.

c) On the other hand, in this defence of salvation through faith, I do not mean to commit myself to a specific position in the age-old (though nowadays mostly becalmed) theological debate about the respective roles of faith and works (i.e., individual actions) in salvation. Even if my thesis can nominally evoke the *sola fide* of the Reformation, since it gives faith the essential role in the production of salvation, it is in fact closer to the position generally thought of as the Catholic one: where the emphasis is on how man is brought into a situation where he can act well, and, using his freedom correctly, (subjectively) appropriate the salvation Christ brings (objectively). In this light, justification becomes the fact of finding oneself in a new practical context, one where obstacles and obstructions to right action no longer bind us when we act, so that it becomes possible for us to be just. On this interpretation, then, justification is more

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<sup>27</sup> Joseph Ratzinger/Benedict XVI, Encyclical *Spe Salvi*, §2 and §10.

<sup>28</sup> In the narrow sense (that of J.L. Austin) used in the philosophy of language, only public utterances (and not mental states) that actualize what they describe, or "do what they say", are called 'performative'.

a journey than a consequence of faith in the resurrection that is acquired once and for all; it is not so much a state in which we find ourselves, as the lifelong tension required for becoming just. Collectively, it is less an event we can describe as having happened, than the process in which, according to Christianity, human beings have been involved since the discovery of the empty tomb. The idea that what leads to salvation is revealed implies a certain receptivity, or even passivity, as the intervention of a God or saviour implies heteronomy. But, it turns out, none of these are incompatible with the individual's having, or needing to have some personal agency in the process of his salvation, that is, with the possibility that the individual's actions will have the character of an auto-salvation. Receptivity and passivity are the starting point, necessary conditions for a new mode of action that an individual can't adopt on his own.

d) Finally, I want to say more about what it means for this discussion of Christ's saving action to shift the focus from the passion to the resurrection – something scholastic theology often saw as nothing more than a happy ending (it's always better when the good guy wins) or else a "miracle" meant to elicit or strengthen faith.<sup>29</sup> First of all, the shift of focus does not imply that the darkness of Good Friday was useless or superfluous, that Jesus's dying on the cross after a degrading agony was irrelevant, or that nothing essential would be missing if he had died peacefully in his bed before being resurrected a few days later, or even more to the point, if he had proclaimed his victory over death without dying himself. First, as theologians in the first few centuries explained in their arguments against the docetist heresy, the reality of Christ's resurrection and humanity require the reality of his death. Second, the passion insofar as it is sorrowful and negative, and the resurrection, are like two facets of the same event – an event that brings salvation<sup>30</sup> and

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<sup>29</sup> See, for example, Cajetan's commentary on Saint Paul (On Romans 4:25) *Epistolae Pauli et aliorum apostolorum [...] juxta sensum literalem enarratae* [1531].

<sup>30</sup> Ultimately, Thomas Aquinas doesn't disagree: "as to efficiency, which comes of the Divine power, the *Passion* as well as the *Resurrection of Christ* is the *cause* of justification." *Summa Theologiae* III, question 56, article 2 ad 4. This same question in the *Summa* parcels out each one's role by distinguishing two aspects in the "complete" concept of redemption: the passion and death of Christ cause the forgiveness of sins by providing satisfaction, while the resurrection institutes a new life. In every case, finding "the correct dose" of passion and resurrection respectively seems to be one of the central concerns of Christian soteriology.

revelation – which can only be fully understood by focusing alternatively on one or the other of its facets. In its initial phase, this event reveals that salvation is not obtained easily; it is not obtained through the means usually promoted in the world (power, riches, honour, will to dominate), through violence, the desire to punish or to seek vengeance. Christ's passion shows that the road to salvation is hard, and that the fight against evil and everything that leads to it is sometimes painful and can require great sacrifice. The passion reminds us that “there is here an ordered sequence that Christ himself followed: first the passion, then the glorification. [...] As long as our life here on earth lasts, suffering and death come before joy and resurrection.”<sup>31</sup> As the theologians say, it was “appropriate,” from this point of view, that Christ should die in the agony of the cross. However, the passion (and this includes its role in salvation) can be fully understood only in the light of the later event that gives it meaning. A story in which Jesus was *only* crucified would have a completely different meaning. Or it might not have any meaning at all, like a symbol of the absurdity and cruelty of the world. So, following Karl Barth, I want to warn those who think seriously about Christian justification and salvation against the Nordic Melancholy of a (good) Friday theology, abstractly focused on the cross alone and forgetful of Resurrection Sunday.

The seriousness with which we insist on the starting point of justification is a good and necessary thing, that is, on the fact [...] that we can only go in one direction: from the death [of Jesus] on the cross to his resurrection. And so we must consider first what is past, that is, our death which he suffered, then what is future, that is, the life he received. [...] But we must see to it that this seriousness – there are examples of this both in Roman Catholic and also in Protestant circles – does not, at a certain point which is hard to define, become a pagan instead of a purely Christian seriousness, changing suddenly into a “Nordic morbidity”, losing the direction in which alone it can have any Christian meaning, suddenly beginning to look backwards instead of forwards, transforming itself into the tragedy of an abstract *Theologia crucis* which can have little and finally nothing whatever to do with the Christian knowledge of Jesus Christ.

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<sup>31</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theodramatik*, 5 vol., Fribourg-Einsiedeln, Johannes Verlag, 1973-1983, vol. 4

[...] The knowledge of our justification as it has taken place in Him can not possibly be genuinely serious except in this joy, the Easter joy.<sup>32</sup>

Finally, I do not for a moment claim that this explanation of how salvation works is the only valid one or that it excludes all others. It is, for instance, perfectly compatible with the satisfaction or atonement theory. Ultimately, I think that the best description of the Christian conception of salvation is this: “Christ’s incarnation, his life and acts, his passion, death and resurrection, are what make salvation from sin possible.” Of course, one could say that all this constitutes just one event of salvation, the “Jesus Christ event”. But as soon as we try to explain how this salvation really works, we end up distinguishing different explanatory frameworks; some that focus more on the incarnation’s saving power as is the case with so-called deification-theories, others like satisfaction theories, that focus more on the passion. As a philosopher, and following in the footsteps of some of Saint Paul’s texts<sup>33</sup>, I have wanted to draw attention to the soteriological value of faith in the resurrection.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> K. Barth, *Die Kirchliche Dogmatik* (Zurich, Evangelischer Verlag Zollikon, 1932-1967) IV, vol. 1, ch. 14, §61, 2

<sup>33</sup> For example, Romans 10:9: “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.” (New Revised Standard Version) On this point, see Stanislas Lyonnet: “La Valeur sotériologique de la résurrection selon saint Paul” in *Christus victor mortis, Gregorianum* 39-2 (1958), pp. 295-318.

<sup>34</sup> Because I want to stick to a philosophical approach, I do not tackle the theme, in all respects difficult, of original sin. The thesis that I defend retains this claim characteristic of Christian theology: between death and sin, there is a causal relationship in the strong sense of productive causality. But it reverses the direction in which the theological tradition, following a possible interpretation of the texts of St. Paul (eg. Romans, 5, 12) has most often considered this relationship: sin (of Adam ) would have produced death (the mortality of man, the “finiteness”) that is to say, strictly speaking, the fact of dying and, in an analogical sense, the “spiritual death” brought about by the breakdown in the relationship with God. If we take “death” in the strict and biological sense, achievements of modern science seem difficult to reconcile with this view (as, in all cases, the theme of a unique and temporally determined *peccatum originale originans*). My interpretation avoids this problem, considering that sin, as a situation, and from there the sins, as actions, follow from mortality as it is spontaneously understood as a fundamental characteristic, both biological and existential, of humanity. The point is not to identify “sin” and “finiteness”, but to show how sin stems from a form of spiritual negativity inherent to a certain understanding of finiteness, probably *de facto* inevitable, but not insurmountable.

I don't think that anyone can be certain with categorical certainty, that the proposition "Christ is risen from the dead" is true. Accepting it will always imply an irreducible element of faith, something like a bet that answers the existential question "what may I hope?" as much as the historical one "what can I know?". But if this proposition is true, if death really has been conquered by a fully human person, this implies an unprecedented existential transformation, whose full array of consequences, in my view, contemporary philosophers, including those who have paid a lot of attention to the relation between life and death (phenomenology, for instance, in Heidegger) have not analyzed. I have tried here to sketch out a few of those consequences, while at the same time suggesting that there is a real existential benefit to the belief that Christ is risen from the dead, in betting, as Pascal understood the word, that he is *really* risen.



# SWINBURNE ON THE SIMPLICITY OF THEISM

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**Abstract.** This paper argues that (1) Richard Swinburne's general account of the simplicity of empirical hypotheses fails because it involves a deeply problematic notion of postulating a property, while there is a wide range of hypotheses where the assessment of simplicity rests entirely on the number and kinds of postulated properties (2) Swinburne's main argument in *The Christian God* for the simplicity of theism, the one based on considerations about pure limitless intentional power, is significantly weaker than he seems to believe. The paper does not draw a conclusion about whether theism is simple.

Section 1 of the paper introduces Swinburne's notion of simplicity as a multi-dimensional feature of a hypothesis, relevant to its intrinsic probability. Section 2 criticizes Swinburne's general theory of simplicity of hypotheses. Section 3 points out that even if theism is very simple, and God's necessary properties are very simple ones, it does not follow that God is ontologically simple. Section 4 identifies weaknesses in Swinburne's main argument in *The Christian God* for the simplicity of theism.

## I. H-SIMPLICITY AS A MULTI-DIMENSIONAL FEATURE OF HYPOTHESES

Swinburne's claim that theism is a very simple hypothesis plays an important role in his case for saying that the existence of God is more probable than not.<sup>1</sup> For example, let *e* be the fine-tuning evidence, and let

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<sup>1</sup> Swinburne's cumulative case is most fully set forth in *The Existence of God*, second edition, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004. The main conclusion is stated on p. 342. Since Swinburne himself holds (and has elsewhere argued for) the Christian doctrine of the

k be all our admissible background evidence. Then according to Bayes' Theorem, the higher the intrinsic probability of theism is, the higher will be its probability relative to k, and the higher its probability relative to k is, the higher will be its probability relative to e&k.<sup>2</sup> Swinburne identifies the two factors determining the intrinsic probability of a hypothesis as its simplicity and its scope, and he declares that simplicity is much more important than scope.<sup>3</sup> Thus although there exist several different conceptions of simplicity (and degree of simplicity) of a hypothesis, what Swinburne has in mind is a logically necessary feature<sup>4</sup>, possessed independently of any auxiliary assumptions required to generate further hypotheses and predictions, and such that (jointly with scope) it determines the intrinsic probability of a hypothesis.<sup>5</sup> I call this feature 'h-simplicity'.

Swinburne holds that h-simplicity is a multi-dimensional feature of theories:

[Quotation 1] The simplicity of a theory, in my view, is a matter of it postulating few (logically independent) entities, few properties of entities, few kinds of entities, few kinds of properties, properties more readily

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Trinity, he explains on p. 344 that 'in Christian terms' his arguments in *The Existence of God* are arguments for the existence of God the Father.

<sup>2</sup> In contexts like this, by 'probability' Swinburne means logical probability. The intrinsic probability of a proposition is its probability relative to a tautology.

<sup>3</sup> *The Existence of God*, pp. 53, 56; 'God as the Simplest Explanation of the Universe,' *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 2 (2010), p. 5.

<sup>4</sup> In this paper 'logically necessary' and 'logically possible' are used broadly, as equivalent to 'metaphysically necessary' and 'metaphysically possible' respectively.

<sup>5</sup> Some people believe that the mathematical discipline *information theory* provides a good criterion of h-simplicity. For example, David L. Dowe, Steve Gardner and Graham Oppy, 'Bayes not Bust! Why Simplicity is no Problem for Bayesians,' *British Journal for Philosophy of Science* 58 (2007), pp. 709–754. The first paragraph of the paper makes it clear that the authors intend to discuss the concept of simplicity which is most directly relevant to arguments from empirical evidence. As far as I know, however, information-theoretic proposals have so far been developed only with respect to the curve-fitting problem, whereas discussing h-simplicity more generally, and theism as an empirical hypothesis specifically, requires far more broadly applicable criteria. Elliott Sober holds that the simplest hypothesis is 'the one with respect to which you need to obtain less additional information in order to answer your questions' (*Simplicity*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975). Swinburne replies that this concept of simplicity is irrelevant to probable truth (*Epistemic Justification*, p. 86n).

observable<sup>6</sup>, few separate laws with few terms relating few variables, the simplest formulation of each law being mathematically simple.<sup>7</sup>

[Quotation 2] One formulation of a law is mathematically simpler than another in so far as the latter uses terms defined by terms used in the former but not vice versa ...<sup>8</sup>

[Quotation 3] Hypotheses attributing infinite values of properties to objects are simpler than ones attributing large finite values.<sup>9</sup>

[Quotation 4] The same hypothesis, in the sense of one postulating the same entities, properties and relations between them, may be expressed in logically equivalent formulations ... One hypothesis is simpler than another if (and only if) the simplest formulation of the former is simpler than the simplest formulation of the latter.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Although a proposition's degree of h-simplicity must be a necessary matter, since it is to be a guide to its intrinsic probability, in the most common contexts in which 'observable' is used whether one property counts as more readily observable than another is typically a contingent affair, depending on the perceptual capacities with which humans are naturally endowed, and on the availability of devices such as telescopes and processes such as magnetic resonance imaging. In *Epistemic Justification*, p. 89, Swinburne recognizes this, and argues that nevertheless 'there remains a logical dependence of the observability of some properties on the observability of others'. It seems to me that if Swinburne is to sustain this claim, without relativizing observability (and so h-simplicity) to natural endowments of different species of intelligent beings, he can do so only by supposing that various laws of nature are logically necessary truths – e.g., laws about wavelengths of radiation which could be used in direct perception.

<sup>7</sup> *The Existence of God*, p. 53. Swinburne adopts the same account on p. 273 of his 'A simple theism for a mixed world: response to Bradley,' *Religious Studies* 43 (2007), pp. 271-277, and on pp. 25, 29 of *Is There a God?*, revised edition, Oxford University Press, 2010. Notice that although in Quotation 1 Swinburne uses the word 'theory,' which suggests a changing cluster of propositions, some more central and resistant to revision than others, the 'theism' whose h-simplicity Swinburne discusses is the single proposition *There is a God*, understood as he understands it. (*The Existence of God*, pp. 7, 344, *The Christian God*, p. 126, and 'A Simple theism for a mixed world: response to Bradley,' pp. 73-274). One might naturally take a theistic *theory* of some subject matter to consist of the conjunction of *There is a God* with, for example, various controversial value propositions, and propositions specifying whether God causally determines all events our universe, but Swinburne does not for the most part discuss the degrees of simplicity of such wholes.

<sup>8</sup> *The Existence of God*, p. 54

<sup>9</sup> *The Existence of God*, p. 55.

<sup>10</sup> *Epistemic Justification*, p. 87.

[Quotation 5] It is always simpler to postulate an absence than a presence.<sup>11</sup>

[Quotation 6] A property defined by similarity to paradigm examples of its application, such as 'green' or 'mass' or 'bright' counts as one property; properties defined as conjunctions or disjunctions of such properties (or as having more complicated probabilistic relations to such properties) count as two or more properties.<sup>12</sup>

[Quotation 7] Where there is a possibility of higher-level hypotheses [which might explain medium level hypotheses postulated to explain some collection of evidence] the extent to which medium-level hypotheses might fit with other medium-level hypotheses into a higher-level hypothesis is relevant to determining their simplicity.<sup>13</sup>

How are we to interpret Quotation 4? On the one hand, there is a reason to think that the phrase 'the simplest formulation' cannot mean the h-simplest formulation. Since distinct formulations of a hypothesis are distinct propositions, it follows that if it is a priori that two formulations are logically equivalent to each other while differing with respect to h-simplicity, then either there is some precisely offsetting difference in scope between them, or else they differ in intrinsic logical probability. It is hard to believe that there will always, or even typically, be a precisely offsetting difference in scope. But if these two formulations differ in intrinsic probability, then we have a major departure from the probability calculus – a departure which Swinburne would be reluctant to make.

On the other hand, what might Swinburne mean by 'the simplest formulation' *other than* the h-simplest one? Apart from those cases in which the two formulations differ merely in degree of mathematical simplicity, he gives no indication that he has in mind any other account of simplicity of formulations. Accordingly, here is a plausible interpretation of Quotation 4:

(Z) Consider any set S of contingent propositions such that for any two members p and q, it is an a priori truth that p is logically equivalent to q. The members of S are to be regarded as formulations of one hypothesis. We should apply the criteria given in Quotations 1 - 7

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<sup>11</sup> 'God as the Simplest Explanation of the Universe,' p. 19.

<sup>12</sup> 'God as the Simplest Explanation of the Universe,' p. 7.

<sup>13</sup> 'Gwiazda on the Bayesian argument for God,' *Philosophia* 39 (2011), pp. 393-396.

to each member of S to judge which is the h-simplest, and regard the degree of h-simplicity of this one as measuring (i.e., as equal to) the degree of h-simplicity of the hypothesis.

Given this interpretation, should we identify the hypothesis with its h-simplest formulation? If not, then with what should we identify it? Perhaps Swinburne should regard a hypothesis as not a proposition but a set S of propositions all and only of which are logically equivalent to each other; the members of S are said to be formulations of S, and any sentence which expresses a member of S is said to express S. Swinburne gives no sign that this is in fact how he should be understood. But consider the alternative, that a hypothesis h is itself a proposition. In that case, the formulations of h would be all and only those propositions such that it is a priori that they are logically equivalent to h. Since the relation between h and its formulations seems symmetrical, surely nothing would stop us from saying that h is a formulation of each of these other propositions. So according to this alternative account, the word 'formulation' is idle, and can be dropped without loss. One could replace Z by Z\*:

(Z\*) Consider any set S of contingent propositions such that for any two members p and q, it is an a priori truth that p is logically equivalent to q. We should proceed in two stages: first, apply the conditions stated in Quotations 1 - 7 to each member of S to judge which one fulfils them to the greatest extent; second, treat the extent to which this member fulfils the conditions as measuring the degree of h-simplicity of each member of S.

Since Z\* departs far from the way Swinburne expresses himself in Quotation 4 and elsewhere, it amounts to a friendly proposal for replacing Swinburne's actual view with a rational reconstruction of it, rather than an interpretation of it. Moreover, adopting Z\* would inconveniently complicate the composition of subsequent discussion of what Swinburne says. So let us work with Z.

Quotation 6 offers us little help with respect to the general theory of h-simplicity, because of difficulties in counting properties. *Being a bachelor* can perhaps be understood as not a single property but as the conjunction of two putative properties, *being unmarried* and *being a man*. Yet it can equally well be understood as the conjunction of four putative properties, *being unmarried*, *being an adult*, *being male*, and

*being a human*. And since individual animals of a wide variety of species are classified as male, it would require a lot of a priori reflection (and perhaps empirical investigation) to determine whether *being male* is a single property or a conjunction of properties, and if a conjunction of properties how many conjuncts there are. So if we want to compare the two rival hypotheses *This is a star* and *This is a planet*, even roughly, with respect to the number of properties postulated, realizing that ‘star’ and ‘planet’ are defined by astronomers today differently to the way they were understood 1000 years ago, then how are we to go about counting?

Quotation 7 is puzzling, because most of the examples of scientific hypotheses which Swinburne gives in his discussions of h-simplicity in *Epistemic Justification* and *The Existence of God* are medium-level ones where obviously there will be higher-level hypotheses, true ones and false ones, which purport to explain them – e.g., *One puma escaped from captivity*, *Quarks have spin*, Kepler’s three laws of planetary motion, and *All ravens are black*.<sup>14</sup> Each logically possible candidate explanans must somehow count, since h-simplicity, being a logically necessary feature of a hypothesis, cannot depend on what is contingently the case. Swinburne does not explain how the infinitely many candidate explanans for (say) Kepler’s three laws of planetary motion, candidates which no doubt differ widely in h-simplicity, contribute to fixing the degree of h-simplicity of these three laws.

## II. POSTULATING PROPERTIES

This section begins with some remarks about how Swinburne uses the word ‘property’. At some places he says that he is doing so in such a way that every predicate designates a property (except for predicates of the form ‘is identical with individual *a*’), and in such a way that any two non-synonymous predicates designate distinct properties.<sup>15</sup> Thus he would

<sup>14</sup> *Epistemic Justification*, pp. 87, 89f, 91.

<sup>15</sup> *The Christian God*, pp. 10, 34; cf. *The Existence of God*, p. 41. Swinburne’s liberal use of ‘property’ may encounter difficulties with predicates such as ‘heterological’. (A predicate is heterological if and only if it is not true of itself – e.g., ‘dyadic’ is heterological.) Furthermore, while the verb ‘loves’ is a many-place predicate, it is not clear that *Helen loves Zeus*, which does not assert or entail the existence of Zeus, should count as affirming

say that the properties *being sulphuric acid* and *being H<sub>2</sub>SO<sub>4</sub>* are distinct, even though they make the same contribution to the way things behave.

As I have already indicated, Swinburne modifies his view that nearly every predicate designates a property when he says that some predicates designate conjunctions or disjunctions of properties instead. More significantly, Swinburne does not always use 'property' in such a way that any two non-synonymous predicates designate distinct properties. For he argues that on his preferred understandings of the predicates used in his explanation of the meaning of 'There is a God', they fit together to designate the one simple property, *having pure, limitless, intentional power*.<sup>16</sup> The conjunction of 'is omnipotent', 'is omniscient', etc, is not synonymous with 'has pure, limitless, intentional power'. After all, when Swinburne argues that the property *Pure, limitless, intentional power* entails *perfect goodness*, his argument employs the premise that agents perform no actions which they believe to be overall bad, and do what they believe to be a best action (or best kind of action) if there is one, unless they are subject to non-rational influences.<sup>17</sup> This premise, even if it is necessarily true, is not analytic. (From now on, the predicate 'has pure, limitless, intentional power' will be abbreviated as 'has plip', while the corresponding singular term purporting to refer to a property will be abbreviated as 'Plip'.')

One might reasonably suppose, given a liberal attitude to the existence of properties, that a hypothesis postulates a property designated by the predicate 'is F' if and only if it asserts or entails that there is something of which 'is F' is true. Thus if a scientific theory endorses the ideal gas law, but does not entail that there are any ideal gases, then it does not postulate the property *being an ideal gas*.

Swinburne, however, does not and cannot say this. Consider the hypotheses *There are no mature vertebrates with two hearts* and *If there are black holes then they all emit Hawking radiation*. Plainly, neither

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that Helen stands in the relation *loves* to Zeus, and thereby postulating this relation instead of (or as well as) the monadic property *loving Zeus*.

<sup>16</sup> *The Christian God*, p. 126. On p. 151 he speaks of the 'reduction' of *being bodiless, omnipresent, perfectly good*, etc, to *being necessarily perfectly free, omniscient and omnipotent*.

<sup>17</sup> *The Christian God*, p. 151.

of them entails the existence of any entities or the truth of any laws.<sup>18</sup> So according to Quotations 1 – 6, the considerations relevant to their degrees of h-simplicity are reduced to how many properties each of them respectively postulates, how many kinds these properties fall under, and how readily observable the properties are, and whether the properties are said to involve infinite magnitudes. But neither hypothesis entails that any property is instantiated. Nor does Quotation 7, or Swinburne's accompanying remarks, provide a way in which we can assess the degree of simplicity of either hypothesis.<sup>19</sup>

Thus Swinburne's general theory of h-simplicity must not incorporate the assumption that postulating a property is a matter of asserting or entailing that the property is instantiated. This truth, however, turns out to generate serious difficulties for the theory. Consider the following candidate principle:

(C1) If  $p$  and  $q$  are contingent, and  $p$  entails  $q$ , and  $q$  postulates the property  $F$ ness then  $p$  postulates the property  $F$ ness.

There are two strong reasons why, given the points made in the preceding paragraph, Swinburne should reject C1.<sup>20</sup> Firstly, C1 is incompatible with the conjunction of two principles which he has strong reasons for accepting, namely:

(C2) In general, if the hypothesis *Either  $p$  or there are  $F$ s* is contingently true or false then it postulates the property  $F$ ness.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Although the expressions 'black hole' and 'Hawking radiation' are theoretically laden, it does not follow that the second hypothesis entails, e.g., the General Theory of Relativity. Suppose that you assert 'If phlogiston had existed then Lavoisier would have been wrong.' The word 'phlogiston' is theory-laden, in the sense that someone who did not know (for example) that phlogiston was believed to be liberated from burning objects would have only a very limited grasp of the meaning of the word, but the conditional proposition you assert does not entail any propositions which, if they were true, would be laws.

<sup>19</sup> Given Quotation 7, each logically possible candidate explanans must somehow count, since h-simplicity, being a logically necessary feature of a hypothesis, cannot depend on what is contingently the case. But *how* do they count?

<sup>20</sup> In personal communications, Swinburne has said that he rejects C1.

<sup>21</sup> C2 should be understood as tacitly excluding certain substituents for ' $F$ ', such as 'predicate which is not true of itself'. The word 'hypothesis' in C2 should be understood as excluding occurrences of *Either  $p$  or there are  $F$ s* in such propositions as *Alice believes that either  $p$  or there are  $F$ s*.

(C3) It is not the case that any arbitrarily selected contingent hypothesis postulates any arbitrarily selected property.

Proof:

- (a) *Either snow is white or there are protons* postulates *being a proton* [from C2]
  - (b) *Snow is white* is contingent and entails *Either snow is white or there are protons* [necessarily true premise]
  - (c) *Snow is white* postulates *being a proton* [from a, b, C1]
- but c) is obviously ruled out by C3.

C3 is secure for obvious reasons. C2 is motivated by the existence of pairs of disjunctive empirical hypotheses (not entailing the existence of any entities, postulating any laws, or employing any quantitative expressions, and not differing with respect to distance of postulated properties from observation) whose degree of h-simplicity one might want to compare – for example, (i) *Either there are no black holes, or else there are black holes and each of them emits Hawking radiation* and (ii) *Either there are no black holes, or else there are black holes and they include very short-lived ones which do not emit Hawking radiation*.

Assuming that Swinburne is committed to saying that both (i) and (ii) postulate such properties as *being a black hole* and *emitting Hawking radiation*, is there nevertheless some way in which he can maintain that *Either snow is white or there are protons* does not postulate *being a proton*? It is hard to see how some difference in content could generate such a difference between (i) and (ii) on the one hand and *Either snow is white or there are protons* on the other hand. If there is indeed such a difference then it seems that it must rest not on differences in their content but instead on the reasons why each proposition is asserted, denied, accepted, rejected, regarded as worthy of further consideration, and so on. But if the various features listed in Quotations 1 - 7 are to contribute to fixing degree of h-simplicity and thereby intrinsic probability, then they must be matters merely of content.

The second reason why Swinburne should not adopt C1 relies on the assumption, already discussed, that at least some hypotheses postulate a property designated by a predicate occurring in them even though they do not entail that the property is instantiated. Given this assumption, it is plausible to suppose that *There is a being who is omnipotent*,

*omniscient, etc*<sup>22</sup> entails *God has the power to prevent its being the case that there are tennis players, unicorns, etc.* Therefore if C1 were true then theism would postulate every property postulated by the latter proposition, including *being a tennis player* and *being a unicorn*. In that case, Swinburne's arguments for the h-simplicity of theism, employing the criteria supplied by Quotations 1 - 7, would be undermined.

So Swinburne should reject C1. Doing so, however, would cripple his theory of h-simplicity. Assume for the sake of discussion that it is straightforwardly true that *This tablet contains aspirin* postulates the property *containing aspirin*, and *This tablet contains an acid* postulates the property *containing an acid*, and *This tablet contains a drug* postulates the property *being a drug*. Yet in the absence of C1 he seems to have no grounds on which to say that *This tablet contains aspirin* postulates the properties *containing an acid* and *containing a drug* (along with other properties such as *being an analgesic* and *occupying space*).<sup>23</sup> Thus the resulting Swinburnean account would place great emphasis on the difference between what *The tablet contains aspirin* asserts and what it entails. But why should we suppose that this difference makes a difference to h-simplicity and thereby to intrinsic probability? That is, why, with respect to *The tablet contains aspirin*, is the number of properties postulated (and the kinds the properties fall under), thus narrowly construed, what counts towards the proposition's h-simplicity and intrinsic probability?<sup>24</sup>

Furthermore, if C1 is rejected, then how is Swinburne to use Quotations 1 - 7 to compare, with respect to h-simplicity, *The object is a star* with *The object is a planet*, and *The sample contains human sweat* with *The sample contains a pesticide*? It is easy enough to imagine contexts of inquiry with respect to which the second of these comparisons would be useful. For example, the two hypotheses might be rival explanations of the presence in the sample of some specific molecule which is often present in human sweat and in pesticides, but which rarely occurs

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<sup>22</sup> I will use the sentence 'There is being who is omnipotent, omniscient, etc' as short for the sentence T in the Quotation 8 below.

<sup>23</sup> Dictionary definitions of 'aspirin' commonly specify that aspirin is an analgesic, and that the chemical name for aspirin is 'acetylsalicylic acid'.

<sup>24</sup> The example cannot be dismissed as a marginal one. Similar points would apply if we took as our example the hypothesis *Rover is a dog*.

elsewhere; we can suppose that the presence of the molecule is equally probable relative to the conjunction of each hypothesis with background evidence; our assessment of which hypothesis was more probable relative to background evidence alone might depend largely on which hypothesis we regarded as the h-simpler.

Here is another way of putting the foregoing points. Suppose, to simplify a little, we accept that 'aspirin' is defined as 'acetylsalicylic acid'. How does this definition enable us to apply the insights provided in Quotations 1 - 7 to *This sample contains aspirin* and thereby estimate this hypothesis' degree of h-simplicity? We might try unpacking the definiens: when we say that aspirin is an acid, and is an acetylsalicylic substance, how complicated is what we are saying? This depends on how complicated the notion of an acid is, and the notion of an acetylsalicylic substance is. Yet surely the difference between truths guaranteed by chains of definitions and truths guaranteed by other forms of a priori reasoning cannot be fundamental to the assessment of h-simplicity. If how h-simple *This sample contains aspirin* is depends to a considerable extent on how many properties it postulates, then every property F such that it is a priori that *This sample contains aspirin* entails *This sample contains something F* should be counted. Yet how can we continue to maintain this is we reject C1? The aspirin example cannot be dismissed as one of a few difficult cases in which we cannot estimate how h-simple the hypothesis is; the same point applies very widely.

I conclude that Swinburne's general account of h-simplicity is seriously defective. It might, however, be suggested that for the purposes of assessing the h-simplicity of theism Swinburne can employ a restricted account of h-simplicity. Let us say that a hypothesis is *existential* if and only if it asserts or entails the existence of at least one non-abstract entity, and let us say that one existential hypothesis is more economical than another with respect to natural kinds of entities, causal powers, etc, if and only if the former entails the instantiation of fewer natural kinds than the latter does, and the possession by entities of fewer causal powers than the latter does. The current suggestion is that Swinburne could say merely that for existential hypotheses what counts towards h-simplicity is economy with respect to entities, natural kinds of entities, fundamental causal powers and (in the case of rational agents) beliefs, desires and intentions, along with mathematical simplicity.

Perhaps something along these lines can be worked out. Here, however, is an elementary objection with which any such restricted account would have to deal. Consider the hypothesis (iii) *There are neutron stars, and either there are no black holes or else there are black holes and each of them emits Hawking radiation*. It is an existential hypothesis, since it entails the existence of neutron stars and the instantiation of such natural kinds as *Mass-possessing entity*. But plainly (iii) is no less economical than *There are neutron stars* is, with respect to entities, natural kinds of entities, fundamental causal powers, beliefs, desires and intentions, and the two do not differ in mathematical simplicity. So according to the proposed restricted account, (iii) does not differ in degree of h-simplicity from *There are neutron stars*. This result, however, reveals that the proposed account is no mere restriction of Swinburne's actual theory to cover merely a sub-class of hypotheses. It is contrary to the spirit of Swinburne's theory.

### III. ONTOLOGICAL SIMPLICITY, AND ITS RELATION TO H-SIMPLICITY

Consider inferences from h-simplicity to ontological simplicity. It is logically necessary that a specific hypothesis has the degree of h-simplicity it has, while in a great many cases at least, degree of ontological simplicity/complexity is a contingent feature of a thing. Therefore the truth that *There are Fs* is h-simple will not typically entail that some specified F, let alone all Fs, are ontologically simple. After all, often *Fness* will be only one of many properties of each actual F thing. Although, no doubt, *There are horses* is h-simpler than *There are insects with genetic code such-and-such* (where 'such-and-such' is short for a detailed specification), every insect with the specified genetic code is simpler than any horse.

How about inferences in the opposite direction, from ontological simplicity to h-simplicity? If *There are Fs* is h-simpler than *There are Gs*, it is necessarily so. Therefore, in classical logic, if *There are Fs* is h-simpler than *There are Gs* then *Any F is ontologically simpler than any G* entails that it is h-simpler. Nevertheless, in general, if we are trying to discover whether *There are Fs* is h-simpler than *There are Gs*, does *Any F is ontologically simpler than any G* give us a reason to believe that it is? I am not aware of a good argument for supposing that the answer must

be *Yes*, and there is a good direct reason for supposing that the answer is *No*: Assume that, as a matter of contingent fact, any insect is ontologically simpler than any horse. It follows by elementary logic that any insect with genetic code such-and-such is ontologically simpler than any horse. Obviously this entailed truth gives us very little reason to believe that *There are insects with genetic code such-and-such* is h-simpler than *There are horses*.

Swinburne frequently says that God is a being of a very simple kind; perhaps at least some of these statements should be read as declarations that God is ontologically very simple.<sup>25</sup> There are surprisingly few other explicit statements in Swinburne's writings to this effect. For reasons given above, even if *There is a God* is very h-simple, and God's de re necessary properties are very simple ones, it does not follow that God is very ontologically simple.

#### IV. SWINBURNE'S ARGUMENT CONNECTING THE SIMPLICITY OF PLIP AND THE H-SIMPLICITY OF THEISM

In *The Christian God*, Swinburne says:

[Quotation 8] The claim that there is a God is to be understood, provisionally, as the claim [T] that there exists necessarily and eternally a person essentially bodiless, omnipresent, creator and sustainer of any universe there may be, perfectly free, omnipotent, omniscient, perfectly good, and a source of moral obligation.<sup>26</sup> On certain understandings of the foregoing predicates, they fit together so as together to designate one very simple property, of having (necessarily) pure, limitless intentional

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<sup>25</sup> Such declarations seem to occur in *The Existence of God*, p. 147 (interpreting 'such' to refer to 'being' rather than 'explanation'), in *The Christian God*, p. 160, and in 'God as the Simplest Explanation of the Universe', p. 20. The proposition that God is a person of a very simple kind need not, of course, be read as entailing that God is ontologically very simple. After all, Swinburne's arguments surely establish at most that the conjunction of all God's essential properties constitutes a very simple kind.

<sup>26</sup> Care is required to interpret Swinburne's account in accordance with his sometimes surprising explanations, for example, 'By saying that God is essentially bodiless, I mean that, although he may sometimes have a body, he is not dependent on his body in any way.' The label 'T' is mine.

power. It follows that the claim that there is a God is a very simple claim and hence much more likely to be true.<sup>27</sup>

[Quotation 9] I conclude that the existence of a substance who has necessarily pure, intentional, limitless power entails and is entailed by the existence of a substance who has necessarily the divine properties [designated in T]. I understand by a divine individual one who has necessarily pure, intentional, limitless power. The claim that there is a God is therefore to be read as the claim that there is such an individual.<sup>28</sup>

Thus prompted, let us consider the following, which I will call *the Plip-based argument*:

- (1) *Plip* is a very simple property.
- (2) Hence *There is an entity which has plip* is very h-simple.
- (3) It is an a priori truth that *There is a God* is logically equivalent to *There is an entity which has plip*.<sup>29</sup>
- (4) Hence *There is a God* is very h-simple.<sup>30</sup>

I will state and discuss three objections to the Plip-based argument. The first casts doubt on the inference from (2) and (3) to (4). Recall Quotation 4, and my interpretation of it as asserting Z. Given Z, it follows from (3) that the propositions *There is a God* and *There is an entity which has plip* are two different formulations of one hypothesis. No doubt there are other formulations. If we were to accept (2) then we might conjecture that *There is an entity which has plip* is the h-simplest of all the formulations, and proceed to identify the degree of h-simplicity of the hypothesis with the degree of h-simplicity of *There is an entity which*

<sup>27</sup> *The Christian God*, pp. 125-126. These three sentences closely paraphrase Swinburne.

<sup>28</sup> *The Christian God*, p. 157.

<sup>29</sup> Swinburne asserts this premise in *The Christian God*, p. 157. In various passages near Quotation 8, Swinburne sounds as if he is claiming merely that (it is a priori that) *Plip* entails *having omnipotence, omniscience, etc.* But in general, the schema *A and B are contingent, A is h-simple, and it is a priori that A entails B; therefore B is h-simple* is invalid. A case in which truth is not preserved is obtained by letting A be *This object is spherical* and letting B be *Either this object is spherical or else our instruments have such-and-such a complicated technical fault*.

<sup>30</sup> How simple is very simple? We should bear in mind the role of propositions like (4) in assessments of empirical arguments for the existence of God. (4) can be understood as the claim that *There is a God* is much h-simpler than any rival which has anywhere nearly as much, or more, explanatory power with respect to evidence statements such as *The observed universe is fine tuned*.

has *plip*. But none of this suffices to exclude the conjecture that *There is a God* is very h-complex. Indeed, if on the basis of Quotation 8 we were to identify *There is a God* with T, and if (ignoring my criticisms of Swinburne's general theory of h-simplicity) we were to apply the criteria of h-simplicity given in Quotations 1 - 7 to T, and we were to accept that it is an a priori truth that T is logically equivalent to *There is an entity which has plip*, then we would have to say that *There is a God* is a less-than-maximally h-simple formulation of the hypothesis of which *There is an entity which has plip* is an h-simpler formulation. The same point would hold if we were to replace the criteria given in Quotations 1 - 7 by some currently unformulated criterion restricted to existential propositions.

It might be protested that Quotation 8, from *The Christian God*, identifies *There is a God* with *There is an entity which has plip*, and that given this identification, (2) by itself suffices to entail (4). This point succeeds in defending the Plip-based argument against the first objection if and only if it is reasonable to identify *There is a God* with *There is an entity which has plip*.<sup>31</sup> It is unlikely, however, that Swinburne himself currently feels committed to the identity. The expression 'pure limitless intentional power' does not occur either in *The Existence of God*, or in *Is There a God?*<sup>32</sup> or in 'God as the Simplest Explanation of the Universe'<sup>33</sup>. His explanations of *There is a God* which are more recent than those in *A Christian God*<sup>34</sup> are in terms very similar to T. Although Plip plays an important role in 'How the divine properties fit together'<sup>35</sup>, which deals with divine ontological simplicity, the paper does not say anything that suggests he still wants to maintain the identity. I can see no reason why we ourselves should do so. After all, we do not in general identify p with q given merely that it is a priori that p is logically equivalent to q.

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<sup>31</sup> Such an identification might be presented not as involving a claim of synonymy but instead as an explication, along the lines of the identification of the ordered pair  $\langle x, y \rangle$  with the set  $\{\{x\}, \{x, y\}\}$ , where alternative explications would also have been viable.

<sup>32</sup> Second Edition, Clarendon Press 2010.

<sup>33</sup> *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 2 (2010), 1-24

<sup>34</sup> E.g., in *The Existence of God*, p. 7.

<sup>35</sup> 'How the divine properties fit together: reply to Gwiazda,' *Religious Studies* 45 (2009), pp. 495-498.

Someone might respond to the first objection by abandoning (1)-(4), and replacing it by a closely related argument which, the responder hopes, will deliver much but not all of what the Plip-based argument was intended to achieve. Let us start with T and consider the various propositions including *There is an entity which has plip* – each of which is such that it is a priori that it is logically equivalent to T. In the light of Z, each of these propositions should be regarded as a formulation of one hypothesis, to which we can give the name ‘theism’, and theism will be either just as simple as or even simpler than *There is an entity which has plip*. Hence if *There is an entity which has plip* is h-simple then theism is h-simple. It does not matter much what we say about the specific formulation *There is a God*. The revised Plip-based argument succeeds in avoiding the first objection, though it still encounters the other two objections stated below, and obviously it departs far from the letter of what Swinburne says.

Let us move on to the second objection to the Plip-based argument, which casts doubt on the inference from (1) to (2). It begins by pointing out that the following principle is not true:

(N) Necessarily, if *There is an entity which is F* is the h-simplest formulation of a hypothesis then the degree of simplicity of the property designated by the predicate ‘is F’ is proportional to the degree of h-simplicity of *There is an entity which is F*, and vice versa.<sup>36</sup>

Notice that Quotations 1 - 7 do not entail or in any other way commit Swinburne to N because none of them incorporate any considerations about simplicity of properties. Given that Swinburne should reject C1, then at least until he develops a theory of the simplicity of properties – he has not so far done so<sup>37</sup> – he should reject N. For it is intuitively

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<sup>36</sup> Perhaps some principle like N can be dimly glimpsed behind Swinburne’s apparent inference, in *The Existence of God*, p. 97, from *The hypothesis that God is omnipotent, omniscient etc is very h-simple to God’s intentions, beliefs and basic powers are of a very simple kind*.

<sup>37</sup> Quotation 6 is relevant, but does not get us very far. After all, there seem to be pairs of properties (e.g., *being a woman*, *being a proton*: many two-year olds can reliably identify women) such that the one more accessible to observation is more complex than the other one; and if this is not so then it needs to be explained why not. Alongside Quotation 6, it is worth noticing a passage in *An Introduction to Confirmation Theory*, Methuen 1973, p. 148, where Swinburne says in effect that that he understands ‘P<sub>1</sub> is a simpler predicate than P<sub>2</sub>’ to mean that that universal nomological propositions which

plausible that *being cancerous* is a much more complex property than *being perfectly spherical*. But given that C1 should be rejected, each of the propositions *There is an entity which is cancerous* and *There is an entity which is perfectly spherical* postulates at most one entity, and at most one property, and since each of them is non-quantitative, and since *being cancerous* and *being perfectly spherical* do not differ much in ease of observability, then, in the absence of any reason for thinking that either of the propositions is a formulation of some hypothesis which has a simpler formulation, Swinburne's criteria of h-simplicity commit him to regarding the two propositions as equally h-simple, or as differing little in degree of h-simplicity.

Assuming that N is not true, why should we believe that (1) is a good reason for (2)? Any answer would have to appeal to some distinctive feature with respect to which Plip, i.e., the property designated by 'has plip', differs relevantly from other properties designated in other hypotheses. Unless Swinburne can identify such a feature, and show that it explains why the inference from (1) to (2) differs from otherwise similar inferences, we have no reason for accepting that (1) supports (2).

The third objection to the Plip-based argument concerns the inconclusive character of Swinburne's case for the truth of (1). Sometimes he seems to be arguing from the h-simplicity of the hypothesis that God is omnipotent to the simplicity of the property omnipotence, and so on for other divine properties.<sup>38</sup> If he were relying on this line of thought alone, however, then the overall argument in which the Plip-based argument is nested would be circular.

He provides other support for the truth of (1) in *The Christian God*, pp. 151-152. *Plip*, he says, is to be understood in accordance with the premises of the argument below:

- (5) *Having plip* involves all the agent's causing being intentional: everything which the agent, x, brings about he means to bring about, and hence x acts only on reason.

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use  $P_1$  are h-simpler, as judged by his criteria of h-simplicity, than universal nomological propositions which use  $P_2$ . This remark is not helpful in the present context, where we are assessing an inference from (1) to (2), rather than from (2) to (1), and where the inference from (1) to (2) is intended to significantly strengthen his case for the h-simplicity of theism.

<sup>38</sup> *The Existence of God*, p. 97.

(6) The power is limitless in that all events that occur (other than x's existing), can do so only because of x's currently either bringing them about or allowing some other substance to bring them about; and all events that do not occur do not occur for that same reason. X's exercise of power is not limited by any ignorance of what x can do with it, or by any substance from without causally influencing how x acts

(7) Therefore, intuitively the notion of plip is very simple.

Inferring (7) from (5) and (6) is perhaps motivated by the thought, expressed in Quotation 3 and reflecting patterns in theory-choice by scientists and other empirical investigators, that, other things being equal, hypotheses which attribute limitlessness are h-simpler than those which attribute limits. But even if we add this thought as a premise alongside (5) and (6), the three premises will not jointly entail (7). Alternatively, someone might seize on the word 'intuitively' in (7) and claim that our intuitions favour the view that *Plip*, as characterized by (5) and (6), is a very simple property. But even if this claim is true, our intuitions are fallible, and therefore they do not confer certainty on (6).

The foregoing truths open the way for the further development of the third objection to the Plip-based argument. Let us treat *There is a God* as identical with T, and let us ignore the first objection. Let us concede to Swinburne, for the sake of discussion, the three suppositions that (3) is true, that (1) entails (2), and that (2) and (3) jointly entail (4). Why should Swinburne's case for (1) persuade us that *There is a God* is h-simpler than we would otherwise have thought? Why should we not instead conclude, in the light of the three conceded suppositions, that whatever considerations we have had for assigning a lesser degree of h-simplicity to *There is a God* – notably, the application of our criteria of h-simplicity directly to T – should persuade us that the property *Plip* is less simple than (1) asserts it to be? In the absence of a convincing answer to this question, the Plip-based argument does not provide strong grounds for accepting (4).<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> I thank Richard Swinburne for helpful discussion of an earlier version of this paper.

# AGAINST THEOLOGICAL FICTIONALISM

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**Abstract.** According to theological fictionalism, God has the same status as a fictional character in a novel or a movie. Such a claim has been defended by Robin Le Poidevin on the basis of Kendall Walton's theory of make-believe. But it is not only a philosophical esoteric account of religious beliefs, it is now an exoteric view, sometimes accepted by "believers" themselves, and so could even be considered a postmodern heresy. But theological fictionalism does not work: faith is real assent and not make-believe; belief is different from acceptance; belief and faith are dispositional, but make-believe seems to presuppose an account of beliefs as occurrent states; we cannot anymore imagine at will than we can believe at will.

## INTRODUCTION

Theological fictionalism maintains that religious monotheistic commitment does not necessitate the truth of theism. According to this position, God could have the same ontological status as a fictional character in a novel or a movie. Such a character does not exist; we know that that character does not exist; but we think about this character and experience emotions (or quasi-emotions) about it and what it does. Like the experience of fiction, religious experience could consist in a game of make-believe. Robin Le Poidevin defends such a theological fictionalism (without using this label) in chapter 8 ("Is God a Fiction?") of *Arguing for Atheism*,<sup>1</sup> partly inspired by Kendall Walton's theory of make-believe.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Robin Le Poidevin, *Arguing for Atheism* (London: Routledge, 1996).

<sup>2</sup> Kendall L. Walton, *Mimesis as Make-Believe* (Cambridge, MA, and London: Harvard University Press, 1990).

In the first section of this paper, I will review Le Poidevin's version of theological fictionalism.

But theological fictionalism is not simply a theory held by philosophers. It also appears to be widespread in Post-modern cultures. The assumption is that we do not have to accept full-blooded theological realism – that God exists, that He revealed himself, that Christ was resurrected, and so on – in order to be religious persons. Such realist claims, it is thought, have been definitively disproven in the post-Enlightenment period, thanks to the human and social sciences. My second point will consist in inspecting this postmodernist flowering of theological fictionalism.

Fictionalism was already recognized in the *Dogmatic Constitution of the Catholic Faith*, in the text known under the name of its Latin headwords, *Dei Filius*:

Even the Holy Scriptures, which had previously been declared the sole source and judge of Christian doctrine, began to be held no longer as divine, but to be ranked among the fictions of mythology.

This indicates that theological fictionalism is the outcome of a modernist view of faith, condemned by the Church if not refuted, but capable of reappearing in new and different guises. The main error of this theory is that it supposes *a non-doxastic account of faith*. Faith would not imply full belief, but only quasi-belief or quasi-acceptance. But there is, inescapably, a strong doxastic component in faith. And unlike acceptance, belief is essentially realistic.

## I. COMPENDIUM OF THEOLOGICAL FICTIONALISM

To explain the position that I call *theological fictionalism*, Le Poidevin makes use of a debate in the philosophy of science over the status of theoretical entities. Within this debate, he distinguishes realism, instrumentalism and positivism and proposes corresponding views about religious matters.

*Realism.* According to realism, scientific theories are to be taken at face value. If they appear to refer to entities in the world called “neutrons”, then this is what they do. Theological realism is the view that statements about God refer to a transcendent being. Such statements are descriptive and so are true or false.

*Instrumentalism.* Theories, according to instrumentalism, are merely useful devices we use to make predictions about how things will behave. So, the entities referred to in theories may just be fictions. Theological instrumentalism says that discourse about God is purely fictional. But the predictive dimension is largely beside the point in theological instrumentalism, unless we have in mind predicting the behaviour of religious persons, which may be anticipated through knowing what they believe.

*Positivism.* Theories, according to positivism, are either true or false (and so positivism differs from instrumentalism in this respect); but (in contrast with realism) theories have not to be taken at face value. Theological positivism says that discourse apparently about God is true, but what it describes, in symbolic language, are truths about our moral and psychological lives.

What I call “theological fictionalism” Le Poidevin calls “theological instrumentalism”. I think that “theological fictionalism” is a better name, because the notion of fiction is central to explaining how this kind of view works. Le Poidevin relies heavily upon Walton’s theory of fiction as make-believe. According to Walton,

just as a child make-believes that a group of chairs set in a line is a bus, or that, in chasing after a friend, he is chasing after a desperate criminal, armed to the teeth with a pop-gun and a water pistol, so we, in reading a novel, make-believe that it is reporting the truth. In doing so we, as it were, locate ourselves in the novel. We are there, witnessing the events. We may even assign ourselves a role, and imagine talking to the characters. It is our active participation in the fiction which explains why we become emotionally involved.<sup>3</sup>

Le Poidevin adds:

Walton’s solution of the paradox that we can be emotionally involved in something we know to be false is that we play a game of make-believe in which the fiction becomes reality, and part of the game is to feel something akin to real emotions, though they are not the genuine article.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Kendall L. Walton, *Mimesis as Make-Believe*, p. 116.

<sup>4</sup> Robin Le Poidevin, *Arguing for Atheism*, p. 117.

Theological fictionalism is thus the thesis that to engage in religious practice is to engage in a game of make-believe:

We make-believe that there is a God, by reciting, in the context of the game, a statement of belief. We listen to what make-believable are accounts of the activities of God and his people, and we pretend to worship and address prayers to that God. In Walton's terms, we locate ourselves in that fictional world, and in so doing we allow ourselves to become emotionally involved, to the extent that a religious service is capable of being an intense experience. [...W]e are presented with a series of dramatic images: an all-powerful creator, who is able to judge our moral worth, to forgive us or to condemn, who appears on Earth in human form and who willingly allows himself to be put to death. What remains, when the game of make-believe is over, is an awareness of our responsibilities for ourselves and others, of the need to pursue spiritual goals, and so on.<sup>5</sup>

So, according to theological fictionalism, Christians are not believers, but *make-believers*; they play with a fictional religious world as children play with toy cars, readers with narratives, and filmgoers with moving images. This can be important for their lives, the sense they have of themselves and of their relations with others, and their sense of morality and spirituality. But definitively, they do not have to claim what they believe to be true about someone or something, and they do not even have to believe anything. They are simply engaged in making sense of stories, characters, interpretations, and so on.

## II. THEOLOGICAL FICTIONALISM AS A POSTMODERN HERESY

Theological fictionalism may seem attractive to those who want to preserve what they think of as the spiritual and moral content of religion but who do not accept an ontological commitment to a transcendent being or realist claims about Christ's resurrection, miracles, the Day of Judgment, and so on. Theological fictionalism says, in short, that you can be a Non-Metaphysical Christian. God can still be viewed positively as the greatest single creation of the imagination. Anthony Kenny suggests that "set beside the idea of God, the most original inventions

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<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 119.

of mathematicians and the most unforgettable characters in drama are minor products of the imagination; Hamlet and the square root of minus one pale into insignificance by comparison”.<sup>6</sup>

Fictionalist theology gives sense to the claim that Christ was resurrected, for example, by saying that it is “true in the Gospels”, “true for those you accept to make sense of a certain story”, or “true in religion”. That Christ was resurrected would be a quasi-assertion. To quasi-assert that  $p$  is to express one’s acceptance of  $p$ , an attitude that is compatible with agnosticism and disbelief. Quasi-assertion is grounded mainly in non-doxastic or non-epistemic reasons, and recourse to this device encourages a non-cognitivist account of religious matters. Arguably, quasi-assertion is grounded in pragmatic reasons, especially to provide comfort to oneself and to make one’s life easier to live. To *accept* that Christ was resurrected is not to *believe* it, as we believe for example that Cracow is in Poland or that the moon is not made of cheese, but it could be very helpful to make-believe it was so.

Theological fictionalism gained credit in Post-modern theology. By post-modern theology, I mean for example Don Cuppitt’s account of religion (see *Sea of Faith*, 1984).<sup>7</sup> He defends a philosophical view of a broader account which has insinuated itself into theology since the fifties. But this is not simply a philosophical affair. It now has a strong influence on religious people, especially in Western countries. I have no sociological evidence to give, but it seems to me that it is in this way that a lot of Christian Westerners – especially those who have received an academic education – now see theological commitment.

What has developed is a deeply non-cognitivist and non-realistic account of faith. It suggests, first, that there are not religious facts to be discovered, such as the existence of God, or the resurrection of Christ. Secondly, it claims that we create the world through language, and historical realities through narratives. It applies to God what Richard Rorty said about dinosaurs: “Once you describe something as dinosaur, its skin colour and sex life are causally independent of your having so described it. But before you describe it as a dinosaur, or as anything else, there is no sense to the claim that it is ‘out there’ having properties.

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<sup>6</sup> Anthony Kenny, *Faith and Reason* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), p. 59.

<sup>7</sup> Don Cuppitt, *The Sea of Faith* (London: SCM Press, 3rd Revised Edition, 2003).

What is out there? The thing-in-itself?”<sup>8</sup> Replace dinosaur by God, “skin colour” and “sex life” by “all powerful” and “absolutely good”, and you have a corresponding non-cognitivist and non-realistic account of Christian religious “truths”. Theological fictionalism explain how one could continue to go to Mass, to pray, to participate in the Eucharist, *without believing*, but only *make-believing*, in religious matters. What is important finally are not the true facts, but the inward emotions and perhaps some of the behaviours (kindness, generosity, tolerance, etc.) exhibited by Christian make-believers. This corresponds also to what George Lindbeck called the “experiential-expressivist” account of faith.<sup>9</sup> God is not an object of discourse, but we can make him a condition of discourse (and also a condition of a certain behaviour), by entering into a game of make-believe. And religion is just that.

### III. WHY THEOLOGICAL FICTIONALISM DOES NOT WORK

Walton says that what fictions make us feel are not emotions, but quasi-emotions. He means emotions that do not suppose that we believe in the situation presented in the fiction. If I am frightened by the colour of the sky, which promises a very big thunderstorm, I believe the sky has this colour and that such a sky indicates that there will be a very big thunderstorm. But if I am frightened by a monster on the screen, I do not believe that there is a monster. In fact, I am not afraid; I enter in a game of make-believe about a monster; and I am *quasi*-afraid, playing at fear, even if I am feeling (phenomenologically) what I would feel in a case of “true” fear. This means that quasi-emotion is a non-doxastic emotion. But perhaps it could also be said that quasi-emotion corresponds to a quasi-belief. I play at believing that there is a monster, and that makes me quasi-afraid.

Aesthetic fictionalism uncouples emotion and belief; theological fictionalism does something parallel and so uncouples faith and belief. We cannot say “I believe that *p*; but not *p*”, as G. E. Moore pointed out. But the theological fictionalist pretends that it is possible to claim: “I have

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<sup>8</sup> Richard Rorty, “Taylor on Truth” (in J. Tully ed, *Philosophy in an Age of Pluralism*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 23).

<sup>9</sup> George Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1984).

faith that *p*; but not *p*”. “To believe” is a factive verb: if I believe that *p*, I am committed to the truth of *p*. But if I have faith in God almighty, it would not be necessary for me to believe in the existence of God: to make-believe would be sufficient. To repeat at the mass that there is a God almighty, or to subscribe to the notion of God almighty Himself, would simply be an emotional prop in a game of make-believe. This would mean that, for faith, quasi-belief and quasi-emotion – the phenomenological content of emotion, without any doxastic component – is all that is needed for our psychological religious life.

But I maintain that this will not do, for it seems for me impossible to “have faith in *G*” if you do not have faith that *G* exists. If *S* has faith in *G*, then *S* believes that *G* exists in a way that renders *S*’s faith in *G* something other than a game of make-believe. That contemporary Westerners are tempted to replace a realistic and metaphysical account of religious faith by a fictional one does not imply that the epistemology of doing so is coherent. I propose four arguments in favour of this critique of theological fictionalism.

*The argument from faith as real assent*

Faith is doxastic, because it supposes to believe that some propositions – those belonging to the *Creed* in the case of Christian faith – are true. To paraphrase John Henry Newman, a fictionalist belief in God – a belief about a God as a character in a narrative, and not about God as a genuine being – would be like “filial love without the fact of the father”. Nobody can place their confidence in Superman, except the inhabitants of Metropolis, who are themselves fictional. The reader or the spectator of Superman adventures cannot place his confidence in Superman, because he does not believe Superman to exist; he may be confident on behalf of the inhabitants of Metropolis, but this has absolutely no real importance, because they are themselves fictional. If Jesus Christ is a fictional character in a game of make-believe, we cannot place our confidence in Him; only characters in the Bible (the apostles for example) could be confident of Him. And so if we understand Jesus Christ to be a fictional character, we do not have faith in Him.

As Newman says in the *Grammar of Assent*, faith is *real* assent, and not *notional* assent. It is not directed to words and stories, but to persons and

facts. So the notion of fictional assent is useless for characterizing faith in God. Because of the doxastic component of religious faith, to have faith is to believe something, and to believe something means understanding that something to be really the case. It is not to claim that the sense of a certain proposition is deep and existentially moving or quasi-moving, but that Christ is actually the Saviour, for example.

*The argument from the difference between belief and acceptance*

Theological fictionalism as it has been presented does not make difference between belief and acceptance. *Accepting* that *p*, unlike *believing* that *p*, is akin to a decision – the decision to hold a proposition. This contrasts strongly with the essential non-voluntariness of belief. Faith can be said to be voluntary, but in the sense that it is not against one's will that a person believes in God. Having faith in God's grace is not like being brainwashed. You can refuse to believe in God. But that does not mean that a religious belief is akin to a decision to believe. The doxastic component of faith is non-voluntary, in the sense that I cannot decide to believe in God, any more than I can decide to believe that I speak Chinese or that I am a pumpkin, for example. One can *accept* a proposition without believing that it is true, and even while believing that it is false, hence contrary to evidence for its truth. But one cannot *believe* contrary to the evidence of truth. This is the main reason why simulated beliefs or quasi-beliefs are acceptances, and so are not beliefs at all. Simulated beliefs are no more beliefs than fake money is money. I wonder if the notion of make-believe and quasi-emotion are not, in this sense, very ambiguous, suggesting something like a belief, but not exactly, and something close to an emotion, but not quite the same thing.

Many cases of acceptance are cases where someone has evidence for what he accepts; yet he has no full beliefs, but only half-beliefs. In such a case, and for him, a fictional stance may make good sense. If I half-believe that *p*, I can simulate that *p*. I can even *try* to believe, like the libertine who asked, in a famous *pensée* of Pascal, to go to Mass and to kneel down, hoping that it would make him a genuine Christian. But when we *try*, that is not faith at all. Aquinas says:

The act of believing ... is firmly attached to one alternative and in this respect the believer is in the same state of mind as one who has science or

understanding. Yet the believer's knowledge is not completed by a clear vision, and in this respect he is like one having a doubt, a suspicion, or an opinion.<sup>10</sup>

This is not acceptance or half-belief, but *a case of certainty without clear vision*. There is not room here to discuss the exact nature of faith, but clearly theological fictionalism is deeply in error about its nature.

*The argument from the dispositional nature of belief and faith*

Like acceptance, simulated belief in a fictional stance supposes that we play with our own mental state. I know that the monster is in fact an artefact on the screen, but I will behave as if I believed that the monster was in front of me. When someone cries when looking at a movie, and is asked, "Why do you cry, it is only fiction?", the answer could be that the very *idea* that something like this could happen is sorrowful. And it is not false that we are able to make ourselves sorrowful simply by focusing our mind on sorrowful ideas. So might it be in the religious case: we make ourselves believers by focusing on religious ideas.

Such an account of simulated belief presupposes what Henry H. Price called an "Occurrence Analysis of Belief".<sup>11</sup> To believe something is to have a certain occurrent mental state. In this case we would be able to simulate having a certain mental state or content, without actually having it. Price distinguishes this account from a Dispositional Analysis of Belief, which maintains that beliefs are not occurrent mental states but are rather dispositions to answer a question or to behave in a certain way. This means that if S believes that p, S does not have a specific mental content but rather has a disposition to answer "yes", when asked if p, or the disposition to act according to the fact that p. And in that case, how would simulation be possible?

The doctrine of simulated beliefs presupposes an Occurrence Analysis of Belief. We would be able to simulate because we can simulate having a certain mental state or content. I will not here defend a Dispositional Analysis of Belief, but clearly if such an analysis is correct, or is at least better than an Occurrence Analysis, theological fictionalism is again in a bad position.

<sup>10</sup> St Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, IIaIIae, 2, 1.

<sup>11</sup> Henry H. Price, *Belief* (London: Muirhead Library of Philosophy, 1969).

*The argument from the limitations of make-believe*

We saw that we cannot believe at will, but we even cannot imagine at will – contrary to what is often said (on the grounds of a very common romantic account of imagination). I am not at all sure that imagining that God sent us His only son to be crucified, as a Redeemer, to save us from our sins, would be something we could so easily do. This phenomenon I call “modal imaginative resistance”. A story is told, but it makes no sense for us, and we don’t believe in it and cannot even make-believe in it. I suppose that it is exactly what happens for a lot of unbelievers. They do not think that the religious story is like a novel that makes sense even if it is a fiction. For them, it is like a novel that does not make any sense!

There is a kind of imagination by which we can consider ourselves as being relevantly different than we actually are. And this is of course often what novels and movies invite us to experiment with – to discover, through fictions, human possibilities: what we could be. But this does not always work. And it seems that fictions are telling us something when we find ourselves impervious to the possibilities that they offer. Fictions are, in short, sometimes non-starters where certain possibilities are concerned. Some philosophers – those who consider that we decide to make-believe – exaggerate our ability to make-believe. Sometimes we simply cannot do so, being unable to imagine that things could proceed as presented in a certain sort of novel or film.

Theological fictionalism must explain to us why we make-believe in God if we do not have to believe in him. But that we make-believe in Him – in His story, that His son died for us, in the resurrection of the flesh, and so on – is not easier to understand than the fact that people really believe these things. And so, theological fictionalism is *not in any way* a better epistemological position from which to explain the religious stance than is theological realism, and is a far worse position from which to raise questions of justification!

## CONCLUSION

Theological fictionalism could perhaps pretend to be simply an account of the cultural dimension of Christian religion. It would certainly be possible to visit Roman churches and Gothic cathedrals with our children, and to say to them: “Look at these wonderful works of art, my dears! Appreciate

all of this beauty!” The children might then ask: “But, Sir, what does all this mean: all these crosses, the statues, and all the rest?” – “Well, dear children, you must make-believe a certain story to make sense of all this. It is a very long story, contained in a very big book called “The Bible”, and I will simply tell you the main episodes. For example, it is said in this story that God had a son, named Jesus Christ, and that he was crucified to save all Humanity from death. Don’t laugh, Immanuel, this has a profound meaning; and if you look at these works of art as if it there were a God, and a Son of God who died for us, you will be intensely moved by everything you see around you. Do the same as you do when you watch a Superman adventure on TV!” This would be cultural initiation. And for such an initiation, we could perhaps do with simulation. Looking at Yoruba sculptures of twins, I can simulate, in a sense, the kind of beliefs traditional Yorubas had about twins. But it is exactly because I do not have those beliefs that I can *simulate* them. If I do believe, I do not simulate, but *share* the Yorubas’ vision.



# ZOMBIES, EPIPHENOMENALISM, AND PERSONAL EXPLANATIONS: A TENSION IN MORELAND'S ARGUMENT FROM CONSCIOUSNESS

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**Abstract.** In his so-called Argument from Consciousness (AC), J.P. Moreland argues that the phenomenon of consciousness furnishes us with evidence for the existence of God. In defending AC, however, Moreland makes claims that generate an undesirable tension. This tension can be posed as a dilemma based on the contingency of the correlation between mental and physical states. The correlation of mental and physical states is either contingent or necessary. If the correlation is contingent then epiphenomenalism is true. If the correlation is necessary then a theistic explanation for the correlation is forfeit. Both are unwelcome results for AC.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Recently J.P. Moreland (1998, 2003, 2008) has argued that non-physical mental states – their existence and correlation with physical states – provide evidence for the existence of God. He regiments his argument as follows:

1. Genuinely nonphysical mental states exist.
2. There is an explanation for the existence of mental states.
3. Personal explanation is different from natural scientific explanation.
4. The explanation for the existence of mental states is either personal or natural scientific.
5. The explanation is not natural scientific.
6. Therefore the explanation is personal.
7. If the explanation is personal then it is theistic.
8. Therefore the explanation is theistic.

The so-called Argument from Consciousness (AC) is essentially a God-of-the-gaps argument. That is, a putative gap in our scientific knowledge regarding nonphysical mental states is taken to be evidence for the existence of God.

AC rests on a number of contentious premises. Premise (1) is at the heart of several heated debates in contemporary philosophy of mind. Many working in this area of philosophy are physicalists<sup>1</sup> and they reject (1). Moreland, though he offers a set of 'standard' reasons in support of (1), states up front that he does not intend to give a rigorous defense. Instead he assumes the truth of (1) 'for the sake of argument.' This is not an insignificant point because it clearly demarcates the target audience of AC - naturalists who countenance nonphysical mental states.<sup>2</sup> I will refer to the members of this target audience as naturalistic dualists. Moreland's hope is that AC will persuade naturalistic dualists to become theists.

Another contentious premise is (5). Moreland offers four reasons in defense of this premise: (a) the uniformity of nature, (b) the contingency of the mind-body correlation, (c) the rejection of epiphenomenalism based on causal closure, and (d) the inadequacy of evolutionary explanations. Though there are important things to be said regarding each of these reasons, careful reflection on reasons (b) and (c) in particular gives rise to an unpalatable tension in Moreland's defense of AC. The remainder of this paper will be devoted to developing this tension into a dilemma.

## II. REASON (B): RADICAL CONTINGENCY

One reason there is no natural scientific explanation for mental states, Moreland argues, is because the correlation between mental states and physical states is 'radically contingent'. This reason is really composed of two parts: an epistemological part involving the term 'radical' and a metaphysical part involving the term 'contingent'. To begin, consider what Moreland means when he says that the mental-physical correlation is *radically* contingent. He writes:

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<sup>1</sup> Some notable contemporary physicalists are Jaegwon Kim (2000, 2005) and David Papineau (2002).

<sup>2</sup> A notable contemporary naturalistic dualist is David Chalmers (1996, 2010).

Why do pains instead of itches, thoughts or feelings of love get correlated with specific brain states? *No amount of knowledge* of the brain state will help to answer this question. For the naturalist, the regularity of mind-body correlations must be taken as contingent *brute* facts. (Moreland 2003, p. 208, my emphasis)

Moreland is making an epistemological claim. Because the mental-physical correlation is *radically* contingent ‘no amount of knowledge’ of the brain can explain why certain mental states are correlated with certain brain states. All that can be said, as committed naturalists, is that this brain state is correlated with that mental state - end of story. As such there is no natural scientific explanation forthcoming. In the absence of an explanation, naturalistic dualists are left to baldly announce that the correlations are *brute* facts of nature.

To simply assert that the correlations are brute facts of nature, however, begs the question against theistic dualists like Moreland who claim to have an explanation for the correlations. This is where the second part of reason (b) comes into play. The correlation between mental and physical states is radically *contingent*. To say that the correlation is contingent is to make a metaphysical claim. It is to claim that there are possible worlds where mental and physical states come apart in various ways. Let’s call this claim Contingency. Moreland describes some of these possible worlds as follows:

For example, given a specific brain state normally ‘associated’ with the mental state of being appeared to redly, inverted qualia worlds (worlds with that physical state but radically different mental states ‘associated’ with it), zombie worlds (worlds with that physical state and no mental states at all), and disembodied worlds (worlds with beings possessing mental states with no physical entities at all) are still metaphysically possible. (Moreland 2003, p. 213)

Asserting Contingency, therefore, commits one, among other things, to the possibility of inverted qualia worlds, zombie worlds, and disembodied worlds.

Contingency is critical to reason (b) because it makes room for a *personal* explanation of the correlation between mental and physical states. In effect it provides a foundation on which premise (6) of AC can be grounded. Moreland writes:

... the fact that the existence of consciousness and its precise correlation with matter is contingent *fits well* with a theistic personal explanation that takes God's creative action to have been a *contingent* one. God may be a necessary being, but God's choice to create conscious beings and to correlate certain types of mental states with certain types of physical states were *contingent choices*, and this fits nicely with the phenomena themselves. (Moreland 2003, p. 208, my emphasis)

Not only does Contingency 'fit well' with a personal explanation it seems that Contingency is *required* for a personal explanation. This is because offering a theistic personal explanation of a given phenomenon seems to presuppose the contingency of the phenomenon to be explained. This is especially so given Moreland's construal of God as an agent with libertarian freedom. He writes, "God is free to act or refrain from acting in various ways." That is, the explanandum of a theistic personal explanation must be contingent since it depends on God's *free* choice. There must be some possible worlds that give content to the claim that God chose to render the relevant phenomenon in a certain way and other possible worlds that give content to the claim that God chose *not* to render the relevant phenomenon in a certain way. For consider what it would be like to offer a theistic personal explanation for the mind-body correlation if the correlation were necessary. That is, what if there were no possible worlds where the relevant mental and physical states come apart? What, then, would the prospects be for offering a personal explanation of the correlation in terms of God's *choice* when there are no possible worlds to make sense of God's ability to do otherwise? The prospects do not seem promising.

Perhaps the same point can be made more clearly by borrowing an image from Kripke (1972). Suppose we imagine God creating the world. What does God need to do after he creates everything physical in the world? If Contingency is true it seems God is now faced with a myriad of choices. God must decide which mental states to correlate with the various brain states that have already been created. He must decide whether or not to correlate an itch with this brain state, a pain with that brain state, and so on. Because, according to Contingency, there are no necessary connections between mental and physical states it is easy to see why a theistic personal explanation for the correlations 'fits well' with the

phenomena. But imagine what it would be like if the correlation between mental and physical states were necessary. When God finishes creating everything physical he would have nothing left to do regarding the mental since there is a necessary correlation between mental and physical states. God's creating the physical would *automatically* bring the mental into existence as well. Rejecting Contingency, therefore, would seriously undermine the plausibility of offering a theistic personal explanation for the mental-physical correlation.

The upshot is that Contingency is critical for the success of AC. A theistic personal explanation for the mind-body correlation requires Contingency. Without this Moreland's argument falters in its main objective - convincing others that a theistic personal explanation of the mind-body correlation is preferable over a natural scientific explanation.

### III. REASON (C): THE FALSITY OF EPIPHENOMENALISM

Another reason there is no natural scientific explanation for mental states, Moreland argues, is because naturalism, at least the dualist varieties, is false. Naturalistic dualism is false because: naturalists are committed to Closure (the causal closure of the physical domain), Closure entails epiphenomenalism, and epiphenomenalism is false. Moreland writes:

... epiphenomenalism is false. Mental causation seems undeniable... [as such] the admission of epiphenomenal nonphysical mental entities may be taken as a refutation of naturalism. (Moreland 2003, p. 209)

The idea is straightforward. If a theory entails epiphenomenalism then that theory is false and any false theory is precluded from providing legitimate explanations. It follows that naturalistic dualism is false since naturalistic dualism entails epiphenomenalism. Consequently there can be no natural scientific explanations that are derived from naturalistic dualism.

Let me take things a bit slower. Closure is the claim that physical events only have physical causes. Moreland describes Closure as follows:

... when one is tracing the causal antecedents of any physical event, one will never have to leave the level of the physical. Physical effects have only physical causes... (Moreland 2003, p. 209)

Closure eliminates the possibility of *nonphysical* entities having causal effects in the physical world. This poses a serious problem for naturalistic dualists. Because naturalistic dualists are committed to naturalism they are obliged to accept Closure, or so Moreland claims. Because naturalistic dualists are also committed to the nonphysical nature of mental states according to premise (1) of AC, naturalistic dualists are obliged, in light of Closure, to accept epiphenomenalism. Consequently naturalistic dualists must also accept epiphenomenalism. But if epiphenomenalism is false, as Moreland rightly asserts, it follows that naturalistic dualism must be false. As a result the possibility of securing a natural scientific explanation for mental states within the framework of naturalistic dualism is forfeited.

The claim that Closure entails epiphenomenalism, I realize, is controversial.<sup>3</sup> My purpose in rehearsing Moreland's logic is not to get embroiled in the debates over mental causation. It is simply to highlight Moreland's insistence on this entailment along with his insistence that epiphenomenalism is false.

Assuming Explanation refers to the claim that there is a theistic personal explanation for the mind-body correlation, the critical elements of my discussion of AC thus far can be summarized with the following three claims:

C1: Explanation  $\rightarrow$  Contingency

C2: Naturalistic Dualism  $\rightarrow$  Epiphenomenalism

C3:  $\sim$ Epiphenomenalism

C1, captured as a conditional, is the claim that a theistic personal explanation of the mind-body correlation requires the contingency of the mental-physical correlation. C2, also captured as a conditional, is the claim that naturalistic dualism, given its commitment to Closure, entails epiphenomenalism. C3 is simply the rejection of epiphenomenalism.

#### IV. ZOMBIES AND EPIPHENOMENALISM: A DILEMMA

There is, however, a tension in Moreland's development and defense of AC. His rejection of epiphenomenalism is at odds with his commitment

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<sup>3</sup> Many contemporary non-reductive physicalists committed to Closure argue that mental states, despite being irreducible with respect to fundamental physical states, are causally efficacious. For interesting discussions on this see Kim (2000, 2005), Crisp & Warfield (2001), and Bennett (2003).

to Contingency because Contingency, as I will argue, actually entails epiphenomenalism. This claim can be captured as a further conditional.

C4: Contingency  $\rightarrow$  Epiphenomenalism

To see why C4 is true consider the ‘standard’ way of characterizing zombies.<sup>4</sup> A zombie is someone or something physically identical to me (or any other conscious being), but lacking conscious experiences altogether. My zombie twin is molecule-for-molecule identical to me (down to the low-level properties of physics) but without conscious experiences. If we assume that my zombie twin is also embedded in a physically identical world he will be identical to me functionally and behaviorally. If I yell ‘ouch’ from a burned finger my zombie-twin will also yell ‘ouch’. Whatever I do my zombie twin will also do. My zombie twin and I are indistinguishable in terms of our behavior and physical structure down to the final detail.

According to Contingency zombie worlds like the one just described are possible. What does the possibility of a zombie world imply about the causal efficacy of mental states? Consider a possible world  $PW_z$ .  $PW_z$  is a zombie world. As such  $PW_z$  is physically identical to  $PW_{\textcircled{a}}$ , the actual world, in every minute physical detail. Every physical event that occurs in  $PW_{\textcircled{a}}$  also occurs in  $PW_z$ . The only difference between  $PW_z$  and  $PW_{\textcircled{a}}$  is that there are no mental states in  $PW_z$ . Since there are no mental states in  $PW_z$  it follows that every physical event in  $PW_z$  will have a causal explanation that is *independent* of any mental state. Take for instance the physical event, call it  $E$ , of my yelling ‘ouch’ after getting burned.  $E$  occurs in both  $PW_{\textcircled{a}}$  and  $PW_z$ . What is the cause of  $E$  in  $PW_z$ ? Presumably it is some physical brain state, call it  $P$ , in my zombie twin.  $P$  causes  $E$  in  $PW_z$ . What does this tell us of the relevant causal relations in  $PW_{\textcircled{a}}$ ? In  $PW_{\textcircled{a}}$  I am also in physical brain state  $P$  and I also yell ‘ouch’. That is, both  $P$  and  $E$  occur in  $PW_{\textcircled{a}}$ . The critical difference is that I am also in mental state  $M$  in  $PW_{\textcircled{a}}$ . But what is the causal status of  $M$  with regard to  $E$ ?

Here it seems we have a situation that is ripe for applying Mill’s Difference Method<sup>5</sup> (or something like it). Let’s assume we can control all the relevant variables when running two experiments, one with potential causal factors  $A$  and  $B$  and another experiment, *ceteris paribus*, with only

<sup>4</sup> For more on zombies see Chalmers (1996, 2010).

<sup>5</sup> For a good discussion of Mill’s Difference Method see chapter 2 of Psillos (2002).

A. Both experiments yield effect *C*. Given these results it seems we can safely conclude that *B* is causally irrelevant, or epiphenomenal, with regard to *C*. Since *C* continues to occur, *ceteris paribus*, even in the absence of *B* we know that *B* cannot be a cause of *C*. In the same way, returning to the mental-physical case, since *E* continues to occur, *ceteris paribus*, even in the absence of *M* in  $PW_z$  we know that *E*'s occurring in  $PW_@$  has nothing to do with *M* either. This shows that Contingency, because it entails the possibility of zombie worlds, leads to epiphenomenalism.

Moreland is now faced with an uneasy tension. According to C1 Moreland must be committed to Contingency in order to make a theistic personal explanation for the mental-physical correlation possible. According to C4, however, a commitment to Contingency leads to epiphenomenalism. But Moreland, according to C3, rightly rejects epiphenomenalism. A dilemma can now be formulated.

9. Moreland must accept or reject Contingency.

10. If he accepts Contingency then he must also accept Epiphenomenalism.

11. If he rejects Contingency then he must also reject Explanation.

Contingency must either be accepted or rejected. If Contingency is accepted proponents of AC are forced to accept epiphenomenalism. If Contingency is rejected proponents of AC are forced to forfeit Explanation. Essentially Moreland is left with two choices: accept epiphenomenalism or forfeit Explanation. Both options are undesirable.

## V. AN OBJECTION

One way of avoiding the dilemma is to reject C4: Contingency  $\rightarrow$  Epiphenomenalism. Just because zombie worlds demonstrate that everything physical in  $PW_z$  can go on just as it does in  $PW_@$  in the absence of mental states it does not follow that mental states are epiphenomenal. Isn't it possible for mental states to be causally efficacious in  $PW_@$  and still have everything physical in  $PW_z$  go on just as it does in  $PW_@$  in the absence of mental states so long as  $PW_z$  is a counter-nomological world? That is, so long as the laws of nature in  $PW_z$  differ from the laws of nature in  $PW_@$ ?

Let's assume that mental states are causally efficacious in the actual world. It is the conjunction of my mental state and my brain state that

bring about my yelling ‘ouch’. That is,  $M$  and  $P$  together cause  $E$  in  $PW_{@}$ :  $M \& P \rightarrow E$ . If, however,  $M$  makes a causal difference regarding  $E$  in  $PW_{@}$  then, *ceteris paribus*, it seems  $E$  should not obtain in  $PW_Z$  since  $M$  is absent. But one might argue that  $E$  can still obtain in the absence of  $M$  if we consider a different possible zombie world  $PW_{Z-LAW^*}$ . In  $PW_{Z-LAW^*}$  unlike  $PW_Z$ , the laws of nature differ from the laws of nature in  $PW_{@}$ .  $PW_{Z-LAW^*}$  is a counter-nomological world. Perhaps there is a law of nature in  $PW_{@}$  that ensures  $E$  is brought about only by the conjunction of  $M$  and  $P$ . In  $PW_{Z-LAW^*}$ , however, there is a different law of nature - one that ensures  $P$  brings about  $E$ , even in the absence of  $M$ :  $P \rightarrow E$ . So we have a possible world, namely  $PW_{Z-LAW^*}$ , that seems to demonstrate the falsity of Contingency  $\rightarrow$  Epiphenomenalism.

There are at least two things to be said in response to this. First, it is unclear whether or not we can say that the identity of physical brain state  $P$  is preserved when considering  $P$  in both  $PW_{@}$  and  $PW_{Z-LAW^*}$ . More generally, it is unclear whether physical identity is preserved across counter-nomological worlds.<sup>6</sup> Take, for example, the proton. Protons have a certain causal profile in the actual world. It is possible, however, for protons to take on different causal profiles in counter-nomological worlds. Perhaps protons could take on the causal profile of an actual world electron and still maintain their identity as protons. But this very possibility – the possibility that a proton could behave exactly like an electron, yet remain a proton – is bizarre by my lights.

Furthermore this position leads to an unparsimonious proliferation of possibilities. For every possible world we had once entertained we would have to include a vast number (perhaps an infinite number) of new possibilities. We would be forced to countenance a new possibility for each possible assignment of causal profiles to the various physical entities. All such possible worlds will be indistinguishable with respect to each other. That is, they will be empirically equivalent worlds. The laws of nature in these worlds will be indistinguishable and all the experiments that work in the actual world will proceed in exactly the same way in these

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<sup>6</sup> For more on this debate see Bird (2005, 2007) and Ellis (2001). Bird poses the question in terms of essential or contingent causal profiles. Those who claim that causal profiles are contingent he calls Categoricalists and those who claim that causal profiles are essential he calls Dispositional Essentialists. Ellis provides compelling reasons to reject categoricism.

worlds. Nevertheless these worlds will be different from the actual world (and different from each other) because the physical entities have all been mixed and matched with different causal profiles. These differences will have nothing to do with how we investigate, confirm, or even express the laws of nature that govern these worlds, but they will still be different because the physical entities that serve as the relata in these laws will be different.

So it seems there is good reason to think physical identity is *not* preserved across counter-nomological worlds. To see why this matters regarding C4 consider, again, what Contingency amounts to. It is the claim that the correlation between mental and physical states is contingent. In order for Contingency to remain a meaningful claim the *very same* mental states and physical states must come apart in certain possible worlds. But when we consider counter-nomological worlds it is not obvious whether or not the identity of physical states are preserved. Indeed there is good reason to believe that *P*, the relevant physical brain state, does not even exist in  $PW_{Z-LAW}$ . But if the identity of *P* is not preserved across counter-nomological worlds then it seems  $PW_{Z-LAW}$  cannot be used to undermine C4.

Second,  $PW_{Z-LAW}$  is a red herring. Even if physical identity were preserved across counter-nomological worlds the possibility of  $PW_{Z-LAW}$  does not have any real bearing on the truth or falsity of Epiphenomenalism so long as  $PW_Z$  remains possible. And it is the possibility of  $PW_Z$ , a possible world that is identical to  $PW_{@}$  in every way (including the laws of nature) minus the existence of mental states, that establishes epiphenomenalism. In other words, the possibility of  $PW_{Z-LAW}$  is orthogonal to the central issue. What really matters, regarding the truth or falsity of epiphenomenalism is the possibility of  $PW_Z$  (not  $PW_{Z-LAW}$ ).

Perhaps, in response, one can simply dig in her heels and assert that zombie worlds like  $PW_Z$  are impossible, or at least argue that zombie worlds are erroneously described since mental states are causally efficacious in  $PW_{@}$ . Worlds like  $PW_Z$ , contrary to the way they are 'standardly' described, cannot be identical with  $PW_{@}$  in all the physical events that occur in them. There will be events that occur in  $PW_{@}$  that do not occur in  $PW_Z$  (and vice versa) due to the presence (or absence) of mental states that make a causal difference in the kinds of physical events that occur. Zombies simply cannot be behaviorally identical with their conscious

counterparts if we assume that mental states make a causal difference in  $PW_{@}$ . For example, I might yell 'ouch' in  $PW_{@}$  because I am in mental state  $M$ . That is,  $M$  is a casual factor in my yelling 'ouch'. My zombie twin in  $PW_z$ , however, will not yell 'ouch' since one of the necessary causal factors for my yelling 'ouch', namely  $M$ , is not present in  $PW_z$ .

There is no doubt that this move will preserve Contingency and undermine C4 but it does so at a price. In order to pursue this strategy one would be forced to reject Closure. We must remember that the casual efficacy of *nonphysical* mental states is a straightforward violation of Closure since Closure is the claim that physical events only have physical causes. Rejecting Closure, however, would be dialectically disastrous for proponents of AC. If you recall AC was formulated with naturalistic dualists in mind. The central purpose of the argument is to persuade naturalistic dualists to become theists. Rejecting Closure, however, is a move, at least according to Moreland, that is unavailable to naturalistic dualists since naturalists (in general) are committed to Closure. He writes, "Most naturalists believe that their worldview requires that all entities whatever are either physical or depend on the physical for their existence and behavior. One implication of this belief is commitment to [Closure]." Given this naturalist commitment it would be dialectically useless to undermine C4 by rejecting Closure.

## VI. CONCLUSION

There is a tension in AC that can be formulated as a dilemma against Moreland based on the acceptance or rejection of Contingency. One is forced either to accept epiphenomenalism or reject the possibility of a theistic personal explanation for mental states. Both options are undesirable. It seems, therefore, that AC in its present form cannot be used effectively to persuade naturalistic dualists to become theists. Perhaps AC can be appropriately revised. This, however, has yet to be seen.

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# ON THE RESURRECTION OF THE BODY: DISCUSSION WITH TRENTON MERRICKS

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**Abstract.** In a recent discussion, Trenton Merricks concludes that we cannot understand how God might miraculously bring it about that there will be the Resurrection of the Body. It is contended to the contrary, that it is not utterly mysterious how God might give us our bodies back.

## THE DOCTRINE

The Christian doctrine of the Resurrection of the Body is explained by Trenton Merricks as follows: ‘we shall not spend eternity as mere spirits or as disembodied souls. Instead, we shall have hands and feet and size and shape. For, we shall have bodies. And not just any bodies. Each of us will have the very same body that he or she had in this life, although the body will be “glorified”. Each of us can have the same body because, at some point in the future, all those bodies that have died will rise again to new life. That is, dead bodies will be resurrected.’<sup>1</sup> However, he points out that this raises the question: ‘how could a body that has passed out of existence – perhaps as a result of decay or cremation – come back into existence on the Day of the Resurrection?’<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> ‘The Resurrection of the Body’, Chapter 21 in Thomas P. Flint and Michael C. Rea, *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophical Theology*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009, p. 476.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

## THE DIFFICULTIES

In answer to it, Merricks notes that '[o]ver the centuries, the most common account amongst Christian philosophers and theologians, an account that was also countenanced by Islamic and Jewish thinkers, has been this: on the Last Day, God will gather up the very small bits that composed a body at death and will "reassemble" them, which will thereby bring the body that died back into existence ...'<sup>3</sup> Yet, '[o]ne potential problem with this account is that even a body's smallest parts might themselves go out of existence [e.g., matter might be converted to energy].'<sup>4</sup> And, '[a]nother objection to resurrection as reassembly trades on the many ways in which the small parts of one body can end up as parts of another body [e.g., most starkly in the instance of cannibalism].'<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, 'our bodies are constantly changing with respect to the very small bits that compose them ... Therefore, a body's identity from one moment to the next is not a matter of having exactly the same very small parts.'<sup>6</sup> Thus, it seems that 'nothing could account for or ground identity across (at least some) resurrection-induced temporal gaps.'<sup>7</sup> This notwithstanding, Merricks contends that believers 'can simply conclude that there will be something in virtue of which each resurrection body will be identical with a body had in this life, something that will ground or account for that identity. Crucially, they can conclude this even given their inability to discover that ground, an inability evidenced by the failure of proposed accounts such as reassembly. After all, no one should presume to know exactly how God pulls off any miracle, including the resurrection of the body.'<sup>8</sup> However, this will not do. For, it is incumbent upon anyone defending *any* scriptural doctrine to show that it is not absurd, 'lest Holy Scripture be exposed to the ridicule of unbelievers, and obstacles be placed to their believing.'<sup>9</sup> So, can this be achieved?

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 478.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., pp. 478-9.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 480.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> St Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 2a2ae., 33, 4 ad 2.

## BODILY SAMENESS

In order to answer this question, note that Merricks says that '[e]ach of us will have the very same body that he or she had in this life, although the body will be "glorified"'. And, since *this* flesh, and *this* blood, and *this* bone, cease to exist in the dissolution of death, the idea of getting our bodies back does not seem to make much sense. However, this is not entirely correct. For, although after dissolution it might be impossible for me to get the same body back numerically, I could get it back otherwise, since there is more than one meaning of sameness: 'things are said to be the same ... whose matter is one either in kind or in number ... [and it is also the case that] ... those whose essence [form] is one, are said to be the same.'<sup>10</sup> Therefore, after its dissolution, my resurrected body would be the 'same' body that I had earlier *if it had the same essential character*. For, it then it would have exactly the same material and formal qualities it had earlier, perfected and glorified.

Yet, this does not appear to do complete justice to the doctrine. For, by it, it seems that I am meant to get this *very* same body back, which means also *numerical* sameness. So, can *this* be retained? Not, it would seem, if we subscribe to Dean W. Zimmerman's argument from fission; *viz.* that, 'just before it completely loses its living form ... [God enables] ... each particle to divide – or at least to be immanent-causally responsible for two resulting particle-stages. One of the resulting particle-stages is right here, where the old one was; another is either in heaven now (for immediate resurrectionists), or somewhere in the far future.'<sup>11</sup> For, then the resultant can hardly be said to be *me*, but rather *me* divided. However, the suggestion that somehow or other there must be two 'me's' for me to get my body back at the resurrection is not altogether unpromising. For, for the time that I am alive, my body is my physical form. Yet, the body of the Risen Christ is meant to be imperishable, glorious, powerful, and spiritual in nature<sup>12</sup>, and 'whoever has a glorified body has it in his power

<sup>10</sup> Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, V, 9.

<sup>11</sup> 'The Compatibility of Materialism and Survival: "The Falling Elevator" Model', *Faith and Philosophy*, vol. 16, no. 2, April 1999, p. 206. (Note that Timothy O'Connor and Jonathan D. Jacobs have recently advanced an intriguing version of this argument. [See 'Emergent Individuals and the Resurrection', *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, vol. 2, no. 2, 2010.] However, for the same reason it is also unacceptable.)

<sup>12</sup> St Paul, *1 Corinthians*, 15:42-44.

to be seen when he so wishes, and not to be seen when he does not wish it [and pass through walls<sup>13</sup>, and so on].<sup>14</sup> So, might it not be the case that, when I die, my body is *spiritualized*; so that what is now my body ceases to be my body at all? That is, as a snake sheds its skin, my body-as-body is then *transformed* into my body-as-soul, and leaves its former self behind. For example, from physical element-of-my-body x is *actuated* metaphysical element-of-my-body x; so physical element x is reduced to being merely a random element, and my continuity *as a body* is in terms of metaphysical element x.<sup>15</sup> For, a body is a unity, and this unity has now assumed the form of being *a unity of metaphysical parts*. This is arguably why ‘ancient corpses suddenly become ashes in the grave’<sup>16</sup>, for they are no longer really ‘bodies’ at all. Thus, just as ‘a dead man is a man in only in name’<sup>17</sup>, so too would a dead body be a body in name only.<sup>18</sup> (This is because its unity – for as long as it lasts – is now merely accidental.) Consequently, although ‘[s]omeone may ask, “How are dead people raised and what sort of body do they have when they come back?” They are stupid questions. Whatever you sow in the ground ... is not what is going to come; you sow a bare grain, say of wheat or something like that, and then God gives it the sort of body that he has chosen ... It is the same with the resurrection of the dead: the thing that is sown is perishable but what is raised is imperishable ... glorious ...’<sup>19</sup>

## CONCLUSION

It need not be relegated to the realms of absolute mystery how God might give us our bodies back in the end. For, despite the temporal gap between the dissolution of my material body and the Day of the Resurrection, there is understandably a way for my disembodied soul then to be allocated exactly the same body I had in death; *viz.* through bodily transformation.

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<sup>13</sup> *John*, 20:19.

<sup>14</sup> St Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 3a. 54, 1 ad 2.

<sup>15</sup> There is nothing esoteric about this: evidently there are emergent metaphysical powers in things – e.g., life in seeds – so why not also emergent metaphysical properties?

<sup>16</sup> Aristotle, *Meteorology*, IV, 12.

<sup>17</sup> Aristotle, *Meteorology*, loc. cit.

<sup>18</sup> Needless to say, the notion of a spiritual body is itself conceptually opaque.

<sup>19</sup> St Paul, *1 Corinthians*, 15: 35-44.

## BOOK REVIEWS & NOTICES

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**Eleonore Stump. *Wandering in Darkness: Narrative and the Problem of Suffering*. Oxford University Press, 2010.**

*Wandering in Darkness* is Eleonore Stump's magisterial treatment of the problem of evil, combining work she has fashioned and revised from some of the most prestigious lecture series, including the Gifford Lectures, the Wilde Lectures, and the Stewart Lectures. It is bold, meticulously argued (chapters are marked by lengthy, stage-setting prologues), and highly nuanced (there are, for example, 153 pages of footnotes). In terms of scope and power, Stump's book clearly ranks among the best book length treatments of the problem of evil by such deservedly well-known philosophers as Alvin Plantinga, John Hick, Marilyn Adams, and Peter van Inwagen. She advances what she claims is a defense of the goodness of God as understood in Judaeo-Christian tradition, especially as that concept of God has been articulated by Thomas Aquinas. Stump defends a narrative approach to good and evil, develops a philosophy of love and relationships, and offers some fleeting, intriguing suggestions about the nature of divine glory. While we raise some questions about the ultimate success of her project specifically in terms of its scope, we have no doubt that Stump has produced a book that deserves the careful attention of any philosophically able reader interested in the problem of suffering in light of the belief in an omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, essentially good God.

Stump follows Aquinas in developing and defending an account of suffering where suffering enables the sufferer to achieve a great good (an affective unity with God) and avoid a great evil (willed loneliness).

In addition, she augments the model from Aquinas by defending the view that while suffering is generated by denying the desires of our hearts, in the final analysis it can be seen to offer the possibility of giving us the desires of our hearts, albeit in forms perhaps not imagined before the suffering. On Stump's account, it turns out that suffering is, in a sense, good for us or is understandable as a benefit: "Roughly considered, a benefit defeats suffering when the suffering is somehow integral to the benefit and the benefit is such that it is rational to prefer having the suffering to not having it, given the benefit which the suffering brings" (p. 488). Stump's account is most powerful when she introduces and analyzes cases of individuals who have flourished as human beings and experienced heightened unity with God as a direct result of suffering.

Stump builds her account of suffering in the crucial central chapters of the book in which she takes up an extensive exploration of four Biblical narratives involving Job, Samson, Abraham, and Mary of Bethany. Stump argues that narratives and relational experiences (what Buber described as I-You relations) can be a source of knowledge that is not available in propositional, analytic format. Her term for knowing states of affairs through narratives is the *Franciscan* method, whereas propositional, analytic modes of knowing she calls *Dominican*. (It is doubtful that non-Christian philosophers would be happy with these terms and their accompanying connotations.) Knowledge reached by the Franciscan method is termed second-person in that the reader of the narrative enters into the characters with empathy based on some shared human experience. It is contrasted with the Dominican mode of knowledge characterized by third-person, objective, propositional analysis.

Stump's discussions in the narrative chapters are both intensely illuminating and worrisome. The Biblical texts she takes up are the narrative; her discussions of each are her interpretations of the texts. Where a reader agrees with Stump's interpretation of the narrative or finds it compelling, her approach is powerful and illuminating (see, for example, the account of Abraham); a careful reading of these chapters is very rewarding. However, narrative texts and their interpretations are much like empirical data and scientific theories; data underdetermines theoretical choice since a number of theories are compatible with the data. If the reader finds Stump's interpretation of the narrative not only possible but plausible, then the narrative support for her account of

suffering moves forward. But if the reader finds Stump's interpretation of the narrative perhaps possible, but implausible (in the sense that motives and inner states are imputed to the actors in the narrative which seem unnecessary to a more straightforward interpretation of the text), then her interpretation of the narrative has less force.

To illustrate, Stump is provocative in the interpretation of the Job narrative with her heavy emphasis on the conversations between God and Satan and the parental way in which she sees God graciously working in a redemptive way with Satan. This same parental theme is then emphasized in her re-telling of the Job narrative in terms of God dealing in a similar manner with Job and with all creatures. However, this parental theme is less potent if one simply takes the God/Satan prologue to be setting the stage for the story (noting that there is no narrative for how things turn out between God and Satan). One might read the famous passages at the end of the narrative where God asks Job where he (Job) was when he (God) set the boundaries for the sea, etc. less as referring to parental relations between God and his creatures, and more in terms of God noting that he is all-powerful and that even all of the chaotic world outside of human control is under his sway. This more common reading of the narrative (which Stump introduces as a foil to her interpretation) at least diminishes the parental theme which is crucial to Stump's account of suffering. Divergent interpretations of narratives suggest that for all their Franciscan potentiality of second-person knowledge, our reading of narratives does not escape some Dominican analysis about the way the world is which we bring to the narratives.

While Stump claims that the truth of the Biblical narratives is not essential to the cogency of her defense (because, after all, she is only describing a possible world, not necessarily the actual one), it seems to us that Stump's project as a whole is best read as a theodicy or an identification of the values that would justify God in creating and sustaining the actual world with all its evil. Stump sees herself as following Aquinas in holding that "God's allowing suffering [is] morally justified either as an antidote to permanent willed loneliness or else as therapeutic for deepened union among persons" (p. 22).

Stump's treatment of suffering is limited by some self-imposed boundaries. The defense of suffering she marshals targets a specific class of persons: "It applies only to the suffering of mentally fully functional

adult human beings; it does not apply to human beings who are not adult or not fully functional mentally, and it does not apply to non-human animals” (p. 476). She defends this limitation by noting that there is no reason why an account of the benefit of suffering must handle all cases of suffering, and suggests that it may be possible to expand her present account to handle other cases of suffering. Her account of suffering, then, focuses primarily on the suffering of individuals with certain qualifications, and does not attempt to resolve questions of suffering for other categories of persons, e.g., the suffering of innocent children.

This setting of limitations also shows up at the outset when thinking of suffering as an evil on a larger scale, a scale beyond the analysis of suffering of particular individuals. She rejects any engagement with reflection on the Holocaust and comments:

Although it is vitally important for us to remember the Holocaust and to reflect deeply on it, taking it simply as one more example or counter-example in academic disputation on the problem of evil strikes me as unspeakably awful. It is enough for me that I am a member of the species that propagated this evil. Stricken awe in the face of it seems to me the only response bearable. (p. 16)

Perhaps one reason (aside from diminishing the Holocaust as only one more example in a debate in the academy) for not discussing the Holocaust is because it would put in very sharp relief the scope of the justificatory nature of Stump’s project. Stump thinks that suffering is (or can be) good for us, which is why a recent review of her book in the *Times Literary Supplement* had this title “Great gifts of pain” (May 27, 2011, p. 32). It would be very hard indeed to claim that the Holocaust was a divine gift or that it would be the kind of event that could be covered by some of the moral intuitions Stump identifies, e.g. “On one common moral intuition, a good parent will sometimes allow the children she loves to suffer – but only in case the suffering confers an outweighing benefit on the child who experiences the suffering, and confers this benefit on him in some way that could not have been equally well achieved without the suffering” (p. 191).

As theists, we believe that it is far better to preserve the thesis that the Holocaust and much suffering is not justified. Mass, industrial murder – genocide – should not occur, ever. We think it more promising to approach the problem of evil by asking whether it is incompatible

with God's goodness for God to create and sustain a cosmos in which some events that occur are good and justified and some events are evil and unjustified. One can see the danger of a justificatory approach to suffering when Stump asks whether, on her view, some suffering should be allowed or not prevented by us because this suffering might be good for the victim. Consider Stump's addressing a case when someone named Paula is considering relieving the suffering of someone named Jerome:

But when Paula considers whether she ought to try to prevent or relieve Jerome's suffering, she cannot know whether the future suffering of Jerome that she is considering is suffering that God will allow. That is because, if Paula does not do what she can to alleviate that future suffering of Jerome's, someone else might do so. (p. 413)

This does not seem fully satisfactory, however, for Stump seems committed to holding that if Paula does not relieve the suffering, God will only allow suffering that is a benefit such that Jerome would retrospectively recognize the suffering as worth the cost.

To be fair, Stump is clear that suffering may only put the one suffering in a position to make a redemptive move toward human flourishing and unity with God. She notes: "Aquinas's theodicy need not be committed to the implication that all suffering moves a sufferer closer to God, or to the implication that God is not justified in allowing suffering if it does not succeed in moving a sufferer closer to God" (p. 404). The sufferer retains libertarian free will which must be exercised. In addition, Stump is clear that her defense also means that individual suffering and its (potential) goods for the individual must be revalued by taking into account the extent of this life in contrast with the potential of everlasting life with God.

Stump's book is distinguished by her working with a view of God that is profoundly personal; God is responsive to the conditions of the world and created souls. Much may be opaque about the role of suffering when we look at the narratives of the lives of others and even consider our own narratives. She believes that a relationship with God is the deepest, true desire of our hearts. It may be that we are not aware of such a desire, but her defense draws back the curtain to show us how the goodness of God is responsible for (or God's creative will is essential for) the created goods that we desire and gives us a glimpse of the enormous good of being in relation to God.

## KEVIN TIMPE

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### **Stewart Goetz. *Freedom, Teleology, and Evil* (Continuum Studies in Philosophy of Religion). Continuum, 2008.**

Stewart Goetz's *Freedom, Teleology, and Evil* is an impressive defense of a non-causal libertarian view of free will. Though not without its defenders, noncausal accounts have tended to receive not only considerably less attention than have event-causal or agent-causal views, but also less sympathy. Goetz's book is a formidable challenge to these tendencies and worthy of attention by all those interested in free will.

At the heart of Goetz's view is that free "choices are, first and foremost, explained teleologically in terms of reasons, where reasons are purposes or goals" (p. 3). And it is this same consideration which leads him to reject both event-causal and agent-causal accounts of libertarian freedom. Why think that considerations of teleological explanation lead one to libertarianism in general, as opposed to compatibilism, and to a noncausal libertarian view in particular? The answers to these questions are at the heart of Goetz's book. It is worth noting, however, that Goetz's response to these questions does not exhaust the wealth of insights found in the book. Along the way he also addresses the nature of intentions, the continued debate about Frankfurt-cases and the principle of alternative possibilities, the problem of evil, primal sin, and more. Many of these discussions are quite detailed, and there is no way to do justice to the depth and wealth of Goetz's arguments in a review. But insofar as his treatment of these other issues depends upon what he sees as the relationship between teleology and libertarian freedom, that is where the review will focus.

We may begin by asking why someone might believe that we have libertarian freedom? Unlike Carl Ginet, whose book *On Action* (Cambridge University Press, 1990) was, prior to Goetz's book, the most developed noncausal libertarian account, Goetz does not base his belief in free will on the phenomenology of choice. Instead, for Goetz such a belief is basic in 'the Plantingian sense': "I am convinced that experiences of choosing, and not other beliefs, ground the belief that I have noncausal libertarian freedom" (p. 4). While Goetz never argues for the existence

of free will, he does however argue both for incompatibilism and noncausalism. Before turning toward those arguments, it is worth noting that Goetz repeatedly utilizes two main strategies for responding to objections to his central argument. The first is a *tu quoque* strategy, arguing that if a particular objection against his noncausal libertarian view holds, it also holds against the view held by whomever raises the objection. (He uses this strategy against objections based on Timothy O'Connor's and Randolph Clarke's agent-causal views, as well as against various formulations of the luck objection.) The second strategy is to argue that the objection begs the question against Goetz's own view. (He uses this against Davidson's causalist challenge and, as we shall see below, proponents of Frankfurt-style examples.)

Goetz lays out his own view in chapters one and two. He is primarily concerned with choices, rather than actions, as he takes the former to be the ultimate locus of freedom. (In fact, he later denies that bodily acts can be free, insisting that choices are the *only* locus of freedom; see pages 80f.) At the heart of his view about free choice is the claim that "a choice is an event that is essentially uncaused and explained teleologically by a reason or purpose" (p. 36). We see here the two central features of Goetz's view: (i) noncausalism and (ii) the centrality of teleology.

Regarding (i), Goetz thinks that choices are simply not the kind of things that can be causally produced. On this issue, the heart of the book is section 2.1 where Goetz outlines the "mental ontological framework" that undergirds the rest of the volume. Here, Goetz differentiates between mental activity and mental passivity, a distinction which is "grounded in the existence of two types of mental properties, namely powers and capacities. These two kinds of properties are inherently different from each other, and each is an ultimate ontological category" (p. 8). Since the nature of exercising a mental power is intrinsically active, such mental actions can have no causes: "any instance or token of mental action by nature lacks an efficient cause" (p. 8). Such exercisings of powers are not only essentially uncaused, but are also ontologically simple and primitive. It would be hard to overestimate the importance of these claims for Goetz's book as a whole. For one, the incompatibility of free will and the truth of causal determinism follows pretty quickly from this ontology: "no exercising of a mental power can be causally determined because no exercise of a mental power can be causally produced" (p. 9). If a choice

cannot be causally produced, then it cannot be causally determined. This, coupled with the basic belief in free will, generates libertarianism. Furthermore, the same considerations also generate Goetz's commitment to a version of PAP (the principle of alternative possibilities):

An agent has a power to chose, and, whenever he exercises it at a time *t*, he is free at that time to exercise it in a different way. In other words, when an agent is free to make either choice C1 or C2, it is not the case that he has one power to choose whose exercising is C1 and a second power to chose whose exercising is C2. There is one, and only one, power to choose that can be exercised in only one of two or more incompatible ways. (p. 9)

And many of Goetz's responses to other issues in the contemporary free will debates depend on his non-causal approach.

But is it really this easy to show that exercises of the will (i.e., volitions) are uncaused? Goetz thinks that one "only needs to be aware of his mental act of choosing to know that it is uncaused" (p. 16). He grants in a footnote that "introspection is not the final word" but that it "certainly is, however, the first word" (p. 159, note 24). But why think that this introspection is veridical? How might one attempt to persuade another who didn't have the same introspective experience? There is, unfortunately, little argumentation here other than the ontological distinction mentioned above:

These two kinds of properties [i.e., mental powers and mental capacities] are inherently different from each other and each is an ultimate ontological category. Corresponding to these two kinds of mental properties are two kinds of event, namely an agent's exercising of a mental power and the actualization of a mental capacity in him. (p. 50)

But why not instead think that the actualization of mental capacities can cause the exercising of a mental power? In non-agential examples, it deems that the actualization of capacities causally produces the exercise of powers. Consider, to use a non-agential example, the cell phone sitting here on my desk next to me, which has (among its numerous features) the power to produce a specific ringtone. It currently isn't exercising this power. But if a certain one of its capacities (namely, the capacity to receive a signal from the local cell-tower) is causally activated by an external source, then the phone will ring. So it looks like the exercise of a power

is not causally distinct from the actualization of a related capacity in all cases. And if this is true of non-agential capacities and powers, then it puts pressure on Goetz's account of agential powers and capacities for whom the exercise of powers is causally independent of capacities. Goetz thinks that agential powers can be exercised without any causal input, including from previous acts of willing. It is for this reason that Goetz thinks there is no reason to adopt an agent-causal approach according to which one has the primitive agent-causal powers to cause acts of will:

What is gained for a libertarian account by postulating a power to cause acts of will (volitions or choices)? Why not just maintain that acts of will are exercising of the power to choose and because they are, they are essentially uncaused? This view is simpler and exemplifies all the virtues of the competing account. (p. 14)

Like van Inwagen and others, Goetz thinks that the addition of agent-causation is "explanatorily superfluous" (p. 4) insofar as it does not secure any further agential control than does the realization that actions are inherently teleological.

This leads us to (ii), the second central element of Goetz's positive view of free will, which is the centrality of teleology. While it is crucial for Goetz that choices are not caused, it is equally crucial that they have teleological explanations. Drawing on work by Donald Davidson, he argues that causal and teleological explanations are fundamentally different and irreducible kinds of explanation. An agent choosing between two actions may have competing reasons for choosing each of these behaviors, but such that "neither reason is sufficient for the occurrence of the relevant choice to act" (p. 19). Goetz grants that the reasons that an agent has may themselves be determined, but denies that that reasons act causally upon the agent. The reasons do not cause the action, but present the agent with a perceived future good to be brought about. So in cases where an agent is torn between two incompatible actions, she is torn between which future good to work towards – that is, she is torn between which reason to respond to. But whichever reason the agent chooses to act on explains the action and prevents it from being random. Goetz argues that sometimes free choices can be given contrastive explanations on his account, though presumably such explanations cannot always be given (as in the case of consciously chosen and reflective akratic actions).

Goetz's forward-directing account of agential reasons is quite attractive, and relates to – in chapter six – Robert Kane's work on self-forming actions and Michael Bratman's and Robert Nozick's work on life plans.

Chapters three and four aim at defending his account from a number of criticisms, mostly various versions of the luck objection against libertarians, and they deserve a careful look for those interested in this debate. As mentioned earlier, Goetz's account of the power to choose freely entails a version of PAP, and in chapter five he attempts to defend that entailment from the challenge posed by Frankfurt-style counterexamples. This chapter stands at nearly fifty pages and is the longest in the volume by a substantial margin; Goetz claims that this length is deserved since "no issue has influenced the discussion about free will more in the past thirty-five years than PAP" (p. 75). In this chapter, Goetz endorses and defends what is known as the Dilemma Defense – FSCs, once all the relevant factors are spelled out, are either such that the agent is morally responsible but still has alternative possibilities, or beg the question against the incompatibilist by presupposing the truth of determinism. Goetz's treatment of this issue is as thorough as one will find in the current literature, engaging FSCs presented not only by Frankfurt, but also by Stump, Mele and Robb, Fischer, McKenna, Haji and McKenna, Pereboom, and Hunt. Goetz builds on earlier versions of the Dilemma Defense proposed by Robert Kane and David Widerker. But then Goetz finds himself in "awkward position of defending PAP against [David] Widerker himself" given that Widerker "has had a change of mind and believes it is possible to construct two successful FSCs against PAP" (p. 113).

In the final chapter of the book, Goetz weaves together a number of issues: the relationship between free will and happiness, restrictivism, life plans, and the problem of evil. As with the middle chapters, there is substantially more content than I can address in this review. For example, he argues at length that the theistic philosopher ought not be content with a mere defense, but rather needs to engage in theodicy in responding to the problem of moral evil. (With respect to the problem of animal suffering, Goetz thinks that a defense is sufficient. For the reasons behind this asymmetry, see pp. 152ff.) Goetz works to provide just such a theodicy based on the experience of complete happiness and the defeat of evil. Rather than exploring this line of argumentation in greater

detail, however, I want to end by focusing on the connection between the account of free will that Goetz develops earlier and his treatment of theism and the problem of evil in this chapter. In the introduction, Goetz considers some comments by Manuel Vargas about the correlation between libertarianism and theism (a correlation which has been confirmed by the recent PhilPapers study conducted by David Bourget and David Chalmers). In response to Vargas, Goetz claims that “I do not espouse libertarianism because of my religion. Rather, I espouse my religion because I am a libertarian. I am inclined to think that there is a supreme agent who acts for purposes because I am aware that I am an irreducible, substantive agent who acts for purposes” (p. 7). And while Goetz goes a considerable distance, via his proposed theodicy, in showing that God has a morally justifying reason for allowing the existence of moral evil, he does not show how his account of free will gives reason to believe in God, as these comments from the introduction would suggest. What he instead gives is a defensive move in that it defeats a reason for not believing in such a being, rather than giving reason to believe that there is such a being. If Goetz does believe that the existence of noncausal teleological freedom gives positive reason for belief in the existence of God, this would be a very interesting argument.

Though I’ve indicated a few places where I wish Goetz would have provided some supplemental argumentation, the book as a whole is rich in careful analysis and argument, particularly as it relates to the problem(s) of luck, the Dilemma Defense, FSCs, and the need for theodicy rather than mere defense. Those interested in these issues would be very well served by a careful reading of Goetz’s text.

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**Andrew Schumann (ed.) *Logic in Religious Discourse*. Ontos Verlag, 2010.**

*Logic in Religious Discourse* contains twelve more or less historical essays by twelve different authors on more or less formal reasoning in connection with various forms of religious thought. The essays cover reasoning in strands of Indian, Chinese, Jewish and Christian thought, as well as Mysticism. The book also contains a preface by the editor.

According to the editor, *religious logic* is to be understood as a distinctive branch of modern logic, and the book is intended as a first step towards a holistic understanding of such a branch of logic independent of any particular religious school of thought. This is an interesting and ambitious goal, and one that I for one support. Maybe religious reasoning is something different from ordinary (non-religious) reasoning, and as such merits its own logical studies. If so, religious logic should indeed be thought of as a branch of its own within the logical study of reasoning. If not, it is still an interesting topic as to why it is not, and as such it still might merit a study of its own. Unfortunately, this ambitious goal is a goal that the book, as far as I can see, fails to fulfill. In what follows, I first provide three critical sets of comments as to why that is. I secondly summarize what these sets of comments indicate about the book as a whole. I end by pointing out what I take to be the most interesting parts of the book, and why.

First, being a non-expert on non-western philosophy and religious thought, I was, with the exception of Schang's 'A Plea for Epistemic Truth', able to make little sense or interest out of the first five essays. This might of course be just a fault of my own, but it might also, arguably, be a fault of a book that intends to provide the first steps towards a holistic understanding of religious logic independent of any particular religious school of thought. It is also not clear, at least not to anyone not already entrenched in the relevant history of Indian and Chinese thought, what these essays have to do with *religious* logic, or logic in *religious* thought and discourse as such. (In fact, with respect to the first two essays by Kak and Bhattacharya, it is not even clear what these essays have to do

with *logic* as such. After all, there is there no real attempt to formalize anything.)

Second, perhaps with the exceptions of Schang's essay 'A Plea for Epistemic Truth' and Uckelman's essay 'Reasoning about the Trinity', none of the essays engage to any sufficient degree with developments in contemporary logic. This wouldn't be a problem if the book weren't intended to be providing the first step towards a holistic understanding of religious logic as a distinctive branch of modern logic, but it is. For example, anyone with some knowledge of contemporary non-classical logic, most significantly many-valued logics, will find little of logical shock-value in this book where negation is a central topic (cf. G. Priest, *An Introduction to Non-Classical Logic*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001, Chapter 7). It is common ground in contemporary non-classical logics that negation is a puzzling phenomenon, e.g. in intuitionistic logic and many-valued logics the negation of a negated formula ( $\sim\sim\Phi$ ) is not necessarily equivalent to the un-negated formula ( $\Phi$ ). But this lack of engagement with contemporary logic should make one wonder what the real value of the book is. Is it just an exposition of some scattered issues of logic with respect to some historical sources? If so, why are Islamic schools of thought left out? Why are African schools of thought left out? If so, I am also not sure the book merits its title.

Third, perhaps with the exceptions of Schang's essay 'A Plea for Epistemic Truth' and Uckelman's essay 'Reasoning about the Trinity', none of the essays go critically into much depth with respect to the logical issues they discuss. To take just one example from what is in fact one of the more interesting essays in the book, namely Dvorák's 'Analogy in Thomism': why isn't there any discussion of how reasoning by analogy relates to reasoning by disjunction? There seems to be interesting links. Also, there isn't much critical examination of whether the various logical structures discussed are any *good*. The book is mostly descriptive. After having read the book one is thus left with the impression that one has been given a mere exposition of some historical sources, but without much *critical* discussion, and without much as to the background *motivation*. This lack of critical examination should leave one, both as a philosopher and as a logician, unsatisfied, especially if the goal is to provide one with the first step towards a holistic understanding of religious logic as a distinctive branch of modern logic.

Taking these three sets of comments together, I believe the overall problem with the book is the following: it is unclear whether it is purely historical and expository, in which case its preface is misleading and the book loses much interest due to an inadequate engagement with the original texts, or whether it is also engaging with modern logic as such, in which case the book is too superficial, uncritical and lacking in many other ways due to its inadequate engagement with modern and contemporary logic.

With that being said, let me end by pointing out what I believe are the best parts of the book, and why.

With respect to logical details and depth, Fabien Schang's contribution 'A Plea for Epistemic Truth' and Sara Uckelman's contribution 'Reasoning about the Trinity' are by far the best. In Schang's essay we are provided with the beginnings of a seven-valued logic, a rationale for why it is seven-valued (and not some other number), and some interesting links with more contemporary logics developed by Kleene ( $K_3$ ) and Priest (LP). In Uckelman's essay we are provided with a supposedly sound logic for syllogistic reasoning about the trinity, which I found both interesting and original. We are also here provided with some genuine motivation for the system, e.g. how to solve the paradoxes by being clear on the different notions of identity involved. Uckelman's contribution is a true contribution to religious logic as such, though I would have liked to see a more critical discussion of the three notions of identity involved. Can we really understand all three notions as notions of identity and distinctness proper? I would also have liked to see more on how her system of syllogistic reasoning about the trinity relates to (and perhaps solves some problems with) contemporary debates on the trinity in relation to classical first-order predicate logic. (We are promised more details in her dissertation of 2009. I have not gone to look whether the promises are fulfilled.)

With respect to religious thought, I found Petr Dvorák's 'Analogy in Thomism' and Pawel Rojek's 'Towards a Logic of Negative Theology' the most interesting, though I would have liked to see more of the logical details entailed by the pictures discussed. What would a suitably full logical system look like for each one of them? Could there really be such a system? It is hard to say without more details.

I also enjoyed Timothy Knepper's essay 'Ineffability Performance' on mysticism, which aims to clear some ground for further work on mysticism along the lines of Sells (*Mystical Languages of Unsayings*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994). The essay goes a long way towards critically clarifying what seemingly cannot be clear, namely what cannot be said. This essay might in fact be interesting for purposes of the philosophy of language at large.

All in all, Schumann's *Logic in Religious Discourse* is an ambitious book with some interesting individual contributions, but fails in its purpose due to an unclear target, I believe.

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### **Rolfe King. *Obstacles to Divine Revelation*. Continuum, 2009.**

If there is a God, then there seems to be significant hindrances or obstacles in the way in which God reveals himself to his creation. What are these obstacles? Can these obstacles be overcome? Are there *necessary* limits to the way in which God must operate when it comes to divine revelation? If there are necessary limits, is this a feature of the created order or is this a feature of God himself? Given these limitations, what sort of divine acts must God use in order to reveal himself (pp. 1-3)?

In *Obstacles to Divine Revelation*, Rolfe King provides some stimulating answers to the above questions and, interestingly, brings the discussion to the centre of epistemology. It is the latter contribution, I think, that is unique to King's project. His project begins, however, by answering an essential question: What is revelation? King defines revelation as: "God's self-disclosure, in any form, leading to some kind of awareness, or knowledge, of him" (p. 5).

From this, one might assume that God's options for revealing himself are limitless. However, King rightly notes that God's options are limited given that the people that he wishes to communicate with are also limited (p. 54). If God, for example, chose to reveal himself with distinct clarity and undeniable evidence in the UDFy galaxy (13 billion light years away) it would do little in convincing his creation of himself. So if God does indeed wish to reveal himself (something traditional theism affirms), then he must do so in such a way that reflects the capacities of his limited creation (e.g., by not revealing himself in galaxies to which we will never have access).

So if God's options for revelation are indeed limited, this might be considered the first obstacle to his revelatory plan. This obstacle, as King notes, says nothing about God and everything about his creation. This is why King understands obstacles to divine revelation as: "Any feature of the created order that may either block or hinder a form of divine disclosure, or has in some way to be overcome in order for God to disclose himself." (p. 5).

These features, whatever they might be, must be located within the created order. But what, exactly, are these features? And how exactly does one go about identifying these features? The two principles that King suggests to identify the features that hinder revelation are the epistemic-revelatory principle (ErP) and the revelatory-context principle (RcP) (pp. 39-40). The former principle claims that epistemic problems concerning evidence (interpreted quite broadly) are an obstacle to divine revelation (p. 9), while RcP claims that a specific context is required in order for God to reveal himself in a way that is comprehensible by his creatures. All obstacles to revelation, according to King, fall into the above categories – they are either epistemic problems or contextual problems (pp. 40-41).

I find ErP more interesting, and more controversial I might add. ErP, for example, makes the claim that God might have difficulty revealing himself insofar as *our* epistemic position lacks complete discernment of the available evidence. The “Eden parable” illustrates this nicely (pp. 44-47). In the parable the angels are talking amongst themselves about all the different ways in which God might reveal himself to his new creation. Despite the available options, they all seem plagued by the fact that there is no assurance the creatures will *trust* the revelation (some experience for example) to be evidence of what God is trying to reveal (perhaps that he exists and that he loves them). Scepticism looms, despite the potentially good revelatory intentions.

But, King suggests, there is another option available to God – one that isn’t dependent on the difficult task of matching belief with the available evidence. King notes that this option, which he calls direct cognition, might potentially undermine his central claim that there are indeed obstacles to revelation (p. 60). This worry, however, seems unnecessary. Even if there is direct cognition, one might assume that this feature has been corrupted (by sin for example) and thus doesn’t always function the way it was intended. This aside, it is King’s understanding of Plantinga (as it relates to direct cognition) that deserves more attention.

King’s discussion of Plantinga is very interesting, but ultimately, I think, mistaken. King’s key claim is that Plantinga’s model is (1) a form of direct cognition and that (2) direct cognition should be understood as divine self-testimony. And that in order for testimony to be *trusted*, (3) there needs to be decisive evidence that the testifier can in fact

be trusted (pp. 76-77, 100). If (1)–(3) is true, then the problem with Plantinga's model seems obvious. After all, if belief in God is directly acquired by some properly functioning faculty, the belief still wouldn't be warranted, according to King, since there is no evidence that the faculty is in fact functioning properly (p. 78). Without getting into all the nuances of the debate here, I think the point to stress is that (3) is false. Even if Plantinga's model is a form of testimony (which is questionable), not all models in the current epistemology of testimony would concede (3) given that it's not at all clear that there needs to be *decisive* evidence that the testifier can in fact be trusted. You might think that testimony is non-inferential, which is consistent with Plantinga's claim that belief in God is properly basic. Thus, the claim would simply be that there couldn't be any *defeating* evidence against the testimony of the testifier. This is known as the defeater clause, which Plantinga's model rightly incorporates.

At any rate, however one feels about the above understanding, the point that King is trying to make is that any account of direct cognition is plagued by the issue of *trust*. And the requirements concerning evidence and the necessity of trust bring us closer to King's position. King's position, then, is that evidence and trust are both necessary given that any (special) revelation necessarily involves testimony (p. 194). This being the case, King provides a solution to the trust problem and claims, as was seen in the critique of Plantinga, that sufficient evidence is needed for trust. King calls this *trust-evidentialism* (p. 176).

The obvious question is whether God can provide such evidence. But in asking this question, we are immediately faced with a dilemma. The dilemma, as described by King, is that "God cannot give us any evidence for special revelation independently of self-testifying in some way that the evidence is due to him. But we need independent evidence to rationally trust that *this purported revelation* is from God" (his emphasis, p. 251).

King's response to this is that "although God cannot give us evidence independent of his self-testimony we may be able to find such evidence" (p. 197). This point isn't as confusing or controversial as it sounds. For example, it was argued by King that there are certain limitations in the ways that God can reveal himself given *our* limitations. This being the case, there must be some *necessary* structure in which God will reveal himself. And the *necessary* structure of this revelation must take into account our limitations. So if we can discern what exactly the necessary

structure of revelation is, we can then know what kind of evidence to look for (see pp. 176-178). King gives several suggestions that I won't recount here (see pp. 177-181, 197, 201-205), but the point that should be taken is that this evidence would provide the basis for what King claims to be central to divine disclosure – trust.

So, then, there is the *initial* evidence that King finds necessary for trust. But, it seems, we are still plagued with the problem of properly evaluating the evidence that would lead to knowledge of God. After all, it's not objectively clear that the evidence does anything beyond giving the initial trust or confidence to *think* some divine testimony *might* be compelling. This is where King's journey-epistemology becomes important. As King notes, "all I can do is to try to find the best grounds on which to base my trust" (p. 200). And this initial trust will be subject to reasons of the heart (suspicions, fears, personal goals, etc. p. 214). So it's a journey in that the evidence (the evidence that initiates trust) is not sufficient to know (in this case perhaps God's existence), but it is both necessary and sufficient to get you on your journey.

While the significance of the arguments presented above depend, I think, on the truth of (3), I find King's *Obstacles to Divine Revelation* both interesting and compelling. Students and scholars who work in religious epistemology and philosophy of religion will find King's work to be of value as it examines and advances many contemporary issues in those fields.

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**Robert Erlewine. *Monotheism and Tolerance: Recovering a Religion of Reason*. Indiana University Press, 2010.**

Erlewine's monograph *Monotheism and Tolerance. Recovering a Religion of Reason* offers a plea for the religious philosophies of three of the foremost representatives of what the author terms the 'Enlightenment religion of reason trajectory'. Two of them, Moses Mendelssohn and Hermann Cohen, are Jewish, one, Immanuel Kant, Christian. The three authors examined, the author holds, put forth an account of religion that may help to reconcile modern religious pluralism and the self-conception of monotheistic religion, including its belief in historical revelation and election, without the latter having to abandon its distinct identity.

In his introduction, Erlewine gives an in-depth analysis of the precarious connection between monotheistic faiths and violence, with which contemporary critics of religion, notably Jan Assmann, have charged the three Abrahamic religions. Following Assmann and others, Erlewine reveals the intolerance and proneness to violence inherent in monotheism to be rooted in its highly agonistic "dynamic between particularity and universality, wherein", the author proceeds to explain, "a particular community is imbued with universal significance, and as a result is brought into conflict with all other particular communities, which lack this universal significance" (p. 10). Thus, in monotheistic faith, a particular historical community, entrusted with divine revelation, is tasked by God with spreading a message of universal significance with the *eschaton* at the end of salvation history bringing about the hoped-for conversion of all mankind. Moreover, the message revealed bears upon the metaphysical *telos* of man's very nature so that the Other outside the divinely-privileged community is bound to fall short of human nature as such. Worse still, as well as missing the aim intrinsic to her nature, the religious Other comes to be seen as positively defying divine providence. However, while there is no denying its proneness to violence, the dialectic between particularity and universality is so essential to the discursive structure of scriptural universalism that modern theories of religious pluralism, which seek to remedy the evident potential of violence intrinsic

to Abrahamic monotheism by rejecting the primacy of any one religion, fail to offer viable alternatives for the faithful. According to Erlewine, it is the chief merit of the three thinkers he sets out to discuss that they all espouse enlightened philosophies of religion while also – with varying degrees of success – preserving both the logic of elective monotheism and the concomitant intolerance of the religious Other. However, theirs is shown to be an intolerance that shuns violence both on the conceptual and physical level with the respect for the humanity in the person being the overriding aim of their Enlightenment religious philosophy.

Integrating the conflicting notions of the election of the Jews and cultural equality into a first draft of Enlightenment rational theology, Jewish philosopher Moses Mendelssohn, whose thought has been unduly neglected in the past, marks the beginning of the religion of reason trajectory. Contrary to those strands in modern Mendelssohn scholarship that pass over the election of the Jewish people as peripheral to his systematic philosophy, the author points out that the attempt to reconcile Jewish elective monotheism and universal rational religion is, in fact, at the fore of the philosopher's mature religious thought. In accordance with his perfection, Mendelssohn's God cannot but have created the best possible world, within which man, as a rational being, takes pride of place. The only being endowed with moral freedom and the ability to strive for individual perfection, man as such is of infinite worth. As a consequence, Mendelssohn is aghast at the notion of eternal damnation which he deems incompatible with a perfect God who, he avers, is unwilling ever to sacrifice the infinite value attaching to a rational being. It is for the sake of his infinite worth as well that man is entitled to believe in an afterlife in which he may continue his perpetual striving. Significantly, Mendelssohn is keenly aware of the blatant contradiction between his vision of rational universalism and his own inherited elective monotheism. Hence, he rules out revelation as the sole means to salvation, insisting that the eternal truths of rational religion, to which man is privy by his capacity of reason alone, is sufficient to achieve the *telos* of individual perfection. Nevertheless, Mendelssohn, despite his outspoken rational universalism, is unwilling to part with the pre-eminence of Jewish monotheism in favour of a position of religious pluralism and relativism akin to John Hick's. Instead, he seeks to preserve the dialectic of universality and particularity so crucial to elective monotheism by

introducing into his account of rational religion the concept of idolatry. While lacking in systematic coherence, Mendelssohn's notion of idolatry serves as an umbrella term for all kinds of aberrations from rational religion both in philosophy and theology. Significantly, it is with regard to his day's Christianity, the prime example of irrational depravations in religion, that Mendelssohn elaborates his key concept. Christianity, for Mendelssohn, is a "living anachronism" (p. 54) evidencing the dangers resulting from scriptural universalism that, lacking rational correction, is at odds with the early modern ideal of tolerant egalitarianism. Positing belief in Christ as the *sine qua non* of salvation, Christianity misconstrues the arbitrary revelation of an unfathomable deity as the only means to attain salvation. Hence, the Christian God, conceived along the lines of scriptural voluntarism, emerges as a gruesome despot who, meting out grace according to his inscrutable counsels, denies man the due value which rational religion bestows upon him as a moral being: The dogma of original sin and the eternal damnation it entails robs the vast majority of mankind of any worth whatsoever. Conversely, Judaism is deemed the historical "emissary of reason" (p. 60). Pending the eschatological conversion of the whole of mankind to their original religion of reason, the Jews, entrusted with a special revelation, are called upon to witness to the religion of reason in a world that is still haunted by the spectre of idolatrous irrationalism. By practicing the rites prescribed by Halakha, Mendelssohn's chief example of Jewish revelation, Israel serves as a priestly nation reminding others of the frequently-forgotten religion of reason from which they have strayed. However, it is here that the gap between elective monotheism and rational theology becomes apparent, as Mendelssohn fails to provide any systematic whys and wherefores of Halakha serving a vital function within rational theology. In fact, both God's election of the Jews and his special revelation of Halakha stem from his inscrutable will, thus proving an unenlightened remnant of scriptural universalism that co-exists somewhat uneasily with Mendelssohn's rational theology and cultural egalitarianism. In the end, Mendelssohn, for all his outspoken religious rationalism, acquiesces in commending the fate of a largely idolatrous world to the incomprehensible counsels of the deity of Holy Writ, viewing Jewish election as only loosely, if at all, linked with the eventual triumph of Enlightenment religion.

Famously, Kant's historic attempt at a *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone* translates Christian religion and the teaching of Christ, the supreme moral philosopher, into rational ethics. With theoretical reason bereft of its access to God in principle, practical reason alone may lay legitimate claim to knowledge about the divine. Avoiding Mendelssohn's rather inconclusive co-existence of rational and scriptural universalism, Kant is unequivocal in his rejection of the unfathomable deity of the biblical tradition. Moreover, not only is scriptural universalism, which, in Kant's account, vainly purports to offer both theoretical insight into and extra-ethical ways to attain to the divine, stripped of its religious legitimacy, but also deemed an obstacle to the practical religion of pure reason. Indeed, in his scathing criticism, Kant charges traditional religion with being subject to radical evil, as it posits self-love and the striving for individual happiness rather than perfection and disinterested love for mankind as the supreme maxim of man's action. Thus, man, instead of undertaking the arduous task of moral self-reform, is tempted into preferring to seek happiness by pandering to the whims of a divine despot. Scriptural religions, moreover, can be seen to be driven by a misguided universalism, as they fulfil their allegedly divine duty to spread their message. Their attempt, however, is doomed from the beginning, as arbitrary revelation, upon which their claim to universality is based, can never hope to engender a universal consensus. In the end, as is shown by ample historical evidence, it is only by resorting to violent means that scriptural religions can hope to enforce their alleged truth. Thus, Kant, surprisingly, exposes the traditional monotheistic creeds as subverting their very *raison d'être*, i.e. the unity of mankind in pursuing the one *telos* of the ethical commonwealth. At the heart of Kant's ethics of autonomy, as Erlewine shows, lies a social ideal that is conditional upon the perspective of moral universality replacing that of eudaimonistic particularity. In keeping with his rational theology, Kant's ethical commonwealth, recognizing man's finitude and utter ignorance of the divine, consists in man's common moral striving to overcome radical evil and unsocial sociability. This effort is necessarily a collective one, as man must positively engage with the Other in joint reflection and mutual critique in order to achieve the highest aim of practical reason: "Kant's new anthropocentric, anti-foundationalist conception of reason", concludes the author, "is public in nature, and rooted in discourse rather than the

dogmatic algorithms of (non-critical) rationalist metaphysics” (p. 123). In so doing, it certainly overcomes the violent intolerance inherent to elective monotheism, while still retaining some of its key notions such as its missionary effort in salvation history and its eschatological fulfilment in the kingdom of God. Nevertheless, in the end, Kant’s concept appears flawed on numerous grounds: For one thing, Kant vacillates about key notions of Christian faith which he sets out to translate into pure practical reason. Thus, while rejecting the idea of man’s original sinfulness as a contradiction in terms, his notion of radical evil, which, by denying the moral law its due primacy, mars man’s every maxim, comes so close to it as to be virtually indistinguishable from it. For another, Kant’s ethico-theology, while seeking to end religious strife once and for all, also introduces a new antagonism, as the new Enlightenment religion must struggle to overcome the unenlightened religions of old. Above all, Kant’s ethical kingdom of ends, which his rational universalism introduces as the rational substitute for the kingdom of God in the biblical vision of universality, emerges as a highly inconsistent “form of politics rooted in morality and not politics as such, a *non-politics* to counter worldly politics” (p. 115). Kant’s explanation of how the ethical commonwealth is to be brought about in a joint effort of human morality and divine grace, thus, remains elusive at best.

Hermann Cohen, whose religious philosophy Erlewine regards as the most promising of the three Enlightenment approaches examined, chooses to retain the intolerance essential to elective monotheism, thus doing justice to the basic self-conception of monotheistic religion. However, Cohen’s is a humane notion of intolerance that rests upon the foundation of a complex ethical hermeneutics of the Jewish holy writ. Seeking to bridge the fateful chasm between rational and scriptural universalism, he posits that, historically, the former originally inheres in and develops from the latter. His method is twofold: Firstly, he subscribes to Kant’s notion of a regulative ideal that, while never actually attained in the endless process of rational inquiry, guides our every scientific and philosophical effort. Secondly, the method of “correlation”, derived from and closely related to the regulative ideal of Kantian philosophy, fuses two concepts into a unity which affects the meaning of both and preserves their semantic distinctiveness at the same time. The idea of God, in Cohen’s systematic thought, is truth. As such, it constitutes the

core principle of reason that safeguards the dynamic correlation of the actual “is” and the possible “ought”, i.e. the scientific and the ethical realms, which, in turn, serves as the indispensable rational foundation of all moral endeavour. Moreover, the very dynamic of the “ought” in the process of realization translates into the concept of human nature which is pivotal to Cohen’s Enlightenment construal of rational religion. The regulative ideal for which both morality and religion strive is the totality of humankind conceived of in contradistinction from the egocentricities of particularity and the vested interests of plurality. It is here that religion and the philosopher’s own Jewish creed play a major role, as the religious rationality of Judaism in particular impresses upon formal rational ethics the crucial correlation between God and man, and that between human beings, as well as the dimension of the interpersonal and human suffering. Like Kant’s rational religion, Cohen’s, thus, is chiefly practical. However, whereas Kant, for all his praise of Christianity, is wary of attributing to it a special historical role, Cohen, besides the correlations between God and man and that between human beings, holds to the correlation of God and his chosen people as well, thus preserving a key idea of elective monotheism. In the course of history, he posits, this latter correlation, which bears on the Jewish people’s historical ministry in spreading the monotheistic creed, decisively shapes the first and the second: Though tracing the history of a particular people, the Hebrew Bible is instrumental in bringing about the moral ideal of universality, as the Jewish revelation, whose multiple historical phases amount to a gradual rationalization of ethical monotheism, leads mankind as a whole towards rational universalism. Rather than being the incomprehensible divine being of scriptural universalism, the unique God of Israel’s historical monotheism, in his correlation with his chosen people, is conceived of as the highest ideal of practical reason, the unity of mankind. In that, the relation between God and humanity is, in fact, so close as to verge on identity, as dictated by Cohen’s logic of correlation: The God whom Israel worships in its biblical history is the foundation of man’s transcending his mere “is” towards a holy “ought”. In turn, the universality of mankind, for whose sake the Jewish people bears witness, is the only means whereby God becomes apparent in the world.

It is to the credit of Erlewine’s fine analysis that he rediscovers the systematic significance of Enlightenment philosophy of religion in

general and a frequently-neglected author of the much-maligned Neo-Kantian school of thought in particular. Among the numerous merits of Cohen's religious philosophy, the author shows, is the relative paucity of its metaphysical commitments, which sets it apart both from Moses Mendelssohn's whole-scale Leibnizean rationalism and Immanuel Kant's equally complex practical metaphysics. All in all, Erlewine's searching analysis of key thinkers of the ongoing project of enlightenment is a fine example of the systematic significance that may accrue to careful studies of hitherto underappreciated representatives of Enlightenment thought. Hence, while eventually revealing both Mendelssohn and Kant's approaches to be inconsistent or flawed, their analyses of the inherent problem of elective monotheism are shown to be highly apposite and paving the way for Cohen's systematically valid philosophy of moral monotheism.

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