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Guest Editor: **GEORG GASSER**
Co-Editors: **JOHANNES GROESSL, LUKAS KRAUS**

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EDITORIAL

Biblical thought presents God as active, not passive. Traditional teaching holds that through God all things are made (John 1:13); that God upholds all things by his powerful word (Hebrews 1:3); that God acts in history by shaping the lives of individuals like Moses and the prophets and even the histories of entire nations like Israel and Egypt; finally, it says that at the end of history God will replace the old order of things with a new one (Revelation 21: 1-5).

The belief that God acts is a centerpiece of a theistic understanding of reality. It encompasses both God's general endeavors, such as the creation and conservation of the world, and his actions at particular times and particular places. This belief is not a mere armchair phenomenon. Each year millions of adherents of various religious traditions journey to uncountable pilgrimage sites because they believe that God (or the gods) can answer their prayers and act for their benefit.

This belief goes hand in hand with fundamental theological and philosophical questions: Does divine action amount to a violation of the laws of nature or is there a less problematic way to construe it? An answer to this question depends on how we understand the causal structure of the world; and this, in turn, calls for an understanding of the way in which science describes the world and the way in which metaphysics might categorize its components.

These questions are rather philosophical. However, divine action is theologically controversial too. An initial worry for many theologians might be that the proposed way of understanding divine action is too literal, and that any adequate talk about it has to be framed by a hermeneutics of the metaphorical. A different concern might be that a literal notion of special divine action is in tension with the classical divine attributes. Take immutability: If God does not change, how is he able to act in human history? Take omniscience: Isn't special divine action a sign that God had to correct his original providential plan?

Even greater complications arise if we start to reflect on God's nature: If we assume that God is an all-powerful, omniscient, and morally perfect being, then doubts arise over whether we can ascribe to him a robust notion of freedom. Wouldn't any deliberation among possible courses of action undermine this concept of God? If so, how are we to

conceive of the relationship between the classical divine attributes and divine freedom?

Alongside the problem of divine freedom comes the problem of theodicy. If God has free control over creation, why does he not prevent the evils that darken so many human lives? A prominent (and partial) answer is that God respects human freedom even though it is the source of many evils. All that God can do in the light of this respect is provide a world with ever new opportunities for human beings to freely accept his offer of love and friendship.

This view is closely connected to another central topic arising from the theological thesis that no fallen human being can will any good without the assistance of grace: How can divine grace and human will cooperate in such a way that both this thesis and human freedom are respected? This question touches on the intricate relationship and possible alignment of different wills – a topic also of relevance to the Trinitarian conception of God: What is the internal structure of agency of a triune God? Is it a perfect form of group agency or is one divine person acting on behalf of all three?

This short detour shows that the challenge of how to think and speak adequately of God's action is a thorny one extending into all areas of theology. The contributors to this special issue have taken it up. Drafts of these papers were presented at the Analytic Theology Conference "Divine Action in the World: Philosophical and Theological Perspectives" in Innsbruck, August 4-6, 2014, the final capstone event of the Analytic Theology Project.

Georg Gasser

DIVINE AND HUMAN AGENCY FROM THE STANDPOINT OF HISTORICALISM, SCIENTISM, AND PHENOMENOLOGICAL REALISM

CHARLES TALIAFERRO

St. Olaf College

Abstract. Phenomenological realism, in the tradition of Dietrich von Hildebrand, is advanced as a promising methodology for a theistic philosophy of divine and human agency. Phenomenological realism is defended in contrast to the practice of historicalism – the view that a philosophy of mind and God should always be done as part of a thoroughgoing history of philosophy, e.g. the use of examples in analytic theology should be subordinated to engaging the work of Kant and other great philosophers. The criticism of theism based on forms of naturalism that give exclusive authority to the physical sciences (or scientism) is criticized from a phenomenological, realist perspective.

Our understanding of human agency and our understanding of the ultimate nature of reality (its origin, if any, and its sustaining structure) are interwoven. As Paul Churchland observes, if one adopts a fundamentally physicalist (or materialist) account of the cosmos as a whole, it is likely one will adopt a physicalist view of human persons. "Most scientists and philosophers would cite the presumed fact that humans have their origins in 4.5 billion years of purely chemical and biological evolution as a weighty consideration in favor of expecting mental phenomena to be nothing but particularly exquisite articulation of the basic properties of matter and energy."[1] Conversely, if one is a theist or open to theism, according to which all the matter and energy that exists (and the cosmos as a whole) is created and sustained by am omnipresent, all good, omniscient, omnipotent God, one will have more philosophical space

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[1] Paul M. Churchland, *The Engine of Reason, the Seat of the Soul* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995), 211.

for understanding human agents in non-reductive terms (as more than matter and energy).

This essay is about the framework and methodology for engaging in reflection on divine and human agency. In particular, I propose we consider two obstacles that stand in the way of developing a constructive philosophy of divine and human agency in the form of what I call historicalism and scientism. Before defining these terms, I ask you to join me in a work of imagination.

Imagine that you and I are attending a meeting of philosophers and theologians when an analytic philosopher of religion named Kevin proposes to defend a coherent understanding of human and divine agency. Taking up a philosophy of human agency first (that he intends to use in developing a view of divine agency), Kevin asks us to consider the process he goes through in fixing Allison's cup of coffee in the morning. He asks us to reflect about whether his free agency would be compromised if someone had (without Kevin's knowledge) planted a chip in his brain that would create in him an urge to bring Allison coffee if it ever happened that he got distracted or, due to some irritable mood swing, the whole task bored him. Now imagine this objection is raised: "Wait a minute! What about Kant? Or Fichte? Or Hegel? Didn't they make some important contributions on the nature of self-awareness, deliberation, and causation?" In response, Kevin concedes that, of course, Kant, Fichte, Hegel, and others, are seminal contributors to these matters. And imagine Kevin goes on to plead with his audience that he was (like many analytical philosophers) simply assuming some standard, common sense notions of agency and familiarity with some widely known thought experiments (in this case, Kevin was assuming acquaintance with the work of Princeton University philosopher Harry Frankfurt). As the philosophers and theologians did not seem happy with Kevin's vantage point, imagine Kevin decides it might be better to postpone his account of human agency and so he proposes, instead, to develop a philosophical model that provide a coherent way to understand the Nicene Creed. But before Kevin can begin to develop his first power point slide, there is an objection: "How can you simply use the creed as a starting point without taking into account Schleiermacher?"

The above scenario reflects what in this essay I will be referring to as *historicalism*. 'Historicalism' is an invented term for the view that serious philosophical inquiry needs to be grounded in the history of philosophy such that (for example) a philosophy of God or of human

freedom that is launched only by the kinds of examples and thought experiments we find in mainstream analytic philosophy is a very bad idea. Instead, such a philosophical investigation should be couched in terms that engage philosophical history involving (at the least) Kant, Fichte, and Hegel. From the standpoint of historicalism, to engage in philosophical theology using the creeds or Biblical texts without taking into account Schleiermacher and hermeneutics would be like exploring Lamprechtsofen, the deepest cave in the Austrian Alps, alone without a map or source of light.

In this essay I consider the historicalist challenge to a constructive, theistic account of divine and human agency, along with considering an objection that comes from what is sometimes called *scientism*. By 'scientism' I mean any of the wide variety of philosophical methods that give primacy to the natural sciences; scientism is represented by what are considered strict forms of naturalism.[2] Historicalism and Scientism present different specific obstacles to philosophical theology; scientism is explicitly atheistic (or non-theistic) whereas historicalism is compatible with any number of theistic positions. But they both impede the kind of philosophical theology that is customary in analytical philosophy or theology: both are positions that are elitist insofar as they both involve a highly advanced, (special or elite) educated perspective on history and science. I will be contrasting historicalism and scientism with *phenomenological realism*, a position that is certainly well represented in the history and the philosophy of science, but it is a method that (in my view) speaks more directly to the generally well educated inquirer (one that is educated but not on the level of specialization of work in historicalism and scientism).

There are three sections that follow: the first sketches the challenge of historicalism and scientism. Section two then offers an account of phenomenological realism as a promising methodology in its own right as well as providing a healthy alternative to historicalism and scientism. I defend what I refer to as the *contextual primacy* of phenomenological realism and propose that philosophical, historical inquiry (as in

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[2] Strict naturalism includes eliminative physicalism as well as philosophies that recognize the mental as real but not given any irreducible explanatory significance. On the latter view, an explanation of some event may include mental relata but these are wholly supervenient upon physical (that is, non-mental) events and laws. For an overview of various sorts of *naturalism*, see *Naturalism* co-authored by Stewart Goetz and Charles Taliaferro.

historicalism) and the appeal to science is secondary and dependent upon what may be called the *philosophical climate* as opposed to what I will describe as *a more general philosophical ground*. A third section considers the cultural significance of phenomenological realism. I propose that phenomenological realism provides us with good reason to insure that the practice of philosophy is widespread culturally in a fashion that promotes the love of wisdom that, in turn, helps foster the foundations for a pacific, democratic republic. I refer to this general, foundation as a *philosophical ground*. In reference to the case of Kevin, I hope to show that his methodology is well justified in the context of a general philosophical ground, but *he should address matters of history and science given certain, specific philosophical climates*. The burden of section three will be to offer some guidelines on distinguishing ground and climate philosophically.

I. A CRITIQUE OF THEISM FROM THE STANDPOINT OF HISTORICALISM AND SCIENTISM

There are at least two reasons behind historicalism. The first may be referred to with a rhetorical questions: Why re-invent the wheel? And the second involves an appeal to humility and solidarity.

Why re-invent the wheel? For all we know, past philosophical work may have already established certain philosophical positions. For example, perhaps Kant has established definitively that we do not have am immediate grasp (or awareness) of ourselves as substantial individual subjects who endure over time. If so, shouldn't we not begin with Kevin's report of his ordinary experiences, but with Kant's arguments and conclusions in the *Critique of Pure Reason*? Arguably, sustained, rigorous reflection would bring to light Kant's particular reasoning, but there is no need for us to approach the topic de nova when Kant has already succeeded in establishing a cluster of relevant points. It also might be the case that Kant was a towering genius and that, without his aid, we would not be able to reproduce and confirm his arguments, but that once we are acquainted with his historically significant findings we may come to see their compelling force.

A second reason behind historicalism is that it is a reflection of intellectual humility and solidarity with philosophers and theologians of the past. We who are working in philosophy and theology today

are inheritors of an immense body of work historically. There may be something cowardly about mindlessly accepting the results of past inquiry, but doesn't humility and an awareness of our working in continuity with past thinkers give us good reason to approach our topics historically? Arguably there would be something arrogant or a sign of a lack of gratitude in some field of inquiry to ignore past inquiry. The study of law, for example, seems especially important to approach in historical terms. To assess, for example, positivism versus natural law theory only in terms of the present moment without couching our arguments and positions historically seems quite inappropriate (especially considering the ways in which the very concept of law involves appeal to past precedence, enduring common law, and so on). Why think philosophy or theology is any different?

As for scientism, let us go back to the meeting with Kevin. Imagine that when Kevin refers to God's action, there is an objection: What sense can possibly be made referring to the action of an incorporeal being? A commonplace criticism of a theistic account of divine and human action is that it involves a Cartesian metaphysic in which an incorporeal, non-physical God causally interacts with the physical, spatially extended world. This is purportedly completely at loggerheads with a scientific philosophy, which presupposes (or assumes or asserts) that we have a clear understanding of causation in the physical world, but little to no understanding about the non-physical. Evan Fales offers this account of what counts as proper evidence, a method that explicitly rules out theism:

> I suggest that we have evidence-abundant evidence- that the only sources of energy are natural ones. Our evidence is just this: whenever we are able to balance the books on the energy (and momentum) of a physical system, and find an increase or decrease, and we look hard enough for a physical explanation of that increase or decrease, we find one. There is no case in which, given sufficient understanding of a system, we have failed to find such a physical explanation. Of course, such an explanation may be lacking for a time. There are famous cases-e.g., the deviations in the orbit of Uranus, and the apparent lack of energy conservation in meson decay-that challenged this this understanding. In each such case, the books have ultimately been balanced by the discovery of a physical cause-here, Neptune and the neutrino, respectively.[3]

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[3] Evan Fales, *Divine Intervention: Metaphysical and Epistemological Puzzles* (London: Routledge, 2010), 16.

The success of the natural sciences are a vindication of the sufficiency of the physicalist or materialist project of accounting for the cosmos, exposing the comparative mysteriousness and opacity of theism and theistic explanations. Herman Philipse offers the following critique of theism from the standpoint of how we have a meaningful, materially based-understanding of human agency but no idea about how such agency would be coherent in the context of the non-physical:

> How can one meaningfully say that God listens to our prayers, loves us, speaks to us, answers (or does not answer our supplications, etcetera), if God is also assumed to be an incorporeal being? For the stipulation that God is an incorporeal being annuls the very conditions for meaningfully applying psychological expressions to another entity, to wit, that this entity is able in principle to display forms of bodily behaviour which resemble patterns of human behaviour. In other words, the very attempt to give a meaning and a possible referent to the word 'God' as used in theism must fail, because this attempt is incoherent.[4]

This objection to theism has many adherents, including Michael Martin, Paul Edwards, Kai Nielson, et al.[5]

Evan Fales presses his case against theism by exposing the emptiness of theistic explanations. Fales asks theists to identify the mechanisms or tools that God employs in creation. Fales offers this picture of the ostensible, scientific inscrutability of theism:

> Can God cause things to happen in a spatiotemporal world inhabited by matter and (if not reducible to material processes) finite minds? If God can, then it is hard to see why, in principle, this could not be discovered by scientific investigation (by which I mean here simply properly careful and controlled empirical observations and suitable inferences there from). If God cannot, then it is hard to see why He would be of any religious significance at all. He would, after all, be both impotent and unknowable.[6]

Fales contends that if philosophical theologians appeal to omnipotence and omniscience in an effort to fill out an account of the modus operandi

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[4] Herman Philipse, *God in the Age of Science? A Critique of Religious Reason* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 101-102.

[5] For a book-length treatment of this objection see my *Consciousness and the Mind of God* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

[6] Evan Fales, *Divine Intervention: Metaphysical and Epistemological Puzzles* (London: Routledge, 2010), 2.

of God, they are engaging in a kind of magic trick:

> The theologian's appeal to these features of the divine nature [God's omnipotence and omniscience] rather resembles the waving of a magician's wand. When a magician waves his wand which with his right hand, we may reasonably wonder what, while our attention is momentarily distracted, he is doing with his left. Appeal to omnipotence and omniscience does not answer our question so much as it merely repeats it. How are we to understand divine omnipotence? How is it that God can do all the things He is understood to be able to do? Or, to put the question a bit differently: Omnipotence is a dispositional property. What categorical properties of God underwrite it, and how, exactly, do they do so?[7]

The charge that the theistic appeal to God's power is explanatorily vacuous or unacceptably obscure is endorsed by Herman Philipse, Jan Narveson, Michael Martin, and others.

II. HISTORICALISM AND SCIENTISM FROM THE STANDPOINT OF PHENOMENOLOGICAL REALISM

I am using the term *phenomenological realism* to refer to the philosophical method employed by Dietrich von Hidebrand (his methodology has also been called *realist phenomenology*), shared by Max Scheler, Reinhardt Grossman, Roderick Chisholm, and, most recently, by Stan Klein.

Dietrich von Hildebrand (1889-1977) is not widely known in mainstream philosophy today, but he is very much celebrated by Roman Catholic philosophical theologians (including John Paul II) and his form of phenomenological realism has a stability and precision that (in my view) is superior to the better known German philosopher who shares in the practice of this form of phenomenology, Max Scheler. According to phenomenological realism, our primary starting point in our philosophy should be a critical study of what Hildebrand referred to as *the datum of experience as this is revealed to us pre-philosophically*. In the context of ethics as well as in terms of building up our general account of human nature and action, we need to apprise ourselves of what first and foremost appears to us as the data that our philosophical accounts need to address.

> In order to understand this moral sphere, we must immerse ourselves, as it were, in the rich qualitative plenitude of a moral datum and

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[7] Ibid, 3.

bring ourselves to a full state of "wondering" about it. We must seek to analyze the datum, delve into its nature, explore its relations with other fundamental data of experience, and, finally, inquire into the presuppositions which have to be fulfilled in order that a man may be endowed with moral goodness.

In pursuit of our inquiry, however, let us be on our guard against all constructions and explanations which are incompatible with the nature of moral data as presented in experience or which in any way fail to do full justice to them. Thus we must, time and again, come back to the most explicit and unrestricted experience of moral data, and confront every result of our exploration with the full flavor of the experienced data themselves.[8]

Hidlebrand is quite explicit about the importance of getting to the datum that is prior to our philosophical reflections:

Before we begin the analysis of our topic, some fundamental remarks of an epistemological nature are in order. These will serve to clarify further the few introductory remarks we have made thus far. This work starts from "the immediately given," that is, from the data of experience. The reader will be able to estimate properly our results only if he is willing to hold in abeyance for a while all theories which are familiar to him, and which provide him with a set of terms which he is accustomed to use in sizing up that which is immediately given. I want to begin from the beginning, suspending all theories concerning the moral sphere.[9]

Hildebrand's form of phenomenology differs from Husserl (who was one of Hildebrand's teachers) insofar as he does not seek to suspend (or bracketed) judgment of what is real in the course of his phenomenological account of values or persons.

Phenomenological realists like Hildebrand, Scheler, Grossman, Chisholm, and Klein are each committed to the reality and integrity of humans as agents who act for purposes and with reasons. Moreover, they maintain that there is nothing revealed by a close study of human agency that agency itself is either necessarily (that is, exclusively) anthropomorphic nor restricted to what is physical; on this later point, they each maintain that our concept of what is physical is not as clear or intelligible as our concept of what is mental (subjective, experiential, mind). Their philosophical methodology is therefore not adverse (or, put

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[8] Dietrich von Hildebrand, *Christian Ethics*, (New York: McKay, 1952), 1.
[9] *ibid,* 2.

more positively, their methodology is genuinely open) to the coherence and plausibility of theism.

Consider again the challenge of historicalism, the view that appeals to what seems experientially evident have been thoroughly undermined by philosophers of the past. Simply to assume we know what we are talking about when using (for example) Harry Frankfurt cases of when a person acts freely in the absence (or presence) of alternative possibilities is to shirk our duty as philosophers to take seriously Kant's view that the self is unobservable (a view shared by Hume, among others) and any number of incompatible alternatives (Nietzsche versus Parfit versus Kim ...) and so on. Let us return to the case of Kevin. What struck philosophers and theologians at the imagined meeting is that Kevin did not begin his presentation by indicating why he seems to presuppose (or believe outright) that he can observe himself serving coffee or that he has reason to believe that he is doing anything (as an agent). Moreover, why think that he, Kevin, is a person or self? Why shouldn't we adopt a Kantian or Humean or a no-self account of selves defended by Parfit? According to historicalism, Kevin may be sincere, well intentioned, and philosophically astute, but he has not undertaken a serious analysis to be evaluated in terms of our own contemporary judgments and/or intuitions when these are not evaluated in light of the history of philosophy.

Phenomenological realism does not provide us with reasons to ignore the history of philosophy, but it gives us a tool for evaluating past (current and future) philosophy and it has a contextual primacy that provides Kevin with prima facie justification for beginning with his ordinary beliefs about fixing coffee as well as with beginning philosophy with a text from the Creed of Chalcedon.

Consider phenomenological realism and the history of philosophy. Hildebrand does not begin his investigations with a philosophical engagement with Kant, Hegel, et al. Does this position fall prey to the why re-invent the wheel? position or does it conflict with an appeal to humility and solidarity with the past? It is hard to see why when one takes seriously the fact that in the history of philosophy itself, so many philosophers have similarly sought to carry out philosophical inquiry into the nature of the self, perception, values, and so on, without first engaging in an elaborate historical preface. In the modern era, Thomas Reid, Bishop Butler, Franz Brentano, G.E. Moore, Roderick Chisholm and others adopt a method very similar to Hildebrand's. As Chisholm writes in *Person and Object*: "Leibniz, Reid, Brentano and many other

philosophers have held that, by considering certain obvious facts about ourselves, we can arrive at an understanding of the general principles of metaphysics."[10] Hildebrand's work is clearly in the same tradition as Chisholm's. So, going back to the two reasons behind historicalism, it may be argued that the history of philosophy is more like discovering different ways to travel rather than inventing and re-inventing wheels. Each generation can learn from the past, but each generation of philosophers also needs to test their own views (and the arguments of the past) in light of their own experience and reflection.

In my view, phenomenological realism turns out to be in solidarity with the past – given that philosophers of the past also appealed to their own experience and reflection to advance their own positions. According to Hildebrand himself, he is adopting a model of philosophy that goes back long before Chisholm to at least Aristotle who, while he gives some attention to his philosophical forebears Aristotle summarily dismisses their views when it comes to him developing his own philosophy:

> I want to start with the moral experience itself. In the same way Aristotle, speaking about the soul, says at the beginning of the second book of his De Anima:

> "Let the foregoing suffice as our account of the views concerning the soul which have been handed an by our predecessors; let us now dismiss them and make as it were a completely fresh start, endeavoring to give a precise answer to the question, What is soul?"[11]

Following von Hildebrand, I believe that it is through a searching, faithful understanding of what each of us knows as persons that we have good experiential grounds for thinking that the earlier datum (persons reason with each other, etc.) has substantial philosophical importance.

I referred earlier to the *contextual primacy* of phenomenological realism. Let me fill this out and then propose that the importance of the history of philosophy depends on what may be called philosophical climates.

I propose that the primary context that virtually all philosophers and theologians do assume when engaging in debate consists in a whole series of beliefs and practices that seem indispensable. Here is a sketch of such beliefs and practices:

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[10] Roderick Chisholm, *Person and Object*, (La Selle: Open Court Publishing, 1976), 15.
[11] Dietrich von Hildebrand, *Christian Ethics*, (New York: McKay, 1952), 2.

There are people who engage in deliberation, presenting reasons for why this or that philosophy is more reasonable than some alternative; persons engage each other in conversation and lectures; they read papers; eat meals; breath; go hiking and engage in other forms of exercise; they sleep; develop friendships; make decisions; publish papers and books; make jokes; laugh; cry; they sometimes make love; they are part of various communities; some have children and participate in large family living; some are professors who have students and some are students who have professors, while others are independent scholars. They typically find each other morally responsible for their actions and those of others; they praise some persons for their humility and wisdom and do not admire the arrogant and narcissistic. Sometimes these people go to church to pray or they may pray silently and (not to leave out the obvious) they are born and they will die. Billions of people in the world practice in some religious tradition and, in doing so, some recite creeds, meditate on Holy Scripture, and so on. Some believe there is an afterlife for individuals, some believe that an individual afterlife is possible but not likely, while still others believe that it is not possible for individual persons to survive the death of their bodies. Last but not least, some people prepare coffee for their spouses and quite a large number of persons adhere to the Creed of Chalcedon.

I suggest that recognizing the above is practically indispensable as commitments of persons in community. Arguably, it would require extraordinary reasons to deny that billions of people recite creeds or to deny that persons argue with each other, presenting reasons why one belief is more reasonable than another. And, outside of a seminar room or conference in which the topic is Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* with a focus on B132 and A352 and/or Parfit's *Reasons and Persons*, it would be very odd to question whether a philosopher can confidently describe his fixing coffee for his wife or to question the philosophical interest in setting out to see if there might be a philosophical model that makes sense of a creed that millions of people subscribe to. This latter observation about seminar and conference rooms, however, brings up a point that should be made about philosophical climates.

In the final section of this paper, I will argue that Hildebrand's phenomenological realism has some important cultural implications in terms of supporting a just, pacific, democratic republic. But for now, I suggest that such a democratic outlook is compatible with the specialized practice of philosophy in which Kevin (in our original

thought experiment) truly does owe a response to Kant, et al. That is because certain sites may be constructed that are dedicated to Kant et al. In such a site, there is what may be called a philosophical climate that needs to be addressed. Different sites will come with different conditions that need to be taken on board. One need not address Wittgenstein's private language argument at a meeting of the Hume Society, without there being special conditions that would make this fitting. But consider a conference or a site dedicated to the philosophy of divine and human nature, and not one dedicated to Kant or Parfit on divine and human nature. I believe that there are enough of what appear to be good "common sense" reasons for objecting to the Kantian and Parfitian arguments so that Kevin (in our thought experiment) need not halt his work to make important contributions to Kant or Parfit studies.

Consider, first a Kantian objection; I indemnify this as 'Kantian' in order to indicate that it is derived from a standard interpretation of Kant's work, without getting tied up in the details of Kantian texts and multiple non-standard interpretations. Here, then, is a Kantian objection: strictly speaking, you do not observe yourself because (unknown to you) there might be an undetectable switching of selves such that (rather than you enduring over time as the self-same person) you are a series of selves, constantly being switched and your memories and apparent continuous consciousness perishing and being re-created. Obviously this is painfully succinct (an historicalist will probably see such a summary as horrifying), but it is one reasonable and widely recognized line of reasoning many find in Kant's work.[12] The Kantian counter-point faces an avalanche of objections: for reasons lying in the philosophy of time (we must endure in time in intervals, not from instant to instant as an instant takes up no time whatever), the switching would have to take place during intervals. How long would these be? If very brief (a Nano-second) then you would be (strictly speaking) a different self who finished reading these sentence from the one who began reading it. In fact, you might be the hundred billionth self in the series. This hypothesis seems to collide with any apparent phenomenological understanding of the experience of thinking and speaking. Speaking of series, if a self is constantly being switched, how would one come up with the experience of series or successive changes (like listening to a song)? Even Kant recognized

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[12] See, for example, J. Bermudez, "The Unity of Apperception in the Critique of Pure Reason," *European Journal of Philosophy* 2, no. 3 (1994): 213-40.

that a series of experiences is not the same thing as the experience of a series.[13] I believe that the prospect of undetectable switching should no more dissuade Kevin from believing he is the same person who is brining Allison some coffee on Monday as him bringing her coffee later that day than he should be skeptical that he is carrying the same cup of coffee because God might be continuously annihilating the coffee and re-creating it.

What about a Parfitian objection – should it prevent Kevin from using his common sense case in his philosophy of human agency? Parfit, like Hume, faces the objection that he is unable to do justice to the overwhelming awareness each of us has as persons who experience and act in the world as subjects and who live and move and have our being from a first-person point of view. Kevin does not need to, nor could he, identify himself (his thoughts, actions or his body) using indexicals (this is my body) without having an antecedent understanding of himself as an enduring subject. For him to think and intentionally to act on the desire to bring Allison a cup of coffee he needs to be able to think and act as the self-same individual who is providing another individual person a beverage. Imagine a Parfitian world in which Kevin is not a self but a series of causally interwoven physical and mental events. Arguably, an event is not itself something that is conscious. Persons or things are conscious; events may involve conscious persons or organisms but an event itself has no conscious awareness.[14]

These worries are not sufficient to dissuade someone committed to Parfit's philosophy of mind, but they do express prima facie real worries that a Parfitian needs to address and they provide some reason to think Kevin's work is not discredited (or tarnished) until he has more fully addressed Parfit's no-self account of the self.

I believe that essentially the same scenario obtains when Kevin turns to the Creed of Chalcedon and he meets with the objection that he has not addressed the work of Schleirmacher. If Kevin is presenting his work to

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[13] In *The Critique of Pure Reason* A364N, Kant hypothesizes that after a protracted period of time, a self might think it has endured over a series of events, but all that has happened is that a the data of a series of selves with their conscious states (selves who have ceased to be and been successively replaced then ceased to be and then replaced, etc. have been transmitted to the self at the end of the series.

[14] For an extended treatment of the objections I am raising to Kantian and Parfitian arguments see the excellent book, *The Conscious Self* by David Lund (New York: Humanity Books).

a scholarly society dedicated to the work of Schleiermacher, then I believe that the philosophical climate demands attention to Schleiermacher. In that domain, it would make greater sense to preface the analytical model of the trinity with a critical evaluation of Schleiermacher's appeal to intuition and feeling. It might even be possible to use analytic tools to unpack some of Schleirermacher's monistic tendencies in which individuals remain individuals and yet are bound up in some overall quasi-Spinozist unity. But while analytical philosophy does need to take seriously what I am referring to as philosophical climates, I suggest that the bare existence of such climates elsewhere does not overshadow or render uninteresting a philosopher seeking to make sense of what billions of ordinary people adhere to.

Let us now turn to scientism from the standpoint of phenomenological realism. As noted earlier, let us consider scientism to be the claim that the physical world is all that there is; its contents are causally closed to anything nonphysical; and the explanation for any event is either in the physical sciences or in modes (e.g. the social sciences) that can be shown to supervene on or be explained through bridge laws in the physical sciences. I think that scientism is deeply problematic for many reasons, including the fact that it rests on terms that are profoundly under determined. I shall propose in reply that *we lack any clear understanding of what it is to be physical or what counts as physical explanations, and so the thesis of causal closure is suspect from the get-go*. Moreover, I propose instead that we have (and necessarily have) a clearer conception of what may be called (by virtually all philosophers "in the game") mental causation than we do of physical causation (which *tout le monde* treats as causal relations between mind-independent things –events, properties, objects et al). First, let us take stock of the current state of play of scientism in the philosophy of mind.

In *Mind and a Physical World*, Jaegwon Kim writes:

> The shared project of the majority of those who have worked on the mind-body problem over the past few decades has been to find a way of accommodating the mental within a principled physicalist scheme, while at the same time preserving it as something distinctive –that is, without losing what we value, or find special, in our nature as creatures with minds. (Kim 1998, 2)

This position (of a triumphant quasi or near-enough physicalism) may have to be modified somewhat, given the many arguments that have been

deployed against physicalism in works such as *After Physicalism* edited by Benedict Paul Gocke, *Contemporary Dualism: A Defence* edited by Andrea Lavazza and Howard Robinson, and *The Waning of Materialism* edited by Robert Koons and George Bealer, among others. But there have been, and there still are, an impressive number of philosophers who share, with Kim, a confident picture of the physical world, and a considerably less confident understanding about how to fit in what we think of as mental.

Consider three more philosophers who give primacy of intelligibility to the physical world and physical causation. Daniel Dennett writes: "I declare my starting point to be the objective materialistic, third-person world of the physical sciences."[15] D.M. Armstrong offers this classic, succinct statement of his metaphysical position: "Naturalism [is] the doctrine that reality consists of nothing but a single, all-embracing spatio-temporal system."[16] Here is Michael Tye's position:

> On the naturalist view, the world contains nothing supernatural ... at the bottom level there are microphysical phenomena governed by the laws of microphysics, and, at higher levels, phenomena that not only participate in causal interactions describable in scientific laws but also bear the general ontic relationship to microphysical items as do the entities quantified over and referred to [in] such higher-level laws as those which obtain in, for example, geology and neurophysiology.[17]

In the wake of such positive claims about what is physical, no wonder some philosophers think that the idea of what may be nonphysical is suspect.

Stepping back a bit, how clear a concept do we have of the physical world and how does that match our concept of what many philosophers classify as mental, as featured in the list cited above in this essay: our thinking, conceiving, feeling, seeing, hearing, tasting, valuing, observing, and so on? Contrary to the assumed orientation in philosophy of mind, I propose that our ordinary beliefs and commitments (as revealed in phenomenological realism) offer us no clear concept of what is physical or material and that subsequent philosophical reflection on the world

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[15] Daniel Dennett, *The Intentional Stance*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1987), 5.

[16] D.M. Armstrong, "Naturalism, Materialism, and First Philosophy," *Philosophia* 8, 2-3 (1978): 261.

[17] Michael Tye, "Naturalism and the Problem of Intentionality," *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 19, (1994): 129.

and the sciences have not generated any clear consensus on what is physical. Most importantly, I maintain that we cannot even begin to try to understand what is physical unless we can trust and understand our reasoning and conceptual powers, for without these we cannot even begin to consider whether or not mind-independent objects have mass, volume, size, color, odor, sound, taste, sensory qualities of heat (as opposed to heat as in mean kinetic energy) and whether the physical consists in individual things (particles) or events or fields.

Following the lines of phenomenological realism, I suggest that priority of intelligibility and clarity should be acknowledged as the mental, and that none of the above conceptions of the physical (from Kim to Tye) can be any clearer or more intelligible than the mental. This is evident in the case of when the physical is analyzed in terms of that which is inter-subjective or those things which more than one person can (in principle) observe. Such an analysis (that invokes the 'third-person' point of view) must presuppose an antecedent confidence and understanding of subjectivity and observation (known in and from the first and second person point of view). No statements of what is physical can be more certain than that which is mental and if it turns out that we should conclude that the mental is physical, this will be due to our confident exercise of intentional reasons, not due to our substituting non-intentional relations for intentional ones. (The latter would be impossible without our ongoing exercise of intentionality.)

Let us review the earlier statements by our various physicalists or near-enough physicalists. In Fales' case, surely our *concepts* or *ideas* of "evidence," "physical," "energy," "deviation," "energy conservation" have primacy over what are not concepts or ideas. In response to Kim, I suggest that it is impossible to have a clearer conception of "a principled physicalist scheme" than you can of a "scheme" which, I assume, is a concept or way of conceiving. And Kim's statement as a whole seems to commit him solidly to the reality of the mental; "accommodating" and "valuing," and grasping principles are mental acts. The point may be so obvious as to hardly bear pointing out, but it reveals the inescapable primacy and essential lucidity of the conceptual, the mental or the reality of our thinking, assessing, valuing, and so on, as opposed to what is posited in the sciences. Michael Tye writes impressively of laws of nature, and yet we can have no conception of a law of nature unless we can trust the reality and reliability of our concepts and the reality of mental causation. In this context, 'mental causation' would be evident

in our grasping laws of nature, of comprehending when it is that certain molecular, atomic, nuclear and subnuclear events cause or explain other molecular, atomic, nuclear and subnuclear events. We only grasp a law of nature if we can trust our reasoning, whether this is cashed out in terms of a covering law model, counterfactuals, or we adopt a philosophy of causation that recognizes basic powers. This involves the use of mental causation insofar as a person grasps the relevant causal relata, and whether the relata is immanent, located in spacetime, or transcendent and non-spatiotemporal, grasping laws of nature involves our reasoning that if certain antecedent and contemporary events obtain then there is reason to believe this will bring about (or cause or explain) another event. The causal elements in the course of a person's reasoning may be vast and complex, but for reasoning to occur, the conclusions a person draws must (in a crucial, ineliminible way) be in virtue of grasping the relevant premises and inferential rules. From simple mathematics in which we reason that the answer is 2 based on our summing 1 + 1, to astrophysics, it is essential that we draw conclusions in virtue of grasping reasons and entailments or inferential relations.

While the following seems to be mind-numbingly obvious, it seems to be overlooked or under-appreciated: microphysics, geology, and neurophysiology cannot be practiced unless there are microphysists, geologists, and neurophysiologists, and each of them must necessarily work with concepts, observations, theories, being able to grasp entailment relations, the laws of logic, and so on.

Consider an objection: All that the above reasoning establishes (or makes reasonable) is that we must have facility with our thinking, reasons, and concepts in order to draw conclusions about the nature of the world. It does not mean we understand what thinking is or reasoning or concepts. After all, someone might have no idea whatsoever about what makes a car go, but she can drive it expertly and get anywhere she wants.

Reply: The analogy needs to be pressed further. Imagine that the driver has no idea at all about driving, let along all the particulars involving roads, wheels, petals, traffic laws et al. She must have an idea about a massive number of interwoven practices and how to bring about changes in order even to get into what she rightly thinks of as a car. For her to be agnostic or to profess to having no idea why driving a car involves her knowing what to do seems to border on us imagining a zombie driver.

What about Philipse and Fales? Both philosophers seem to assume that we have a clear idea of what it is to be physical (material or corporeal) and what is different about physical and nonphyscical causes. Do we? Can we rightly assume that what is physical is solid, dense stuff; it is uniform, made up of distinct particulars, compared to which the non-physical, whatever *that* is, is spooky and mysterious? Actually, much of 20th century physics seems to lead us to think that the physical world is more spooky than we imagined; consider Bertrand Russell's observation: "Matter has become as ghostly as anything in a spiritual séance."[18] I suggest that Noam Chomsky is correct that "The notion of 'physical world' is open and evolving" and, as I argued above, that it is not sufficiently precise to use as a lucid alternative to that which is 'non-physical.'[19] Proposals that, for example, being spatial is a necessary condition for being physical seems problematic given the history of philosophers (from the Cambridge Platonists to G.E. Moore and H.H. Price) who treat spatial things and events as non-physical (including the visual field, sense data, dream images, after-images, etc).

Philipse seems to assume some form of behaviorism, requiring a God who hears and responds to prayers to act in ways that are similar to the way we humans listen and respond to one another. Unfortunately for Philipse, even if it is granted that his implicitly anthropomorphic understanding of God is a fair representation of theism, behaviorism seems thoroughly discredited when it comes to humans (the anthropos is anthropomorphic).[20]

In further considering the objections of section one, it is worth noting the peculiarity of Fales' first argument which appears to have this form: if God cannot (or is not?) knowable or discernable scientifically, then God is impotent or unknowable. Imagine we conclude that we cannot know scientifically what Shakespeare meant in all his plays. Would it follow that the Bard is impotent? That seems doubtful. What about unknowable? Perhaps some non-scientific means are sufficient for us to have reasonable beliefs about what the Bard meant. Von Hildebrand thought that we can have some experiential awareness of God and this is of the kind that many philosophers have since come to use in theistic

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[18] Bertrand Russell, *An Outline of Philosophy,* (London: Routledge, 2009), 78.

[19] Noam Chomsky, *Rules and Representations,* (New York: Columbia, 2005), 5-6.

[20] See *A Brief History of the Soul* by Stewart Goetz and Charles Taliaferro (Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2011).

arguments from religious experience.[21] This, in principle, would provide conditions in which one can offer a phenomenological account of what it is for persons to experience the divine or sacred.

On Fales' demand that a proper theistic account needs to offer an account of how God acts, this again, seems to be an example of anthropomorphism or likening God to a being who is the subject of laws of nature as opposed to their author. In theistic tradition, God is believed to possess divine attributes in ways that are interconnected. I happen to be in the Anselmian or prefect-being tradition and understand God's power, knowledge, essential goodness and the like, as being made evident by God's unsurpassable excellence. I have defended the ontological – and other theistic – arguments elsewhere.[22] Fales's characterization of omnipotence as a purely dispositional property in search of a categorical property is (at least) misleading, insofar as traditional theism sees God's powers (of knowledge and to bring about states of affairs) as basic, and not due to the causal powers of any intermediary. Does this make them obscure or empty? It is hard to see why when one can recognize conceptually explanations in terms of intentions or purposes by created persons that are not reducible to non-intentional and non-purposive explanations. For the sake of argument, let us concede that in actual fact, human beings intentional agency can be reduced to the non-intentional, it still does not follow that such a reduction is necessarily the case so that (a) it could not be otherwise or (b) there could not be forms of intentional agency whose intentions are not reducible. Fales' analogy with magic therefore seems far-off. Theists do not do the equivalent of sneak rabbits into hats. They rather address the very nature of what counts as an ultimate, unsurpassable great or excellent reality; to complain that such a reality or being needs to meet the standards of explanation that befit beings of less excellence seems wide of the mark.[23]

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[21] See, for example, *The Rainbow of Experiences, Critical Trust, and God: A Defense of Holistic Empiricism* by Kai Man Kwan (London and New York: Continuum, 2011).

[22] See *Contemporary Philosophy of Religion* by Charles Taliaferro (Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, 1998).

[23] For an overall look at the relevant philosophical domains, see *The Routledge Companion to Theism* ed. by C. Taliaferro, V. Harrison, S. Goetz (London: Routledge, 2013). Fales' demand for the means by which God acts reminds us of cases when philosophers insisted that we cannot explain human volition without positing some intermediate such as a higher order volition to have a volition, and so on ad infinitum. Many philosophers of human agency make use of the notion of basic acts, which do not

By way of a further defense of divine and human agency from a theistic point of view, consider a final barrage of three, interrelated objections concerning the project of this essay and a summary response.

Objection one: Appealing to phenomenological realism only expands a list of what needs to be explained scientifically. Science has shed enormous light on our intentional action. But what further science can shed light on divine agency? The scientific inscrutability of divine agency shows theism to be anti-scientific.

Objection two: Appealing to phenomenological realism entrenches us in the status quo of ideas and ideals. It used to be common sense to appeal to demon possession. Surely we need a better alternative.

Objection three: Phenomenological realism gives us data that is thoroughly neutral in terms of the deep philosophical theories historically and in our own time. Imagine evaluating a Spinozist metaphysics and epistemology in light of phenomenological realism! There is a long tradition of philosophers who think that some metaphysic or epistemology is true or well grounded, but it cannot work in the life of practical engagement. David Hume realized he needed to play backgammon from time to time to escape his reasoning and conclusion in the study, but that did not give him a philosophical reason for thinking his ruminations in the study were spurious.

On the first objection, it is obvious that the natural sciences (especially brain sciences) along with the social sciences have shed a great deal of light on human agency, but none of it has given us good reason (in my view) to adopt a reductionist or identity theory of the mental. This is partly due to the problem of even knowing what is physical, but it is also due to the important difference between the sciences establishing correlations of the mental and brain and other bodily processes and events versus identity. The inescapability of the mental actually provides us good reason for thinking that practicing neurologists implicitly presuppose a form of dualism, even if they profess otherwise .[24] As noted above, the fact that theistic explanations do not yield scientific scrutiny (identifying what mechanisms God uses when God acts) is no more

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require further volitions or intentions. See, for example, *Person and Object* by Roderick Chisholm. La Salle: Open Court, 1976.

[24] This is made evident in the essay "Neuroscience: Dualism in Disguise" by Riccardo Manzotti and Paolo Moderato from *Contemporary Dualism: A Defense* (London: Routledge, 2014).

reason to dispense with theistic explanations than we would have reason to dispense with explanations of mathematical propositions in terms of logical entailment because such explanations are non-biological. As many have argued, there is reason to think theism provides a foundation for science and, from such a point of view, it is anything but anti-science.[25]

Two, phenomenological realism reveals our use of reason to be self-correcting and providing a foundation for the critical investigation of the credibility of our beliefs. The legacy of von Hildebrand is an on-going, rigorous self-criticism. As a matter of historical significance, von Hildebrand's philosophy led him to radically oppose the status quo of his society, risking his life facing up to anti-Semitism and fascism in Europe.

Third, I propose that Spinoza and Hume (and their progeny) do face some prima facie objections as revealed in phenomenological realism. Spinoza does need to provide reasons (and he actually does so) for why we should set aside what appears to be our experiential awareness of our possessing powers to make changes in conditions that are contingent. Hume does need reasons for adopting the bundle theory of the self, his view of causation and our observations about the world, and (to his great credit) he offers such reasons. By providing some reasons in this essay why Kevin does not need to stop practicing his philosophy of human and divine agency in order to first engage Kant and Parfit, I am not denying that Kant and Parfit have provided us with rich and intriguing arguments we should pursue on their own. The thrust of this essay is not at all anti-philosophical; it is simply a matter of knowing what philosophers need to do in order to successfully make their case in specific projects.

Limitations of space requires that I refer readers to where I have employed phenomenological realism to explicitly support a non-reductive account of human persons and divine agency. I develop this most recently in *The Image in Mind*, which extends considerably an earlier project of defending what I call integrative dualism and integrative theism.[26] In the space remaining, I propose to make an observation

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[25] In *The Routledge Companion to Theism*, see the entries on Naturalism, Natural Sciences, Evolution, Physical Cosmology, Psychology, Cognitive Science.

[26] See *The Image in Mind* co-authored with Jil Evans (London: Continuum, 2010) and *Consciousness and the Mind of God* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994). A reviewer of an earlier version of this essay asks how one might settle disagreements among phenomenological realists. Imagine one phenomenological realist reaches the conclusion that libertarian agency is right, whereas another concludes with compatabilism. While there is no convenient algorithm to decide matters, I suggest

about the cultural significance of our philosophical methodologies and, in particular, the significance of phenomenological realism.

III. THE CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE
OF PHENOMENOLOGICAL REALISM

What do historicalism and scientism have in common? In a sense, both are elite positions insofar as both require advanced education in the humanities and sciences respectfully. Ordinary persons do not worry about Kant's argument about the possibility of undetected switching of themselves. Nor does the everyday person suspect that their purposes, desires or even consciousness itself may not exist. Phenomenological realism, in contrast, treats our everyday, apparent conceptions of ourselves and the world as real and trustworthy, subject to critical review. A good example of this involves our experience of the world in color. A phenomenological realist may well (as I do) come to conclude that mind-independent objects do not have the colors they appear to as intrinsic properties of the objects themselves, nonetheless the evident experience of color gives us very good reason to resist the effort to deny that persons actually experience color (or those who deny that subjective experiences of color do not exist). Because Hildebrand, and other phenomenological realists, promote a philosophical method that takes seriously our ordinary experience there is a sense in which it is quite natural that Hildebrand promoted the widespread practice of philosophy in culture in which ordinary persons may be drawn to the practice of philosophy as the love of wisdom. Arguably, among persons who sincerely pursue the love of wisdom with a balance of courage and humility, there will be great resistance to intellectual manipulation, an openness to the reasons of others, the fostering of alternative viewpoints in which persons may freely assess and critically review. In my view, Hildebrand's phenomenological realism, implemented culturally, would naturally be very much in line with what Karl Popper describes as the open society.

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that we distinguish between a phenomenological analysis of agency itself (the first-person awareness of oneself when acting) and our commitments or convictions on the level of theory. Although it is impossible to argue for this here, my own view is that we do experience ourselves as agents in a fashion that gives evidential presumption to libertarianism, however this prima facie justification can be overcome by theoretical reasoning supporting determinism and compatabilism. For the record, I think the prima facie evidence favoring libertarianism is not defeated by further philosophical reflection.

In this respect, phenomenological realism is helpful in promoting what may be called the philosophical ground for an open society.

Hildebrand had an outstanding record as an opponent of the enemies of an open society. He was an early and sustained opponent of fascism and anti-Semitism before and during World War Two. Hildebrand was a German citizen, though born in Italy who had to flee Nazi forces, moving from Germany to Austria, then to Switzerland and eventually to the United States. His opposition to Nazism was especially dangerous in terms of his personal security in Austria. The Nazi ambassador to Austria, Franz von Papen wrote "That damned Hildebrand is the greatest obstacle for National Socialism in Austria. No one causes more harm" and he proposed that Hitler order the assassination of Hildebrand, "the architect of the intellectual resistance in Austria."[27]

I do not suggest that historicalism and scientism should be rejected because they are elitist or that phenomenal realism should be adopted because it promotes a democratic culture. But I do suggest in closing that in our reflections on the philosophy of divine and human nature, we take into account the cultural implications of our philosophical methods. For practical persons, it is impossible to see historicalism or scientism as the mainstay for mainstream cultural exchanges. There are and should be special sites for specialized historical and scientific inquiry. But there are also good reasons for those of us who are philosophers and theologians to promote a philosophical foundation that supports an open society in which these more specialized pursuits can flourish.

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[27] Dietrich von Hildebrand, *My Battle Against Hitler* (New York: Image, 2014).

OPERA TRINITATIS AD EXTRA
AND COLLECTIVE AGENCY

ADONIS VIDU

Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary

Abstract. This paper assesses the viability of the model of 'collective action' for the understanding of the doctrine of the inseparability of trinitarian operations, broadly conceived within a Social-Trinitarian framework. I argue that a 'loose' understanding of this inseparability as 'unity of intention' is insufficiently monotheistic and that it can be 'tightened' by an understanding of the ontology of triune operations analogically modelled after collective actions of a 'constitutive' kind. I also show that attention to the 'description relativity of action ascriptions' can potentially move us beyond the impasse of the doctrine of appropriation. Finally, I respond to potential objections.

INTRODUCTION

This paper addresses the intelligibility of what I have called the 'twin principles' of classical Western Trinitarian theology: the doctrine of inseparable operations and the corollary doctrine of appropriation. Latin Trinitarianism (LT) understands the former doctrine to teach that economic divine agency belongs to the Trinity as a whole, with particular actions such as creation, redemption, incarnation, etc., being *appropriated* to one of the divine persons. Social Trinitarianism (ST), on the other hand, wants to preserve the distinctive agency of each of the persons, in some cases reading the former doctrine in terms of a unity of intention. Talk of this unity of intention is then expected to preserve the motivation and purpose of the *opera ad extra* principle without inviting its problematic implications such as the doctrine of appropriation.

One of my purposes is to test this 'looser' conception of the unity of external operations. I will be assuming, for the sake of argument, the overall framework of ST and will ask whether this account of unity sufficiently preserves the motivations for the ancient embrace of the concept of inseparable operations. My conclusion will be that, without further supplementation, such an account of unity is insufficiently preserving of those intuitions. This leads me to suggest that we might better describe the unity of external action in terms of collective agency, appropriately described. Such an analogy can help ST preserve both the unity of economic action, as well as its stress on distinctive agencies of the persons.

I start the conversation with a summary of recent discontent about the two doctrines and a presentation of an alternative conception of unity centred around intentions. I then explore the grammar of the doctrine in the Cappadocian fathers. Next, I draw on two items of the philosophy of action: the description relativity of action ascriptions, and the notion of collective actions. The last two sections test the Trinitarian viability of this model and address some objections.

RECENT CRITIQUES OF THE 'TWIN PRINCIPLES'

During the last few decades the 'twin principles' of inseparable operations and appropriation have been subjected to a concerted critique. Ted Peters summarizes the discontent well: 'Here is the problem: should one want to press to the limit the implications of Augustine's maxim that the operations of God in the world are undivided (*opera trinitatis ad extra sunt indivisa*), then we would have to say that the Nicene creed borders on the unorthodox – it divides the work. [...] Each person of the Trinity, in turn, has a different function. The work of the one God seems divided.' (Peters 1983: 33) To put it differently, the differentiation that is manifest in the economy seems to divide the operations. Peters also mentions the alleged implications of the principles, some of which are notorious, such as Aquinas' suggestion that any one of the divine persons might have become incarnate (Aquinas 1981: III.3.1). This seems to further rob revelation of any epistemic purchase. The fact that it is the Son who has become incarnate, and not the Father or the Spirit, tells us nothing, it would seem, about the immanent identity and personhood of the Son.

Catherine Mowry LaCugna also leans heavily against Augustine in her pivotal work, *God For Us: The Trinity and Christian Life*. She claims

that Augustine's principle 'follows logically from the starting point in the divine unity instead of the economy of salvation' (LaCugna 1993: 98). LaCugna continues: 'once it is assumed that the Trinity is present in every instance where Scripture refers to God, and once the axiom of *opera ad extra* is in place, no longer, it seems, is there any need for the plurality of persons in the economy. At least it is no longer possible to single out any person in relation to a particular activity. The Triune God's relationship to us is unitary.' (LaCugna 1993: 99) This does raise an important point in relation to ascription of actions. We recognize a threefoldness in God precisely because of a differentiation in divine action in the world. However, if this differentiation is ultimately denied, it would seem we no longer have a basis for making such distinctions in the very being of God. The importance of this point can hardly be overestimated. I will return to it very shortly.

LaCugna's work comes on the heels of Rahner's critique of the Western separation between the immanent and the economic Trinity. He admits that there are appropriated relations between the Trinity and the world. Such actions are appropriated 'only where the supreme efficient cause is concerned' (Rahner 1970: 77). Rahner operates here a distinction between supreme efficient causality and what he calls a 'quasi-formal causality' (Rahner 1970: 36). There are ways in which God acts in the world as a single agent, as it were. The distinctions we may make between the outcomes of those actions are not to be projected back into the divine agency. This is very much an Augustinian (as well as a Cappadocian) view. However, Rahner insists that not all divine actions fit into that pattern. Were that so, the incarnation could not be ascribed to the person of the Son, but it would equally have to be predicated of the Father and the Spirit.

An un-nuanced understanding of the *opera ad extra* principle and its implied doctrine of appropriation would indeed seem to warrant such a reading. The agency in this case would seem to be ascribed to the Trinity as a whole, *simpliciter*. And in this case, appropriation would be a mere linguistic device, with no real epistemic purchase. It would simply indicate that the Scriptures mandate – as a matter of arbitrary convention – that the incarnation is referred to the Son.

Rahner counters that the incarnation should be regarded as a 'dogmatically certain instance for an economic relation proper to each person, of the divine persons in the world' (Rahner 1970: 27). In other words, there is no qualification and correction to be made to our

common-sense observation that this action (incarnation) is ascribed to the second person of the Trinity. The persons have distinct economies. Taking revelation seriously should force us into this conclusion, Rahner insists.

To the question whether this threatens the unity of the divine essence in any way, Rahner does not apply himself with much care. He does state that such a construal is still compatible with God still having a single (one) relation to the world, 'but precisely a relationship which refers him as threefold, each person in his own way, to the world' (Rahner 1970: 28).

An immediate question, though, would be: if the incarnation is a dogmatically certain instance of God's economy, on what economic basis can we still conclude that the actions of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are not the actions of three gods? How is the unity of the divine substance to be secured and prevented from it being divided among the persons?

Christoph Schwöbel's seminal work, *God: Action and Revelation* proposes precisely such an account that preserved the general lines of Rahner's insistence on the incarnation as a dogmatically certain instance of personal economy. His solution is to speak of the unity of these differentiated actions as *a unity of intention*. This, he thinks, is sufficient to preserve the grammar and aim of the ancient principle: 'The unitary intention which is contained in the internal relatedness of the three types of action is expressed in the insight of traditional trinitarian theology: *opera trinitatis ad extra sunt indivisa*.' (Schwöbel 1992: 43)

The unity of God's external operations is not something that flows from a prior metaphysical construal of God's essence, but something that needs to be derived from bottom up, starting and assuming the differentiation of divine actions: 'If we can construe the internal relatedness of the action of God, Father, Son, and Spirit in such a way, we can express the unity of divine agency in the differentiation of God's actions in the divine economy. This is the essential element of truth in the in other ways very problematical thesis of Western trinitarian thought *opera trinitatis ad extra sunt indivisa*.' (Schwöbel 1992: 56-7)

Like Rahner, Schwöbel senses that the difficulty derives from the creeping influence of the metaphysical attributes of God, defined primarily in terms of substance. Such a conception of the attributes of God needs to be reconfigured in terms of action. The only way, he argues, that we can even individuate divine action is if we reformulate the metaphysical attributes of God (omnipotence, omnipresence, eternity, etc.) within the framework of intentional agency. Metaphysical descriptions of divine

attributes exclude, among other things, temporality. But '[p]recisely what is excluded in this way, however, constitutes the necessary conditions for individuating actions and for identifying agents' (Schwöbel 1992: 52). This is also a very important point, in fact related closely to LaCugna's comments about action ascriptions. Unless we are prepared to recognize the reality of temporal and personal differentiation, we shall have no means of individuating divine actions, and more importantly of identifying agents.

Schwöbel does not explain exactly why this is a problem. Nor does he put forward a very substantive defence of the claim that an intentional unity sufficiently expresses the grammar of the problematic principle of the *opera ad extra*. Such a defence is absolutely essential, for, as I will show, there are models of cooperative action which are insufficiently expressive of the unity (and simplicity) of the divine nature. To see this I now turn to the Cappadocian grammar of inseparable operations.

THE CAPPADOCIANS AND INSEPARABLE OPERATIONS

That the Cappadocian fathers affirm the principle of unity of external operations is noncontroversial. Basil the Great affirms it in relation to understanding the work of the Spirit: 'The Holy Spirit is inseparable and wholly incapable of being parted from the Father and the Son [...] in every operation.' (Basil the Great 1999: ch. XVI, sect. 37; see also ch. VI, sect. 15) One of the functions of this principle in Basil's work on the Spirit is to demonstrate the divinity of the Spirit by showing that his actions are at the same time the actions of the Father and the Son. As several writers have shown recently (cf. Holmes 2001; Holmes 2012: 107; Barnes 2001: ch. 7), the Cappadocians use the principle of the unity of external operations as a means of demonstrating a common nature.

The unity of operations is not meant simply to say that Father, Son, and Spirit all do the same *action types*, independently of one another. Such an argument is indeed present in, say, Nyssen. In *Against Eunomius*, he argues that since the Father, Son, and Spirit do the same kinds of actions, they share a unity of power. But unity of power implies unity of nature, hence the Son and the Spirit share in the divine nature.

While this argument is sufficient to establish a unity of divine nature, it still left open the possibility of tritheism. Thus, as Barnes (2001: 299) shows, Gregory of Nyssa shifts, in *On the Holy Trinity* and *On 'Not Three Gods'* to an argument that proceeds from unity of activity to

unity of nature. Unlike the case of human actions, which several people might similarly do without erasing their own proper distinctness and individuality, trinitarian monotheism requires the claim that every divine action is equally participated in by all trinitarian persons (Barnes 2001: 303).

The action of cleansing from sin, for example, is attributed to both Spirit (Rom 8:2, 13) and Christ (1 John 1:9), and God the Father (Isa 1:16-18). Clearly this is not the case of the Son cleansing some, the Spirit others, but both being involved in the same action. As Barnes comments: 'Thus Christ and the Spirit have the same *ergon*, product. But if the two have the same activity, then they must have the same nature. Just as the appearance of the properties illuminating and burning must indicate the same nature, fire, so too much common activity indicate the same nature of the Son and Spirit.' (Barnes 2001: 303)

For Gregory's argument to work, then, it is not sufficient that the two work in common, with the intention of achieving a common end. Rather, they must each be involved in each other's activities. 'Thus,' writes Nyssen, 'since among men the action of each in the same pursuits is discriminated, they are properly called many since each of them is separated from the others within his own environment, according to the special character of his operation. But in the case of the Divine nature we do not similarly learn that the Father does anything by Himself in which the Son does not work conjointly, or again that the Son has any special operation apart from the Holy Spirit; but every operation which extends from God to creation, and is *named according to our variable conceptions of it*, has its origin from the Father, and proceeds through the Son, and is perfected in the Holy Spirit. [...] For this reason the *name derived from the operation is not divided* with regard to the number of those who fulfil it, because *the action of each concerning anything is not separate and peculiar*, but whatever comes to pass, in reference either to the acts of His providence for us, or to the government or constitution of the universe, comes to pass by the action of the Three, yet what does come to pass *is not three things*.' (Gregory of Nyssa 2004: 334)

The above excerpt is extremely careful in the distinctions it is making. They bear directly on my thesis. Nyssen insists that, unlike the operations of man, which although similar and related, are nevertheless ascribed to different agents (identified by plural nouns), the actions of God bear a common agency, of the three persons together. Gregory feels compelled to say this because he is interested in preventing tritheism.

A second distinction made by Gregory is that between our perception of distinction and multiplicity, and the ultimate and transcendent unity of divine action. What appears to us are 'three things', whereas the action of God is really one and indivisible. Human actions are indeed 'separate and peculiar', whereas Triune action is indivisible and unified.

The lack of distinction between what the persons bring about is an essential part of the grammar of the Cappadocian concept. It serves Nyssen's ultimate purpose, of safeguarding the unity and simplicity of the divine essence, as opposed to the division of human nature. And it is precisely 'the unity existing in the action [which] prevents plural enumeration' (Gregory of Nyssa 2004: 335). Temporal distinction is also excluded: 'every good thing and every good name, depending on the power and purpose which is without beginning, is brought to perfection in the power of the Spirit through the Only-begotten God, *without mark of time or distinction (there is no delay, existent or conceived, in the motion of the divine will from the Father, through the Son, to the Spirit)*.' (Gregory of Nyssa 2004: 335)

Let me try to spell out why I think these distinctions are important for the Cappadocians. Take cases of human collective action, for example, the case of a team of builders constructing a house. While all of these builders share a common purpose and common intentions, they each do different actions, some in complete isolation from each other. The person driving the nail, for example, does it in isolation from the one painting the interior walls, and so on. These actions are distinct. Moreover, there is a temporal duration between these actions such that one agent must await the successful completion of other actions before he commences his.

While we can certainly infer a common nature from these activities (these are all men), we shall have to call them by different names. Their activities are sufficiently distinct and different, so that they 'are properly called many', their nature being divisible.

Thus, the Cappadocian construal of the unity of external operations is sufficiently precise to caution against construals of such a unity merely in terms of a common intention. The agencies of Father, Son, and Spirit must be mutually involved in each other, such that the common action of the Trinity cannot be broken into simpler constituent actions. Basil is quite explicit on this latter point: 'the operation of the Father who worketh all in all is not imperfect, neither is the creating work of the Son

incomplete if not perfected by the Spirit.' (Gregory of Nyssa 2004: ch. xvi, sect. 38)

I have chosen to focus on the Cappadocian account of the insepara-bility of trinitarian operations, since the Cappadocian account of the Trinity is often invoked to support so-called 'social Trinitarianism'. My argument is that accounts of this unity in terms of a shared intention are insufficient to preserve the requisite monotheism of trinitarian doctrine. Such accounts of cooperative action have been consistently rejected as anthropomorphic by the Cappadocians. Moreover, the assumption of the Cappadocian approach is that the doctrine of the inseparable operations is not an optional extra, but that it is an implication as well as a presupposition of monotheism. The question is now whether it is possible to account for this inseparability from within a broadly Social Trinitarian framework. However, such a model should also be able to preserve ST's important emphasis on the epistemic significance of revelation. To use the all important example, can the incarnation be predicated specifically to the Son without undermining the inseparability of external operations?

The next sections test the model of collective action (appropriately understood) as an affirmative answer to these questions.

DESCRIPTION RELATIVITY OF ACTION ASCRIPTIONS

Theologians are engaged in a debate over the ontology of divine action. They are asking the question: how many actions are being performed *ad extra* and who (how many?) are the subjects of these actions. Some are insisting that the agent of all *opera ad extra* is the Trinity, taken as a whole. Others, conversely, claim that the divine economy is *composed* of distinct actions, performed by distinct agents.

In their disagreement over the ascription of responsibility (or agency), both sides stand in apparent agreement over the particular descriptions of the action. They apparently refer to the same action. So, for example, both talk about the 'Incarnation' as if how this event is individuated would pose no specific problems whatsoever. The event is clearly individuated, with the only remaining question being whose intentional action explains it.

However, in failing to problematize the very way in which events/ actions such as the incarnation are individuated and described, the two

sides in fact end up talking past each other. What I would like to suggest is that the two sides can in fact live with one another if it is understood that *each individuates the action and describes it in a different way*. Furthermore, when it comes to the economic activity of God, each such activity must be described twice (see Lewis Ayres' (2010: 260-262) use of the concept of *redoublement*), in order to more adequately bring out its nature.

The philosopher of action (and law) Joel Feinberg has coined a term to express this description relativity of action individuation. He has called it the 'accordion effect'. The principle brings out a peculiar characteristic of the ontology of action. This is the fact that actions are not easily identified and described. There is no single easy way to talk about what *S* did. Take this classic example:

> *S is flipping the switch*
> *S is turning on the light*
> *S is illuminating the room*
> *S is preparing to read a book*
> *S is alerting the burglar* (of whom he was unaware)
> *S is startling Mrs. Smith*
> *S is killing Mrs. Smith* (due to a heart condition, aggravated by her being startled).

Feinberg suggests that we can contract an action so as to include only its 'proximal' effects (the light coming on, the room being illuminated, etc.), but we can also expand an action to include more 'distal' effects of this action, some of which may be unintended, and some, indeed, taking place at a different time than the time of my flipping of the switch.

'Fine grained' philosophers of action (see, e.g., Goldman 1971) would argue that this list presents us with multiple actions, and not just a single action identified under a variety of descriptions. 'Coarse-grained' theorists, Feinberg being one of them, insist that there is a single action, which one simply identifies, or picks out under a variety of descriptions.

I will pick up this principle of description-relativity in my discussion of how collective actions may be described. The suggestion will be that the same action could be described in a particular way, so as to ascribe it to the agency of an individual, or described in a different way, so as to ascribe it to the agency of a collective. These descriptions are not mutually exclusive precisely because in their *redoublement* they pick out something about the nature of collective agency.

The operative distinction I am making is between events, i.e. happenings which take place in the world, and actions, talk of which is a way of correlating events and intentions. Events can be explained as actions of agents.

However, as Feinberg has shown, actions themselves can be described in terms of how they are related to a series of effects. Coarse-grained action philosophers such as Donald Davidson would claim that there are only basic actions such as one's movement of the body. The rest, he says, is up to nature. What he means is that there is always a single action, that of moving one's body. Yet this action is described and identified in relation to the multitude of effects it brings about.

There is a remarkable similarity between this 'coarse' approach and classic Western theism, which holds that God's acts in the economy spring from one eternal will of God. As the late C. J. F. Williams put it: it is 'inaccurate to speak here of acts in the plural, of *operationes*. The act of creation is one act, a single decree which says 'Fiat' to the entire history of the universe' (Williams 1994: 242). According to the dominant Thomistic strand in this classic Western theism, there is only one act of God, and that is to be himself. However, there are 'created effects' of this single act of will.

As in the case of Feinberg's accordion, descriptions of the one act of God will vary depending on which created effects serve to identify the action. Yet these will nonetheless remain descriptions of the same collective act, which is that of the Trinity as a whole.

This description-relativity of action ascriptions is particularly interesting in the case of collective actions. I will use an example from Christopher Kutz (2000) to illustrate this. Say a friend of mine and I are preparing a picnic together. I intend to use this as an opportunity to relax, whereas my friend intends to use the picnic as an opportunity to discuss a book. While we are both intending to have picnic together, our intentions about what takes place specifically during the picnic may differ. It can thus rightly be said that 'We are jointly preparing a picnic'. However, it would be wrong to say 'We are jointly preparing an opportunity to discuss a book'. If we describe the effect of our 'making of sandwiches', 'buying drinks', etc., as a picnic, the action can be ascribed to both of us (it is described as a collective action). However, even though we do end up discussing the book during the picnic, at the time of preparing it only one of us was intending that effect. Thus, my friend's action at the time

can certainly be described as 'my friend is preparing an opportunity to discuss the book with me'.

It thus appears that the same action can be made out to be an individual, as well as a collective action. Let us call this 'agency toggling'. This will become significant in terms of describing trinitarian action as being both collective, as well as individual. The crucial factor is to which (intended or non-intended) effects the action is related.

Let me try to show why this description-relativity of action ascriptions is significant in this context. One recent defender of the 'twin principles', Kyle Claunch, in an otherwise fine article makes the following claim: 'for the historic doctrines of inseparable operations and distinct personal appropriations to be coherent when affirmed together, it must be shown how each specific action appropriated distinctly to one person is simultaneously the unique act of the one person and the common act of the three.' (Claunch 2013: 797) For Claunch, however, this means that any action done by either trinitarian person, must be equally ascribed to the Trinity as a whole. Indeed, he does not hesitate to make the claim that 'the act of *assuming human nature* [is] peculiar to the Son, common to all three' (Claunch 2013: 797). Claunch says this in the sense that the subject of the incarnation is the Son, while the principle of the Incarnation is the Trinity as a whole.

The difficulty with the principium/terminus approach (or principle/subject) is (partly) that it removes us from common ways of ascribing actions to subjects, such that we ascribe 'the assumption of human nature' to the whole Trinity, albeit in a way different than it is ascribed to the person of the Son.

My argument, on the contrary, conditions this 'toggling of agency' upon certain redescriptions of the action. The twin principles call for the same action to be ascribed to both the Trinity as a whole, as well as to an individual person. My suggestion is that while it is indeed the same action that is to be thus ascribed, the action is picked out and identified differently.

The action of God in the economy is one and identical with his will. However, as his action unfolds, it brings out a variety of created effects. Now some of these effects are more akin to the distinctive personality of one or the other divine persons and are thus ascribed to it. For example, the revelatory and teaching dimensions of God's action are appropriately related to the Logos, while the sanctifying effects are

attributed to the Spirit. However, neither of these descriptions of divine action is sufficient. We have covered the ground only once. We now have to *redouble* these descriptions by ascribing the action to the whole Trinity. But, as I've argued, we will ascribe to the Trinity the same action, yet under a different description. *Pace* Claunch, the Trinity does not assume human nature. Rather, the Trinity can be said to save, to draw humanity to itself, whereas 'assuming human nature' is only a dimension of salvation and union with God. All the divine persons can be said to save and to draw humanity to Godself. Yet, when that same action of 'redemption' is picked out in terms of one of its effects (assuming human nature), it is only ascribed to the person of the Son.

This asymmetry is a common feature of collective actions. Take for example the collective action, 'The United States declares war on Japan'. Given that such a declaration is accomplished through the signing of an executive order, the following sequence of action descriptions is pretty common sense:

– Roosevelt moves his left arm
– Roosevelt moves the pen on the paper
– R leaves ink marks on the paper
– R signs the document
– R declares war
– The United States declares war on Japan

Or take the example of a soccer match, where the leading team has a one goal advantage. In the final seconds of the match, a defender fouls from the position of last defender, thus preventing the opposing forward from scoring. Per the current rules of the game, the defender is red carded and ejected from the game. As it turns out the resultant penalty shot is wide off the mark and his team goes on to win the game. Consider now how his action might be described:

– Defender X trips forward Y
– X fouls forward Y
– X prevents Y from scoring
– X saves his team
– X eliminates himself from the game
– X's team preserves its lead [insofar as X acts on behalf of the team, his action is ascribed to the team]
– X's team wins the game [while it can be said that the team has been winning the game every second of the play, it is especially true of

this particular moment of the game, concentrated in the action of this individual player.]

What is peculiar about both of these cases is that *while each individual agent (Roosevelt and defender X) acts on behalf of the collective and therefore it can be generally said that the collective acts through them, it is only under certain descriptions that their individual actions can be ascribed to the collective.* There is a break-off point in the movement of the accordion, so to speak, where – given the same action description – toggling agencies won't work.

So, for example, it makes sense to say that 'R declares war' and that 'the USA declares war'; but it doesn't make sense to say 'the USA leaves ink marks on the paper', or 'the USA moves its left arm'. Similarly, it will not make sense to say 'X's team eliminates itself out of the game'.

These examples are hopefully sufficient to illustrate the principle that appropriate 'agency toggling' is conditional upon specific action descriptions. They also show how one can equally ascribe one action to an individual agent, as well as to a collective.

TWO TYPES OF COLLECTIVE ACTIONS

There is one major hurdle, though, that still needs to be cleared. The patristic witness is consistently rejecting 'cooperative' models of relating the three personal agencies. But collective action seems to be precisely cooperative action.

I will argue, though, that not all types of collective action have the form which has worried the Cappadocians and Augustine. To flesh this out we need to turn to a brief phenomenology of collective action.

An essential rule of the ancient grammar is that any action of any triune person needs to be understood as inherently involving the action of all the others. The question, then, is how does the collective action model construe the relationships between component actions? To answer that question I have distinguished between two kinds of collective actions.

The first type of collective action construes the relationship between component actions, and between the component actions and the larger actions in an instrumental and causal way. We may define it thus:

> *ICA(x): An action x is a collective action of an instrumental kind if and only if x is a collective action and the individual actions of which it is composed help cause the collective outcome.*

In such actions, the common collective action is 'made up' of its component parts. Examples of such actions abound, from building a house, to playing soccer, winning a war, pushing a piano up the stairs. It is quite clear that the theological usefulness of this type of collective action is very limited. The powers involved are potentially too different to warrant the ascription of different natures. So, for example, both master and serf can collectively work on building the house. Or, to use an Augustinian example, both master and student together sculpt the statue.

We may identify, however, another kind of collective action. Let us call it collective action of a constitutive kind:

> *CCA(x): An action x is a collective action of an instrumental kind if and only if x is a collective action and the individual actions of which it is composed are necessarily constitutive of the collective outcome.*

Take the example of two friends walking together, dancing together or two lovers kissing. One might say that the individual components of the collective action are *analytic* to the collective action as such. This is not simply a case of the collective action being completed by these individual acts, but it being constituted as such by these. Our walking together is not a collective action composed out of my walking with you, which makes possible your walking with me. The individual actions are conditions for each other's possibility, one might say, as well as for the possibility of the collective act as a whole. If you stop walking with me, I may not keep on walking *with you* (although I may keep walking). The action of each agent is embedded and involved in the action of each other agent.

The case of kissing, or of sexual intercourse, of procreation, might be even better examples of CCA, which is probably why the matrimonial metaphors were so popular in explaining the concept of *perichoresis*.

I am now in a position to cash out the suggestion that triune action in the economy might be understood after the model of collective action, of an appropriate kind. I suggest that we can understand Triune action in the economy on the model of CCA. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit each act notionally, but these proper actions will only be described in their full ontological totality if they are also described as collective actions (of a constitutive kind) of the whole Trinity. Hence, the outcome of trinitarian action is not composed out of the sum of notional acts. Neither do these notional acts cause each other. Rather, for each trinitarian action in the

economy, such an action is equally constituted by the notional acts of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Hence, the doctrine of appropriation simply enforces the idea that theological descriptions of such actions must aim for their ontological totality, which entails ascribing them to both individual persons, as well as to the whole Trinity.

TRIUNE COLLECTIVE ACTION

The first point I wish to make is that an understanding of the unity of triune action in terms of a unity of intention is inadequate – if left without further specification. Neither can collective intentionality, as Searle (1990) has shown, be reduced to individual intentionality plus a set of shared beliefs. Searle's solution, to talk about a primitive collective intentionality in the absence of a primitive trans-individual self, is unpersuasive.

Might this be, one wonders, one of these occasions where the doctrine of God supplies precisely the kind of ontology which is needed to make sense of human collective action? Might we say that the cooperation between individual selves dimly mirrors the supreme cooperation between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit? In such a case, it would make theological sense to say that the only truly collective action is God's *opera ad extra*, since human collective action fails to unify disparate individual selves sufficiently into a pure collective intention. While the demonstration of this point is not my aim here, it does indicate, I believe the fertility of thinking about divine action in terms of collective agency.

Searle's insistence on an exclusively individual intentionality, one might speculate, is precisely a symptom of human failure to appreciate the reality of the trans-individual. It is precisely this myopia that Augustine and Thomas, as well as the Cappadocians were speaking to when they explained the doctrine of appropriation 'on account of our weakness'. This should not be read, as I argued, in the sense that God is intentionally cloaking his true unified agency behind what is only an apparent diversity of individual actions. Rather, these 'diverse' agencies are truly unified, but due to our weakness we are often unable to see the unity. And so we split the operation of the Father from the Son, we distinguish between the God of the Old Testament and the God of Jesus Christ, and so on. It is our minds, trained on distinction and fed on finitude, which fail to see what God has revealed of himself all along.

Such a perception involves learning to identify the action in a different way, learning to describe it as the action of the whole Trinity. The entailment of this is that we have never adequately described e.g., the Incarnation, as the action of the Son, until we have also described it as the action of the whole Trinity. Each created effect of divine grace must be gone over twice in our efforts to bear witness to its truth.

Merely to talk about the unity of intention between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is not sufficiently preserving of trinitarian monotheism. Such intentions might still be the individual intentions of persons sharing a composite essence.

What the doctrine of the Trinity supplies is precisely a way of accounting for the Triune we-intentionality in ways which does not reduce it to the I-intentionality of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, as manifested in their discrete actions. The principle of the *opera trinitatis ad extra sunt indivisa* is always prefixed by another one: *opera trinitatis ad intra sunt divisa*. Thus, the Triune intentionality manifested in the economy is identical with the perichoresis of the individual intentionality of the Father, Son, and Spirit, coalescing together in the intra-trinitarian counsel to form this unitary intention.

C. J. F. Williams suggested the analogy of a 'group mind' (Leftow's language). While each divine person has its own will and knowledge, the three wills coalesce in love such that they are entirely open to one another, 'so that each adopts those [knowledge and will] of the other, sees with his eyes, as it were. The barriers that keep us from knowing each other's hearts, save fleetingly [...] are there down eternally.' (Williams (1994: 241)

This makes a further personalist correction to the classic language. The incarnation is appropriate to the Son not simply because of the proper way in which the Son shares in the divine substance (as only begotten of the Father), but also because of his own intention in the divine counsel. The incarnation, then, truly represents the personal identity of the Son, his personal wish and desire.

The crucial difference, though, from reductive models, is that the historical (economic) activity of the Son cannot be fully understood unless it is *redoubled*, i.e., unless it is described both in terms of an individual intention, as well as in terms of a unified divine intention (constituted by the eternal willing of Father, Son, and Spirit).

We can now think of the *opera trinitatis ad extra* in terms of an unfolding collective action of God. This action, however, must be

appropriately understood. It is to be understood on the analogy of a collective action of a constitutive kind (CCA). To speak of a constitutive relation between the actions of the Father, Son, and Spirit best preserves the Cappadocian principle of mutual indwelling, without falling into non-personalist language.

It is still possible to describe an individual component of a CCA as an individual action. 'The dancer is putting his left foot forward'; or, 'she is pressing her lips against his'. But this, by itself, will never account for the full richness of the action, unless a description is given of the action in terms of the collective intentionality involved: 'They are kissing'; 'They are dancing.'

A final word is needed about the principle of appropriation. We are forced to lament appropriation as a mere linguistic device only if we assume that there is only one possible ontology of actions. The action of the Son is not merely appropriated to him, in the sense that the *real* agent is the Trinity as a whole. But neither is it an individual action which contributes causally to the larger divine collective action. Rather, the action of the Son is mutually constitutive of the actions of the Father and the Spirit, as well as of the action of the three considered as a whole.

Appropriation is indeed a device that is due to our finiteness, for we are not able to entertain these dimensions of description all at once. Moreover, appropriation does not mean that the distinctions we make (between various actions and agencies) are not indicative of a real *taxis* of the divine action. Rather, it means that whatever these distinctions refer to, it is not of such a nature as to divide his being and action.

I believe this approach preserves the intentions of both unifiers and multipliers. The unity of God's essence is protected by the claim that the divine collective action is not composed of discrete individual actions and intentions, to which it might be reduced. There is a prior triune collective intentionality, which I have localized in the divine 'counsel'. Such an intentionality is not constructed from the created intentionality of, say, the man Jesus – these are effects in time of the one action of God. In that sense, the immanent Trinity grounds the economic Trinity.

On the flip side, such an account preserves the reality and revelatory significance of the individual actions which compose/constitute the one collective action of the Trinity. Non-personalist and modalistic language is avoided in favour of a thinking which prefers personal action to being, or better yet, subordinates being to personal action.

RESPONDING TO SOME OBJECTIONS

In the previous pages I have tried to supplement the Social-Trinitarian account of the unity of external operations by (a) appealing to the description relativity of action ascriptions and by (b) extending the unity between token actions beyond mere shared intentions, such that the actions of the Father, Son, and Spirit are understood after the analogy of collective actions of a constitutive kind. There are two stated advantages of this model. First, the unity which characterizes their respective agencies is sufficiently monotheistic. Secondly, specific actions are truly ascribed to individual triune persons, without erasing the fundamental unity of their operation.

Does my approach to inseparable works in terms of CCA sufficiently preserve the distinctness of the persons and their respective actions? Both the social account as well as the Latin approach account for this distinctness in their own ways. Social Trinitarians simply ascribe distinct actions to individual persons, while classically Western trinitarians refer different created effects to the various persons as distinct modes or 'dimensions' of the same action. In tightening the unity of operations I seem to have abandoned both the Latin dimensional approach, which in some cases can be quite concrete, but also a 'distinctive roles' approach characteristic of ST. While I may in this way have avoided the charge of an 'Olympian' approach to the Trinity, it seems as if I have overdetermined the collective action in such a way that each of the persons in themselves can in fact fully account for the collective outcome. As Leftow puts it, 'It could be that the Three overdetermine the divine action, each of them contributing enough of his own to fully account for the divine effect.' (Leftow 2002: 238)

The overdetermination problem does not apply to my account since the individual actions of CCA are not superfluous to the collective outcome, but rather constitutive. This means that each individual action is a condition for the possibility of the other individual actions of the collective members. While together they mutually produce a collective effect, each action taken individually has its own form. Thus, one of the dance partners is pirouetting, while the other is completing another move.

Similarly, the Son's becoming incarnate and the Spirit's indwelling of believers are constitutive of one another as moves within the eternal saving action of God. But this sounds counter-intuitive. How might the

contemporary action of the Spirit be constitutive of the long-past action of the Son in the incarnation? This is where appropriate description comes in. In fact, the action of the Son in the economy is one and the same with the action of the Spirit. However, because we have identified the action in terms of one of its created effects (incarnation, indwelling), the statement above seems mistaken. If, however, we bear in mind the distinction between the action in itself and the created effects in relation to which we describe the action, the contradiction disappears.

A second objection presents itself at this point. It can be charged that my argument, although moving ST in the direction of a stricter monotheism, still insufficiently safeguards the unity of God. Two people dancing from all eternity are, after all, still two people. The objection could perhaps be stated in Nyssen's language: although Father, Son, and Spirit act in a way that is mutually constitutive, they may still be called in the plural.

In a certain sense, to fully answer this objection would require mounting a fully fledged defence of ST. This is clearly beyond the scope of this paper. Moreover, my argument should not be taken as the expression of a preference for ST. What I set out to do is to explore the ways in which the doctrine of inseparable operations might be defended, should one choose ST.

I do think, however, that an appropriate use of the collective action analogy can strengthen ST's monotheist stance. This model stresses that the discrete actions of the trinitarian persons in the economy should not be taken as a dogmatically certain instance of revelation, without qualification. Such a qualification is provided by the axiom that every action of each person is constituted by the actions of the other two. Together these actions are caught up in an eternal unity of pure act. Barth is exactly right to write that 'if we confused the analogy with the thing itself, if we equated the distinctions that are comprehensible to us with those that are not, in other words, if we thought we had comprehended the essence of God in comprehending his work, we should be plunged at once into the error of tritheism' (Barth 1975: 373).

I am not convinced, though, that merely appealing to the mutual-constitution of the economic acts is sufficient to establish monotheism. As I have already indicated, the particular distribution of agencies within the economic collective act is reflective of the eternal *taxis* of the inter-personal relationships themselves. It is primarily at this level that a defence of monotheism has to be mounted.

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HOW ARE WE ARE TO THINK OF GOD'S FREEDOM?

PAUL HELM

University of London

Abstract. The paper discusses two conceptions of divine freedom. The first, Hugh McCann's, proposes that God is a timelessly eternal act, whose agency is not deliberative and who, in that act, creates himself and the contents of his will. God is such an act. Following discussion of this view, its costs and benefits, a more traditional account of God's freedom, in which he possesses vestigial alternativity, the freedom to choose an alternative should there have been a sufficient reason to do so.

THE STRANGENESS OF GOD

God, the concept of whom is routinely discussed by the bulk of Christian philosophers and philosophical theologians, is incredibly strange, though this fact is seldom pondered. Perhaps this is because of a professional familiarity with a concept or concepts of God is conflated with the being of God himself. Such a God is said to be an unbounded or infinite spirit. Perhaps he exists in three persons. But if so this adds to the strangeness. What is an infinite spirit? Maybe one that exists at all times and in all places. Taking fright at this, we might say, no, God cannot exist at all places and times, but he has *access* to all times and all places. But is this an improvement, as far as intelligibility is concerned? Do these modifications take away any of the initial strangeness? It does not seem so. Or consider this, does such a God have a personality, a preference or schedule of preferences; a goal or goals for the attainment of which he adopts means? Or, having wonderfully brought the universe into being, and upholding it, is his posture principally reactive to changes in

the creation. Having initiated the universe, does he restrict himself to tinkering with it?

We think of him, perhaps, as a most perfect being, or a most perfect trio of persons in one perfect godhead. We think, with Anselm, that what is great-making, or what constitutes a perfection, is what it is better to be than not to be. This infinite spirit is thus good in some sense, but in what sense? Must this being be worthy of worship? But what sort of goodness is worthy of what sort of worship? Maybe what is worthy of worship is a being that has those properties which we would like to have had we been God!

Currently, I guess, if we were to poll the professionals, what would have the vote is a God who has created human beings with libertarian free will, which justifies many if not all of the incalculable ills and evils of this vale of tears, and which at the same time provides us professionals with an interesting agenda of problems and possible solutions to them. One such problem is the consistency of the existence of such a God with the moral evil, and the postulation of a God who is in time, in order to give men and women sufficient elbow room to choose to do evil things and he reacts to them. Nevertheless to have the prospect of entering into a dialogue with God, there has to be a relationship with him that has some seriously symmetrical features. So the guild of philosophical theologians definitely has something to show for all the ratiocination of its members; some proposals, but also a raft of remaining problems that require 'further research'.

I do not say these things to poke fun at professional philosophical theology. For I myself am implicated in all this. In fact I am perhaps deeper in the mire than is this outlook I have been sketching. Perhaps the best spirit in which to try to get clearer about some of all this is one of both attachment and detachment; attachment to a particular point of view, and detachment from that point of view in a readiness to help others try to get straight on their point of view, while soliciting for similar help oneself.

There is another thing to keep in mind. Philosophy, or at least the reaching of philosophical conclusions, is about trade-offs between costs and benefits. Any definite philosophical view seems to be in the same plight. What is a limitation in the one case is not in the other, and vice versa. In this spirit I shall in this paper attempt to discuss the freedom of a timelessly eternal God. In what follows I shall try to keep this strangeness of God in mind also, in this case because of his transcendence.

Strangeness that expresses itself philosophically in a concern about even the conceptuality to be employed in trying to think about God.

To start with, in the first part of the paper, I try to see the freedom of God through the eyes of one current philosophical theologian who does indeed recognize this element of strangeness in theism, Hugh McCann. This account is to be found in his *Creation and the Sovereignty of God.* While there is much that is thoughtful and provocative about what he argues, I shall towards the end of the paper return to a more conventional way of thinking about this deeply mysterious business, though there are versions of this type of view that might profitably borrow some of what McCann has to say.

MCCANN ON DIVINE FREEDOM

Hugh McCann is someone whose outlook on divine sovereignty, considered in the most general terms, is one that I share. While his book is wide in scope, elaborating views in philosophical theology for which McCann is best known – a robust account of divine sovereignty, including God's timelessness, an occasionalistic view of God's creating and upholding of the creation, and a libertarian view of human freedom – what I wish to comment on here is what might be regarded as the book's central issue, certainly the culmination of McCann's fascinating discussion, the issue of God's freedom.

What he takes to be the dominant picture of God's freedom, freedom as the exercise of a deliberative choice among possible worlds, is rejected by McCann. This view

> [i]magines that the enterprise of creation begins with God deliberating about the alternatives. In an ontological if not a temporal sense, there is a phase prior to God creating the world in which God surveys the available options – namely, the (presumably infinite) set of worlds that are logically possible – and chooses from them the world he will create. (p. 158)

His rejection is prompted by a concern that the currently received view entails an abridgement of divine sovereignty. For on this view God deliberates among possible worlds which – to exaggerate a little – he *finds* among the contents of his knowledge, his *natural knowledge* as it is sometimes called. These possibilities, being *there*, cannot be said to exist as a result of his creative action.

McCann rejects this general approach, no matter how it is worked out, because of the way that it compromises divine sovereignty, and the nature of creation. Further, he holds that the simplicity of God has no place for a deliberative view, for it threatens to destroy God's freedom. For on such an account God has all his properties essentially, and if so then no being has any choice at all as to what its essential attributes are to be. (pp. 213ff.) He has no elbow-room to make free choices and to bring them to pass. Without such choice God's free will and thus his sovereignty would be qualified.

Another objection that McCann has is this: suppose that there is a best possible world that God deliberates over, that 'there is only one that is the best, one that will stand out to an all-knowing and all-loving God as the possible world most worthy of being realized in existence' (p. 158). This qualifies divine freedom. McCann says:

> [I]n order for God to be God he must from eternity possess all the properties that are essential to him, so that their presence would be presupposed for any existence-conferring activity we might attribute to him. (p. 216)

How then could any of these properties be the causal products of his will?

> God's nature must, then, be ontologically presupposed in his activity as creator and so cannot also be an ontological product of that activity. (p. 216)

Which returns us to the problem of God's will. (p. 217) If everything about God's nature is essential, then this is as a consequence of universal necessitation. But '[I]t might be possible to argue that that although it is indeed true that all of God's deeds are essential to him, even so he is not subject to any necessity in their performance' (p. 219). There are no alternatives, no possible worlds actualizable but not actualized, since this, the actual world is a product of his essence, and it is impossible that he is free to have created an alternative.

> [I]f all that he does counts as a manifestation of his essence, then whether his actions are necessary or not, there will still be a problem as to how they can be 'up to him' in any truly libertarian sense. (p. 219)

McCann avoids such necessitarianism by virtue of the fact that the act which is God is the manifestation of his free creativity.

So in the light of the difficulties regarding necessitation, McCann makes a proposal of a more radical kind respecting God's freedom. Leaving aside the idea that the divine nature might be the effect of some other, non-divine source, McCann thinks that an alternative to this might be 'to treat God's nature as voluntarily derived, as somehow owing to the operation of his creative will' (p. 214). God is 'event' or act. So God is not a substance, but nevertheless the eternal act which is God has essential properties. I shall return to the problem of divine necessitarianism later on as part of my own suggestions, but I wish first to look at the idea that God himself is the product of his own creative will.

DIVINE CIRCULARITY

Consider first the problem. McCann makes appeal to Alvin Plantinga's 'sovereignty aseity intuition' (Plantinga 1980: 34), that is, the intuition that God is in no way dependent on or subject to anything beyond his control, including the idea that God's properties may dwell in some independent realm and be exemplified in God, that their existence in that realm may thus be ontologically prior to God. McCann does not hold to the idea that God has a 'structure' such that certain features are ontologically prior to other of his features. So he does not allow that God's essence is posterior to anything he does. God's perfections, which are not be understood abstractly, such as being omniscient and omnipotent, 'cannot pertain to God's nature without his say-so; if they did, his sovereignty would be as such impugned as if they had independent existence as well' (p. 214).

What does McCann propose? In respect of God's relation to his creation God is best thought of as a kind of primordial timeless event.

> He is not reactive or passive toward anything, awaits no prompting in order to be manifested in any respect, and is not modeled on any archetype. God is, rather, fully completely spontaneous – nothing held back, nothing hedged, nothing in doubt or subordinated, and by the present account utterly without dependency of any kind. (p. 228)

God is, essentially, an act of free will – an act with no prior determination of any kind, in which he freely undertakes to be and to do all that he is and does. The effect of this is profound and dramatic. Far from escaping his sovereignty, God's having the nature he does turns out to be *in itself* an exercise of his sovereignty. That is, the reality that is God's having the nature he does is itself the action of his freely undertaking to have it,

and all that is essential to him is grounded in this exercise of freedom. It does not follow that God confers existence, or any other aspect of his nature, on himself, in the sense that his act of so doing is prior to or causally productive of the active being present. But McCann claims that his nature falls under his own sovereignty, *thus avoiding the circularity problem*. For even though his nature is essential to God, it is 'up to him' in the sense that there is nothing that makes it what it is beyond the very exercise of voluntaries that constitutes it. (pp. 231-2)

McCann's is an initially attractive idea, because God-as-act coheres nicely with traditional ideas of God as pure act, and seems to do justice to the idea of God's absolute sovereignty. And it does justice, he thinks, to Aquinas's position that 'it is in willing his own being that God also wills the being of all other things' (p. 229). So, as McCann puts it, God is this eternal act, which includes God's willing the actual world, the power of the act also being a part of God's perfection. His perfections are identical with his act of creating the universe. (p. 229)

SOME COMMENTS

Sovereignty does not go so far as Descartes' 'universal possibilism' as characterized in Plantinga's *Does God Have a Nature?* (Plantinga 1980: 95f.), according to which even the laws of logic are only contingent. Perhaps McCann would say that such a question is not even askable? We shall see him making a move like this later on.

Initially this looks to be a case of an act without an agent, for the agent *is* the act. Otherwise we are back to the deliberative, possible worlds way of thinking. '[T]he reality of God's having the nature he does is itself the action of God's freely undertaking to have it, and all that is essential to him is grounded in this exercise of freedom.' (pp. 231-2) This is not only an interesting and unusual way of thinking of God's transcendence and his perfection, it creates difficulties.

Let us think of the concern which prompted this *tour d'esprit*, that of the ontological priority of divine perfections over God himself. On McCann's proposal,

> [W]hile God is not self-creating in the sense of causing himself to be or conferring existence on himself, he is creatively disposed toward his nature, in that that nature finds its first and only reality in the completely spontaneous act of God Intending to have that nature – that act that is God himself. (p. 232)

It might be asked: Isn't being creatively disposed a feature of God's prior nature? And doesn't being disposed indicate passivity in God?

What God creates is in turn both God's existence and his having libertarian freedom. What is this character due to? Not presumably to God who is unfolded in it, its product, though perhaps a product that he is creatively disposed to be. Of course the act does not have temporal parts, but it does have parts, or seems to. Part of the difficulty here is the sheer unfamiliarity of the proposal. If the traditional doctrine of divine simplicity is certainly difficult to grasp, how much more that of an eternal, free act which grounds God's nature? McCann recognizes this in allowing that while the doctrine of divine simplicity requires a collapse of the distinction between subject and attribute, and that his proposal that God is an actual state of affairs requires this separation, it compromises the traditional picture, in which what God is is logically prior to what God wills. As he doubts that any other views can do justice to divine simplicity in the traditional sense, the gain in the view he is advocating must lie elsewhere.

One gain is that God is a state of affairs, like Socrates acting wisely. Yet God does not change; he is not a series of such states of affairs. Nevertheless we can say that he is 'his existent nature, his being, an actual dynamic state to which existence itself is essential and upon which all else that is real depends' (p. 228), and by 'all else' McCann means not only what exists in time, but *abstracta* of various kinds, but it is not clear that these include all those which earlier led to the circularity problem. Though McCann does say that '[God| is not modeled on any archetype' (p. 228). Is he the contents of this act? He is the act behaving thusly – being goodness and justice and whatever else constitutes a perfect act. He is act, not reaction, an act of complete spontaneity. God is what he becomes, not by any sort of temporal process, but in a sort of timeless 'moment'.

Let us return to some of the difficulties in the traditional view that prompted this. For example, the circularity problem arises when we think that God may have all universals under his sovereign creation. God does not exercise his will, on this view, but he *is* an exercise of will. Hence he cannot deliberate. That is a benefit for McCann, for whom God transcends all modality. (p. 235) So how does he deal with this? God does not just happen to have the attributes that he has – that would be an abridgement of his freedom, having attributes that were just given, or 'came to him', and so were not his as a result of a sovereign

act. But he *is* an exercise of will, and the 'one thing that cannot happen with an exercise of will is that from the agent's perspective, it should be a matter of happenstance' (p. 231). So the act is an act of sovereignty? An act of free will, but not an act of anybody? The act itself is somebody.

It is hard to see how McCann can consistently say 'God is essentially, an act of free will – an act with no prior determination of any kind, in which he freely undertakes to be and to do all that he is and does' (p. 231). We cannot say that God finds himself in an act for there is no passivity in God. God is free for McCann because there is an absence of independent states that have a determining or inclining force on what he may do, the spontaneity that is characteristic of action, and intrinsic intentionality. But besides this there is not what is often sought in libertarian freedom, namely alternativity. (p. 234) We shall return to this point.

But can this creative act that is God be thought of as exercising deliberation between possible outcomes that are present before his mind? There is no process of selection, no deliberativeness about what he does, nor whatever may be the absence of deliberativeness. His nature is essential to him in that it is essential to his creating. (p. 230) God is identical with the act, but also (it seems) the subject of the act. Can he be both together?

That is, it is not clear that McCann's idea of God as an act of free will helps us with the circularity problem. The God who is the act of free will presumably has a character in the act, but not a prior character. God and this one libertarian (in a qualified sense yet to be discussed) act are indistinguishable. We may gain some help from the thought that God does not develop in stages or through stages, for this is a timelessly eternal act, from beginning to end (as it were). And there is no distinction within that act of a timelessly eternal God and what that God wills. For on this view there is no distinction between God and what God is the agent of respecting himself, and possibly in his creation *ad extra*. The temporal continuum of the creation and all it contains is grounded in the one eternal act. Yet this act which is God is one 'without any prior determination', though 'he freely undertakes to be and to do all that he is and does' (p. 251). God is what he is and does after this free act, or in the free act, which is an act that is free in three essential features; the absence of any determining cause, spontaneity, and intrinsic intentionality.

God avoids subjection to modality by being free, and the freedom from modality is a bar to asking questions about the modal status of what he creates. The actual world is possibly only possible, or it is possibly

necessary, but we cannot pursue the question of which it is. (p. 231) How can McCann distinguish between the status of God's powers in creation and that of what he creates, and so avoid pantheism? Well, the world that God creates is part of God's creating action, but are not contingency and alternativity at the creaturely level embedded within this world?

And there is the further problem of an eternalist making an act or action the absolutely most basic thing in reality. There is the question of an action that is eternal, which takes up no time. I shall postpone this for a moment. In addition there's the question of how God thinks of or in this act. Does God pursue an enterprise or project the characterization, and hence the description and understanding, of that which is logically posterior to his undertaking it? No, God does not perform the act, he *is* the act. Does God exist only when the act is complete? But the act is durationless. It is in the occurrence of this durationless act occurring (atemporally) that God's creative resources come to have a character, and he to realize what that character is. But God cannot be said to learn in this process, because learning requires states of passivity, which God does not possess. Logical moments do duty for what would be temporal moments for an action performed in time.

I'm an enthusiastic atemporalist and resort (as do others) to 'logical moments' to try to get things straight; a device to make distinctions rather than divisions in eternity. But I have an Ockhamist conscience about multiplying such moments. Sometimes they seem to do full duty for temporal moments in eternity! But I think that McCann uses them sparingly, but perhaps he needs to use them more to explain away the difficulties.

As I understand it, in this one indivisible timeless moment, this eternal act or action, the distinction between God in himself and as he is to us cannot be expressed, for God is eternally both God as he is in himself and in that he is God for us, the God of creation and redemption. So there is no basis for a distinction between God *in se* and God *quoad nos*.

God's will is the act of willing. But that act has contents which can be separately discussed, and distinct powers and properties which are to be considered distinctly from their exercise. The first alternative seems to go against the requirement that God's act, himself, is without any prior determination. He is what he is eternally in the act. Let us suppose the act; then it is presumably an action with a willing of finite effects, an immense universe and all that it contains, unimaginably gigantic and of amazing detail all the way down, yet in some sense bounded. Does God know what

the act that is himself is or is to be? So is his foreknowledge a property manifested in an act which a willing of finite effects or consequences, an action of creation. And what of deliberation? Throughout his book McCann is suspicious of a deliberative picture of God's action, in which God selects one from among an infinite number of possibilities prior to some act. But McCann can hardly wish to endorse the proposal of God as an act of free will is mindless, but its mindedness is in the act, for God has no mind which can be considered prior to the act. Some of this sounds pantheistic, but that sound can be removed if we bear in mind the distinction between God and his creation.

So while there is much that is fascinating about McCann's proposal there are also numerous problems with it. There is, at the root, the basic problem of everything on the 'being' and the 'decree' side of God, being a component in an eternal act or action. Of course what is planned in this act includes temporal sequences, a changing creation, but as far as the decree of God is concerned it is one timeless moment. How are we to understand this? As an action that takes up no time. No time here must mean no time, and not just a very short time, like the time it takes to blink, but no time at all. Can sense be made of such a timeless moment? But within that moment it is necessary to differentiate between, say, the end of the action, and the means for the achievement of the end or ends of the action, a distinction which can only be logical or rational in which the means has only logical priority to the end. There are numerous goals to be achieved in this timeless moment. (I realize that these questions are pertinent to eternalism per se, if they are pertinent at all)

Finally, is God free? On the account God knows/intends that his free action has the features we have noticed. McCann is a strong libertarian where it is possible to be, but reckons that this eternal action of God falls outside the categories of libertarianism as he believes these apply to the creature.

A MORE TRADITIONAL PICTURE

In contrast to this fascinating but very difficult idea of McCann's, I wish to offer a criterion of freedom of a more traditional, in McCann's sense a 'deliberative' (with qualifications) account of God's freedom. Some of what this involves has come out by implication in our discussion of McCann, so here we can be briefer.

I think that many current philosophical theologians have abandoned the idea of offering metaphysical criteria for the Creator-creature distinction, for example, criteria such as the Creator is timeless and space-less and so changeless, the creature temporal and spatial and liable to change and so. Such a distinction has been replaced by a the operation of a sliding scale so that God's immutability is liable to be parsed as God's resolve not to change; temporality replaces timelessness, etc., and God's relation to space is rather like a person's relation to his body when it is functioning normally. His omniscience is conditioned by the character of the universe he has chosen, or by his own resolve to be ignorant about aspects of the future.

When considering divine freedom a basic question is: are the ways in which philosophers discuss creaturely libertarian free will and determinism of help in discussing the freedom of the Creator? I think that a general answer to this question depends on how anthropomorphic the idea of God is taken to be, and that in turn depends on to what extent God and creatures in his creation share properties or predicates. If God is in time then he shares the property of *being in time* with ourselves for on most views we are in time. But even if not, even if God is 'outside' time as we say, then both he and ourselves share the property of being interested in what goes on in time, say. But then we have the problem of how like our interests are God's interests. And similarly with space, and morality, and ontology, and so on.

The currently conventional way to approach the question of God's freedom as 'deliberative' means that God becomes the Creator by actualizing one amongst many possible worlds, which are *there*, in the mind of God as sets of possibilities just as he the Creator is there and the prime actuality (e.g., Rowe 2005). McCann is very exercised, as we have seen, by the circularity problem. Indeed his discussion that leads to his account of divine freedom, and the discomfort it causes, is dominated by it. This deliberative view is less exercised by it. It seems to me that God's necessarily having the glorious character that he has is the stopping place in any investigation of the scope of God's sovereignty. The question 'And who made God?' shows a certain intelligence but one which has not yet tuned in to the grammar of God, to the fact that God is the one of whom it makes no sense to ask that question, because of his aseity or necessity. In a parallel way to ask, did God simply find himself with the character he has? Or did he in some sense give himself that character, or endorse it, having in that way a God-only sovereignty over himself? Is not this

also a bit like the young boy? Our 'sovereignty-aseity intuition' may be strong, but it is not so strong that it covers God's sovereignty over his own essence or being, surely. Any more than it reaches to the 'universal possibilism' of Descartes, as Plantinga calls it. Where did God get the idea of perfect goodness from, and how did he invest himself with whatever it connotes? These seem ill-tuned questions. On a more theological note, to think of God as the self-creator, however hedged about with questions we cannot answer because we don't know how too, looks like a violation of the creator-creature distinction.

But that's not to say that in turning away from the more extreme implications of the circularity problem, it is necessary to turn away from all the proposals that McCann makes. We may think of the deliberative model as open to some of the McCann treatment as well. At least, I shall try this out. In the Genesis account we find that the object of his activity was 'without form and dark'. This is not the eternal formless matter of the ancients, nor (perhaps) a phase of an unformed physical universe, or not only that. Maybe we can take this phrase to embrace not only a physical void but also a conceptual void at the creaturely level until concepts are created as an aspect of the Creator's sovereignty. And how are concepts created? By creating kinds of thing, possibilities being imaginative extensions of what is actual. At the creaturely level at least, possibility may depend upon actuality (Ross 1986).

THE CRITERION OF DIVINE FREEDOM

I wish to take up a possibility raised by McCann but dismissed by him, that God's activity as creator is not *wholly* a matter of his essential nature. (p. 219) Deliberation is a cost to be borne. This account will be deliberate in structure, but a deliberate act in my sense would not involve full alternativity, at least not straightforwardly.

We are familiar with the difference between senses of necessity: *Necessarily, if the table is brown then the table is coloured* and *The table is necessarily coloured.* So there is a parallel difference between *Necessarily, if God decrees/foreknows that the universe is created then the universe is created*, in which the necessity of the creation follows a divine act, but not otherwise; and *The universe is necessarily created*. Given this, there could not fail to be a universe.

Expressed in biblical terms, this contrast is between 'From everlasting to everlasting you are God' and 'You return man to dust' (Ps: 90 2-3).

The decree of God is contingent as in 'could have been otherwise'; it is not sufficient that it is contingent in the sense of simply 'not intended or foreseen'. Divine action would not be free unless it was contingent in the first sense. So the question is: How is the contingency of divine action to be understood?

Let us suppose that the divine decreeing of this universe is not a part of God's essence, due to it alone. How are we to think of this? We might propose a test of freedom of this sort: In order to be free in the sense of being a true alternativity, God's decree that A happen and that B not happen must be hypothetically necessary.

How are to think of this and to express it? What I suggest is the following criterion of divine freedom: that the exercise of the decree of God, is a sufficient condition of God having freedom of alternativity. So divine creation is a case of hypothetical necessity, a necessity that depends on the divine decree, but not otherwise, not *de re* necessity. A case of *de dicto* necessity, a necessity of the consequence. This in turn assumes that the decree of God to bring A about is a non-necessary act. Of course God is immutable in his nature, but his decree is consistent with that nature, on this view. But he is not himself, in his essence, subject to it. So his action *ad extra* is non-necessary, but in accordance with God's immutable nature and is the outcome of his decree.

So God is subordinate to modality, though not in himself, in his essence, but rather his free decree is. He freely chooses and as a consequence what he decrees is necessitated by an immutable decree which is so because it is a freely chosen instance of God's immutable nature. So God decrees freely (with an alternativity yet to be discussed) and what is chosen has an immutability.

Is God's deliberation between possible outcomes a case of God being at the mercy of external features or goings on? I don't think so, because all contents that constitute the world he chooses will be contents of his mind, this being a non-Molinist account of God's freedom, and the actual world contains a feature F which ensures that it is electable over all alternatives. It is not necessary for this to work that there exists an objective, independent schedule of alternative worlds which God must consult, or an objectively determined scale of preferences, operated by an independent felicific calculus, a set of possible worlds of ascending goodness which God must 'respect'. Rather, God could have summoned an alternative to the world he chose had there been for him sufficient grounds to do so. So the outcome, whether this actual creation,

or some other possible creation, is created, is not the outcome of God's deliberation, but of the truth of the following counterfactual: If there had been for God a reason to choose some alternative to what he did choose, he would have done so. This much is needed to preserve the agency of God and so to distinguish between God the Creator from an eternal principle or value, which are necessarily inert, not capable of agency.

Suppose a possible world that best brings about God's purpose or purposes. This needn't be thought of as the best universe in some scale of value determinable independently of God's preferences, but that world which God has an overriding reason to create, or the best reason to create. Rather, we're to think of a scale of alternative possibilities which the 'good pleasure' of God might have been attracted to. Such a condition applies both to ends and means to those ends. So God does what seems best to him, and therefore is the best. Could an alternative to what in fact God chose have been attractive? It is stretching speculation too far for my taste to suppose that only this universe, of the untold alternatives, has the feature F. Does this suggest voluntarism? Perhaps it does, in the sense that if God is simple or has a highly integrated unity that is short of simplicity, the will of God will be involved.

We began this paper by considering McCann's objections to God's freedom as deliberation between alternatives, alternative states of affairs or possible universes as created objects, not possible worlds in the strictly modal understanding in which God himself is a component of some worlds and not others. But I am arguing that there is a modified account of this that may work. We can, consistently with this idea of alternativity, state that had the prospect of an alternative state of affairs have afforded a better way of satisfying or expressing God's generosity, or an equally good expression of his wisdom, or whatever, it might be that God could have and necessarily would have decreed that alternative world at the expense of the world he did in fact decree. Such a counterfactual is not necessarily false; it is one that God did not have a sufficient reason to bring to pass.

So perhaps we can think of the *de dicto* necessity of the created order along these lines: A (some alternative universe/outcome to the actual universe) could have obtained/been decreed, had God's creative thought been different. And what we have been arguing is that this is a not a counterfactual that is necessarily false. If God were to have had a 'different creative thought' for some alternative to A then decreeing to bring about that alternative would have been eternally 'embedded', as the

actual world is in fact embedded. The choice of that one universe would have been the dismissal of all alternative universes, and of alternatives derived from each alternative in a Ross-like way. This is a different state of affairs from one in which it is proposed 'Were God not to be perfectly good, then ...' which is a counterfactual respecting the essence of God and is necessarily false.

That is one way we might think of divine freedom. But we can also think rather differently about it, in a more McCann–like way. Suppose God had in mind this world and as part of the same act he willed it to be. We can fill this out, perhaps, in the following way. The world in respect of the perfections of God is contingent. God in this scenario did not deliberate between alternatives, he knows *ab initio* which he must choose, where 'must' here does not record any external necessitation. From that one world depicted other possible worlds are derivable rather in James Ross's sense. We can handle the usual talk about possible worlds in this way. Yet for all we know God could have depicted a different world from which a different set of possibilities are derivable. And the answer to the question, what would that world then be like might be a shake of the head: 'We have no idea.'

It follows from this that God's freedom does not have to accommodate what might be call, à la William James, a *forced* choice. Nevertheless this account does make it possible to think of some at least of God's actions as less well entrenched in his essence than others, namely the possibilities by a quite different creative choice and the possibilities it would engender, and those that are derivable when the imagination is fired by the one world which God has in fact created.

SELF-PRESENTATION

Can we say anything more about such an alternative in a condition of timelessness? Using the notion of 'immediate self-presentation' one might suppose that a timeless omniscient being knows the creative choice before (logically, but not temporally) to exhibit that feature F, and that it (and its consequences) are immediately 'self-present' to the mind of God. It is the one overwhelmingly obvious alternative, 'clear and distinct' so to speak, immediately ruling out all other alternatives. Nevertheless there is a logical alternative.

So it is possible to say that if the good pleasure of God had been that an alternative world be designed/created, with its own crop of

possibilities emanating from it, then an alternative world would have been created that could have been incommensurable with what was in fact designed/created. So my suggested criterion of God's freedom is satisfied if there is a possibility that God could have designed/created. Given such a circumstance the actual world is hypothetically necessary.

So an alternative account of God's freedom to McCann's, one that adheres to something like his idea of divine sovereignty, could borrow a central thought of McCann's account of divine creativity, and with respect to the creation abandon the idea of possible worlds before the mind of God. The idea of an infinite number of possible worlds before the divine mind's eye is in any case, perhaps, an unnecessary extravagance in our fitful understanding of God, such as it is. One might instead think both of the actual world being a result of divine creativity, and of the possibilities we presently reflect on as being derivable, by human acts of abstraction, composition and correction that we are familiar with, extrapolations of the one creative act. So we could suppose that the creation has an instance of triangularity such that the concept of triangularity is logically posterior to the decree to create a particular universe in which there are umpteen triangles.

This account I have been tentatively sketching has some of the features of a deliberative account, notably that of there being alternatives before the mind of God which he is able to reflect on. But it is easy to see that it lacks other features of full blown alternativity, any that require the passing of time, or the surrogate of such passing, an array of eternal 'moments'. If at 10 am Joe has not made up his mind whether or not to wear his new tie but has made up his mind by 10.10 am, this is an intelligible situation of a person resolving a state of indecision, whatever factors make for that resolution. I am supposing that it is impossible for God to be in such a state of indecision. Though there are alternatives which he could have chosen, none were 'feasible', and even were he in time he would not need a period of time to resolve the matter of what to create. The point is, no alternatives open to God need be Jamesian 'live' options. Nonetheless they are possible alternative outcomes. For the Creator is above all things a *creative* God.

Earlier I noted that in philosophy there are costs as well as benefits to any argument. What are the costs here? The chief one has to do with simplicity and the contingency of creation. It is hard to see how a strong sense of divine simplicity can be combined with the contingency of the creation, even in the sense discussed, or even with any contingent

features within a creation that is in itself necessary. And there seems to be potency remaining in a God who creates a finite universe, imperilling his status as one who is pure act. These problems are brought out by James Dolezal (2011).

A PARADOX

To end with, I make the following observation. A compatibilist, such as myself, nonetheless wishes to preserve the alternativity of the Creator's choice, and who therefore for whom alternative choices to what exists must be possible, though not actual; and such as Hugh McCann, a robust libertarian when it comes to creaturely choice, but someone who thinks that God, though he is libertarianly free, does not possess alternativity in even an attenuated sense. What this may teach us is that the developed categories of libertarianism and compatibilism are exclusively creaturely categories, inapplicable to God.

Acknowledgement. Thanks to Hugh McCann for helping me to iron out some misunderstandings.

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AGENCY INCOMPATIBILISM AND DIVINE AGENCY

HELEN STEWARD

University of Leeds

Abstract. In this paper, I consider whether an argument for compatibilism about free will and determinism might be developed from the thought that God's agency seems consistent with the rational determination of at least some divine actions by the True and the Good. I attempt to develop such an argument and then consider how to respond to it from the point of view of my own position, which I call *Agency Incompatibilism.* I argue that a crucial premise in the argument is ambiguous and offer responses to the argument on behalf of the Agency Incompatibilist, on each of the two disambiguations.

There is a motivation for compatibilism about free will and determinism which is less often voiced than those which are based on suppositions about what science has shown us, and which stems instead from the philosophy of religion. In many important religious traditions, God is conceived of as an agent, and it is natural to suppose that if God *is* an agent, then he must be an agent with free will. For we usually consider ourselves to have free will, and moreover, we tend to believe that free will is a necessary condition for the possession of some of our most importantly ennobling capacities, including, for example, the capacities for moral responsibility, for creativity, for artistry, and perhaps even for thought itself. Arguably, free will is essential to true personhood and many have wanted to argue that God should be conceived of as a person. And yet there are also reasons for supposing that God's actions, if he ever performs any, must be determined – not indeed by prior causes, but by such things, perhaps, as the True and the Good. It should be *settled*, one might think, what God will believe, and what he will desire, simply because he will believe only what is true and want only what is best, so that there is no question of his having to *make up his mind* about anything, in the way characteristic of limited human beings who have to

do such things as wonder, deliberate, process information. In command of all the reasons for all the various possible courses of action, and their relative weightings and priorities, a determinate answer to any question of the form 'What ought to be done?' should inevitably and immediately be forthcoming for God, one might think, unless there is either more than one equivaluable best option – what one might call a tie for first place – or else real, objective indeterminacy about what is true or best in the particular instance, such that even God could not know the answer, there being no answer. But provided the question 'What ought to be done?' does indeed have a unique and determinate answer in a given case, God's will with respect to that case should be settled. And it would follow from these claims about God that free will must be compatible, at any rate, with a certain *kind* of determinism in the generation of action – what one might call *rational* determinism – the determination of what an agent does by the best *reasons*. I shall define the Divine Rational Determination Thesis thus:

DRDT: At least some of God's actions are such that they constitute, in the circumstances in which they occur, the uniquely best action which could possibly have been performed by God in those circumstances – and hence it is not possible, in respect of any such action, that God should not perform it.

DRDT is in some respects a relatively weak thesis, since it asserts merely that at least *some* of God's actions are rationally determined – allowing that it is perfectly possible that not all of them are, and hence that incommensurability and ties for first place might exist with respect to at least *some* divine actions. Weak though it is, of course, one might still conceivably be a theist and yet deny it. One might believe, for example, that the incommensurability of distinct values goes so deep, and infects the realm of value and morality so thoroughly, that indeterminacy concerning what it would be best to do is present at every juncture, even for the Divine Being, so that even he must deliberate and constantly attempt to weigh the incommensurable. Or one might believe that just as in the human case, the presence of different, equivaluable ways in which to ensure a wanted result is ubiquitous, even for God – so that, for example, even supposing it to be determinate that the best thing for God to do now is to part the Red Sea (say), he might do so by parting it exactly *here;* or else perhaps *here,* one centimetre further to the west, say. It might seem plausible that it could not possibly make any difference

to anything to which any kind of value was attached, where precisely God chooses to part the Red Sea, provided the parting takes place in the right general area, generating options for God that are distinct, at least at a certain level of description. Divine action would, in either of these eventualities, retain some of the contingency, indeterminacy and uncertainty that is present in the human case, and there would be no reason to deny that certain kinds of alternate possibility are omnipresent, even for God. But for the sake of argument, I want to concede DRDT for the time being, because I want to attempt to prosecute a certain kind of argument which generates a conclusion which is apparently at odds with one for which I have elsewhere argued, and in doing so, I am happy to concede my potential opponent this assumption about divine agency. In particular, I want to consider the potential for using DRDT as a premise in a distinctive form of argument for a version of compatibilism about free will and determinism.

One might wonder, of course, why anyone would think there is any connection at all between DRDT and the traditional question whether free will is compatible with determinism. The claim that a given agent is, in acting, sometimes subject to rational determinism is, after all, very different from the claim that that same agent is, in acting, sometimes subject to *causal* determinism, so one might fairly ask what bearing the idea that God is a rationally determined agent could possibly have on the usual questions raised in the free will literature, where it is generally the compatibility of free will with *causal* determinism that is at issue. It certainly does not follow immediately without a great deal of further argument from the claim that God's actions are rationally determined that they are thereby *causally* determined. Nevertheless, I think there is an interesting relationship between DRDT and the traditional free will problem. The relation is this. If the rational determination of a given action is truly consistent with that action's being freely willed, then we are surely going to need an account of free will which reveals it to be exercisable by agents on occasions on which it is nevertheless impossible that the action they in fact perform should not occur. If DRDT is true, that is, at least some of God's actions are such that a certain kind of necessity attaches to them; with respect to the relevant class of uniquely best actions, it is impossible that any alternative action should have occurred. And yet this does not appear to get in the way of our supposing that these actions of God are freely willed by him. Whatever exactly we mean, therefore, by 'free will', it looks as though it must be a property that does

not require the kind of alternate possibilities on which libertarians have often been wont to insist, alternate possibilities which remain available, even holding fixed the exact circumstances in which the actual act took place. And this might make one inclined to distinguish very sharply between the *ability* to have done otherwise, which one might think could not sensibly be denied to an omnipotent being, and the *possibility* that one should have done otherwise, circumstances remaining unaltered – allowing the former to God, but insisting that it does not entail the latter. And it might seem likely that this claim could be turned to the advantage of the compatibilist about free will and *causal* determinism. If God can have free will, even though it can in some cases be settled what he will do, one might think, perhaps *humans* can have free will, even though it is settled (in a different way) what they will do. Thus, one might suggest an argument with something like the following form:

P1. God exists and is an agent.

P2. If God exists and is an agent, all of his actions are freely willed.

But,

P3: If God exists and is an agent, at least some of his actions are such that they constitute, in the circumstances in which they occur, the uniquely best action which could possibly have been performed by God in those circumstances.

P4: If God exists, and is an agent, it is not possible that God should perform a non-optimal action.

Therefore:

C1 (from P3 and P4): If God exists and is an agent, at least some of his actions are such that it is not possible that any alternative to them should have occurred.

Therefore:

C2 (from P1, P2 and C1): There are some freely willed actions which are such that it is not possible that any alternative to them should have occurred.

I take it that the truth of C2 would represent a victory for compatibilism. For the sake of having a handy label, I shall call this argument **the Argument from Divine Agency.**

I have argued in recent work, however, for a version of *incompatibilism* about free will and causal determinism. And it is reasonable to ask anyone who is an incompatibilist what their reaction is to the suggestion that God, at any rate, can act freely and yet in such a way that it may be impossible that he will do anything other than precisely what he does in fact do. It is reasonable, I think, to ask this even of atheists; indeed, I am myself an atheist, and hence my interest in divine agency is not motivated by the desire to formulate an account of God's actions merely for the sake of having such an account. But in so far as they reveal the shapes and structures of our concepts, reflections about what sorts of properties might be found combined in the person of God are relevant to questions about humanity also. The compatibilist may allege that the case of God, whether or not it is *actual*, shows that we can readily conceive of a free-willed agent who nevertheless at least sometimes – and conceivably even always – acts in such a way that it is impossible that he should act in any other way. And this is an important challenge to the incompatibilist, which deserves to be met.

In the rest of this paper, I plan to consider this challenge from the point of view of my own recently developed position, which I call Agency Incompatibilism. In the next section, I shall attempt a brief outline of the view itself, before moving on to consider how the Agency Incompatibilist should respond to the compatibilist-friendly line of reasoning I have outlined above. I shall argue that it is crucial in understanding what is implied by the conclusion of the argument to undertake a certain disambiguation of its conclusion. On one reading, I shall suggest, C2 is not inconsistent with Agency Incompatibilism at all. Moreover, I shall suggest that the capacity to stave off the compatibilist's challenge by making the distinction on which this ambiguity rests is a feature of my particular version of incompatibilism which gives it an advantage over many others. On the second reading, for which I concede there may indeed be theological motivations, C2 *is*, I think, inconsistent with Agency Incompatibilism and so a decision must be made about how to respond. My suggestion will be that Agency Incompatibilism provides a reason for treating the argument as a *reductio* of its first premise. I thereby hope to provide a principled justification for someone who wishes to retain commitment to the first conjunct of P1, to deny the second. Then finally, I shall conclude with some reflections on the question what alternative notion of God these considerations might seem to recommend to a theist who was also attracted by Agency Incompatibilism.

AGENCY INCOMPATIBILISM

In *A Metaphysics for Freedom*, I argued for the libertarian view that agency itself – and so, *a fortiori* also 'free' agency – is incompatible with determinism. I mean by 'agency' to denote a capacity that is common to humans and a great many animals, a property that does not demand tremendously high-level powers of reason and reflection, deliberation or moral sense, but which simply consists in the ability of a conscious being to effect movements of, and changes in its own body, and thereby bring about further changes in the world, under its own direction, in accordance with its desires and other forms of motivation, guided by its perceptions. I reject the idea that there is a special class of actions, the so-called 'free' actions, concerning which a peculiar conflict arises with the thesis of determinism. Rather, on my view, all actions whatever are such as to generate the conflict – hence the label, 'Agency Incompatibilism'.

In many traditional versions of libertarianism, the alleged alternative possibilities requirement on freely willed actions is the source of the supposed inconsistency with determinism. But this alternative possibilities requirement is generally derived from principles that demand it be interpreted in a particular way. Often, the requirement that there be alternative possibilities available when an agent acts is tied to the idea that unless there are such possibilities, the agent of the action cannot be morally responsible for it – the thought being that it would be *unfair* to blame an agent for what he cannot help doing (and perhaps also beside the point to praise him, if the action is good). What must be undetermined, then, one might think, according to this style of libertarian thinking is a fact of the form 'that A will ø at t', for some morally relevant act-type ø of the sort that might figure in an agent's deliberations. For example, if an agent, Peter, has in fact robbed the poor box at time t, it must have been undetermined *that Peter would rob the poor box at t*, an action that he might have considered under that very description. Agency Incompatibilism, though, derives the inconsistency between freely willed actions and determinism from a different source, and its focus is accordingly on the non-determination by prior events and states of a much wider class of facts – including many that are quite below the radar of anyone's deliberative mechanisms, and which are rarely, if ever, objects of our choice – such as, for instance, the fact that I will move my finger just *thus and so* at *t*, as I type the word 'deliberative'; or that this sheep will meander along precisely *this route* between *t1* and *t2*. The *detail*

of action, as well as, on occasion, its description at the levels relevant to motivation and morality is part of what is alleged to be undetermined until the agent determines it, in acting. The incompatibility is traced to a robustly metaphysical, rather than to a moral source and has its roots in considerations not of fairness, but rather in considerations concerning what it is to be an agent in the first place.

What are these considerations? The basic idea on which my position is based is that within certain important limits, all animals above a certain degree of complexity are self-determiners of certain aspects of their fate – they can determine, or *settle*, to use a concept on which I place some weight in the book, such things as where, precisely, they will go, at what speed, precisely when and how they will go there. It must be conceded, of course, that instincts, as well as basic physiological limitations, place enormous *constraints* on any animal's possible futures – but the Agency Incompatibilist insists that these constraints will never narrow an animal's possibilities down to a single token action, such that nothing other than that particular action could have occurred in the circumstances. The distinction between type and token actions is extremely important in the articulation of the view – for any sensible view must concede that in certain circumstances, a given animal may be rigidly determined to perform an action of a certain *type.* It might be absolutely impossible, for example, for a gazelle that has just spotted a lion crouching in the bushes not to begin running in the opposite direction, or for a lapwing whose chicks are threatened by a gull not to attempt to fight it off. But the idea is that the precise details of the responsive action must remain to be settled at the time of action by the animal itself, if the action is really to *be* an action in the first place – the precise trajectory and timing of any flight, for example, or the exact mode of an attack, from within a repertoire of available possibilities. Even if it is settled by matters beyond the control of the individual agent at the time of action, then, that a *type* of action of which the individual act is an instance will occur, the fact that *other* types of action of which the individual act is *also* an instance will occur is not – which implies in turn that the occurrence of the *token* action in all its rich spatiotemporal, material particularity, is not a necessitated event.

Why should one think that this has to be so? Having granted that it may be determined for a given agent in given circumstances that she will F in those circumstances, for at least some types of action F, why cling on to the insistence that nevertheless, each particular action must be such that there is at least *some* type G it instantiates, such that the agent might

not have G-ed, even given all the circumstances immediately precedent to the occurrence of the action? Roughly, the motivation is rooted in a suggestion about what an action *is*. Reflection reveals, I think, that the concept of action is a much richer and more complex concept than has generally been recognised, a concept that is connected tightly to a whole set of categorisations that come naturally to human beings. In particular, it is essential to an action that it is performed by an agent; its source in the agent is arguably the most fundamental thing about an action. But what is it for an event to have its source in an agent in the way characteristic of action? In my view, the right answer to this question has a modal aspect – for an event to have its source in the agent in the way that an action does, is for it to *depend* on the agent whether or not it occurs at all, and for that to be the case it always has to be possible which respect to each ø-ing which really is an action, that the agent could have refrained, as it were, from bringing that particular action into existence, by moving her body in the precise way that she does. For if the agent lacks the power *not* to bring the individual act into existence, the question whether or not that token action will occur is settled not by the agent but by something else – the occurrence of some prior events or states, perhaps, which then bring about the relevant bodily movement inevitably. But no such deterministically caused event, on the Agency Incompatibilist's view, could be an action. An action must be a spontaneous production, and truly spontaneous production is possible only of non-necessitated events.

The compatibilist may object at this point that as long as the events and states from which a bodily movement deterministically flows are of the right type – as long as they are beliefs and desires, say, or intentions – that will be sufficient for the whole causal process to constitute the occurrence of an action, and that the deterministic nature of any causal relationships here either cannot be to the detriment of, or might perhaps even be *beneficial* to the operation of agential powers. But the Agency Incompatibilist will insist that such things as beliefs, desires and intentions are simply not the sorts of things from which a bodily movement can flow deterministically. All the intending in the world, she will note, is not enough, by itself, deterministically to precipitate any kind of bodily movement – in order for that to occur, the agent also has actually to *do* something. And when she does, it is *she*, and not her intention, who gets her body to move in the right way at the appropriate time. That is so phenomenologically; it is so conceptually, too. For the

doing really to be a *doing* in the requisite sense, she will argue, it must be an appropriately *spontaneous* injection by the agent into the course of nature, something which no deterministically caused event could ever be. An action which it is not possible for an agent *not* to perform, the thought is, is not a performance at all – for it lacks a modal feature essential to an action – that of coming into existence only as the exercise of a *two way* power – a power which the agent could, at the crucial moment, have refrained from exercising instead.

AGENCY INCOMPATIBILISM AND DIVINE AGENCY

Various possible objections to Agency Incompatibilism are, I am sure, likely to have arisen in readers' minds already – but I cannot attempt to defend the view against all-comers here. My aim in this paper is rather to consider how the Agency Incompatibilist might meet the challenge from the Argument for Divine Agency. For it may look as though the Agency Incompatibilist simply cannot concede C2, the conclusion of that argument. C2 claims that there are some freely-willed actions such that it is not possible that any alternative to them should have occurred. But this implies that there are some *actions* such that it is not possible that any alternative to them should have occurred – and that seems simply to contradict the Agency Incompatibilist's thesis that there are no necessitated actions.

One must be careful here, however – because as elsewhere in the philosophy of action, the distinction between type and token actions is important. As stated, the Argument from Divine Agency simply quantifies over 'actions', without specifying whether it is types or tokens that is meant. And one might think there is a fairly strong argument for supposing that the argument is best interpreted as one whose premises and conclusion quantify merely over act-*types*. It is arguable that rational determinism, indeed, is in general properly considered to be a thesis about *types* of action, not tokens, simply because it is plausible that reasons for action are always reasons why *types* of thing should be done. I may, for example, have a reason to visit my neighbour if she is old, vulnerable and lonely. But the reason here relates to the act-type 'pay my neighbour a visit' – not to the individual action that I may execute in doing so, which will have a wide array of other properties, none of which is rationalised in any way by this reason, and many of which will not be

rationalised in any way by *any* reason. For example, in the execution of the particular action, I may exit my gate at a particular place, but exiting at this place might not be something for which I have any reason.

If the quantifications in P2, P3 and P4 ('all of his actions', 'at least some of his actions', 'a non-optimal action') are interpreted as quantifications over act *types* – such as 'creating the Universe', 'parting the Red Sea', 'raising Lazarus', or whatever – actions which, even if they in fact occur only once, are still *kinds* of thing one can do in a vast number of specific ways – then there is in fact no conflict between Agency Incompatibilism and C2. For the Agency Incompatibilist already concedes that there is no conflict between the idea that it is determined, or settled, that in circumstances C, an action of a particular *type* will be performed, and the idea that the token action remains non-necessitated. This is indeed quite crucial to the view, for as I remarked earlier, any sensible position simply *has* to concede that there are important constraints upon the agency of any animal being – that it may be settled, for example, that the gazelle will run from the lion on seeing it, even though it is not settled that her run will have this trajectory rather than that. The consistency of rational determinism with agency, then, need be no bar to the truth of Agency Incompatibilism, focused as that doctrine is on the token action, rather than the type.

There is, however, a complication, which is due to the fact that the agency we are considering is the supposed agency of a divine being. For someone might wonder whether God chooses not only the *types* of action he performs, but also all their precise features, such that in effect he chooses not only the general parameters but the precise contours of every token act. Perhaps unlike a limited human being, that is, God is able to see that there are individual token divine actions which are such that these *token* actions are the uniquely best actions to be performed in the circumstances in which they occur. Perhaps, given the omniscient, divine perspective on things, there might indeed be reasons for performing an action in a way so precisely defined in terms of such respects as timing, location, material result, etc., that it is not conceivable that there should be *two* distinct token actions of this same type. And in that case, P2 would become,

> P2*: If God exists and is an agent, all of his token actions are freely willed;

P3 would become:

P3* If God exists, and is an agent, at least some of his *token* actions are such that they constitute, in the circumstances in which they occur, the uniquely best *token* actions which could possibly have been performed by God in those circumstances.

And then C2 would become C2*:

C2* There are some freely willed *token* actions which are such that it is not possible that any alternative to them should have occurred.

And that is indeed a thesis that is incompatible with Agency Incompatibilism. What should the Agency Incompatibilist say?

I think we need, at this point, to recall the Agency Incompatibilist's motivation for insisting that token actions can never be necessitated events. The reason had to do with the nature of action in general; an action, the Agency Incompatibilist believes, has to be a contingent, spontaneous intervention into the course of nature, something with its own distinctive modal character, an event that is essentially the exercise of a two-way power. And so if some of God's token actions are said to be necessitated, in effect, by the True and the Good, by the facts about what it is best to do, given the circumstances as they actually are, the Agency Incompatibilist will want to ask the question why the source of their results should be taken to be an agent at all, given that the exercise of power involved appears to be strictly one-way. Why is it not something much more like a law, a force or a principle that is at work, taking the world inevitably in a particular direction, a direction that could have been predicted long in advance, and therefore leaving nothing to be settled in the moment itself? It would seem that on the view of divine agency now being considered, there is a seamless and necessary transition from certain facts about what is best to certain facts about what will occur. Why, then, is the particular, temporally specific kind of intervention that we know as agency required in order for the transition to occur? Surely the view of God that is encouraged by such a picture is a view which rather accords him the status of something more universal, a view of God as something much more like a general principle than like a particular agent. God, one might say, is not, on this view, a causal nexus of an agentive type – since the consequences that we attribute to God's will simply flow with inevitability from the True and the Good. One attractive possibility, indeed, might be that we should simply identify these things – the True and the Good – in some way with

the Divine itself. My suggestion is, then, that Agency Incompatibilism gives one a reason to reject the second conjunct of P1, on the reading of the Argument for Divine Agency which generates conclusion C2*. On that reading, given Agency Incompatibilism, the argument represents a *reductio* of its first premise. And for a theist, who is not free to reject the first conjunct of that premise, my suggestion is that she should reject the second, and embrace a non-agentive view of the Divine.

I have argued, then, that the Argument from Divine Agency is in fact no threat to Agency Incompatibilism. It is susceptible, I have suggested, to alternative interpretations, depending on whether the actions over which it quantifies are taken to be types or tokens. If types, the Agency Incompatibilist is well-placed simply to concede the conclusion of the argument – an advantage her position enjoys over most other libertarian positions. If tokens, she must reject it, but can do so in a principled way, by arguing that the view of divine power which is implied by the relevant version of C2 suggests that God is better thought of as a universal law, force or principle than as a particular agent. Being myself, as I have confessed, an atheist, I have no particular stake in any given vision of God – but I do think any tenable conception of God as agent must present God in such a way as to respect the essential contours of the concept of agency. That can be done, on my view, only by *rejecting* the idea that God's token actions are ever rationally necessitated events.

DIVINE ACTIVITY

THOMAS SCHÄRTL

University of Augsburg

Abstract. The paper discusses basic models of divine action and intervention. However, the most part of the article is dedicated to the question whether or not there are theistic reasons to stick to some sort of non-interventionism. Therefore, Schleiermacher's argument is put under scrutiny and presented in a way that could substantiate some version of non-interventionism. Additionally, the paper explores an argument in favor of non-interventionism coming from a specific notion of divine aseity and self-sufficiency. Ultimately the paper votes for a broader notion of the God-world-relationship alluding to the idea of the world being God's body.

INTRODUCTION

During the last two decades, German theology has become fully aware of the problem of divine agency. The number of monographs and book-chapters, articles and essays dealing with this very specific topic is still growing. It seems as if divine agency has become the topic that hurts most or, to put it into more friendly terms, reveals what we truly think about the concept of God and the relationship between God and the world. Supposedly, the so-called anthropological turn in theology or variety of anti-realistic approaches to theological statements (based on a certain mode of giving credit to Kant) has somehow put all the questions related to divine attributes on the back burner for quite a while. However, in the meantime these questions are back – for a number of reasons. One of those reasons is that divine agency is the topic where the proverbial rubber meets the street and where the antagonism of science and religion comes into sight. But most of all, it is the area where our notion of God

becomes entirely crucial. It is apparent that you cannot have a concept of divine action without getting your concept of God affected. So it is not just accidental that Reinhold Bernhardt, who offered one of the most prominent and well-received accounts of divine action in the German speaking area and who advertises the idea of a divine 'force-field' of love, turns to a rather a-personal or hyper-personal concept of the divine,[1] whereas Klaus von Stosch in his masterly crafted defense of (so to speak: weak) divine intervention ultimately embraces open theism.[2]

However, in this paper I am not going to talk about the benefits of having either a personal or a non-personal concept of God. Having a non-personal concept of God might get you out of some of the age-old atrocities of what John Bishop as well as Ken Perszyk have called 'omni-God theism'.[3] On the other side, we have to face the demands of 'Abrahamitic Theism', which seems to commit us to a personal concept of God. In addition, there are many who believe that you cannot be a Christian, if you do not believe in some sort of direct divine intervention.

But what is direct divine intervention? The easiest answer is that direct intervention happens – as direct intervention performed by human being does – at the level of basic actions. Once you want to perform a higher-type action of some sort, it will still be your own action, but it will be a *mediated action* in this case, even if it is constituted by your very own basic actions. So, if one is willing to accept divine basic actions, he/she should give an account of what such divine basic actions could consist of: Could they be purely mental activities (and how would they relate to a physical universe)? Or would they rather be bodily movements leading up to the somewhat extravagant idea that God possesses a body (or has our universe as his body)? A second proposal would be that divine actions could be called 'direct', if and only if they are not mediated through agents who are different from God or through events that are not simultaneously the truth-makers of divine basic actions. Although mediation of that sort could as well be within the range of divine agency (and it could also be a way of interacting with a world which is truly preferred by God), anyone who insists on the possibility of direct divine intervention might wish to add a second mode of divine agency: God is capable of performing actions which are not in need of any *further*

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[1] Cf. R. Bernhardt (1999: 399-439).
[2] Cf. von Stosch (2006).
[3] Cf. Bishop & Perszyk (2014: 1-17).

mediation. This request finally brings us to the third interpretation of what could be called 'direct intervention': Within the human realm basic actions are realized by some kind of event-forming 'material' – we may as well speak of physiological or biological processes as the prerequisite of performing basic actions in a physical universe. But it seems that a certain reading of divine aseity rules out the possibility of divine basic actions being made of some (more or less material) stuff or are realized by further processes, which are not truly and necessarily internal to God. Finally, a fourth notion of direct divine interaction could be associated with the idea that a divine agent responds directly to a certain situation at a given time. In this case, the problem does not arise from the question whether God needs intermediaries or not, but whether an eternal being can truly respond to a state of affairs seated in time. Since God is considered to be beyond time (and, therefore, lacks some sort of time-indexed knowledge), it is quite dubious, whether or not he is able to bring about alternative states of affairs in a temporal or even timely manner.

Unfortunately, it is not always entirely clear in contemporary theological literature what proponents of a so-called 'direct divine intervention' specifically mean by the phrase in question. It seems to me that all the aspects of meaning mentioned above play a certain role for a correct understanding of this view. Nevertheless, I take the aspect of God not being in need of a by-relation in order to cause certain events as the *core criterion* of interventionist approaches.

I. MODELS

It was actually Ian T. Ramsey who first (to my knowledge) used the phrase "model" to talk about different analogies and conceptualizations of divine action. The beauty of his distinction is its simplicity, because it circles around two poles. Ramsey's very own conceptualizations seem to offer a less complicated approach than, for instance, Reinhold Bernhardt's distinction between an agent-personal, a sapiential-ordinative, and a representational model of divine agency.[4] Moreover, it does not get stuck in the somewhat unlucky and unfruitful distinction between a so-called causal and a so-called personal model of divine agency, since – from a certain point of view – persons have to be causally effective in order to have an impact as personal agents. However, I grant

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[4] Cf. Bernhardt (1999: 314-439).

that the latter concept just wants to emphasize that divine agency is best pictured in terms of friendship and love or in terms of the aesthetic beauty of a certain presence, instead of billiard balls being stopped or developments being put on hold by a super-powerful divine influence.

According to Ramsey, the two poles we have to consider when we talk about divine action are economy (*oikonomia*) on the one hand and presence on the other.[5] Intuitively, in those distinctions all the aspects and worries we may have with divine action are named and put into focus: Do we not want to experience divine presence in our human realm – a presence, which includes some kind of unmediated encounter with the divine? Although the notion of presence straightforwardly seems to point at direct divine intervention, it is far from being clear whether this is really the case. Once you take a closer look at experiences within the human realm as points of comparison, the demands and standards of presence seem to differ on a case-by-case basis: It is quite different for us, to experience the presence of a neighbor, a friend or of a spouse. But, of course, there are areas of overlap, since presence does not necessarily require bodily presence. Rather, we want to catch the attention of the person, which is meant to be present with us. People can be physically present to us, but still seem to be light-years away from us, if their heads are in the clouds. Also the opposite is true: Persons can be close to us, although we have no chance to interact with them by immediate physical contact – we talk to them on the phone, contact them via email and feel their presence due to the fact that we get their attention. Only the framework of the intimate relationship of lover and beloved seems to require both physical and mental presence. Nevertheless, it is quite sound to say that even in those cases of close intimacy presence is still mediated to a certain extent, because bodily presence serves as a key symbol to the presence of the mind.

It is interesting to note that talking about divine presence as a model of approaching divine activity does not require that we make a decision between immediate and mediated forms of divine presence beforehand. Ramsey, for instance, is very careful and reluctant in doing so, because he reminds us of divine omnipresence, which seems to rule out an additional presence of the divine as a surplus or addendum to omnipresence.[6] Thus, Ramsey introduces the notion of God's *ordinary* presence:

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[5] Cf. Ramsey (1973: 15-39).
[6] Cf. Ramsey (1973: 31).

> How can God be both locatable and non-locatable; here in this place, and yet such that the heaven of heavens cannot contain him? What I have offered [...] is the suggestion that what is sometimes called God's 'ordinary presence', non-locatable presence, is better – and less misleadingly – called God's ubiquity or omnipresence. Such ubiquity is revealed in each and every cosmic disclosure: it relates to that activity, power, other than ourselves, which any and every cosmic disclosure discloses.[7]

The second model of an extraordinary divine presence is characterized by Ramsey as follows:

> [T]o speak of the locatable presence of God is to speak of the activity of God which is displayed through, and so modelled in terms of, the presence of finite things and persons.[8]

It is noteworthy that the latter does not seem to require straightforward divine intervention or what some call 'direct' intervention. Maybe this is due to the fact that Ramsey's approach remains on a rather epistemic level and is less interested in the modelling of models. As soon as one is willing to push the distinction offered by Ramsey just a little bit further, some blurring of the outlines of both aspects might result: Divine ubiquity allows the disclosure of everything as being affected by the divine, while extraordinary divine presence requires the identification of certain events, things or persons as displaying the presence of the divine. It seems that the latter presupposes the ontological basis which is referred to by the former. But we would have to add some further specifications to keep what Ramsey called 'ordinary' and 'extraordinary' presence distinct from each other – by introducing, as I would phrase it, the idea of belonging to the cosmos as a whole. *Ordinary* divine presence would be accessible, as soon as we regard each and every event of the world as part of a well-structured cosmos, which is able to disclose divine presence. In contrast, extraordinary divine presence would presuppose the specific identification or (to use Ramsey's phrases) location of divine presence, which – as a location – comes always at the risk of idolatry[9] or (to allude to Freud) building up a fetish. I don't want to claim that any location of that sort is outright impossible (quite the opposite), but

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[7] Ramsey (1973: 39).
[8] Ramsey (1973: 34).
[9] Cf. Ramsey (1973: 36-37).

I throw in the caveat that extraordinary divine presence demands some crystal clear criteria of identifying its manifestations in space and time. Whatever we come up with, we have to be careful, because the 'mystery, therefore magic'-fallacy might haunt us.

Ramsey's second model of divine activity is the analogy of economy – which he identifies as the most prominent idea on divine action found among the church fathers.[10] The most important aspect of this model is to identify events which are able to disclose certain *patterns*:

> Suppose now we see an array of stones in a continuous wavy line. Something might strike us, demand our attention, stir us to ask questions, 'What caused the stones to fall into this pattern?', and these questions might be answered in terms of the tidal currents, the shelving of the beach, the size of the pebbles and so on. In this way the pattern of stones would be set in a progressively larger pattern of causal antecedents, and the way prepared for a cosmic disclosure [...].[11]

What we can learn from this example is that we need more insight and information to derive a personal origin, because patterns do not per se refer back to a person. Thus, we need to point to intentions we are aware of or to circumstances which make it unavoidable to trace the patterns back to the will of a person. Therefore Ramsey adds:

> The Christian model of economy, like the Christian household is contextualized in love: which means that for empirical fit it must be possible to find patterns in the universe which can be 'interpreted by love'.[12]

The model of economy fits nicely to what parts of the tradition had to say about divine providence: God has installed a certain order of being and – at least in the view of some of the church fathers – also a supernatural order of salvation. Order in this case means that every event is given a certain value, a certain interconnectedness with other events, and a certain meaning determined by God's point of view. If God has some sort of serious foreknowledge, general providence and special providence (as it is related to certain individuals or events) turn out to be two sides of the same coin. The idea of economy does not preclude direct divine intervention, but its metaphorical surplus of meaning (as

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[10] Cf. Ramsey (1973: 18-20).
[11] Ramsey (1973: 16).
[12] Ramsey (1973: 20-21).

well as its cultural shaping) could as well be combined with some forms of the above-mentioned 'by-relation': There might be certain instances or causes, which are capable of serving as mundane causes in order to set a divine plan in motion.

Although the concepts of presence and economy seem to be antagonistic to a certain extent, it is by no means necessary to regard them as fierce adversaries. If we take a second look at the historical shaping of the model of economy, we can also refer to the Greek and Hellenistic idea that the father of the household or the emperor installs a certain order (economy) in order to guarantee, thanks to the help of intermediaries, the execution of his will. In this view, certain instances of intermediaries can be regarded as making the presence of the father/ emperor accessible. Although this notion may contain some sort of legal fiction, it does not rule out a more serious metaphysical option which says: a certain entity x can be present to another entity y thanks to the performances of an entity z, if there is a specific context and if there is a strong enough relation between x and z, which makes this transitivity of presence possible. Of course, it might be asked whether or not the idea of immediate access could be put into question by introducing such a model. However, the idea of mediated presence is, as it stands, not seriously threatening the very notion of presence, because even in the human realm we find countless examples of how presence is mediated by certain instruments without destroying the true presence of the one we are ultimately referring to.

II. MOTIVES

The idea of economy can be easily combined with the Christian doctrine of the Trinity. Considering many attempts of the Church Fathers to explain the mystery of the Trinity – as e.g. the writings of Origen –, it seems to be quite obvious that classical paradigms do not commit us to a concept of direct divine intervention. In fact, it rather is the other way round: We find the idea that God, as the father, can interact with the world only through the Logos and the Spirit. To Origen, there is no other way to keep divine transcendence intact while sticking to the idea that God has some serious impact on the world. Unfortunately, contemporary social Trinitarians are guilty of having blurred the outlines and sold out the benefits of the more classical model. Indeed, if the Logos is a full-blooded agent (as the Spirit is supposed to be according to social Trinitarian

models) we won't get any helping hand from Trinitarian theology and
we even risk to increase the various problems of direct intervention.
However, for Origen there is no direct intervention of the Father, since
everything is mediated through the Logos and the Holy Spirit. While the
Logos encapsulates the idea of economy and providence, the Spirit is the
warrant of divine presence.[13] According to this classic theologian, the
Spirit's gift is purely epistemic, because he enables us to see patterns of
divine presence and activity. Patterns are regarded to be signs – and this
would be the door that opens up to describe the precise role and essence
of the Logos: The Logos is the sign of the Father, who has the capacity of
leaving imprints in the world pointing back to the providence and love
of God and who can be detected thanks to the support coming from the
Holy Spirit. According to this view, incarnation is most appropriate and
fitting, because it would be the most privileged way for God to leave his
signs in the created world, which – based on the Holy Spirit – are also
instances of divine presence. If Origen were cornered and asked whether
his picture of divine interaction is interventionist tout court, the answer
would be rather complicated and, to a certain extent, unsatisfying for the
interventionist, since there is, to say the least, *ultima facie* no unmediated
agency of God, the Father. Furthermore, the role of the Logos is – if the
Logos is meant to have a serious effect on the world – deeply related to
human nature. Furthermore, the works of the Holy Spirit can hardly be
described in terms of agency – given that the supra-personal or a-personal
descriptions of the Spirit are true: the Spirit is more like a *force of nature*,
the *warmth of a sunbeam* or the *splendor of the divine majesty* than what
we call a personal agent in a contemporary sense.[14] So, if we try to access
the conceptual framework of these metaphors, the least we can say is that
the activities of the Holy Spirit should not predominantly be interpreted
in terms of independent actions of a free agent, since the Spirit is also the
mode of divine presence in a non-divine realm.

It is equally important to underline that Ramsey's notion of economy
revolves around the concept of patterns. As it seems, the disclosure of
divine agency is epistemologically bound to the identification of those
patterns. But what if our universe has to be considered as displaying great
ambiguities? Just think of Paul Moser's famous 'Hell's Canyon Parable'[15]:

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[13] Cf. Schärtl (2003: 148-149).
[14] Cf. Schärtl (2014).
[15] Cf. Moser (2010: esp. 3-15).

Lost in the desert, we find an abandoned police station and finally get to detect an old radio, which might well work, but we have no reason to believe that anyone is at the receiving end of that radio. Since we don't know whether or not the station is abandoned forever and whether or not the radio still works, *hope beyond hope* might be the most we can get. Coming back to divine agency we can pretty much tell the very same story: Our universe displays countless wonders and produces incredible beauty, but it also contains horrendous evils, which make it hard to believe in God pictured as the ultimate rational and morally good agent. Of course, there are the patterns of ultimate love and goodness to be found in this universe, but these patterns are over-written by other patterns, which rather point to Schopenhauer's worldview: that there is an a-moral force of life being at work everywhere at the universe, which does not really care about the fate of an individual entity. This ambiguity remains even if we come up with the most sophisticated theodicy.

But one could also defend this ambiguity from God's perspective. If the ultimate goal of human existence is to seek and to find God on one's own terms, a certain level of ambiguity is needed. I take this to be one of the core motivations in Klaus von Stosch's work on reconciling divine agency with a theory of revelation and the problem of theodicy: As it stands, divine intervention (and let us now just take revelation as an additional version of divine agency), must not rule out doxastic freedom, which I would rephrase as the ability to come to belief in God based on a willful and deliberate decision (and not by force of any kind).[16]

However, I have to admit that this picture is still quite optimistic. If we approach the problem of evil from a rather existential side, we may as well say that we continuously have to look into an abyss of horrendous evils, which seriously casts doubts whether or not there are instances of divine intervention. One can even include this statement into a refined logical argument from evil. As Ken Perszyk and John Bishop have brilliantly put it: Given that there is an eschatological good end to the universe (created beings are meant to encounter) and given that the amount of evil is such that no greater good defense is able to conceptually cope with it, we might as well question the nature of God as being a rational and morally good agent.[17] If this conclusion is valid, we will have only three ways to escape: At the end of the day, you could either doubt that God

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[16] Cf. von Stosch (2006: 152-174).
[17] Cf. Bishop & Perszyk (2011: esp. 122-123).

is rational or question divine goodness (and both strategies will come at high costs). Or you can question whether or not God should be described as an agent at all. And it is this insight which is one of the reasons why non-interventionist approaches are still around and kicking, although they might seem to be on life support in the meantime.

So far, I have offered two rather theological motives to be reluctant when it comes to talk about divine actions. If we take a look at Origen's version of the Trinity again, we would have reasons to say that the average notion of 'agency' does not help at all, because it is quite unable to capture the nature of the divine *modus operandi*. Regardless, whether you embrace Origen's concept of the Trinity or not, the overall question remains, in how far the divine nature precludes certain modes of operation and favors others. And if we refer back to the problem of evidence and ambiguity, we are, at least, left with the problem of criteria for identifying intervention. The Humean debate on miracles, as fallacious it might seem from a nowadays perspective[18] (although some hold that you will find some kernel of truth in Hume's way of approaching the religious problems of miracles[19]), admittedly had the advantage of providing us with a criterion of divine intervention: breaking the laws of nature or breaking out of what is perceived to be a regularity in nature. Instead, one could focus on some version of 'single causality' – as David Armstrong once put it[20] – and, at the same time, abandon the idea of breaking a law of nature, since single causality entitles us to have a purely nominalist account of laws of nature. In order to develop a concept of miracles, one would have to refer to specific powers of God, by which he is able to stop finite events in their execution of natural-causal dispositions and to alter the ordinary course of events. Indeed, I think this model is a probable narrative to describe the place of miracles in a post-Humean and a post-post-Humean world. Nevertheless, the evidentalist's question would kick in in terms of identifying these powers we take to be exceptional divine capacities. But even if we were to find such exceptional powers, you could not really rule out that those exceptional powers are part of the 'natural' world accessible only under certain circumstances, once you have given up the Humean idea of regularity and law. Why is it that exceptional powers displayed in exceptional situations unambiguously refer back to

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[18] Cf. Johnson (1999).
[19] Cf. Fogelin (2003).
[20] Cf. Armstrong (1990: 204-210).

the Christian God? Again, we must not treat mystery for divine magic. Without referring to the nature of divine revelation (and the nature of what is revealed by divine revelation) we won't get a satisfying answer. Let us, for the sake of the argument, say that exceptional powers and situations are meant to serve as instances of revealing the divine nature as supremely good and benevolent. This won't get us very far, because the problem of theodicy, which is a necessary side-aspect of divine agency, will ultimately haunt us. How can we reconcile the apparently rare incidents, which (still not unambiguously) seem to glimpse at the nature of God with the horrendously dark side of the universe? It might be – at least from an existential perspective – a more plausible story to claim that divine agency is seriously bound by the autonomy of the universe. This does not categorically rule out divine presence, but makes it somehow dependent on what events in the universe and their constituents are 'willing' to display, i.e. if they are willing to serve as the intermediaries of divine agency or presence.

III. GOD AS THE ABSOLUTE CAUSE

Is there an argument available, which would help us to vote against direct divine intervention (without voting against any form of divine efficacy or agency tout court) – an argument that does not fall prey to the naturalistic prejudice which holds that the web of natural causes is closed or that there is a natural flux of events and causes that must not be violated? It seems that some parts of contemporary systematic theology are eager to sign off on naturalism much too early, so that their reluctance in accepting incidents of special divine action is crucially bound to a certain version of naturalism (which could be or has already been proven to be rather wrong).

But I think that there is an argument available and I am inclined to call it the Rahner-Schleiermacher view on divine action. Before I offer a certain interpretation of this view, it is necessary to point out that it has to be purified in order to get rid of its affiliations with some sorts of naturalism or naturalistic determinism. I think that this affiliation is not required to keep the values of the argument, but that this purification will rather give us a reason to stick to the core of the argument.

In his *Grundkurs des Glaubens,* Karl Rahner raises the question whether there can be some kind of immediacy in relation to God.

If there is no such thing as an immediate/unmediated relation to God, then whatever we say about divine action has to be conceived in a way that does not simply cross out the position of finite beings vis-a-vis God. Therefore, Rahner emphasizes that God must not replace the role of finite beings and finite causes in contexts of causal efficacy.[21] Instead, God is the transcendental ground and horizon of every being, of every act of being and knowing. So, the connection between God and finite beings is a relation which is (exclusively?) an encounter between the transcendental horizon of being on the one side and the concrete, finite entity on the other side. The picture of special divine agency you might get from Karl Rahner looks more or less like this: Any form of special divine action is nothing else but the becoming concrete of the transcendental relation between God as the absolute ground and the finite entities. The possibility of becoming concrete is already a feature built into the layout of the world. And we find this feature, for instance, whenever we encounter the openness of the material world towards the mental. We see it at work when consciousness arises in the physical universe or when self-conscious persons open themselves up towards experiencing God, who is the ultimate horizon of experience.[22] In other words: Karl Rahner holds that God as the 'transcendental source' (ground/cause) of all being cannot intervene directly into the course of the world because of his nature as being the transcendental source of everything. Thus, so-called intervention would be possible only in a mediated way: through events or especially through persons that have the capacity of making or becoming aware of the transcendental relation to God.

A comparable approach can be found in Schleiermacher[23]: He seems to have two main concerns. The first concern refers to the idea that

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[21] Cf. Rahner (1976: 91): "Die Unmittelbarkeit zu Gott kann, wenn sie überhaupt nicht von vornherein ein absoluter Widerspruch sein soll, nicht davon abhängen, daß das Nicht-Göttliche schlechterdings verschwindet, wenn Gott nahekommt. Gott braucht als er selber nicht dadurch einen Platz zu finden, daß ein anderes, das er nicht ist, den Platz räumt. Denn mindestens einmal das Anwesen Gottes als des transzendentalen Grundes und Horizontes alles Seienden und Erkennenden (das doch auch einen Ankunft Gottes, einen Unmittelbarkeit zu ihm ist) geschieht ja gerade durch und in der Gegebenheit des endlichen Seienden."

[22] Cf. Rahner (1976: 96).

[23] Cf. Schleiermacher (1830/31, part I: 240-241): "Indem nämlich dasjenige nicht erfolgt, was durch die Gesamtheit der endlichen Ursachen dem natürlichen Zusammenhange gemäß erfolgt sein würde; so wird eine Wirkung verhindert, und zwar nicht durch den Einfluß anderer auf natürliche Weise gegenwirkender und auch im Naturzusammenhang

God might serve as some sort of overriding cause. The second worry, however, is related to the causal closure of natural events, which seems to exclude any supernatural intervention. While the second concern is highly problematic – because it seems to give in to some sort of unfounded metaphysical naturalism too easily – the first worry is much more interesting and much more relevant to us. We can phrase Schleiermacher's first concern like this: It is a problem, if God brings about event e that should otherwise have been brought about by a mundane cause c, because in this case God takes the job of a mundane cause. The problem continues if you imagine that God stops the occurrence of event e^*, which otherwise would have been be brought about by mundane cause c (if c would have worked properly). In the latter case, God blocks the effect of cause c. So, if God intervenes into the course of the world, God either *replaces*, *blocks* or *overrides* the efficiency of c. Apparently, Schleiermacher thinks that 'blocking is mocking' while 'enhancing the powers of mundane causes equals cheating'. Therefore, Schleiermacher has serious troubles with the notion of special divine action. But why is this even a problem, since blocking or overriding is pretty much what any agent performing a deliberate action has to do in any case?

Maybe the idea of a causal nexus between purely natural causes is still at work here, because Schleiermacher thinks that natural causes contribute to the fact that nature will run its course, if left untouched. Within this order, natural and finite agents have a well-determined role and possess well-limited powers. Thus, Schleiermacher considers special divine intervention to be an annihilation of the course of events, which happened beforehand. However, this only makes sense if we presuppose that the causal or nomic web of finite properties and powers is necessarily closed. But, of course, we do not have to accept this presupposition.

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gegebener, endlicher Ursachen, sondern ohnerachtet alle wirksamen Ursachen zur Hervorbringung dieser Wirkung zusammenstimmen. Alles also, was von jeher hiezu beitrug, wird gewissermaßen vernichtet, und statt nur ein einzelnes Übernatürliches mitten in den Naturzusammenhang hineinzustellen, wie man es eigentlich will, muß man den Begriff der Natur ganz aufheben. Die positive Seite ist nun die, daß etwas erfolgen soll, was aus der Gesamtheit der endlichen Ursachen nicht zu begreifen ist. Aber indem dieses nun als ein wirksames Glied mit in den Naturzusammenhang eintritt, so wird nun in alles Zukunft alles ein anderes, als wenn dieses einzelne Wunder nicht geschehen wäre; und jedes Wunder hebe nicht nur den ganzen Zusammenhang der ursprünglichen Anordnung für alle Zukunft auf, sondern jedes spätere Wunder auch alle früheren, sofern sie schon in die Reihe der wirksamen Ursachen eingetreten sind."

Now, are we entitled to give Schleiermacher some credit? I am inclined, as indicated above, to reread Schleiermacher's worries differently – in a way that steers away from the highly problematic notion of causal closure. Instead, we should connect Schleiermacher's intuition to the notion of *divine providence*, which is the ultimate source of a natural order of causes and events as well as of features and powers built into the natural order:

(1) Imagine that based on divine intervention the actual world w@ turns out to be identical to w**, while, without divine intervention, it would have been identical to w*.

(2) On its own, world w@ would be identical to w*. In realizing w** by interfering with the course of events in w@, God expresses dismay and disapproval towards w*.

(3) The expression of dismay is rather a 'moral annihilation' of the dignity of the world w* that would have been identical to w@.

(4) Having foreknowledge, God could have known right from the start that w@ would turn into w* and that this provokes his expression of disapproval. Therefore, he could have equipped the entities building up the substance of the actual world with features which secure that w@ will always turn into w**.

Schleiermacher has a point, if we rephrase his intuitions in terms of divine fore-knowledge and the pre-creational approval of the world God is going to actualize. Then Schleiermacher's concerns are, as it stands, at the very heart of the classic notion of divine providence: If God does have some sort of serious fore-knowledge and if he is pre-creationally aware of the intended course of the world which he approves, special divine intervention does not seem to be necessary.[24]

But there is something else that can be found in Schleiermacher's view, which connects Schleiermacher back to the position I have outlined and associated with Karl Rahner: The status of God as an absolute cause seems to prevent God from acting in an intermediate and direct way, i.e. in a way that makes God's agency comparable to human agency.

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[24] It is important to note that once you have a strong notion of providence you don't actually need the occurrence of miracles. Cf. Hebblethwaite (1978: 224): "Divine providence is distinguished from miracle by the fact that in providence God is supposed to act in and through natural agencies to bring about his purposes and specifically not in the gaps between them."

Furthermore, the notion of a causal order, which has been established by God based on divine providence, seems to confront God with the problem of *causal overdetermination* in case God would want to replace, override or block natural causes, which are in place. Let us take a closer look at the issue of absolute causes. If we isolate the more important aspects of this idea in Rahner's and Schleiermacher's writings, we can identify three main theorems, which serve as a backbone to this view:

(1) If x is the absolute cause of y, it cannot serve as a relative/finite cause of y simultaneously. [from 1) *seems* to follow: If God is always the absolute cause of y he can never be the relative/finite cause of anything.]

(2) If x is the absolute cause of y and if y is the relative/finite cause of z, then x must be the absolute cause of z either.

(3) If x is the absolute cause of y and if y is brought under the 'influence' of z (in case z is an ideal, a universal etc.), then x must be the absolute cause of z.

According to this view, to be an absolute cause means to serve as an ultimate cause of being. Nevertheless, one might simply ask whether this notion of absolute causation, which offers the above-mentioned distinction between absolute and finite causes, rests on a simple dogma. It seems, as if the grammar of this distinction is tied to the assumption that there is a crucial metaphysical difference between absolute and finite causes. Apparently, this is also echoed in the notion of finite causes, although it is quite hard to define what Rahner as well as Schleiermacher exactly mean by finite causes in particular. If we say that finite causes are such that they are part of the natural order of causation, we might as well get stuck into a vicious cycle. Instead, I would like to introduce the following explications:

(a) A finite cause is finite *iff* it can be represented by a set of states of affairs whose number isn't infinite.

(b) A finite cause is finite *iff* it explanatorily depends on another entity.

It is easy to see that – based on those terms – God cannot play the role of finite causes because of his very own infinity as well as his aseity. But we still have to add another ingredient:

(c) Any event e that originates within the world needs a *causa efficiens* that serves as its relative/finite cause.

The idea, which is expressed in c), states more or less that within the order of the world the composites of the world display a certain signature (as being finite). In such a situation an absolute cause would be a serious disturbance of the whole layout of the created world. And this might as well be the reason why Schleiermacher talks about the risk of 'annihilation': How can it be the case that some sort of causation, which doesn't fit the parameters of the created world, enters the created world without over-writing the above-mentioned signature and without mocking the dignity of finite entities? That infinity – in God's case – might be a problem for divine interaction can also be accessed by some kind of weak analogy: Just imagine that the world fulfills the above mentioned requirements for non-finite causes. An eternal world would be something like an infinite collection of events. Does it make sense to think that the world as a whole works as a finite cause to bring about certain effects? Presumably not.

Now let us turn to the problem of causal over-determination. Overdetermination can be described as a subspecies of redundant causation:

> *Redundant causation* occurs whenever there are multiple actual distinct events c_1, c_2, ... , c_n, e, such that each c_j without the other cs would cause e. For simplicity I focus on the case with just two redundant factors, c_1 and c_2. In such a case, *preemption* (asymmetric redundancy) occurs whenever just one of the cs actually causes e; *overdetermination* (symmetric redundancy) occurs whenever both of the cs are causally on par with respect to e.
>
> So when two vandals throw rocks that simultaneously shatter the window, there are three actual distinct events: c_1, the throwing of one rock; c_2, the throwing of the other rock; and e, the shattering of the window. Here c_1 and c_2 are redundant causes of e. And since both c_1 and c_2 are causally on par with respect to e (neither rock arrives first, or knocks the other off course, etc.), c_1 and c_2 are overdetermining causes of e.[25]

Within the framework of divine agency, the problem of over-determination is based on a crucial premise: The risk of over-determination arises only if we consider a certain event e that would have been caused by a mundane cause anyway. So, imagine that God allows the world to run its course (free agency included while giving God some sort of middle knowledge in order for him to know what is going to happen). If God wants to bring about the event e knowing fully well that event e will

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[25] J. Schaffer (2003: 23).

occur "anyway" (thanks to the course of events and the agency of free agents God knows about ...) and if he affirms or approves it, it would mean overdetermination to put in an additional divine volition (if this is a divine basic action) or to perform a divine basic action to bring *e* about or to display supernatural powers to bring *e* about. As you can see, the over-determination warning within the area of divine agency rests on a very strong presupposition which says:

> (A) Every event *e* God *wants* to be brought about is *capable* of being brought about and (actually) *will* be brought about by mundane/finite causes anyway.

But, of course, we can still question whether A) is acceptable. What could be the reasons that support A)? One reason would be to insist on the autonomy of the created world. However, this is just not enough – not just because the notion of autonomy is ambiguous, but rather because one might wonder whether autonomy is indeed valuable from God's point of view. Instead, a strong notion of providence might help us here. Therefore, we need a modification of A) that looks presumably like this:

> (B) Every event *e* God *wants* to be brought about is *capable* of being brought about and (actually) *will* be brought about by mundane/finite causes anyway, *iff* the occurrence of *e* is part of an order of events established by divine providence (right from the start).

This idea, however, would not be applicable in cases in which *e* is not part of a foreseen course of events or of a certain order of events. But given divine providence, we will have to ask whether or not some event *e* can literally be outside God's providence.[26] Let us assume, just for the time being, that certain outcomes of libertarian free will (on the side of creation) are not within the range of divine providence (although from a Molinist point of view God would not be surprised by the occurrence of these events). It might as well be assumed that even direct divine

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[26] I will take it that open theists will strongly disagree with this idea. The broader question is whether or not providence is a required divine attribute. Of course, the notion of providence is another burden added to the problem of theodicy. However, as Perszyk and Bishop have shown, the open theist is not better off with regard to this very specific problem. If God has some serious foreknowledge, it is hard to reconcile his knowledge of the horrendous evils with his morally benevolent and loving character. But if God doesn't have any serious foreknowledge and just takes the risk of horrendous evils to come, this will not only undermine his moral character but also his position as a rational agent since it is downright irrational to bring about something unforeseeable 'at all costs'. See Bishop & Perszyk (2011: 116-119).

intervention cannot undo these outcomes of creaturely libertarian free will. Since these outcomes rest on indeterminacies, which God seems to have willingly put into the order of the created world, God can only overrule them at the cost of mocking, even annihilating creaturely freedom.

IV. DIVINE ASEITY

One very powerful divine attribute, which seems to demand a serious reconsidertation of how God acts and how he is related to the world, is divine *aseity*. We should understand divine *aseity* as the most radical form of independence. God does not depend on anything metaphysically and if he seems to depend on something, this is just a *prima facie* impression, which *ultima facie* cannot be true. So, any limitation God seems to have is brought upon God only and exclusively by himself. From this very notion of divine aseity we may derive the nature of the relation, which created beings have with respect to God. Whatever the different flavors of such a relation might be, it seems to be apparent that this relation must not cross out divine *aseity*, i.e. divine independence. It is also apparent that there is one prominent act of God, one instance of divine agency, which meets the standards of divine aseity at full length: *creation*. In creation, spelled out as *creatio ex nihilo*, there are no metaphysically robust relations established previously to the act of creation. Furthermore, creation is best approached as an instance of David Armstrong's singular causality, because the event of creation is singular by itself. Before and at the moment of creation, there is no chance of referring to laws and regularities, because apart from God there are no further entities having any properties or displaying any dispositions, which could serve as truthmaker of regularities we are willing to detect.

The creation-mode of activity keeps divine aseity fully intact and, equally, asserts the full dependency of the created world. So, we can state as the basic signature of any finite entity:

(SFE) $\forall x$ (If x is not identical to God, or if x is not a proper part, attribute or aspect of God or of the divine essence → God contributes in the creation-mode to the existence of x as long as x exists).

My proposal at this point is that divine agency is predominantly and exclusively performed in creation-mode, if divine aseity has to be taken

seriously. I will also add the somewhat courageous (if not outrageous) idea that any additional form of divine agency would put God himself in the weird position of being guilty of causal overdetermination by himself.

To understand this, we need a somewhat more complex understanding of creation. In order to get there, I will make use of Brian Leftow's distinction between *initial creation* and *late creation*. Leftow starts out with a very basic notion of creation – pointing out that God provides the material mundane beings are made of. Let us just, for the time being, assume that the material substitutes of finite beings are what van Inwagen or Merricks call 'material simples'. Then we arrive at the following picture of creation:

> Simples make up *David*'s block of marble. If all of these were created, all *David*'s parts were created. If all parts or all stuff of *David* are created, God made all of *David* appear *ex nihilo*. By doing so he made a creating-*ex-nihilo* causal contribution to *David*: He made the creating-*ex-nihilo* sort of difference for *David* by providing all *David*'s matter *ex nihilo*. This is God's necessary but insufficient contribution to *David*'s appearance. Taken in terms of this, 'God created *David*' is a loose way to say that God created all of *David*, and the latter is a consequence of his making all of the universe begin to exist. [...] [I]n a slightly thicker sense of 'creates', God creates *David* with C's help, as C determines that it is *David* God creates, though God made His whole creative contribution to *David* by strict-sense creating all of the universe.[27]

However, this basic notion of creation is not satisfying. If we say that God is the creator of everything, his role has to be more robust and somewhat more important. So, Leftow continues:

> We can add to this first model to 'thicken' the sense in which God creates items that appear after the universe begins. Suppose, for example, that at the beginning or later, God creates *ex nihilo* some deterministic causal systems, primed to act. He foreknows all that they will bring about. Surely He fully intends some of it. (Perhaps He merely accepts some, as a foreknown but unintended price for effects He wishes: perhaps these effects are unavoidable given these creatures' natures.) By putting these systems in place primed to act as He intends, God causes them to bring about what He intends. So God works through such systems once they exist, even if He is not currently willing their results. So if God creates

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[27] Leftow (2012: 15).

such a system, He in a thicker sense creates things which appear by its deterministic workings: through it He arranges parts into wholes whose existence He intends. If God has created some deterministic systems *ex nihilo* and intends the existence of at least some things He knows that they will bring to exist, God late-creates some items this way.[28]

But even this picture is not satisfying in every respect. The very last step would be to throw in some devices that safeguard the freedom of creatures, which are endowed with some kind of significant free will:

> If God led Michaelangelo to carve as he did, God in this thick sense made David through him. The system consisting of God, Michaelangelo, and the rest of C is not deterministic, but it is close enough to being so to let us say that God creates through Michaelangelo.
> These additions yield a second model: God as remote and creatures as proximate causes of late creation. On this model, both God and creatures act in ways that guarantee an effect; that is, are individually sufficient for it. God 'late-creates' only through creatures.[29]

However, we have to add that the distinction between initial creation and late creation makes sense from a finite perspective only. If God is eternal, initial creation and late-creation happen at the very same instance for him, within *the one eternal now*. Thus, we might as well assume that initial creation and late-creation are just two aspects of one and the same action, since no sequence of time is available to God to discriminate and distinguish different instances of activity. So, if late-creation is just a metaphor to describe from a human and temporal perspective what seems to be some sort of a later appearance (but within God's context this would not be correct, since creation and late-creation are simultaneous and happen in one eternal "now"), we may introduce a *transitive* notion of creation. But what can we gain from a transitive notion of creation for the case of divine agency?

Imagine a slightly enriched picture of initial creation and late creation, adding some further ingredients to Leftow's approach. This way we can put some flesh to the bones of a *transitive notion of creation*. For instance,

(1) if God creates the raw material of the universe,
(2) if God determines universals or laws or causally relevant properties and powers,

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[28] Leftow (2012: 16).
[29] Leftow (2012: 16-17).

(3) if God creates finite agents,

(4) if God determines the essences of agents and grounds the counterfactuals of their freedom within those essences,

(5) and if one agent brings about event e,

(6) then God is related to this event e in the creation mode.

The problem of over-determination is couched in the question whether immediate divine action – imagine for the moment that it could, indeed, occur – could *do* anything further which would not already be provided by the creation-mode of divine action. Again, let us use our imagination: Imagine that God determined by creation mode that a certain event e will occur and additionally decides in a later-stage 'non-creation'-mode (displaying a specific instance of his will) that e will occur, then this would be a (strange) version of causal over-determination. For in this case, God would display two distinct volitions (one might add that this contradicts the doctrine of divine simplicity) aiming at the very same effect. So, what could God really add to the creation mode of bringing e about? Maybe the second volition is meant to truly secure the occurrence of e due to the fact that the creation mode might not be stable enough to do so (given the fact that the creation mode has to secure certain probabilities in order to have a place for created freedom).

Even if we neglect for the time being that the notion of an instable creation mode remains quite puzzling, we still have to face another serious problem: If e is an event that can be brought about by a free finite agent only, then God cannot bring it about – neither in the creation mode nor by (*ex hypothesi*) direct intervention – without literally destroying the nature of finite beings' free will. So, if everything that God is able to bring about, when he establishes the order of the world, can be brought about in creation mode, why would direct intervention still be necessary?

The only way how God could do anything beyond what is already done in creation mode would be to undo what he has installed in creation mode. Although it might be in accordance with the 'raw power' of divine omnipotence to replace finite causes, this very same ability might not be within the range of a divine omnipotence, which has confined itself further by a serious form of divine self-determination and limitation. In other words: Once God has established a certain order of being by creation mode it is hard to see why further intervention is really needed. If God has some sort of serious foreknowledge and is capable of providence, he is in a position to predetermine the particular course of events – at least

within a range of possible courses of events –, which finds his approval. If God has some form of middle knowledge, the possible outcomes of creaturely free will could be also part of his picture of the actual world. Again, the question arises why one needs additional divine intervention, which puts God himself into a position of causal overdetermination in presenting two colliding volitions aiming at the very same effect.

If we add, in applying Ramsey's insights to our current debates, that divine presence can be mediated by mundane causes, it is hard to see why the eternal God, who has installed a certain order of the world by creation-mode, cannot be present to a certain person seated in time. But, of course, one man's *modus ponens* is another man's *modus tollens*: My picture crucially depends on divine eternity and foreknowledge. If you want to have direct divine intervention, you might as well get rid of these attributes – and this is the move Open Theists would have to make.

Clearly the creation mode cannot and must not imply proximity with regard to immediate authorship or agency, because this would overrule the fact that finite beings can serve as the prima facie causal sources of certain mundane events. Nevertheless, God is related to every event *e* by creation mode. Based on middle knowledge God could have furnished the essences of agents in a way that order the counterfactuals of freedom for each event and every agent to an eschatologically good end. Based on a strong notion of providence we have to say that God has established the laws of nature (or the powers of finite beings) as well as the material the world consists of in a way that secures a course of the world which finds divine approval. Why would God still need specific and direct intervention – especially if we take into account that the outcome of finite free will must not be under the full control of God?

Well, this picture will still cast certain doubts, because it looks as if God is only indirectly involved in altering the course of events, when he has to create the material of the world, powers and properties, finite agents themselves and when he has to determine laws and essences etc. in order to 'late'-create a certain event. It seems that the material, the laws and the essences are very complex and intermediary means to the end and that they are either constituting divine agency or realizing some kind of creatio-continua-kind of activity. However, from a divine point of view, creation and late-creation are just two sides of one coin – ultimately based on a single divine volition, which unfolds into the continuing creation of the universe. Divine simplicity and eternity would give us, I assume, further reasons to embrace the creation-mode of divine action.

V. CONCLUSION

Of course, *causa efficiens* is not the best way to think about the impact God may have on the world. In my proposal, the *causa efficiens* mode of operating is reserved to the creation mode of agency in God's case, because this mode is the only way to preserve divine aseity.

I am quite intrigued by the idea (contemporarily presented by John Bishop and Ken Perszyk) that God predominantly (if not exclusively) serves as a formal and final cause to the universe. This could be a way to strengthen the model of divine economy as well as the notion of divine presence, which does not compete with a view that demands finite causes for finite effects. To make my point clear, I am inclined to refer to a common analogy: God as the formal cause of the universe could be seen as the soul of a body, which is the universe itself. This would give us a chance to identify mundane events as basic divine actions, if those events somehow respond to an attraction which is given to them by the formal cause. Furthermore we could also see the emergence of new features in the world as the result of the above-mentioned tendency towards supreme goodness and beauty, if those features are presuppositions of the occurrence of entities which realize ultimate goodness or ultimate beauty.[30] If God's nature is nothing less but supreme goodness, the attraction of goodness could be the pattern we need in order to identify divine activity in the world.

If we make use of this model, there might be additional benefits. We could, for instance, introduce the idea of a continuous incarnation of the divine. This very idea is not completely extravagant because you can find it in the writings of classic Christian theologians like Maximos Confessor.[31] Christopher Knight maintains that this view would allow us a 'pansacramental' approach[32], because it offers the prerequisites to

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[30] Cf. Hebblethwaite (1978: 227): "There is also the *argument* that evolutionary theory cannot actually *explain* the appearance of new and higher levels of organization out of the interaction of lower levels. It is not a question of gaps. The descriptive evolutionary story is continuous. Higher levels have emerged out of the lower. We are not to suppose that additional items have surreptitiously been fed in. But the whole process leading from 'elementary patterns of energy to the limitless complexity of the physical instrument of Shakespeare's wit or Newton's genius' is not self-explanatory. We do not detect the Creator's hand at this point and at that. But the whole story manifests his providential work in and through the gradual complexification of organic life; for it manifests a teleology hard to deny."

[31] Cf. Knight (2005: 182-183).

[32] Cf. Knight (2005: 193).

understand incarnation as the process in which the universe gets closer to the nature of God and is in a progressively better position to display the very features of the divine nature, namely ultimate goodness and beauty. Of course, in order to get to this point we are relying on a very peculiar understanding of incarnation, which – alluding to Hegel – means the presence and realization of the infinite or ultimate within the finite universe. If you take this approach, indeed everything can become the medium which reveals and realizes divine presence. However, as a crucial criterion we would have to add that this only happens when the mundane entity is willing to be attracted and, therefore, shaped by the ultimate form which is the divine nature.

Let me add an additional note: Some theologians have introduced a very specific interpretation of quantum indeterminacy in order to offer a causal joint for divine action. But this is presumably misconceived as it runs into further problems[33]: If something is regarded as indeterminate, it still implies breaking a law of nature (or some kind of rule which is equivalent to a law of nature) if God starts messing around with the statistical probabilities in order to guarantee a certain outcome even if this messing around goes undetected for the human observer. Still, the whole story would be a case of some sort of heavy-weight divine interference, which seriously jeopardizes the dignity of the created order. Instead, we may very well interpret indeterminacies in nature as the dispositions God could have built into nature (by creation-mode) in order to let nature respond to the attraction of the formal cause. The patterns we would have to identify in order to talk about divine agency and activity are analogous to the patterns we detect once we find out that there is a serious difference between being a corpse and being a body owned by a person. If contemporary naturalism gives us the impression that humans are just parasites inhabiting a corpse, theism must come up with signs that the universe and its development resemble a lively organism.

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[33] Cf. Saunders (2000).

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TROPES AS DIVINE ACTS:
THE NATURE OF CREATURELY PROPERTIES
IN A WORLD SUSTAINED BY GOD[1]

ROBERT K. GARCIA

Texas A&M University

Abstract. I aim to synthesize two issues within theistic metaphysics. The first concerns the metaphysics of creaturely properties and, more specifically, the nature of unshareable properties, or *tropes*. The second concerns the metaphysics of providence and, more specifically, the way in which God sustains creatures, or *sustenance*. I propose that creaturely properties, understood as what I call modifier tropes, are identical with divine acts of sustenance, understood as acts of property-conferral. I argue that this *theistic conferralism* is attractive because it integrates trope theory and the doctrine of sustenance in a mutually enhancing way. Taking modifier tropes to be divine acts mitigates certain weaknesses of trope theory and safeguards divine sustenance from the threat of both deism and occasionalism.

I. INTRODUCTION

In this article I aim to synthesize two issues within theistic metaphysics. The first concerns the metaphysics of creaturely properties and, more specifically, the nature of unshareable properties, or *tropes*. The second concerns the metaphysics of divine providence and, more specifically, the way in which God continually sustains creatures, or *divine sustenance*. My aim is to bring these issues into closer contact by explaining and motivating the proposal that creaturely properties are identical with

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[1] I dedicate this article to the memory of my friend Scott Austin, who acted divinely if anyone ever did.

divine actions. Ultimately, I will arrive at a more nuanced version of the
following thesis:

> *Theistic Conferralism* (provisional statement): Divine sustenance
> involves basic and unmediated acts whereby God supplies creatures
> with their properties. As such, there is no distinction between the
> supplying of a property and the property supplied. In fact, those
> actions are identical with the properties of creatures. And, with
> respect to a metaphysical theory of properties, those actions-cum-
> properties are tropes.

Note that this thesis identifies *creaturely* properties with divine acts. It
does not affirm (or deny) that *divine* properties are identical with divine
acts. I will not directly discuss the latter identity claim here, though it
merits consideration.[2] At any rate, the restriction to creaturely properties
will be suppressed in the sequel.

I will argue that, in its final form, theistic conferralism is attractive
because it offers a mutually enhancing integration of a prominent theory
of properties – trope theory – and a crucial monotheistic doctrine –
sustenance. Taking tropes to be divine acts mitigates certain weaknesses
of trope theory and safeguards divine sustenance from the threat of both
deism and occasionalism.

II. THE METAPHYSICS OF CREATURELY PROPERTIES

There are many theories about the existence and nature of properties.
However, I take theistic conferralism to be viable only if it is understood
in terms of the specific theory I have in mind, which I call *modifier trope
theory*. The latter is often conflated with a nearby but fundamentally
different view, what I call *module trope theory*. As I explain below, if
theistic conferralism is (mis)understood in terms of module tropes,

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[2] The claim may offer a way to understand or improve theistic activism. As originally
developed by Morris and Menzel (1986), theistic activism has it that God creates the
platonic realm of necessarily existing objects, including God's own essence. I'm inclined
to think that theistic activism is best understood (or improved) as identifying the divine
nature with a basic divine action, rather than taking the divine nature to be in some sense
created by a divine action. So understood, theistic activism would hold that God's nature
just is a self-naturing act. Thus, because a basic divine act is free but not itself created,
a theistic activist could affirm that God freely natures himself, while denying that God
creates his nature. For more on basic divine action see Alston (1994: 45). For recent
discussion of theistic activism, see Menzel (Forthcoming) and the essays in Gould (2014).

it will straightforwardly entail occasionalism. Thus, because avoiding occasionalism is one of the chief aims of the proposed view, it will be important to distinguish module tropes from modifier tropes and to understand theistic conferralism in terms of the latter. Something else that is important for understanding the view is the distinction between a property-role and the various types of candidate entities that philosophers have employed or postulated to play that role. To clarify these matters, I will begin by sketching out a hierarchy of views and choice points concerning the metaphysics of properties, eventually drilling down to modifier trope theory.

Among the many traditional and contemporary views concerning the existence and nature of properties, perhaps the highest level of disagreement concerns whether properties exist at all. The naysayers are called *austere nominalists*. On their view, strictly speaking, there are no characteristics but only primitively charactered objects; there are spherical objects – billiard balls and the like – but no sphericity per se.[3] Those opposed to austere nominalism agree that properties exist in some sense or another.

Generally, philosophers who think that properties exist think that properties are needed to do metaphysical work. This is sometimes expressed by saying that there are one or more *property roles* that need to be played.[4] Thus, as Alex Oliver puts it, each of the competing property theories can be seen as positing a system of candidate entities that are supposed to be the best qualified to play whatever property roles need to be played (1996, 11). There are several putative property roles, but here I will focus on the traditional idea that a property is a *character-grounder* and plays what we might call the *character-grounding role*. Properties ground character in that an object is variously charactered in virtue of having the specific properties that it does. For example, the sphericity of a ball grounds its shape; the ball is shaped as it is in virtue of being related to sphericity in the right way.

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[3] As I understand it, austere nominalism entails but is not equivalent to so-called ostrich nominalism. Roughly, the latter denies that properties are required to account for *predication*, whereas austere nominalism denies that properties are required to account for *anything*. For more on austere nominalism, see Loux (2006), Garcia (2009), and Carroll and Markosian (2010). For ostrich nominalism, see the excellent discussion in Imaguire (2014).

[4] For helpful discussion about various putative property roles, see Oliver (1996), Swoyer (1999), and Edwards (2014).

Those who agree that properties exist disagree over what properties are like – over the *kind* of entity that plays the character-grounding role. Indeed, philosophers have employed a wild variety of entities to play this role. Here, the most general disagreement concerns whether properties are constructed out of more fundamental entities. Among philosophers who take properties to be constructed, for example, some identify properties with sets of (actual or possible) ordinary objects. On the latter view, generally speaking, an object is charactered in some way in virtue of being a member of a certain set of objects; here, the set plays the role of a character-grounder and, thus, the set *is* a property.

Among those who posit unconstructed, fundamental properties, a major point of disagreement concerns whether or not properties are *shareable* (multiply-instantiable, repeatable, etc.). A property is shareable if and only if it can characterize multiple wholly distinct objects at once. A realist takes (non-haecceitistic) properties to be shareable and calls them *universals*. On realism, it is possible that two distinct spheres *a* and *b* exist simultaneously, such that the sphericity of *a* is (numerically) identical with the sphericity of *b*; the sphericity is a universal.[5] In contrast, a trope theorist takes properties to be non-shareable and calls them *tropes*. On their view, if distinct spheres *a* and *b* exist simultaneously, then the sphericity of *a* and the sphericity of *b* are exactly similar but numerically distinct; the sphericities are tropes.[6]

We have almost drilled down to modifier trope theory. Discerning this theory is somewhat impeded by the fact that the literature tends to conflate the view with a nearby but fundamentally different trope theory, what I call module trope theory.[7] The difference turns on a distinction between two competing concepts of a trope. To illustrate the distinction, suppose there is a billiard ball that has a sphericity trope, what a trope theorist might describe as "an instance of sphericity" or "the sphericalness of the ball". Now consider: Is the trope itself spherical? If you think the answer is yes, that a sphericity trope is itself spherical, then you are thinking of what I call a module trope. If you think the answer is

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[5] Important contemporary defenses of realism include Armstrong (1989) and (1997), and Moreland (2001) and (2013).

[6] Important defenses of trope theory include Stout (1921) and (1923) and Williams (1953), and, more recently, Campbell (1981) and (1990), Maurin (2002), and Ehring (2011).

[7] I am indebted to Michael Loux for first alerting me to this distinction. I say more about my indebtedness in Garcia (2015), where I discuss the distinction at length.

no, that a sphericity trope is not itself spherical, then you are thinking of what I call a modifier trope. Roughly, the module/modifier distinction turns on whether tropes are self-exemplifying (module tropes) or non-self-exemplifying (modifier tropes).

As before, it is crucial to understand theistic conferralism in terms of modifier tropes and not module tropes. Thus, to forestall potential misunderstanding, it will be useful to say a bit more about each concept of a trope. On the one hand, a module trope is a character-grounder that is self-exemplifying and non-shareable. However, self-exemplification should not be taken to imply that a module trope somehow has its intrinsic character derivatively. Rather, a module trope is *primitively* charactered with respect to the character it self-exemplifies: a sphericity module trope is primitively spherical. Moreover, a module trope is primitively *maximally thinly* charactered: a sphericity module trope is primitively spherical and not (to the extent possible[8]) otherwise intrinsically charactered. Thus, in effect, a module trope is a primitively singly-propertied *object*.[9] A sphericity module trope is a primitively merely-spherical object. This concept of a trope often shows up – usually only tacitly – within a trope bundle theory, such as those defended by D. C. Williams (1953), Keith Campbell (1990), and, perhaps[10], Anna-Sofia Maurin (2002), and Douglas Ehring (2011). This is no accident arguably, module tropes are better suited for a bundle theory of substance than are modifier tropes.[11]

On the other hand, a modifier trope is a character-grounder that is non-self-exemplifying and non-shareable. It does not exemplify, have, or bear the character it grounds. Rather, a modifier trope grounds the

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[8] In Garcia (Forthcoming) I argue that there are problems lurking here for module tropes.

[9] Although module trope theorists often categorize tropes as properties, I think module tropes are best thought of as belonging to the category of object. In contrast, modifier tropes are accurately thought of as being properties in the traditional sense of being "predicable" entities. For this reason, modifier tropes tend to be employed within a substance-attribute model. For example, some philosophers – such as Lowe (2006) – sharply distinguish *objects* and *modes* of objects while identifying modes with tropes. I take such a view to be identifying modes with *modifier* tropes. Arguably, the latter identification is incompatible with a *module* trope theory. I thank Ross Inman for pressing me to clarify this.

[10] I say "perhaps" because it is less than clear to me that Maurin and Ehring are working with the concept of a module trope.

[11] I discuss this in my (2015) and "Tropes as Character-Grounders".

character of its *bearer*; a modifier trope is, as it were, a *character-maker* or *characterizer*. On modifier trope theory, a sphericity trope is not itself spherical. Rather, the trope makes its bearer spherical. A sphericity modifier trope is a non-shareable, non-spherical, *sphere-maker* or *spherizer*. This concept of a trope is often tacitly at play within substance-attribute ontologies such as that of C. B. Martin (1980) and E. J. Lowe (2006).[12]

To sum up, we may say that a modifier trope is a singly-characterizing property, whereas a module trope is a primitively- and singly-charactered object. Both concepts of a trope have currency in the literature, and each has unique strengths and weaknesses.[13]

There are several reasons why theistic conferralism should be understood in terms of modifier tropes and not module tropes. First, taking creaturely properties to be module tropes that are identical with divine actions would entail that divine actions are (or are among) the basic *objects* of the world. This is not only implausible – on the grounds that no action is itself, say, spherical – but it would also seem to amount to a version of panentheism.[14] This would be an unwelcome result, not least because the proposed view aspires to improve a theistic doctrine of sustenance.

Second, for similar reasons, understanding theistic conferralism in terms of module tropes would imply that natural causes are identical with divine actions – in other words, it would amount to a version of occasionalism. Many trope theorists hold that tropes are the immediate objects of perception and the terms of causal relations.[15] With respect to perception, trope theorists have argued that one immediately sees the redness of a rose. And, regarding causation, they have argued that the hotness of the stove is the direct cause of the burn on your hand (Maurin 2013). Arguably, however, these claims are predicated on the (tacit) assumption that tropes are module tropes.[16] For example, it

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[12] It is not easy to tell which concept of a trope is the intended one in Lowe's work. In conversation, however, Lowe clarified that he takes tropes to be modifier tropes.

[13] See my (2015) and (Forthcoming).

[14] Roughly, panentheism is the view that God is in the world and the world is in God but God is not identical with the world. Panentheists cash out their view in different ways. For recent discussion, see especially Clayton and Peacocke (2004).

[15] See Campbell (1990), Ehring (2011), Maurin (2013), Schaffer (2001), and Williams (1953).

[16] I argue for this in my (Forthcoming).

is precisely because a redness module trope is itself red that the trope can be immediately perceived when I look at a rose. And, it is precisely because a hotness module trope is itself temperatured that a hotness trope can directly cause a burn when I touch a hot stove. In other words, module tropes can play a direct role in causation and perception because they are thinly-charactered objects. Thus, if understood in terms of module tropes, theistic conferralism says that divine actions are identical with thinly-charactered objects that play a direct role in causation and perception – that divine acts *are* natural causes and percepts. In this way, on module trope theory the proposed view would entail occasionalism.

Crucially, this is *not* the case on modifier trope theory. A redness modifier trope is not colored and a hotness modifier trope is not temperatured. As such, modifier tropes are not eligible to play a direct role in causation and perception. More generally, as character-grounders, modifier tropes act as formal causes rather than as efficient causes. Thus, identifying divine actions with modifier tropes does not entail that those acts are efficient causes, and so does not entail occasionalism.

A third reason stems from conclusions that are upstream of this project. For reasons given elsewhere, I take modifier tropes to be superior to module tropes.[17] As I will explain in section seven, however, several weaknesses of modifier trope theory can be mitigated by conjoining the theory with theistic conferralism.

Fourth and finally, on a plausible understanding of it, the monotheistic doctrine of sustenance seems to tacitly involve a commitment to modifier tropes. I hope to substantiate this claim in the next two sections.

III. SUSTENANCE

In Western monotheism a perennial philosophical issue concerns the nature of providence. There are several aspects of providence, but the dimension of interest here is that of *sustenance*. The scriptures and creeds of the monotheisms of the Abrahamic tradition routinely give voice to the idea that creatures are profoundly and continually dependent on God.[18] This idea is so important as to be called the doctrine of sustenance, which

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[17] I offer reasons in my (2015), (Forthcoming), and "Tropes as Character-Grounders".

[18] The doctrine is said to find expression in many sacred texts, including Wisdom 11:25; Psalm 36:5-6; Acts 17:28; Romans 11:36; Hebrews 1:2-3; Colossians 1:16-17; and Qur-án 13:2-3 and 59:24. The doctrine is affirmed in creeds such as the 1530 *Augsburg Confession* (God is said to be the "creator and preserver of all things visible and invisible")

we may summarize as the thesis that all created entities whatsoever are dependent on God's sustaining them in being from moment to moment.[19]

To understand theistic conferralism, we need to draw a distinction within sustenance itself. The distinction stems from a contrast between a narrow and a broad sense of sustenance. Kathryn Tanner draws the contrast as follows:

> In a narrow sense God is the creator as the giver of existence, where the fact of being is contrasted with what one is or does or becomes. But in a broader sense, God acts in the mode of creator whatever the aspect of created existence at issue ... [In the broad sense, from] the most general to the most specific features of existence, all that the creature is it owes to God as the creator of the world. (1994: 112-113).

In other words, in the narrow sense, sustenance only involves God's continually upholding creatures in existence, or supplying them with existence. Hugh McCann calls this *existence-conferral* (2012, 30). In the broad sense, sustenance also involves God's continually supplying creatures with their properties and powers. That is, it involves the continuous dependence of all creatures on God for their properties and powers. I will call this dimension of broad sustenance *property-conferral*. In this sense, creaturely properties are *conferred properties* – hence the name, "theistic conferralism".[20]

The broad sense of sustenance finds expression in the work of various theologians and philosophers. For example, Louis Berkhof says that sustenance is "that continuous work of God by which He maintains the things which He created, together with the properties and powers with which He endowed them" (1996, 170). Similarly, Richard Swinburne says that "God is our supreme benefactor: we owe our existence from moment to moment, and our powers and pleasures, our knowledge and desires, to his sustaining power" (1998, 112). Thus, for Berkhof and Swinburne, sustenance is twofold and involves not only God's continually upholding things in existence (existence-conferral) but also God's continually supplying things with their properties (property-conferral).

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and the 1646 *Westminster Confession of Faith* ("God ... doth uphold, direct, dispose, and govern all creatures, actions, and things ...").

[19] This summary is adapted from Rogers (2010: 99). Sustenance is sometimes called *preservation*. For a helpful general discussion see Kvanvig (2008).

[20] See Ásta Sveinsdóttir (2008) and (2013) for an excellent discussion of conferred properties. I take it that, in Sveinsdóttir's terms, theistic conferralism is a conferralist account of (creaturely) properties.

Similar avowals of broad sustenance are not hard to find throughout the monotheistic tradition.[21]

Property-conferral seems to be at the root of one of the traditional challenges for an account of providence. The challenge I have in mind is that of avoiding both deism and occasionalism. As Farley notes, in the orthodox tradition, "God's governance can neither be reduced to 'bare permission' [deism] nor identified with the natural order alone [occasionalism]" (1988, 173). Some philosophers reject property-conferral, apparently on the grounds that property-conferral leads to occasionalism by making God the immediate cause of a creature's having its properties.[22] Others affirm property-conferral, apparently on the grounds that rejecting it leads to deism by taking God out of immediate contact with the world.[23] Thus, it seems that property-conferral poses a dilemma: the rejection of it threatens to give rise to deism and the affirmation of it threatens to give rise to occasionalism. My principle aim in this paper is to take a closer look at property-conferral and to propose a way of understanding it in terms of modifier tropes. My hope is that understanding property-conferral in this way will resolve the above dilemma and, moreover, shore up weaknesses of modifier trope theory.

IV. THE PALETTE THEORY

The foregoing has primarily been stage setting: First, I have introduced trope theory and distinguished between modifier tropes and module tropes. Second, I have introduced the doctrine of sustenance and marked out the aspect of sustenance that I call property-conferral. I will now focus on the following questions: *Metaphysically speaking, what does property-conferral amount to? And, in particular, does God create properties prior to distributing them to objects?*

In the next section, I will argue against a natural and affirmative answer to the second question. In descriptions of broad sustenance, such as those noted above, the language often suggests that in property-conferral there is a distinction between an act of conferring and the property that is conferred. More specifically, it suggests that God creates a property prior to bestowing it on an object, where the priority here

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[21] See, for example, Berkouwer (1952) and van Inwagen (1988).
[22] E.g., Thomas Tracy (1994: 89).
[23] E.g., Kathryn Tanner (1994) and Hugh McCann (2012).

need not be temporal. I will call this the *palette theory* because it suggests that the way that God confers properties on objects is analogous to the way that a Renaissance artist paints a canvas: by first making the paint and then applying it to a canvas. On this analogy, God paints objects with antecedently created properties.[24] Or, dropping the analogy, God characterizes objects with antecedently created characteristics. For example, in sustaining the character of a ripe tomato, God has created redness and bestowed or conferred it on the tomato.

The palette theory offers a natural way to understand property-conferral. However, I think that there are reasons to reject the palette theory and that those reasons support theistic conferralism. In the next section I will offer reasons to reject the palette theory. In the subsequent section I will explore the implications of rejecting it.

V. AGAINST THE PALETTE THEORY

I will present three problems for the palette theory. As we will see, the case against the palette theory is also a case for theistic conferralism.

The Immediacy Challenge

First, the palette theory violates an immediacy criterion for sustenance. According to Charles McCracken, a traditional aim of a doctrine of sustenance is to secure or recognize "the total and immediate dependence of all things on God."[25] Others, such as Philip Quinn (1988, 87, 98) and Kathryn Tanner (1988, 84), take it to be a *criterion* for an acceptable doctrine of sustenance that sustenance be characterized by immediacy and the absence of instruments. According to Tanner, "God's agency must be talked about as universal and immediate, ... conversely, everything non-divine must be talked about as existing in a relation of total and immediate dependence upon God" (1988, 84). As Tracy puts it, on this view "there is no instrumental substructure in God's creative activity, God does not do one thing by doing another" (1994, 84).

On the palette theory, properties are God's *tools* for character-grounding. Mediating between God and an object is a distinct entity: a property that serves as a created instrument for God's sustaining that

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[24] This analogy is not perfect, as the artist case involves temporal priority whereas the palette theory does not.

[25] Cited in Quinn (1988: 98).

object. For example, between God and a billiard ball, there is sphericity, a created property by which God sustains the ball. More generally, on the palette theory, one category of created entities – the properties – is used by God to sustain another category of created entities – the objects. Thus, if palette theory is true, then property-conferral is a *mediated* divine activity. In this way, the palette theory violates the immediacy criterion.[26]

The Regress Challenge

Second, the palette theory either leads to a problematic regress or requires a self-undermining restriction. As we will see, the regress can be stopped by a natural and plausible restriction on the palette theory, but the theory is undermined by the very fact that this restriction is plausible.

As a warm up for the regress problem, suppose there is a peculiar craftsman – let us call him Guido – whose peculiarity stems from two facts about him. First, Guido cannot make anything without using his tools. And second, Guido must make all his tools. I submit that Guido would be hard pressed to make *anything*. Or, perhaps he could make something only if he made an infinite number of things. As we will see, on the palette theory, God and Guido are in similar situations.

The palette theory accepts the broad conception of sustenance: it takes sustenance to involve property-conferral and the continuous dependence of all creatures on God for their properties and powers. What makes the palette theory unique is that it takes property-conferral to involve the creation and bestowal of a property. Here, a creature is dependent on God's supplying a property that God has created. On this picture, God creates a character-grounder with which he grounds the character of an object by giving the character-grounder to the object. That is, for any creature x, God sustains x, in part, by creating properties and bestowing them on x. For example, God creates sphericity in order to ground the shape of a sphere; in being shaped as it is, the sphere *depends* on God's (logically) prior creation and bestowal of sphericity.

Unfortunately, this threatens the palette theory with a vicious regress. According to the palette theory, for any creature c, c depends on God's sustaining activity, where this involves God's creating c's properties and bestowing them on c. But because c's properties are created, they also

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[26] I follow Quinn (1988) in taking immediacy to be a criterion and not merely a desideratum for a theory of sustenance. However, even if immediacy is only a desideratum, violating immediacy is still a pro tanto disadvantage of the palette theory.

depend on God's sustaining activity. Thus, where F is one of c's properties, God sustains F by creating F's properties and bestowing them on F. Thus, to sustain a *first-order* property (F), the palette theory has God creating *second-order* properties (the properties of F). An example of a first-order property is the familiar property *sphericity*, whereas a second-order property would be a property of sphericity itself, such as *being a shape*. On the palette theory, to sustain the first-order property sphericity, God must create and bestow all of sphericity's second-order properties – such as such as *being a shape*, *being non-shareable*, *being a sphericity property*, and so on. In being the kind of property it is, sphericity depends on God's prior creation and bestowal of these second-order properties. But because each second-order property is created, it also is dependent on divine sustenance, generating an unattractive and seemingly vicious dependence regress of property-conferral.

An obvious and plausible way to avoid the regress is to restrict the palette theory to exclude properties from its scope. Call this the *restricted palette theory*. Here, God creates and sustains properties but the property-conferral involved in sustaining properties does not involve God's creating second-order properties which God then bestows on the first-order properties. Instead, with respect to sustaining created properties, property-conferral is immediate and amounts to unmediated character-grounding. In other words, God acts so as to ground directly the character of first-order properties without a separate and prior act of creating their second-order properties. On the restricted theory, God's unmediated characterizing action is itself the character-grounder for a property and there is no distinction between the act of conferring and the property conferred. For example, in sustaining a billiard ball, God creates, confers, and sustains sphericity, but God does not sustain sphericity by first creating a rather rococo second-order property called "being a sphericity property" and bestowing it on sphericity. Instead, with respect to sphericity, property-conferral is immediate: God directly grounds the character of sphericity. Thus, whereas sphericity directly grounds the character of the ball by *spherizing* the ball, God directly grounds the character of sphericity by *sphericity-izing* sphericity.

To be sure, there are independent reasons for denying that there are second-order properties. For example, one might take second-order predications like "being a sphericity property" to be made true by the (first-order) property itself (i.e., by sphericity). This provides a further

reason to restrict the palette theory.[27] However, as we will now see, the upshot of this restriction is the same.

The restricted palette theory stops the regress of property-conferral, but it does so by allowing that for some created entities – namely, (first-order) properties – property-conferral is immediate and does not involve the prior creation and bestowal of (second-order) properties. However, if the regress can be stopped by immediate property-conferral for *some* category of created being, why not stop it at the object-level rather than at the property-level? Presumably, if the strategy works at the property-level, then it would also work at the object-level. But deploying it at the object-level would do away with *all* non-immediate property-conferral, thus making it unnecessary for God to create any properties at all. Thus, the restricted palette theory requires a move that makes it unnecessary for God to create first-order properties in the first place. In this way, the restricted palette theory undermines the rationale for the original palette theory.

To sum up, the palette theory involves either a problematic regress or a self-undermining restriction. More generally, the problems with the palette theory suggest that property-conferral need not involve the creation of properties. Moreover, it suggests that all property-conferral is immediate and amounts to unmediated character-grounding, whereby God plays the character-grounding role by acting to ground directly the character of objects, without a separate and prior act of creating their properties. For example, there is no need for God to sphericity-ize sphericity, which in turn spherizes the ball. Instead, God can directly spherize the ball.

The Precognition Challenge

The palette theory faces a third and final challenge. Here the problem stems from a plausible principle concerning divine precognition. According to many prominent voices in the tradition, God's knowledge of creation, in some sense, precedes God's free creative activity. That is, in some sense, God precognizes what he freely creates. Here I want to focus on what we might call *qualitative* precognition, the principle that God foreknows all the *kinds* of things God could make. I will put the idea as follows:

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[27] I thank John Heil for drawing this to my attention.

Precognition: Prior to creating anything whatsoever, for any *x* that God could create, God foreknows everything about the kind of thing *x* would be, everything about the nature *x* would have, and, in particular, God foreknows all the kinds of things that *x* would be essentially capable of doing.

Two brief but important caveats about this principle are in order. First, the type of priority in precognition need not be temporal. That is, however we understand Precognition, it should be consistent with different views about God and time and whether or not creation has always (albeit contingently) existed. Second, I intend for Precognition to be neutral on whether and to what extent God foreknows what creatures would freely do.

I take Precognition to enjoy a high degree of plausibility, largely stemming from a consideration of how things look if we deny it. In his recent book, *Ontology and Providence in Creation: Taking Creation Ex Nihilo Seriously*, Mark Ian Thomas Robson develops a view of providence predicated on the denial of Precognition. In short, Robson argues that if God has precognition then what God creates is a mere replica of what God precognizes, and this, in turn, violates the doctrine of creation ex nihilo. Indeed, to imagine that God has precognition is to think of "God as the great photocopier" (2008, 50). Thus, to preserve creation ex nihilo, we must deny that God has prior qualitative knowledge of what his free creative acts could produce. Strictly speaking, God lacks foreknowledge about the kinds of things God could create prior to God's free creative act. Robson aptly calls this *radical* creation ex nihilo.

Unfortunately, and with all due respect to Robson, what he takes to be radical, I take to be a compelling and vivid *reductio* on the denial of Precognition. To show why, perhaps it will suffice to consider a passage from Timothy Pawl's review of Robson's book. As Pawl imagines it, if Robson is right, God found himself in the following situation:

> God is confronted with a large (perhaps infinite) number of levers (i.e., continua or capacities), each of which, in some sense, is a part of God. Each lever has a large (perhaps infinite) number of possible positions (i.e., actualizations of that capacity), and, for any position, if the lever is put to that position, it will produce something or other. God, however, does not know which lever does what. In fact, he doesn't even have a list of things the levers could do. It isn't that he knows that one produces colors and another elephants; he doesn't even know of colors or elephants. The only

way he learns which lever does what and which position on each lever does what is by trial and, if not error, at least observation. Then, after pulling levers, he can tell what each lever is for, and what general sort of thing it creates. In creating, God pulls lots of levers (2009).

In other words, on Robson's view, God literally *discovers* what he is capable of. On this picture, prior to creation, God is omnipotent yet maximally ignorant of what his creative power can do. In effect, this represents God as the greatest conceivable savant[28] – by my lights, a more dubious deity than the photocopier God.

Moreover, I am not convinced that we are forced to choose between the photocopier God and the savant God. This is because I think there are grounds to reject an apparent assumption of Robson's argument. I have in mind the assumption that *God has precognition only if what God creates is a mere replica of what he precognizes*. This seems to be based on the idea that precognition would require not only divine ideas but divine ideas understood as self-exemplifying forms – as *archetypes* or *paradigms*. However, even if precognition requires divine ideas, it is neither obvious nor plausible that those ideas must be archetypal. Indeed, whatever case can be made for archetypal divine ideas, I would sooner reject some premise in that case than accept the maximally savantic God.

To be sure, Precognition naturally suggests some form of divine conceptualism – roughly, the idea that God's eternal knowledge in some way involves rich ideational content. I have a few things to say about this below, but for the purposes of this paper I do not need to settle the question of which version of conceptualism best complements or supports Precognition.[29]

Their logical independence notwithstanding, the plausibility of Precognition lends support to theistic conferralism. It does so by undermining the palette theory. To see why, suppose that God has qualitative precognition and, setting aside the above regress worries, suppose that the palette theory is true. And consider a token property of sphericity, which God has made. Given Precognition, prior to making

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[28] The following *OED* gloss on 'savant' is the relevant one: "A person who displays an unusual (often exceptional) aptitude for one particular type of mental task or artistic activity despite having significant impairment in other areas of intellectual or social functioning ..." ("savant, n." *OED Online*. Oxford University Press, Web. 2 April 2015.)

[29] I'm inclined to pair theistic conferralism with *theistic conceptual realism*, as developed by Greg Welty (2014).

sphericity, God knew what sort of metaphysical work the property would be able to do, or, to say the same thing, what sort of property role the creature would be able to play. Generally speaking, sphericity's job would be that of a formal cause, or character-grounder. More specifically, its job would be to ground, or be the formal cause of, the shape of a sphere. To use language I introduced above, the job of sphericity is to be a *sphere-maker* or *spherizer*. Thus, creating sphericity would amount to making a sphere-maker. And, given palette theory, God's creating sphericity amounts to God's making a sphere-maker in order to sustain the shape of a sphere.

But, presumably, if God essentially has the knowledge and power required to make a character-grounder – for example, to make a sphere-maker, then God has what it takes to ground character directly, whereby his doing so plays the role of a formal cause, and thereby *just is* a formal cause, such as a sphere-making or spherizing. Thus, if God's aim is to ground the sphericity of something, there would seem to be no point for God to make first a sphere-maker. In this way Precognition suggests that the palette theory saddles God's creative activity with redundancy and unparsimoniousness. These vices provide a reason to reject the palette theory and affirm theistic conferralism, which removes them.

This line of argument suggests that God does not need to create properties in order to ground the character of creatures. Rather, given Precognition, God can *directly* ground the character of objects. In any given case, God's act of doing so would itself be a character-grounding. In this way, God's action would itself play the property-role and, thus, the divine act would *be* a property.

VI. CONVERGING ON THEISTIC CONFERRALISM

This concludes the case against the palette theory. The immediacy, regress, and precognition challenges present serious difficulties for the thesis that God creates the properties he bestows – and, indeed, for any theory on which God creates character-grounders.[30] Those challenges also converge on and support the following idea, which is an enhanced version of my original proposal:

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[30] Elsewhere I hope to show how the regress and precognition challenges pose difficulties for the version of theistic activism proposed by Morris and Menzel (1986). But see my suggestion above, in footnote 2.

> *Theistic Conferralism*: Property-conferral does not involve the creation and bestowal of properties. Instead, a divine act of property-conferral grounds the character of an object immediately, without the instrumentality of a property distinct from the act itself. Thus, the properties of creatures are identical with acts of divine sustenance, specifically, unmediated acts of property-conferral.

On this view, the actions-cum-properties that constitute property-conferral turn out to be modifier tropes. Above I noted that a modifier trope is a non-shareable, non-self-exemplifying property, or character-grounder. On theistic conferralism, the acts that constitute property-conferral satisfy this description of a modifier trope. First, if the proposed view is right, then an unmediated act of property-conferral itself plays the character-grounding role that a traditional trope is supposed to play. But whatever can play a property-role is, by definition, a property. Thus, because an act of property-conferral can play the property role, it is a property qua character-grounder. In this sense, the properties of creatures are identical with divine actions. Second, acts of property-conferral are non-shareable. If an act grounds the sphericity of some object O, then God's doing so – his *spherizing-O* – is an O-specific action. As such, the act is unshareable in that God's *spherizing-O* could not possibly be an act of spherizing some creature distinct from O. Third, the act of grounding the sphericity of a ball is not itself spherical. Rather, the act is the formal cause of the *ball's* being spherical. In this sense, acts of property-conferral are not self-exemplifying. Thus, the acts that constitute property-conferral are non-shareable, non-self-exemplifying properties. They are modifier tropes.

VII. IMPROVING MODIFIER TROPE THEORY

Previously, I mentioned that theistic conferralism mitigates several weaknesses of modifier trope theory. We are now in a position to see how this is so.

The first weakness concerns unifying natural classes of tropes. Almost all trope theorists allow that there are (or could be) numerically distinct but exactly similar tropes.[31] There might be, for example, many exactly

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[31] Charles Hartshorne seems to have held to a trope theory on which no two tropes are exactly qualitatively alike; see Robson (2008: 55-56).

similar but numerically distinct sphericity tropes. However, on pain of invoking a basic or irreducible universal, many (perhaps most) trope theorists deny that the unity of the natural class of sphericity tropes is to be explained in terms of a distinct property that is shared or instantiated by all and only sphericity tropes.

Instead, the standard view takes it to be primitive that a basic[32] trope is the kind of trope it is.[33] On this view, tropes belonging to a natural class are similar just in virtue of being the tropes that they are.[34] That is, the unity of a natural class of tropes is grounded in the similarity of tropes, and the latter is determined by each trope primitively being what it is. Realists have alleged that accounting for the unity of a natural class of tropes in this way is unsatisfying and marks at least a pro tanto weakness of trope theory. A trope theorist may or may not agree, but if they do agree they will take the relative lack of explanation at this point to be a disadvantage that is, all things considered, outweighed by the advantages of having non-shareable properties.

Regardless of whether or not this marks a genuine pro tanto weakness of trope theory, theistic conferralism allows for a deeper explanation of the unity of natural classes of tropes. By accepting the proposed view, trope theorists can take a sphericity trope to be a divine act of spherizing. And, by accepting Precognition, they can take the natural step of holding that the unity of a natural class of modifier tropes is grounded in *whatever it is* that God precognizes when God precognizes the kind of thing that he would make were he to perform one of those acts-cum-tropes. Or, if you go in for a theory of divine conceptualism, the unity of a natural class of tropes would express and be grounded in a single divine idea. For example, the natural class of all and only divine spherizings – all the sphericity tropes – would enjoy a unity that is grounded in the single divine idea of sphericity that all and only those acts-cum-tropes express. Thus, any two spherizing acts are spherizing acts in virtue of expressing the divine idea of sphericity in general. Solving the unity problem in this way requires something like divine conceptualism, but as noted

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[32] At issue here is the similarity of *simple* tropes. A trope theorist who allows for complex tropes (tropes that have tropes as proper parts) can account for the similarity of complex tropes in terms of the similarity of their proper parts. Of course, this would not account for the similarity of simple tropes.

[33] See Campbell (1990: 29-30) for what Ehring (2012: 8f) calls "standard trope theory".

[34] Ehring (2012) defends a different view. On his account, a trope is the kind of trope it is in virtue of belonging to primitively natural classes.

above, the latter is compatible with theistic conferralism and, moreover, is naturally suggested by Precognition.

The second weakness concerns the origination of tropes. It is plausible to think that tropes are contingent beings – especially within a theistic framework. But if so, what accounts for their coming to be? Campbell puts the problem as follows. On trope theory,

> "[e]very real change involves trope replacement – if trope A gives way to trope B, where A ≠ B, a change has occurred. If A and B are of different kinds, we have qualitative change of the classic type. What was green is now red (as apples ripen). ... As trope replacement, one trope disappears and its place is taken by a brand new creation, a trope that has not hitherto existed. The trouble with such a theory is that the whole process remains absolutely obscure and magical. Where does the original trope go? Where does the replacement come from? How does the new trope nudge the old one out of the way? There is no machinery to manage the transition." (1990: 141-142).

As I read him, Campbell is a module trope theorist. However, his worry about trope origination also arises on a modifier trope theory. Suppose I mold some clay so as to make a ball and, for the sake of argument, suppose the ball is perfectly spherical. On trope theory, the sphericity of the ball is numerically unique – that is, it is non-identical with the sphericity of any other sphere that there might be. Moreover, on modifier trope theory, the sphericity of this ball is not itself spherical and so is numerically distinct from the sphere that my molding produced via efficient causation. Rather, the sphericity of the ball is the formal cause of the ball's being shaped as it is. Nevertheless, on modifier trope theory, a sphericity trope did come into existence, just now, as I finished molding the clay. Again, the process by which a trope is conjured up is "absolutely obscure and magical". Thus, in a sense that begs for deeper explanation, it would seem that the trope came to be *out of nothing*.[35]

Theistic conferralism goes some distance towards providing an explanation. Here, tropes are identical with *basic* divine acts. Because tropes are basic acts, they originate in God but are not created per se. And because acts of sustenance are *contingent*, tropes are contingent. Thus, theistic conferralism provides for both the origination and

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[35] Campbell attempts to solve this problem (and others) by taking *all* genuine tropes to be fields. See Moreland (2001: 66-67) for a critique.

the contingency of tropes. To be sure, this is not to say that such acts are wholly unmysterious. However, a theist is already committed to something rather mysterious: basic divine actions that are contingent but non-created. Thus, by identifying some of those basic divine acts with tropes, theists consolidate the mystery of trope origination into a mystery they already accept. On theistic conferralism, the origination of tropes is no more (or less) mysterious than the origination of other types of contingent divine acts.

A third and final problem concerns the indeterminacy of modifier tropes. This concern is specific to modifier trope theory. The problem is brought to light by the modifier/module distinction, which suggests that the concept of a modifier trope is a *functional* concept. That is, a modifier trope is defined in terms of what it *does*, in terms of its *characterizing effects*, as it were. A sphericity trope, for example, is a sphere-maker; it is something that *spherizes* something else. However, identifying the *role* a modifier trope plays – saying what it *does* – is insufficient to specify the intrinsic nature of the entity that plays that role. Thus, because the concept of a modifier trope is a functional concept, merely postulating modifier tropes is not enough to fix the trope ontology. Other than what they *do*, what can we say about the modifier tropes *themselves*? Leaving this question unanswered saddles modifier trope theory with an undesirable and arguably problematic indeterminacy.[36]

Theistic conferralism resolves this indeterminacy by identifying modifier tropes with divine acts of property-conferral, which, arguably, a theist is already committed to. (And even if theism does not entail property-conferral, theism is consistent with it.) These acts play the modifier trope role and thus provide a more determinate ontology for modifier trope theory.

We have now seen three ways in which theistic conferralism shores up weaknesses of modifier trope theory. In addition, theistic conferralism seems to be more nominalistic and parsimonious than the conjunction of theism and standard trope theory. A theist is independently committed to divine actions of some sort or other. Thus, by taking tropes to be divine acts, theistic conferralism makes it unnecessary to postulate a further category of *sui generis* tropes. Instead, the category of trope is consolidated into the category of divine action.

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[36] Edwards (2014: 93) raises a similar objection to both predicate and concept nominalism.

VIII. IMPROVING THE DOCTRINE OF SUSTENANCE

Theistic conferralism also offers a way to overcome the previously mentioned dilemma that property-conferral seems to pose for a theory of sustenance. As previously, the dilemma is that the rejection of property-conferral threatens to give rise to deism and the affirmation of it threatens to give rise to occasionalism.

Property-conferral threatens occasionalism when it is taken to involve efficient causation. So understood, God's conferring sphericity on an object would involve God's being the efficient cause of the object's coming to be spherical. More generally, God would be the efficient cause of every creature's having the character it does. Thus, divine acts of property-conferral would be in direct competition with natural causes. On such a picture, the threat of occasionalism is severe.

On theistic conferralism, however, divine acts of property-conferral do not compete with natural causes. To see this, set aside theistic conferralism and consider how character-grounding would otherwise work on modifier trope theory.[37] To illustrate, suppose L is a lump of clay that an artist shapes into a perfect sphere. L thereby comes to have a sphericity trope and the trope grounds L's shape. Importantly, the *efficient* cause (the artist) of L's coming to be spherical acts logically (but not temporally) prior to the *formal* cause (the sphericity trope) of L's being spherical. In this way, on modifier trope theory, a sphericity trope is not an efficient cause. Rather, the trope acts logically posterior to efficient causes and does not compete with efficient causes.

According to theistic conferralism, modifier tropes are identical with divine actions. As such, divine acts play the character-grounding role that standard modifier tropes would otherwise play. That is, divine acts cum tropes are formal (non-efficient) causes that operate logically posterior to efficient causes and do not compete with efficient causes. Thus, theistic conferralism offers a way for sustenance to involve property-conferral without putting acts of property-conferral in direct competition with natural causes – thereby avoiding occasionalism, while maintaining that a creature's having a property or power is immediately dependent on an unmediated act of divine sustenance – thereby avoiding deism.

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[37] This is more or less the same way character-grounding works if character-grounders are taken to be non-self-exemplifying universals. I take Armstrong (1980) and (1989) and Moreland (2001) to hold the latter view.

It should be noted, however, that theistic conferralism requires rejecting McCann's thesis that "to sustain an entity is the same thing as to create it" (2012, 29). On theistic conferralism, sustenance is not continuous creation because unlike creating, sustaining does not involve efficient causation. In other words, with respect to *creating* something, the divine acts that constitute property-conferral include acts that are formal causes and acts that are efficient causes. But with respect to *sustaining* something, the acts that constitute property-conferral only include acts that are formal causes.

IX. GOING FORWARD

My aim has been to explain and motivate theistic conferralism, the thesis that creaturely properties are identical with acts that constitute divine sustenance. I have argued that the thesis is attractive because it connects so-called trope theory and the doctrine of sustenance in a mutually enhancing way. On the one hand, by identifying tropes with divine actions, theistic conferralism mitigates the weaknesses of modifier trope theory. And, on the other hand, by identifying divine actions with tropes, theistic conferralism offers an understanding of divine sustenance that avoids both deism and occasionalism.

Going forward, theistic conferralism raises many questions that cannot be taken up here. Most generally, it remains to be seen how best to situate the thesis within a complete theistic metaphysic. Perhaps I may be permitted to conclude by offering a provisional reply to two specific questions.

First, what is the ontological status of the entity that is *characterized* by a modifier trope cum divine act? That is, how should we understand *trope-bearers* on theistic conferralism? For example, what sort of entity is the *subject* of a divine act of (formal) spherizing? Many trope theorists are bundle theorists: they take objects to be entirely constructed out of tropes.[38] On such a view, the bundle that contains a trope is the bearer of that trope. Elsewhere I argue that while a module trope bundle theory is viable, a *modifier* trope bundle theory is not.[39] Thus, because theistic

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[38] Trope bundle theorists include Williams (1953), Campbell (1990), Schaffer (2001), Maurin (2002), and Ehring (2011).

[39] See my "Tropes as Character-Grounders". For criticism of bundle theory in general, see Garcia (2014b) and (2014c).

conferralism is predicated on modifier tropes, I take it to be incompatible with bundle theory. Presumably, then, if theistic conferralism is to work, it will have to work with a substance-attribute model.[40] For example, one might deploy the thesis within a substance-attribute model on which modifier tropes (here identified with divine acts) and bare particulars go together to make up objects. Following other constituent ontologies, such as Armstrong (1997) and Moreland (2001), this model could take objects to be charactered in virtue of having substrata and modifier tropes (divine acts) as constituents, in some (perhaps sui generis and non-mereological) sense of 'constituent'.[41]

Second, how well does theistic conferralism comport with traditional views about divine immutability and divine simplicity? Would an unmediated act of property conferral – God's spherizing a particular, say – involve an intrinsic change in God or require God to have constituent parts? According to theistic conferralism, by performing acts of property conferral, God is *in some sense* responsive to creaturely reality. But I see no reason to think that this kind of divine activity and responsiveness is any more (or less) problematic than the more familiar kind of divine activity and responsiveness, such as God's answering prayers or talking to Abraham. In short, theistic conferralism does not appear to introduce any *new kind* of challenge for the doctrines of immutability or simplicity.[42]

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[40] Trope theorists who reject bundle theory and opt for a substance-attribute model include Martin (1980), LaBossiere (1994), Lowe (2006), and Heil (2012).

[41] See Magalhães (2006) for a helpful discussion of the sense(s) in which Armstrong's universals are (or are not) spatio-temporal. See Garcia (2014a) and Pickavance (2014) for recent discussion of bare particulars.

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SPECIAL DIVINE ACTION AND NATURAL SCIENCE

THOMAS TRACY

Bates College

Abstract. A number of modern theologians have concluded that the rise of natural science makes it necessary to give up the idea that God acts in particular ways to affect the course of events in the world. I reply to this claim, taking up the challenge to explain what might be meant by a 'special' act of God. There are several ways to conceive of such acts, including the possibility that God might determine what is left determinable in the structures of nature, e.g., at the quantum level. I address objections to this view, and consider metaphysical puzzles that it presents.

How can we conceive of special, or particular, divine action in the world described by the contemporary natural sciences?

Anxiety over this question has played an important role in forming (and, arguably, deforming) a great deal of modern theological reflection, often providing the rationale for fundamental revisions of what had been core teachings in mainstream belief and practice. Theists in the Abrahamic traditions have classically affirmed that God acts not only at the foundation of the world as its creative ground, but also within its ongoing history as the providential guarantor that the divine purposes will be achieved. If the findings or methods of the sciences are somehow incompatible with the idea that God acts in particular ways to affect the course of events in the world, then religious thought and practice in the theistic traditions will have to change.

These dynamics are vividly illustrated in the struggles of the biblical theology movement. In the 1950s thinkers like G. Ernest Wright and Bernard Anderson called for a renewed recognition that the God of the Bible is an agent who acts at particular times and places to call, promise, judge, renew, and redeem (Wright 1952; Anderson 1957).

The proclamation of this *Heilsgeschichte*, they contended, is the primary content of the faith. In a now famous critique, Langdon Gilkey argued that the biblical theologians were caught in an awkward dilemma (Gilkey 1961). They insisted that narratives of divine action, such as the story of the Exodus from Egypt, constitute the core of Biblical revelation. But as informed participants in the scientific age they were committed to understanding events as occurring within a lawful continuum of natural causes, rather than as reflecting dramatic interventions by supernatural agents. So if God did not turn the Nile to blood or part the waters of the red sea, then what *did* God do to bring about the liberation of the Jewish people from captivity? In the absence of any account of God's role in the events of the Exodus, these theologians were left in the uncomfortable position of proclaiming that God is made known through 'mighty acts in history', yet being unable to say what God has done. Gilkey concluded that,

> ... in the shift of cosmology from ancient to modern, fundamental theological concepts have so changed their meaning as almost to have lost all reference ... It is no good repeating the abstract verbs 'to act' and 'to speak', if we have no intelligible referents with which to replace the vanished wonders and voices ... Unless we have some conception of how God acts in ordinary events, we can hardly know what our analogical words means when we say: 'He acts uniquely in this event' or 'this event is a special act of God'. (Gilkey 1961: 204)

In this paper I want to take up Gilkey's challenge, clarifying what might be meant by 'special' divine action, and sorting out the possible relations of such acts to 'ordinary events'. Gilkey decided that the ascendancy of modern (i.e., scientific) cosmology makes it necessary to give up the idea that God acts within the world's history to affect the course of events. I will argue that he is mistaken about this, and contend instead that a strong conception of special divine action remains a viable option in contemporary theology.[1]

CREATION

If we are to think through God's relation to ordinary events, we need to begin with the doctrine of creation. The idea of creation has been elaborated in a number of different ways in the history of theology, but

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[1] This discussion draws upon material from Tracy (2012), and Tracy (2010).

I will focus here on a view (or family of views) that came to occupy the mainstream of the tradition: the doctrine of creation out of nothing, *creatio ex nihilo*. God's creative act brings about the existence of all finite reality, and apart from this act nothing but God would exist. Creation is not a one-time event that generates a world which thereafter persists on its own. Created things exist from moment to moment in absolute dependence upon God; God empowers them to be, and if God were to cease doing so, they would return to nothingness. For creatures, therefore, relationship to God is essential; to be is to be in relation to God, and in this relation is found not only the creature's ground but also its highest good. God, on the other hand, does not require the existence of creatures in order to be God; God creates the world out of love because it is good for the world to be. Creation is a gift of the divine generosity.

It follows that God's relation to creatures as their creator is fundamentally different from any causal relation that holds among created things. Created things stand in causal relations by virtue of bringing about *changes* in other things. This is true even when the action brings something new into existence (the creation of a work of art) or causes something to cease to exist (as in causing the death of a living organism). God's creative act, by contrast, does not merely cause a change in the creature, but rather *produces the creature itself*. Apart from this act, there is 'no-thing' to change. God's creative activity, therefore, radically transcends the causal powers of creatures.

This understanding of creation provides the foundation for answering Gilkey's question about God's relation to events in the ordinary course of nature. God as creator acts in every moment of the world's history as it source and ground. There can be no event untouched by the divine agency, and it is seriously misleading to contrast 'extraordinary' events in which God acts and 'ordinary' ones in which God does not. God acts in every event, and the question about special divine action is whether and on what grounds some of these events might be singled out as distinctive or unique.

A further refinement is needed here, however. It might be thought that this strong understanding of God's universal creative action displaces created causes altogether, and makes God the only productive power at work in the world. If God is the immediate cause of the existence of each entity along with all its properties, this may appear to leave no role for the operation of created causes. Consider the paradigmatic causal event of billiard balls interacting on a pool table. We might suppose that

the doctrine of creation entails that God not only immediately sustains the existence of each entity involved in this event, but also causes them to possess their specific properties from moment to moment. So God causes there to be a cue ball with a particular trajectory and velocity, and an instant later God causes there to be a motionless cue ball and a target ball with a related trajectory and velocity. On this account, it appears that all the causal work is done by God, and created entities are merely 'occasions' for God's continuous activity of actualizing each new state of the universe. As long as this divine activity forms consistent patterns, the world will display a causal structure in the regularist sense, without any role for creaturely causal power or efficacy.

Roughly this position was embraced by thinkers who came to be known as 'occasionalists', but it has consistently been rejected by most Christian theologians. Thomas Aquinas described the view of Muslim occasionalists in this way: 'Some have understood God to work in every agent in such a way that no created power has any effect in things, but that God alone is the immediate cause of everything wrought: for instance, that it is not fire that gives heat, but God in the fire, and so forth.' (Aquinas 1265-1272: I, 105,5) Aquinas energetically resisted this account, and insisted that 'God works in things in such a manner that things have also their proper operation'. No doubt God *could* operate as the occasionalists suggest, and directly cause all of the events that constitute the world's history. But Aquinas contended that God's creative power is more fully expressed by granting causal powers to created things, so that in their interactions they affect and are affected by each other. As Aquinas put it, 'there are certain intermediaries of God's providence, . . . not because of any defect in His power, but by reason of the abundance of His goodness; so that the dignity of causality is imparted even to creatures.' (Aquinas 1265-1272: I, 22,3)

God's generosity in creation, therefore, includes empowering creatures to bring about changes in the properties of other creatures in an ordered structure of causal relationships. Only God can cause being, but both God and creatures, if God so wills, cause change. This establishes the familiar scheme of primary and secondary causation, in which God acts on two levels. God acts directly without intermediaries in every event as the ground of the creature's existence. God also acts by means of the ordinary processes of nature to produce a vast range of particular effects, and these effects can properly be described an indirect divine acts. This pattern of action attribution is familiar to us in daily

life. We often do one thing (vote for our favoured candidate) by doing another (marking a ballot). These chains of indirect action can be quite extensive, though there are some important limits on action attribution to human agents, since we frequently fail to accomplish what we intend, and produce instead various outcomes we do not want. In the case of indirect *divine* action, however, these limitations do not apply. God could so arrange the network of created causes that all and only the effects intended by God come to pass. This would be the case, for example, in a perfectly deterministic natural order. By establishing a complete set of deterministic causal laws and setting the initial conditions, God could specify every event in the world's history, each of which would be an indirect divine act no matter how remote it might be from the initial state of the universe. The emergence of a new species and the fall of an individual sparrow would each be God's intentional act, though they are brought about through an inconceivably complex chain of intermediate events as means.

This story about divine action becomes more complex, of course, if we move away from a simple deterministic picture, and include underdetermined chance or libertarian free action in our account. I will say more about this in a moment, but it is worth observing that even in indeterministic worlds, God's creative choice will establish and delimit the range of possible developments and their relative probabilities. This guarantees that God has profound providential control over the world's history.

SPECIAL DIVINE ACTION

Given this account of God's action in ordinary events, how might we respond to Gilkey's challenge to explain what we mean by a 'special' divine act? There are at least three ways in which we might mark out some events as divine acts in a distinctive sense.

First, we can begin where Gilkey ends, with the familiar shift in liberal theology to a strictly epistemic interpretation of special divine action. On this account, the significance of the event consists solely in its role in prompting a new insight or revealing an important truth. What makes this event special is its effect *on us*; it need not entail any distinctive form of divine action in the world. Suppose, for example, that the escape from captivity in Egypt involved only the ordinary processes of nature without any supernatural divine intervention. This experience may nonetheless

play a crucial role for the Hebrew people in awakening a vivid recognition of God's liberating purposes and forming their understanding of their place in those purposes; the exodus is a *subjectively special* moment in Jewish religious self-understanding. As Gilkey pointed out, the Biblical theologians hesitated to make any stronger claim than this about special divine action, and this reluctance fatally undermined their proposals.

Second, an event might be special by virtue playing a distinctive role in the world's developing history. This can be the case even if this development results from ordinary processes at work in nature and human history. We have just seen that events built into the plan of creation from the outset can be attributed to God as indirect divine acts. It could happen that some of these events might make an especially important contribution to advancing God's purposes, e.g., as a turning point or a culmination. This will be a fact about the event in its relation to the overall course of the world's history, and not just an observation about our beliefs regarding it; indeed, we might often fail to recognize the actual importance of such events. On this view, the improbable escape of the Hebrew people from subjugation in Egypt not only reveals God's purposes, but also advances them in a special way; the exodus would be a *functionally special* indirect divine action.

Third, an event might be marked out as special because God acts directly within the world's history to bring it about. More precisely, God might act to ensure the occurrence of this event even though created causes alone, given the world's actual history to date, would not be sufficient to produce it. This would be an *objectively special* divine action, distinguished from other events by the *way* God brings it about – its causal history will include, along with all its natural antecedents, a specific divine input. This takes a step beyond the idea of functionally special divine action, because in this case God produces an effect in the world not by writing this outcome into the program of history at the outset, but rather by acting within the world once its history is underway. If this is the mode of God's action in the Exodus, then in addition to acting indirectly through the order of created causes, God affects the course of events directly to ensure that the Jewish people escape from Egypt.

SCIENTIFIC VETOES

All three of these understandings of special divine action can be affirmed simultaneously of a single event. But it is useful to distinguish them

because they make claims of varying strength, and can be separately asserted or denied. It is, of course, the third way of conceiving of special divine action that has been so problematic in modern theology. There are multiple reasons for this, including historical-critical and interpretive considerations, but an overriding concern has been the alleged incompatibility of such claims with scientific understandings of the world. I have elsewhere called this the 'scientific veto argument' (Tracy 2012: 59-61), and variants of it have become a commonplace in contemporary theology. If we attempt to formulate this argument, however, its weaknesses quickly become apparent.

Consider, for example, a particularly adventurous version presented by Gordon Kaufman. He contends that the sciences have generated a 'modern conception of nature and history as a web of interrelated events that must be understood as a self-contained whole', and he concludes that 'in such a world acts of God (in the traditional sense) are not merely improbable or difficult to believe: they are literally inconceivable' (Kaufman 1972: 132, 135). In making his case, Kaufman observes that that the sciences seek to explain events in terms of lawful causal relations to other events within the system of nature, and they exclude appeals to causes or agents that are not part of that structure. Suppose that we accept this claim about the methodological naturalism of the sciences. Objectively special divine action would be ruled out of *scientific* explanations (*contra* some forms of intelligent design hypothesis), but this does not entail an across the board rejection of this idea; it remains available for use in non-scientific contexts. Kaufman must defend a stronger claim: namely, that the sciences understand the web of natural events as 'self-contained' in the sense of being immune to outside influences. This *would* entail that there can be no objectively special divine action in the world described by the sciences. But why should we accept this view? Kaufman seems to think that this is a necessary presupposition of scientific inquiry. His argument here slides unselfconsciously from methodological to metaphysical naturalism. Although the sciences may be committed in principle to seeking explanations of a particular type (i.e., 'naturalistic' ones, whatever that might turn out to mean), they cannot themselves authorize the conclusion that there always are such explanations to be given. The program of scientific inquiry can be extended indefinitely, but there is no guarantee, from within that enterprise, that it will always be successful.

Kaufman's argument, then, overstates the case against objective divine action in the world. But thinkers like Kaufman and Gilkey are correct in recognizing that the natural sciences have profoundly affected the epistemic context within which theology now operates. We bring to our experience a strikingly different set of expectations than did, say, Gregory the Great when he wrote the *Life of St. Benedict*. Gregory tells us, for example, about a monastic graveyard that would not hold the body of a disobedient monk; the sacred ground spontaneously exhumed the corpse each time it was reburied until finally Benedict forgave the monk his misdeed (an unauthorized visit to his parent's home, during which he died outside the monastery). (Gregory the Great c. 590, 1895: Ch. 24) Many of us, I would venture to say, are not inclined to accept this story at face value as an accurate report of an historical episode. But, *contra* Kaufman, the problem is *not* that we share a scientific world view that rules out the possibility of such events. Rather the difficulty is epistemic; the story is at odds with our prevailing sense of how things go in the world, and so would require especially strong backing in order to become credible to us. This, of course, is the core idea developed by Hume's epistemic argument against miracles. But we can resist Hume's sweeping dismissal of all miracle claims while still acknowledging that such claims face special evidential burdens in our epistemic context, a context that includes background beliefs shaped by the modern sciences. The veto argument, I suggest, reflects an overreaction to this intellectual situation.

The background beliefs shaped by our scientific culture are, to be sure, a mixed bag. One problematic belief that has played a significant role in discussions of objective divine action has been the assumption that causal explanations in the sciences must not only be naturalistic but also deterministic, and that causal closure in a complete system of deterministic relations constitutes the scientific norm. Once again, we need to make a distinction between a (putative) methodological commitment to seeking explanations that provide causally sufficient conditions, and the metaphysical doctrine of universal determinism. Modern theologians have often overlooked this distinction, treating universal determinism as a concomitant of scientific inquiry. If this is our picture of the natural order, then there are just two ways in which God can shape the direction of the world's development. On the one hand, God's creative act can determine every event in cosmic history by specifying the laws of nature and a set of initial conditions. On the

other hand, God can intervene in the deterministic series to break the chain of natural causes and redirect the course of events. If intervention is rejected, then God's providential guidance of the world's history must, without remainder, be built into the act of creation. Deism responded in just this way to the triumphant determinism of eighteenth century mechanics, and the result was that the God who acts in history was replaced by Laplace's demon.

Given the failure of the scientific veto argument, the idea of divine intervention should not be ruled out as an option in contemporary theology. Indeed, if we affirm that God is the creator *ex nihilo* of the whole structure of finite causes, it would be odd to deny that God could act directly in the world. But given the epistemic challenges facing claims about intervention, the cautiousness of many modern theologians on this point is understandable.

DIVINE ACTION IN AN INDETERMINISTIC WORLD

Perhaps there is a way beyond this simple and unsatisfying juxtaposition of deism and interventionism. The conceptual options for thinking about direct divine action change in intriguing ways if we consider the possibility that God has created a world whose history does not constitute a rigidly complete causal system, but rather includes open alternatives for the future. In such a world, there will be at least some developments that are not precisely determined by their antecedents; in just these circumstances, any of some range of different outcomes will be possible. These events are not uncaused, but they are underdetermined, that is, they have necessary but not sufficient causal conditions in the world's prior history. If the natural order includes processes of this sort, then God could select among these alternative possibilities without disrupting any deterministic causal sequence. This would be an objective divine action that affects the world's unfolding history, but it would not be an intervention, if by this term we mean an action that interrupts an otherwise complete series of finite causes and effects.[2]

This represents a third way of thinking about special divine action. But this alternative will be available only if (1) it is plausible to understand the causal structures of our world as under-determined in some respects, and (2) these under-determined events can make the right sort of difference

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[2] On difficulties in defining 'intervention' see Plantinga (2011: 108-113).

in the subsequent development of the world's history. The question about whether and how these two conditions might be met has led in recent years to a sustained engagement of theology with science, and a variety of possibilities have been explored[3]. One of the most promising has focused on indeterministic interpretations of quantum mechanics. Needless to say, this carries us well outside the home territory of theology, and the discussion must be exploratory and tentative in character. I want to suggest that whether or not this line of thought makes a contribution to a theology of divine action, it raises some puzzling wider questions about God's relation to nature in an indeterministic world.

The first thing to be said about quantum mechanics is that the theory can be interpreted in a fascinating variety of different ways, and it is a mistake to present any one of these interpretations as representing *the* findings of quantum theory. This interpretive pluralism reflects the challenge of trying to imagine a world that gives rise to the odd behaviour observed in the laboratory and described by the quantum formalism. The quantum realm lies at the foundation of our familiar world of discrete objects bearing determinate properties, and yet it defies description in these terms. Some of the properties of an electron, for example, have definite values; this is true of its mass, charge, and spin magnitude. But other properties stand in uncertainty relations such that if we gain information about one, we lose information about another; this is true of the electron's position and momentum, and its spin orientation on more than one axis. In order to describe the state of the electron, we must map a set of probabilities for the value that would be obtained for each property if we were to measure it, and before a measurement is made these properties remain indeterminate. Mutually exclusive outcome states for the position or momentum of the electron are conjoined in a 'superposition' described by the Schrödinger wave equation. This mathematical representation of the quantum object undergoes a continuous (i.e., deterministic) development over time. But when the right sort of interaction takes place, the wave function 'collapses' to a specific value for the measured property. It is here that we encounter underdetermination in quantum mechanics; the theory, at the level of its mathematical formalism, does not explain the selection of one of these possible outcomes rather than another.

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[3] For example, see the collections of essays from a series of conferences on divine action and natural science: Russell (1993-2007).

This peculiar situation has provoked interpretive disagreements right from the start. In an extended debate with Nils Bohr, Einstein insisted that quantum theory had to be incomplete, that there must be hidden variables that would make it possible in principle to provide a sufficient reason for the outcomes produced under various measurement conditions. The probabilistic character of quantum theory, he thought, ought to reflect the limits of our knowledge, and not the way the world works. Einstein, Podolsky, and Rosen generated the famous EPR thought experiment to show that if quantum theory is complete, it has various counter-intuitive consequences when applied to systems involving two-particles whose wave equations are entangled (*viz.*, 'spooky action at a distance') (Einstein, Podolsky, Rosen 1935: 777–780). J. S. Bell (1987) later demonstrated that quantum theory and deterministic local hidden variable theories of the sort Einstein envisioned produce different predictions for the correlation outcomes of EPR-type experiments (when the detectors are set at different angles). In the 1970's it became technically possible to conduct such experiments, and the quantum predictions were confirmed.

This does not mean that quantum theory cannot be interpreted deterministically. But it does mean that a quantum mechanical determinism will be a very different creature than the familiar macroscopic determinism of Laplace. David Bohm's reconstruction of quantum mechanics, for example, manages both to preserve classical particles with determinate properties and to provide these particles with complete deterministic trajectories. But in order to match the observed quantum statistics, he posits a 'quantum potential' that sustains instantaneous links between spatially distant regions (Bohm 1952: 166-193). When we make a measurement on an entangled two particle system, the orientation of the measuring device is registered by the pilot wave as a whole, and this fixes the state of the other particle even if the two are separated at 'space-like' distances, i.e., distances great enough that no causal influence can be communicated within the signalling time permitted by the speed of light. This generates a deterministic hidden variable theory, but it does so by giving up the causal locality of classical determinism.

Bohm's interpretation has not been not widely embraced among physicists and philosophers of physics, though it certainly remains a live option. Many theorists profess a reluctant allegiance to the 'Copenhagen interpretation', but even this is actually a diverse family of related

views. For my purposes, it is enough to note what is generally shared among these approaches. First, they treat quantum theory as complete, rather than looking for hidden variables, and they therefore grant that properties held in superposition are indeterminate until measurement. Second, they accept that the transition from the superposition state to a determinate outcome is underdetermined; when a measurement occurs, the quantum system described by the wave equation undergoes a discontinuous collapse.

If quantum mechanics is interpreted this way, then the natural order at a deep level may provide a vast array of branching alternative pathways, all of which are available within its causal history. The structure of such a world weaves together law and chance, regularity and flexibility. But the presence of chance in nature is not enough by itself to provide for an open future. Chance transitions at the quantum level will need to have particular causal consequences over and above establishing the stable regularities of the macroscopic world. Unsettled scientific questions arise here, particularly with regard to the possible role of quantum events as triggers for chaotic amplification. But we know that quantum transitions can have specific effects at the macroscopic level – this happens in physics labs when measurements are made on quantum systems – and there are good reasons to think that some processes in nature function this way. A striking example can be found in evolutionary biology, where quantum effects play a role in some kinds of genetic mutation, and the results of these changes can then be amplified or extinguished by natural selection. (Russell 1998: 191-224)

An indeterministic interpretation of quantum mechanics, therefore, holds some promise of opening up fresh options in thinking about special divine action in the world. Of course, any theological proposal along these lines will be intimately tied to the current state of physical theory, and will be vulnerable both to new theoretical developments and to changing assessments of the relative plausibility of competing interpretations. As we have seen, modern theologians typically have fled from this kind of empirical exposure. But if theology is going to be relevant to the world in which we actually take ourselves to live, then it may need to run such risks, recognizing that this interpretive dialogue will be open-ended and that the ideas it generates will be tentative and revisable.

It is important not to overstate what is at stake in a proposal of this kind. Divine action through quantum (or any other) underdetermination

would be just one of the ways God might act in the world, and it will not be the most basic. We have already seen that, in the first place, God acts directly as creator *ex nihilo* in every event. Second, God acts indirectly by means of created causes as they operate according to natural law. Third, God can directly intervene in an otherwise deterministic secondary causal series. Fourth, we now add an additional possible mode of direct divine action in the world – namely, that God acts to determine some or all of what is left underdetermined by secondary causes.[4] These ways of conceiving of divine action provide a rich set of resources that we can call upon in responding to Gilkey's challenge to explain what we mean by an act of God in history.

THEOLOGICAL OBJECTIONS AND METAPHYSICAL CONUNDRUMS

Let me now turn briefly, first, to theological objections to the idea of non-interventionist direct divine action at the quantum level, and second, to some conceptual puzzles generated by this idea.

A number of objections are rooted in uneasiness with the idea that God would be so pervasively involved in the mundane business of moving the world along from one state to the next. This may seem excessively hands-on, over-involved, and quotidian – a kind of busywork that is beneath the dignity of the creator. It entails that God acts among or alongside secondary causes, and this purportedly treats God as one power among others, filling in where created causes are insufficient. This has the effect of demoting God from the position of transcendent creator *of* the world to being merely a formative power *in* the world, a cosmic demiurge.

These intuitive misgivings can be sharpened into at least two more precisely expressed objections. First, the idea that God acts at the quantum level might be criticized as a return to the discredited 'God of the gaps'. Modern theology has not found it a winning strategy to seek out points at which scientific explanations are incomplete, and rush forward to insist that this is where God's hand can be seen at work. The problem, of course, is that when these gaps are filled by expanded scientific understanding, God is once again pushed out of the world.

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[4] I hasten to add that these do not exhaust the range of possibilities. I have said nothing, for example, about divine action through the free intentional actions of created persons. I discuss this topic in Tracy (2010).

The reply, in brief, is that not all gaps are created equal; that is, they do not all arise in the same way. The gaps that give the God of the gaps a bad name are merely epistemic; they are a consequence of limitations in our current understanding of the way the world works. By contrast, the gaps identified by indeterministic interpretations of quantum mechanics reflect incompleteness in the causal structures of the world, i.e., they are ontological gaps (and therefore also epistemic gaps). The existence of these gaps is part of what quantum theory (so interpreted) has discovered about the world; they reflect what we currently think we know, rather than simply being artefacts of temporary ignorance. If our best current physical theory suggests that God has chosen to make a world with an objectively gappy structure, then this is an interesting fact that theology should take into account.

A second objection elaborates the worry that direct divine action at the quantum level (or finally at any level in the structure of nature) fails to appreciate appropriately the transcendent character of God's agency. The root problem, the objector claims, is contained in the very idea that God makes use of openings in the structures of nature in order to act without displacing secondary causes. This allegedly misunderstands the nature of divine agency, which as the creative ground of all finite things does not need to find a way into the world to act. Every activity of created things necessarily is an activity of the God who causes them to be. So there can be no trade-off, no juxtaposition, of God acting *or* creatures acting. The notion that there can be competition between divine and created agency, and that God must find 'room' in the world to act, represents God as one agent among others all of which operate on the same level.

This objection begins with a sound theological premise about creation, but the conclusion is a *non sequitur*. I noted earlier that the concept of creation out of nothing entails a fundamental distinction between God's act of causing being and creatures' acts of causing change. Nothing in the idea of direct divine action at the quantum level (or anywhere else in the structure of nature) denies this distinction. Rather, the idea is that the God who acts always and everywhere to give being to creatures, might also freely choose to act among them in their history. As Aquinas notes, God 'is not subject to the order of secondary causes, but, on the contrary, this order is subject to Him, ... Therefore God can do something outside this order created by Him, when He chooses, for instance, by producing the effects of secondary causes without them, or by producing certain effects to which secondary causes do not extend'

(Aquinas 1265-1272, 1945: I, 105, 6). If God chooses to act in this way, then there will be a trade-off between divine and created agency. *In these instances*, God rather than the creature produces the effect. But in acknowledging this possibility, we are not claiming that in general divine and created agencies are locked in a zero-sum game. Nor does direct divine action (whether interventionist or non-interventionist) among secondary causes reduce God to the status of a secondary cause. As sovereign creator *ex nihilo*, God may act directly in the world without being diminished; it would be strange to say otherwise in a religion with divine incarnation at its centre.

These particular theological objections, then, are misconceived. But significant conceptual puzzles certainly do arise in considering divine action at the quantum level. I want to suggest that some of these puzzles present difficulties not just for attempts to construct a non-interventionist account of divine action, but for theology generally in conceiving of God's relation to the created order. If God has chosen to make a world that includes ontological chance, then we must grapple with the question about God's relation to these underdetermined events. This question arises even if one has no interest in the kind of proposal I have sketched here, and it leads to some fascinating and fundamental metaphysical issues. There appear to be only two possibilities: events that are underdetermined by secondary causes must either be determined by God or by nothing at all.

Each of these alternatives brings with it further intriguing questions, though there is space here only to introduce them briefly. Consider the second possibility, namely, that God leaves quantum transitions 'up to chance'. How is this possible for the creator of the universe *ex nihilo*? Human beings can resort to chance (say, by rolling dice or flipping a coin) because we are unable to predict the outcome of the events in question; even if we understand the relevant causal laws, our knowledge of the initial conditions is insufficiently detailed to make possible an accurate calculation. But chance obviously cannot work this way for the Creator who brings about both the causal structures and the initial conditions under which they operate. Perhaps God might ordain that a creature shall instantiate any of some set of possible properties. The puzzle here is that God must cause there to be an entity or event whose content is not fully specified either by God in the act of giving it being nor by secondary causes. Peter van Inwagen (1988) has considered this possibility, and has suggested that God might leave even the initial state of the universe

undetermined. Perhaps God's creative decree takes the form: 'Let one of X or Y or Z come to be.' One of these possible worlds would then spring into existence without sufficient reason for doing so. This account of creation would no doubt disappoint defenders of the cosmological argument, since appeal to a self-existent creator of the world would not after all provide a sufficient reason for the existence of *this* universe.

Alternatively, we can hold that God determines the outcome of naturally underdetermined transitions in quantum systems. This preserves the principle of sufficient reason. But if God directly brings about the outcome of every quantum transition, then these phenomena are an immediate expression of God's activity, and so are the objects, properties, and relations built up on this base. Our familiar world consists of a vast aggregation of events actualizing God's choices between alternative possibilities. At this point, we may wonder whether we are witnessing the second coming of occasionalism.[5]

Recall that the traditional theological response to occasionalism contended that God's creative act endows creatures with causal powers of their own, capacities to cause change in other creatures and, in turn, to be changed by them. Historically, of course, the theory of causal powers developed as an analysis of the relations of macroscopic objects taken as discrete and determinate particular things. Causal powers are (or are linked to) intrinsic properties of particulars; to possess these properties is to be disposed under appropriate stimulus conditions to display characteristic behaviours and to produce characteristic effects. As we've seen, however, the quantum theory disrupts this metaphysical picture. An electron, like a macroscopic object, has a determinate mass that when observed is found at one location in space. Unlike a macroscopic object, however, the electron before we observe it does not have a determinate location, but somehow combines a mutually incompatible set of positions in a region of space. It hardly needs to be said that this is not the sort of entity envisioned by traditional accounts of created causes.

The first move in response to this strange new picture is to revise our account of causal powers so that it incorporates the stochastic properties of quantum entities, and allows for non-necessitating, probabilistic causality. The created bearer of causal powers would then be understood as an evolving structure of potentiality, an entity defined not only by various intrinsic determinate properties, but also by a set of well-defined

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[5] I draw here upon Tracy (2013).

probabilistic propensities. The causal powers of this entity include its capacity to generate with precise likelihoods this range of outcome states under the requisite measurement conditions.

So far, so good – but further puzzles immediately arise. Under many conditions 'quantum entities' cannot be individuated as separate bearers of stochastic properties. Consider a two electron system. According to the Pauli exclusion principle these electrons must be described by a single anti-symmetric wavefuction. Their joint state is not simply the sum of objective probabilities possessed by each electron considered individually; rather, they can only be described in relation to each other. In EPR-type experiments, physicists make separate measurements on two particles. But these particles cannot be regarded as *localized* bearers of causal powers. When a measurement is made on one electron, it collapses the wave function for its anti-correlated counterpart. Rather than there being a transmission of causal influence between discrete individuals, these particles appear to constitute a relational system, a whole that somehow maintains instantaneous correlations of its separated components. Current physical theory suggests that this is a ubiquitous feature of our world, and so the challenge is to develop an intelligible analysis of this situation in terms of causal powers.

It is tempting to sidestep these puzzles by regarding quantum theory strictly as a useful conceptual scheme for organizing experimental results and directing inquiry, but not as disclosing new classes of entities with causal powers. Talk about particles and their properties would have value not as a description of the quantum stuff we encounter in the lab (and elsewhere of course), but as a model that can incorporate current observational data, predict results, shape ongoing inquiry, and so on. What matters scientifically is that the object language of the theory (its description of the inhabitants of the 'particle zoo') is empirically adequate, i.e., able to account for current observations. But we would remain agnostic about whether this language correctly describes real items in the world, i.e., about whether it is literally true.

This metaphysical modesty is appealing. But if we adopt this cautious anti-realism, then we no longer have bearers of causal powers at the quantum level. Instead, we have patterns of events organized according to probabilistic laws that support complex counter-factual conditionals – causality in a strictly regularist sense. If we assert that all of these events are directly produced by God, then God is the only productive cause, and we are no longer in a position to reply to the

occasionalist by contending that God produces these effects by means of the operation of secondary causes.

Occasionalism has its advantages; it eliminates problems about how God can act in the order of nature without disrupting or displacing secondary causes, since there are no secondary causes. God is the cause of all change as well as of all finite beings, and natural laws simply identify recurring patterns in this divine action. Christian theologians have usually thought that this represents a loss of value in the world. In an occasionalist world, as Aquinas said, creatures do not 'have also their [own] proper operation'. They lack, we might say, a structure of active being that is their own, and in this respect the occasionalist's God stops short of positing the creature as a genuine other, differentiated from God's own activity.[6]

Quantum mechanics, then, may open the door to a non-interventionist account of objective divine action. But when we step through that door, we enter an unfamiliar world that leaves us facing fundamental metaphysical puzzles about God's relation to the world. In this context, it will not be enough simply to repeat classical claims about divine action through secondary causes; we need to grapple with some difficult underlying questions about how to conceive of such causes.

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[6] Bas van Fraasen argues that 'the language of science should be literally construed, but its theories need not be true to be good' (1976: 632).

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CHANCE IN A CREATED WORLD:
HOW TO AVOID COMMON MISUNDERSTANDINGS
ABOUT DIVINE ACTION[1]

LYDIA JAEGER

Institut Biblique de Nogent-sur-Marne

Abstract. In the article 'Against Physicalism-plus-God: How Creation Accounts for Divine Action in the World' (Jaeger 2012a), I defined a framework which allows us to make some progress in our understanding of how God acts in the world. In the present article, I apply this framework to the specific question of chance events. I show that chance does not provide an explanation for special divine action. Nevertheless, chance does not hamper God's ability to act in the world, and creation provides a framework for the understanding of chance, which is akin to what we see in modern science.

DEFINITIONS: WHAT IS CHANCE?

Chance is a notoriously difficult concept. Different authors use it with different meanings, and the same author can use several meanings in different contexts, sometimes without any explanation (and perhaps sometimes without being aware of the shift of meaning). Thus it is crucial to provide a precise definition, in order to avoid unnecessary confusions.

I offer the following basic definition: *A chance event (fact, state of affairs, etc.) is an event (fact, state of affairs, etc.) without cause*. Please note right from the start that chance as the absence of a cause can never be used as an *explanation* of anything. The affirmation that something happens 'by chance' does not mean that 'chance' produced it, but that it happened without a cause, which is the very opposite of a (causal) explanation.

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[1] For a fuller treatment of chance, see Jaeger (2014).

The basic definition gives rise to a variety of distinctions, as 'without cause' can have different meanings. The most important ones for our reflection are the following:

– *Inexistence or ignorance of cause?* In the age of classical science, it was believed that every event has a cause. For Leibniz, the principle of causality was logically necessary, it was as certain as 3 x 3 = 9.[2] Following Hume's criticism of (efficient) causality, Kant reinstates causality as a category of the faculty of understanding. It is the result of a synthetic *a priori* judgement: although it is not logically necessary, it is nevertheless true *a priori*, that is before any experience (Kant 1781: III, 92s/IV, 65s). In fact, no experience (in the scientific sense) is possible without presupposing the universal reign of causality. If we do not take for granted that all that happens is the effect of a cause, our senses would register impressions, but it would be impossible to integrate these into a system, which could count as scientific experience (Kant 1781: III, 167).

In such a perspective, chance can only stem from the limits of our knowledge. But quantum mechanics has undermined confidence in the universal reign of causality. Although discussions go on, the prominent interpretation today considers that there is 'real' chance in the atomic and subatomic world. It is still possible to formulate a more limited law of causality following the lines of Kantian transcendental reasoning, in close connection with incomplete objectivation prevalent in quantum mechanics.

– *Chance à la Cournot (the encounter of two independent causal chains) or indeterminism*? There is place for (a certain form of) chance in a completely deterministic universe: Antoine Augustin Cournot, following Aristotle and J. S. Mill, defined a chance event as the encounter of two independent causal chains. As an illustration, let us remember the strange happenings on February 15, 2013. Astrophysicists had calculated that an asteroid would pass the earth at a short distance. The same day and without having been predicted, another smaller asteroid penetrated the atmosphere over Tcheliabinsk, at the border of Siberia and caused considerable damage. The orbits of both asteroids were determined by the law of

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[2] Mittelstaedt (1989: 149), who quotes G. W. Leibniz, *Von dem Verhängnisse*, *Hauptschriften II*, p. 129. See Mittelstaedt (1989: chap. V) concerning the principle of causality in classical and quantum physics.

gravity, thus were not without cause. Nevertheless it makes sense to ask if the fact that both events took place the same day was due to chance, that is without correlation. In fact, scientists have not come to an agreement on this question: whereas several studies did not point to any link between the two asteroids, an article published in *Nature* tried to show that both had been part of a bigger asteroid which broke up (Borovička et al. 2013).[3]

- *Without an efficient cause (which produces the event) or without a final cause (aim, purpose)?* Another distinction is inspired by the Aristotelian theory of causality, his famous four causes. Taking up two of them, the efficient or moving cause is what produces the event (the movement, the change), it is this cause which we normally have in mind when we talk about causality today. The final cause refers to the aim, the purpose for which something is produced. The final cause points to the project, the design behind the events. Modern physics has largely discarded final causality. But the concept is still relevant in biology and even more in the human sciences. The easiest way to grasp the distinction is to think of an artefact: efficient causality is interested in the chain of physico-chemical causes which have led to the production of a pair of glasses, for example. Final causality underlines the fact that it is also true that the glasses were produced in order to allow a short- or longsighted person to see better. Concerning chance, it can be asked if, under certain conditions, an end can be pursued in the absence of efficient causality: is it possible to realise a project with the aid of stochastic phenomena, or does chance exclude design?

- *Without a cause accessible to science or without any cause at all?* Unless one thinks that science provides a complete picture of reality, and that there is nothing outside science, one should not conclude from the absence of causality in the scientific description of an event, that there is no cause at all. God is not a physical cause, thus it is important not to confuse chance on the level of scientific explanation with the absence of transcendent determination.

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[3] See the section 'Coincidental asteroid approach' of the article 'Chelyabinsk meteor' on *Wikipedia* for bibliographical information on those studies which favour a coincidence. Available at: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2013_Russian_meteor_event> [accessed December 18, 2013].

– *Indeterminism or unpredictability?* One could think (and Laplace thought) that the absence of chance guarantees predictability. Laplace's intelligence incarnates his conviction that all past and future can be calculated in a deterministic world, if only its state is completely known at one moment (Laplace 1814: 2). But in fact, this view is too simple. For there are stochastic processes which are perfectly predictable: Boyle's law correlates the volume, temperature and pressure of an ideal gas. The underlying molecular movements are stochastic, but their averages follow a strict deterministic law. At the same time, there exist deterministic systems with an unpredictable future. These are the famous 'chaotic' systems: although they are described by deterministic equations, the smallest difference at one moment will lead to exponentially divergent futures.

CHANCE AS EXPLANATION FOR DIVINE ACTION?

After these preliminary clarifications, let us turn to the central theme of this article: divine action in connection with chance. The first topic I want to examine more closely (in this and the next section) is the conviction of several scientist-theologians that chance is central to understanding how God acts in the world. They do not want to limit God's action to the preservation of the natural order, but want to make room for specific divine acts, without violating the laws of nature which God instituted at creation.

The problem they raise is the following: in a deterministic world, one can believe in general providence, because the world would not continue to exist and function as it does without the divinely given laws. But what about special providence? What about prayers which are answered, special blessings promised to the faithful? If they imply violating the laws of nature, one would need to understand why God does not respect the laws which he himself has given. If special providence does not violate natural laws, such a theistic world would strangely resemble a deistic world. For the deist, God abandons the world to its evolution following laws established at creation; for the theist, God remains active in the world. But its evolution would completely follow from the deterministic pre-established laws. Therefore this theistic world would have exactly the same history as a deistic world, if only initial conditions are the same. Same 'answers' to prayer, same blessings 'given' to the faithful.

For this reason (without rejecting general providence), some scientist-theologians look to chance, in order to provide room for divine action in what is left undetermined by probabilistic laws. They consider that one finds here the leeway necessary in order to understand how God enters into relation with humans, punishes their sins, answers their prayers... Unsurprisingly, quantum mechanics occupies centre stage: Robert Russell, founder and director of the *Center for Theology and the Natural Sciences* at Berkeley is currently one of the best-known advocates of the idea that quantum indeterminism is central to a good grasp of divine action.[4] Ian Barbour, who is often credited of being the father of the contemporary science-faith dialogue, favours another strange property of quantum systems: non-locality (Barbour 2006: 118). John Polkinghorne looks instead to the unpredictability of chaotic systems in order to make place for divine action in our world.[5]

Although these proposals try to make sense of divine action in the light of contemporary science, they face important scientific problems. With regard to quantum theory, research following up the EPR-paradox formulated by Einstein (J. S. Bell, Alain Aspect) has shown that quantum mechanics is not incomplete in the sense that it would leave gaps which could be filled by divine intervention. We have to be very cautious when transferring our common sense intuitions on causality to the reign of quantum mechanics. They were formed in the macroscopic world of everyday experience and lead us into error when applied to the quantum world. In addition, it is quite unclear, even if it were possible to 'squeeze' divine action inside the boundaries of what is left undetermined by Heisenberg's principle of uncertainty, that this would provide any leeway for significant action. In the analogous case of human action, Peter Clarke has convincingly argued that quantum effects are far too small to account for human freedom.[6] The hope that quantum indeterminism would provide an explanation of free (divine or human) action would seem to be an illusion.

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[4] See Wetger-McNelly (2006: 96-111) and Polkinghorne (2006: 137-45).

[5] See Smedes (2004: *passim*) for a good presentation and critique of these proposals.

[6] For example, Heisenbergian uncertainty is more than 100.000 times smaller than what would be needed to change even the most feeble chemical bond. And in order to function at typical body temperatures, the brain must be stabilized against thermal noise. But thermal perturbations are about a billion times bigger than any quantum uncertainty. See Clarke (2010; 2014).

Concerning Polkinghorne's appeal to chaos, as far as we know, chaos only happens in classical systems, so that it does not introduce any true indeterminism, but only a lack of predictability.[7]

It follows from these considerations that, if there was a difficulty of allowing divine action in the deterministic world of classical physics, the indeterministic theories of contemporary physics would not be of any help. But let us remember that the founding fathers of classical physics (Galileo, Kepler, Newton, Descartes...) did not think that there was any problem for God to act in the world their science described. Not only was God as the Creator responsible for the natural order, but also, for example, Newton's immense interest in biblical prophecies shows that he believed in the God who continued to be active in the created world.[8]

GOD'S ACTION BEYOND THE SCIENTIFICALLY CORRECT

In fact, on reflection, the question is quite bizarre: How does God act in the world? It's *his* world. He has created it and continually sustains it by his providence. 'For in him we live and move and have our being', as Paul declared in Athens (Ac 17:28).[9] Thus there is no need to find gaps in the scientific description in order to make room for divine action. It cannot be limited to what chance leaves undetermined.

But there is still the objection that God would be inconsistent if he went against the laws he himself has instituted. In response, it should be noted that a law of nature only fixes the behaviour of a system as far as there is no external cause interfering with it: the pen falls to the earth according to the law of gravity – unless I put out my hand and retain it; two electrically charged balls move away from each other following Coulomb's law – unless a strong magnet is close by, which has to be integrated into the calculations ... Any law only applies if all acting causes are taken into account.

That is the reason why it is not correct to define a miracle as a *violation* of the laws of nature. It is instead the intervention of an external cause, and more precisely of a non-natural cause. Laws of nature describe what normally happens, under the condition that such an external action

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[7] I explain more fully these scientific problems in Jaeger (2012a: 297-9).

[8] See Newton (1974a; 1974b).

[9] Unless otherwise stated, all Scripture quotes are taken from the New International Version.

(apart from general providence) is absent. The ordinary formulation of laws leaves this condition implicit, which leads to the wrong impression that such an intervention would violate them (Lewis 1960: chap. 8).

Some are unconvinced by such a line of argument and point to the beauty of a world where everything happens according to a small set of simple laws. But one might question the validity of such an aesthetic intuition: Is it up to us to decide what suits best for God's action in the world? An analogy may help us to understand that deviating from the normal rules may not lessen the overall beauty of a work. To the newcomer, any violation of the rules of grammar and style are forbidden when writing poetry, as he would be tempted to thus cover his lack of imagination and mastery of the language. But the accomplished poet allows himself, at certain chosen moments, to deviate from the rules, in order to create special effects. Far from impeding the beauty of the poem, these deviations better bring to light the author's intentions and underline the unity which the text finds in them.[10] In an analogous vein, the unity of what happens in the world is to be found in God's active will. Departures from regular patterns (which we discern as laws of nature) are not disconnected from the overall fabric of events, but serve, together with the 'normal' happenings, the plan of the one Creator and Governor of the universe.

For the Christian, laws of nature do not limit what God does in the world, and miracles are possible (and even real!). This fact takes away much of the motivation behind chance models of divine action. Does this means that there are two, and only two modes of divine action in the world: the preservation of the ordinary reign of natural laws (general providence) and miracles? It may be possible (but I recognise that this proposal is speculative) to view these two modes of action not as strict alternatives, but more as limiting cases, in between there is a continuum of operating modes through which the Creator is present and active in the world. Multidimensional models of reality, developed for example by Karl Popper and Herman Dooyeweerd may provide an inner-wordly analogy. They recognize different dimensions of reality, not all of which are accessible to a physical description.[11] In such a perspective, human thought and will is linked to physical processes (foremost in the brain),

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[10] See Lewis (1960: chap. 8).

[11] See also Nagel (2012). Nagel argues for irreducible teleological and axiological principles at work in nature, albeit his resistance to any theistic reading of them.

but nevertheless go beyond what can be scientifically explained. Human liberty is not contradicted by the scientific description of these processes, but indicates that natural science does not capture all of reality. The control human thought exercises over bodily processes comes in a variety of degrees, from the instinctive, non-reflective response, at the one end, to the carefully pondered deliberation unhampered by any malfunctioning of the brain, at the other. It may be that we find here the best analogy, in order to understand various modes of divine action in the world.[12]

CHANCE: AN OBSTACLE TO GOD'S ACTION?

We have seen that it's not necessary to resort to chance, in order to make space for God's action in our world. Let us now consider a second question: does chance threaten God's sovereignty? It's quite curious to observe two opposing attitudes among believers: some hope that chance will solve the difficulty of understanding God's action, but others consider that chance is an obstacle which does not allow God to control everything. But both these positions are mistaken and neglect to take fully into account divine transcendence. God is not one cause among others, accessible to scientific description. Thus his action does not enter into conflict with natural causes, so that chance would be necessary, in order to make room for it. Nor is his sovereignty hindered by the absence of natural causes. For example, quantum indeterminism does not imply that God could only predict or determine events at the atomic level with a certain probability. It is true that quantum indeterminism is objective, but the restriction is only valid on the level of physical causality. As with any scientific theory, quantum mechanics doesn't limit what God can do.

As much as the Bible emphasizes that the natural order is grounded in creation, equally it insists on the control the Lord exerts over fortuitous events. A proverb states this conviction in a very straightforward manner: 'The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the Lord' (Proverbs 16:33). Most interesting are the texts which talk of *hòq* as imposed by the Creator's will to the sea. The sea, in the mythology of peoples around Israel, symbolises the forces of chaos, the disorder which threatens to wipe out humanity's vital space. To say that God's *hòq* is imposed on the sea, means that nothing can evade being determined

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[12] For further development of these intimations, see Jaeger (2012a: 299-302, 307-10).

by it. The Hebrew word allows two translations: depending on the context, it can be translated as 'limit, border', or as 'law, rule'. In certain passages, it clearly has the second sense (Jeremiah 31:35-36; cf. Job 38:10; Proverbs 8:29):

> Thus speaks the Lord, who establishes the sun to light the day,
> the laws that govern the moon and the stars to light the night,
> who stirs the sea, and its waves roar,
> His name is 'Lord of armies':
> If these laws depart from before me, declares the Lord,
> the descendants of Israel will forever cease to be a nation before me.[13]

Thus divine sovereignty is not limited by what seems to humans to be out of control and unpredictable. On the contrary, what humans can't control and predict is completely submitted to God's reign. As Calvin wrote: 'It was a true saying of Basil the Great, that Fortune and Chance are heathen terms; the meaning of which ought not to occupy pious minds.' (Calvin 1845: I.XVI.8) More exactly, it's chance, in the sense of absence of a metaphysical cause, which doesn't have a place in the created world. No principle of chance independent of God's providence, no deity *Fortuna* or *Tychè* can compete with the Lord.

CHANCE UNDER GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY

But beware: don't confuse metaphysical determination with natural determination. Chance, in the sense of absence of natural cause, finds its place in the created world, as once more Calvin writes: 'Though all things are ordered by the counsel and certain arrangement of God, to us, however, they are fortuitous.' (Calvin 1845: I.XVI.9) As the biblical God controls all events determined by the laws of nature (and the initial conditions), he controls all events without a natural cause. Neuroscientist Donald MacKay states it in the following way:

> The God of biblical theism is beholden to none to account for his creative agency. If he freely wills into being a succession of events in which one half of the sub-microscopic details at any time are unspecified by their precursors, this would involve no inconsistency with his character, still less with his sovereignty, as portrayed in the Bible. (MacKay 1978: 30)

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[13] My translation, see Jaeger (2010: 162-9, 150-3).

Faith in God's sovereignty does not necessarily lead to a deterministic, and even less to a fatalistic world- and life-view. For on one hand, God's decrees *transcend* the world. One cannot conclude from the fact that God 'works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will' (Ephesians 1:11), to determinism on the level of natural causality. In the words of Calvin:

> We do not admit the term Fate ... For we do not with the Stoics imagine a necessity consisting of a perpetual chain of causes, and a kind of involved series contained in nature, but we hold that God is the disposer and ruler of all things. (Calvin 1845: I.XVI.8)

As the transcendent primary cause, God does not normally put aside secondary causes; on the contrary, he provides the necessary foundation, so that each creature can act according to its own constitution.

On the other hand, providence is the act of a *personal* God and does not come down to a blind, non-rational determination, unlike Stoic fate. In this way, we can admit, at the same time, God's absolute sovereignty over the world and the chance character of many events, when considered from within the world. Once again Calvin:

> As the order, method, end, and necessity of events, are, for the most part, hidden in the counsel of God, though it is certain that they are produced by the will of God, they have the appearance of being fortuitous, such being the form under which they present themselves to us, whether considered in their own nature, or estimated according to our knowledge and judgement. (Calvin 1845: I.XVI.9)

It is interesting to compare the biblical view with rival metaphysical conceptions and the place they can or cannot give to chance. First, scientism, which considers that science delivers a complete description of everything, that nothing exists which science could not, in principle, explain. Chance forces a limit on scientism: it has to recognise that science doesn't explain everything that happens, as certain things happen without any cause accessible to science. Second, deism, which considers that God, in the beginning, created the world, and left it then to the pre-established laws, without intervening any more. Chance forces deism to allow for realities which do not follow from God's original creation. Two solutions are on offer:

– Either the deist simply acknowledges that some events are not determined by the order which the Creator instituted in the

beginning, thus are (at least partially) independent of Him. But in a certain sense, this comes down to giving them a quasi-divine status, considering that they are their own cause. In fact, this is a form of (philosophical) polytheism.

– Or chance pushes the deist towards a higher view of providence: recognising God's continued action beyond initial creation makes space for events which are not connected to preceding events by natural causality, without giving them quasi-divine status.

To state it more bluntly: chance forces the deist to choose between polytheism and theism.

ORDERLY CHANCE IN A CREATED WORLD

As we have seen, it is possible to believe in God's sovereignty over everything *and* to accept that certain events count as chance on the scientific level. A clear distinction between the primary transcendent cause and secondary natural causes leads us to understand that something can be part of God's plan, without having a natural cause. Those who believe in divine omniscience and omnipotence should not be bothered by chance and its important role in contemporary science. But let us take a further step: Is it really sufficient to show that chance is no obstacle to faith in God? Many people stop at the scientific description of chance events. Why add metaphysics and talk of transcendent causality in the absence of natural causes?

The answer to these questions depends, above all, on the general attitude one has towards the Christian faith. Those who believe in the biblical God will resist the idea that transcendent causality is a more or less arbitrary add-on. On the contrary, somebody for whom this faith is mistaken could not accept the view that everything is grounded in the Creator and his action. The debate goes beyond the scope of this article and concerns the overall plausibility of the biblical worldview. Let us just mention two arguments which are directly linked to science and the role chance plays in it.

The presuppositions of science in harmony with creation

First, creation accounts for several central presuppositions of science. It explains the existence of a stable natural order, why this order is accessible to human knowledge, and why its exploration is a noble activity. The

biblical worldview even leads to the experimental method of modern science insofar as it sees creation as a free divine act: God could have given this world a different form or create different natural laws. It is not sufficient to reason about nature, but it is necessary to go and 'look', by doing experiments, in order to discover which world God has really decided to create. The good match between the doctrine of creation and the scientific method counts towards explaining why the Christian faith assisted the birth of science as we know it today.[14]

Chance and the creation of matter

Second, the form chance takes in a created world matches well with chance as we see it in contemporary science. The central notion in this context is the liberty of creation. Creation doesn't flow from God's nature, but from his will, as the book of Revelation sings: 'You created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being' (Revelation 4:11; cf. Ephesians 1:11; 1 Corinthians 15:38). Because of the freedom of the creative act, the world is not necessary, but contingent: it could not exist, and it could be otherwise than it is. This leads to a radically different understanding of the contingency of the world than in the Greek view of a world formed by a demiurge. As Wolfhart Pannenberg puts it:

> The transformation of the concept of contingency is that the contingent is now no longer based on the indeterminacy of matter, but on the freedom of God's will as the creative ground of the world and all its parts. (Pannenberg 1994: 1052)

Unlike the biblical Creator, the demiurge works on pre-existing, eternal matter, in order to impart form to it. This leads to a dualistic view: on one hand, form, reason, order; on the other, matter which eludes rational investigation. Creation doesn't admit such a dualism: God created *ex nihilo*; everything, including matter, comes from his hand. Therefore nothing in the created world is absolutely disordered or chaotic; nothing is radically irrational. This view is in accordance with the fact that chance in modern science is open to mathematical description. In fact, it is possible to formulate laws which govern random phenomena, even if only for their average values or their probability. Thus chance in science is no first principle opposed to form or order, as was Greek matter. This is not only true for 'games of chance', of which the tossing of a coin is

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[14] See Jaeger (2006 : chap. 1 and 3).

the most simple and the most widely known. These games are in fact deterministic – but because of the complexity of intervening causes, we can't trace the exact evolution. 'Ordered' chance, as we expect it in a created world, happens even in quantum mechanics, although quantum theory certainly provides the purest form of chance we know of. The principle of causality doesn't apply universally; nevertheless it is possible to write down mathematical equations which describe microscopic processes. Quantum indeterminism does not imply the return of Greek irrational matter. The microscopic world contradicts, for sure, many of our intuitions acquired in the everyday world of mesoscopic dimensions. But quantum mechanics does not take us away from mathematical science which Newton and others constructed from the conviction that our world is created.[15]

CONCLUSION

Those interested in understanding God's action in the world should guard themselves against two (over-?)reactions to chance: chance neither provides an explanation for, nor is it a threat to divine action.

First, we have seen that chance does not provide an explanation for special divine action, which would include such action in the scientific world-picture. Neither quantum indeterminacy nor chaos theory provide the necessary leeway for divine action to happen without 'breaching' scientific laws. But we have also seen that chance models of divine action typically rely on a reductionist interpretation of the world. If physical science captures only certain aspects of the world, there is no need to look for a physical model of divine action. In fact, the most promising inner-worldly analogy may well be provided by human action understood non-monistically. As human thought and will are exercised through, but are not reducible to physical brain processes, God is actively present in His world. There is no need to look for a scientifically acceptable description of his action, as science does not fully comprehend all aspects of reality.

Second, chance does not hamper God's ability to act in the world either. As his sovereign control is not on the same level as the natural order, it is wrong to conclude from the absence of a natural cause to

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[15] In fact, it has been recently possible to derive the probabilistic predictions of quantum mechanics from non-probabilistic axioms: Mittelstaedt (1998: 47-57). See Jaeger (2012b: 90-93).

metaphysical indeterminacy. As the transcendent Creator and Sustainer of the world, he freely chooses how to build the causal nexus of the created world. A created world leaves room for chance events, as God's decree is not to be confused with any inner-worldly deterministic order, or Stoic impersonal fate. In fact, creation provides a framework for the understanding of chance, which is akin to what we see in modern science. Not only do important presuppositions of modern science follow from the doctrine of creation, but also creation *ex nihilo*, with its corollary of created matter, excludes any radically irrational dimension from nature, so that we expect chance events to yield to some form of mathematical description.

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"... IN GOD ONLY ONE INFINITE ACT
CAN BE THOUGHT ..."
THE AMBIGUITY OF DIVINE AGENCY
AND THE DIVERSITY OF EVIL

INGOLF U. DALFERTH

Claremont Graduate University

Abstract. The paper argues that God does not act but is creative activity, which helps to overcome evil by the possibilities of the good that it opens up for creatures in the face of evil.

DIVINE ACTIVITY VS. DIVINE ACTIONS

In his *Lectures on the philosophical doctrine of religion* Kant is reported to have said: „Creation cannot have been other than completed at once in an instant. For in God only one infinite act can be thought, a single, enduring force which created an entire world in an instant and preserves it in eternity. Through this act, many natural forces were poured out, as it were, in this world-whole, which they gradually formed in accordance with general laws."[1]

The implications of this claim are far-reaching. "Fundamentally only one action can be thought in God; for in him there is no succession; but nevertheless this one act may have an infinite number of relations and expressions according to the constitution of the subjects to which it relates, and it actually does have them too. Hence God's power is not at all visible to us at one time while at another it is sensed by us."[2]

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[1] Kant (1817: 426).

[2] Ibid. Similarly at other places: "in God only one act can really be thought, which never ceases but expresses itself without variation or interruption. For in God no succession of states takes place, and consequently no time." (Kant 1817: 432.)

Thus, on the one hand Kant agrees with classical theism that God is *actus purus*, unceasing activity and complete actuality. On the other hand he does not assume different acts or actions of God but only one fundamental, unceasing divine activity. Distinctions presuppose time, and there is no time in God. Divine activity is not in time but makes time and the succession of states possible: Without God, no time, no creation, no actions. But God himself is not in time, nor a part of creation, and hence not somebody (or something) of whom (or of which) we can truly predicate actions. Creation, conservation, salvation, redemption, perfection, consummation etc. are not distinct actions or kinds of actions of God but only one single and unceasing divine activity named differently on the basis of how it affects creation in general or some creatures in particular as this is sensed or conceived by us. Therefore, what we call divine actions are human ways of speaking about the unceasing creative activity we call 'God'. They are our determinations of a divine reality, a human manner of speaking, but they are not distinct divine actions or a divine reality.

Kant was not the only one who argued in this way. Schleiermacher holds the same view. In his treatment of creation and preservation in *The Christian Faith*, for example, he insists that the traditional talk of divine actions ascribes agency to God in a "too human fashion":[3] "portraying creation and preservation as distinct kinds of divine activity inappropriately places God within the ‚realm of contradictions'".[4] When one speaks about God's activity, one is not properly speaking of divine agency or particular divine actions at all but of the divine enactment of creation as a whole. Divine activity is the fundamental reality without which there wouldn't be anything to refer to or the possibility to refer to anything. Divine action talk, on the other hand, is merely a manner of speaking based on our experience, or 'feeling', our sense of God's creative presence in particular circumstances. It brings to light certain features of our human experience, in particular its being grounded in some prior actuality not of our making, but it does not describe a distinct particular divine reality. Theologians, therefore, must be realist about divine activity but not about divine actions or distinct types or kinds of divine activity. They are human manners of speaking that change over time. But divine

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[3] Schleiermacher (1831: 173).

[4] James (2004: 5).

activity is timelessly actual, indeed, it is that without which nothing else would be possible or could take place.

THE ONTOLOGICAL PRIORITY OF THE POSSIBLE

All this was not new, of course. Kant and Schleiermacher owed this line of thinking to seminal thinkers of the 17th and 18th centuries, in particular to Spinoza[5] and to Leibniz, and beyond them to a fundamental change in ontological outlook in medieval theology that paved the way towards modernity: the discovery of 'the ontological priority of the possible'.[6]

In Spinoza's metaphysics there are no divine acts; there is only the divine activity of the *natura naturans*, the creative ground of the *natura naturata* which is the manifestation of the infinite modes and attributes of the *deus sive natura*, mind (mental reality) and extension (physical reality) being two of them. Talk of a plurality of distinct divine acts or actions requires a way of distinguishing between them, a way of describing 'creation' in contrast to and distinction from 'preservation' for example. But to draw such distinctions depends on finite contrasts, signs, and language, and this is something we have and use but not God. God is single, abstract and impersonal, the only substance there is, whereas everything else are modes or modifications of its eternal activity. We *speak* of divine actions, but there *is* only one divine activity in its infinite expressions and manifestations.

In a different way Leibniz conceived God's divine activity not as a distinct reality alongside created activities nor as the common ground of all created reality but rather as an activity pluralized in the myriads of ways in which monads or individual perspectives on the whole of creation are created, sustained and perfected by God. God's activity works in and through each individual substance or monad in a distinct way. On the one hand it is individualized in the infinite plurality of finite versions and visions of the whole of creation that Leibniz calls 'monads', each reflecting the entire universe in its individual way. On the other hand it is the intrinsic bond that keeps the myriads of monads together within one and the same creation. Each monad is an individual manifestation of divine activity distinct from all others and as such an individual version or microcosmos of the whole of creation. God, the central monad, keeps

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[5] Cf. Lamm (1996: 127-157).

[6] Cf. a more comprehensive account of this discovery in Dalferth (2014).

all those individual perspectives on everything compossible with each other within the totality of individual perspectives in one and the same universe, and in his infinite goodness, wisdom and power he does so in a way that makes this universe, if not the best world for each of us, then at least the best of all possible worlds for all of us.

Both the creative potency of the *natura naturans* in Spinoza and the totality of possibilities that strive to become actual in the monads of the best of all possible worlds in Leibniz presuppose the revolution in medieval metaphysics that reversed the ontological order of being and possibility by changing from the priority of the actual over the possible to the priority of the possible over the actual. In the Aristotelian tradition possibility in all its senses was tied to actuality. What is possible differs from what is actual only by being not yet or no more actual: Possibility is possible actuality, actuality takes place in time, and hence all possibility is the possibility of something past, present, or future. Of course, there is an important difference between *possibilitas* and *potentia*, between the possibility of something or someone ('It is possible to f') and the potency or competence of something or someone to be or to do something ('It is possible for *a* to f'). But both *potentia* and *possibilitas* are grounded in being and always the potency and possibility of something actual. There is no potency per se, and there is no genuine possibility that can remain forever unrealized, as the so-called Principle of Plenitude[7] holds. Aristotelian possibility in all its various senses does not involve reference to simultaneous alternatives but is understood in a statistical or temporal frequency way: Whatever is possible, was, is, or will be actual.[8]

In *Metaphysics IX (Theta)* Aristotle introduced the modal distinctions in order to be able to describe and analyze the manifold changes in the *kosmos*.[9] This helped Christian thinkers to understand *becoming in the world*, but it was of no help in understanding the *becoming of the world*, i.e. the *creatio ex nihilo*. In Aristotelian terms this required postulating not only the possibility of the world but also an actual potency that actualizes that possibility. But the *possibility of the world* could no longer be understood as the possibility of the actual world but had to be presupposed *as possibility*: It was no longer a relative possibility but an absolute possibility, a *possible absolutum*.

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[7] Lovejoy (1936)

[8] Or in alethic terms: necessary propositions are always true; possible propositions are sometimes true and sometimes false; impossible propositions are always false.

[9] Uckelman (2009: esp. chps. 1, 2 and 3).

The unfolding of this idea led to a completely new paradigm of modal thinking. The possible is no longer defined by reference to the actual in time, the impossible no longer in terms of its incompatibility with the actual world (physical impossibility) or the actuality of the world (metaphysical impossibility). One still holds that there is no possibility, necessity or impossibility as such. But since modalities can no longer be defined as modalities of the actual world, they are seen as being grounded in the divine creator of the world: Absolute possibilities become identified with the eternal ideas in the divine mind. The possibility of the world is understood not relative to the actual world but to the divine mind of the creator. Similarly impossibility is understood independently of any reference to the actual world merely by reference to the creative mind of God: Possible is now everything that is *possible for God*, i.e. that is *made possible by God*; and similarly impossible is everything that is *impossible for God*, i.e. *made impossible by God*. That is to say, the distinction between the possible and the impossible is no longer dependent on any reference to the created world but solely to God. God is creator as the poet of the possible who distinguishes between the possible and the impossible by making that unique possibility actual from all the simultaneous alternatives before him which best corresponds to God's will for his creation.

This view can be traced back not merely to Duns Scotus in the 14th century but in an important sense to Thomas Aquinas in the 13th century. For Scotus modalities are rooted in the intellect of God. Nothing is possible that is not intelligible and everything that is intelligible receives its being as intelligible in the intellect of God. The totality of intelligible beings make up the various possibilities. However, not all intelligible beings are compossible and can thus be actualized. "Compossibility, understood as logical compossibility, partitions the conceptual space into sets of beings all of which are compossible. One of these sets God actualized, and the others though unactualized are possible."[10]

This argument limited the set of possible worlds to those that could be created because they were characterized by logically compossibility. But it did not answer why God created *this* world rather than any another of the set of non-contradictory worlds. In the 13th century Thomas Aquinas had given an answer to this by arguing that God can indeed "do all things that are possible", i.e. create everything that is free from

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[10] Uckelman (2010: 20-21).

contradiction, and this in an absolute way.[11] His power is not restricted to the possibilities of the actual world. Yet not everything that is non-contradictory is a *factibile* for God but only those *possibilia* whose existence God can will without self-contradiction. Only the possible worlds that correspond to God's good nature and good will are *factibile*. Since God is good, only what is good can be a *factibile* for God, and since the *summum bonum* is one, the *factibile* must also be one. This not only means that all contingent existence is grounded in the actualizing actuality of God but also that nothing exists that is not willed by God because it is good (or, which amounts to the same, is good because it is willed by God). The actual world is not merely a possibility willed by God to be actual but a possibility willed by God to be actual because it is good – good with respect to its existence (that it is) even if it may not be as good as it could and ought to be with respect to the mode of its existence (how it is). Everything God creates is good because God only wills and creates what is good. The actual world may not be as good as it could and ought to be, but it would not be God's creation if its actuality were not a good willed by God. Any argument for a plurality of possible worlds which God could have created must therefore show that for God there would have been another world that is *factibile*, i.e. not merely non-contradictory and hence possible, but also such that its actuality would have been compatible with the good will and love of God.

It was precisely this that Leibniz attempted to show to be impossible in his *Essais de Théodicée sur la bonté de Dieu, la liberté de l'homme et l'origine du mal*. And just as his arguments were in no way refuted by the facts of the Lisbon earthquake or any other disaster in the world, because they are based not on the goodness of the world but on the goodness of God's creative will, so the singularity of the world cannot be shown by reference to the logically possible but merely by reference to the uniqueness of the creator and the unequivocal definiteness of God's loving will. There may be more than one possible world. But there is only one creation. Hence nothing can be a possible world that is not a part or an aspect of creation, and since God in fact willed this and no other creation, no other possible world could be a *factibile* because it would be incompatible with the will and love of God.

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[11] S. Th. I, q. 25 a.3 crp.: "Deus dicitur omnipotens, quia potest omnia possibilia absolute".

This implies a view of God as the ground of all possibility and impossibility. If anything exists at all, it is impossible that nothing exists whatsoever. But whatever exists is possible, and all possibility is the possibility of something actual, as Kant argued in *The Only Possible Argument in Support of a Demonstration of the Existence of God,* "whether as its determination, or through it as a consequence".[12] "Every possibility presupposes something actual, in and through which everything is given that can be thought."[13] Or as Kant puts the same point in his *Lectures on the Philosophical Doctrine of Religion*, "every possibility presupposes something actually given, since if everything were merely possible, then the possible itself would have no ground; so this ground of possibility must itself be given not merely as possible but also as actual."[14] This is true with respect to every possibility, and that without which there would be no possibility whatsoever, and in particular no possibility of anything free and good, Kant calls 'God'. Or in Kierkegaard's terms who summed up this line of thought: God is "the actuality of the possible"[15] – the actuality that the good is possible even in the face of evil and despair.

THE TRIUNE ACTIVITY OF GOD

Kierkegaard's idea of God[16] does not mean that in God all possibilities are actual or that God is the actuality of both the possibility of good and the possibility of evil: This would make God impossible or ambiguous since not all possibilities are compossible, in particular not good and evil. It rather means that God is God precisely as the one who actualizes possibilities of the good for each of his creatures that enable and empower them to live a life that manifests the love which God is. God is the creative source of everything good by permanently creating, selecting and actualizing possibilities that help to transform his creation into a *simile* of his divine love. If we seek to unfold this idea of God, we must say a least the following:

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[12] Kant (1763: 79): „Alle Möglichkeit ist in irgend etwas Wirklichen gegeben, entweder in demselben als eine Bestimmung, oder durch dasselbe als eine Folge."

[13] Kant (1763: 83): "Alle Möglichkeit setzt etwas Wirkliches voraus, worin und wodurch alles Denkliche gegeben ist."

[14] Kant (1817: 377).

[15] Kierkegaard (1837: 41.21)

[16] In what follows I analyze an *idea* of God and do not offer a (pseudo-)description of God. To blur that distinction is to slide from theology or philosophy into idolatry.

(1) God does not act but is *unceasing creative activity* (*semper et ubique actuosus*).

(2) God's activity is *creative* by continuously distinguishing between the possible and the impossible in a temporal process of actualization that creates a reality that is in principle distinct from God and not necessarily compatible with or in correspondence with the love of the creator.

(3) God's creative activity is *threefold*: God makes the possible possible and therewith the impossible impossible (God is the poet of the possible); God selects from the possible that which can actually become actual because it is compossible with his actuality and hence good (the *factibile*) by distinguishing it from that which can't because it isn't good (God defines the range of what actually can become actual at any given time because it is good); and God corrects and cultivates the actual by opening up possibilities that are not implied in it (God directs creation towards what is good for his creatures by the possibilities which he makes available to them beyond those which creatures can access in and from their actual states by themselves).

(4) God's threefold creative activity is a threefold *good*: It is good that something is possible rather than nothing; it is good that some possibilities can become actual rather than others because they are compossible with God's actuality and hence good; it is good that at any given time more becomes possible than that which has already become actual or is implied in it and hence enlarges the range of real possibilities of created actuality that are good for it. The first shows that it is a good thing that creation is possible (it is good that there can be a creation because God is creator); the second shows that it is good that there actually is a creation (it is good that there is something rather than nothing); the third shows that the actual state of creation can and ought to be better than it in fact is (it is good that the way in which creation is can and ought to be better than it is).

(5) Everything possible has an intrinsic tendency, compulsion or urge for becoming actual, and it does become so if it isn't stopped from becoming actual by some other possibility that contradicts it.

(6) Only that which is not contradictory but compossible can become actual, but not everything that is compossible does become actual,

and not everything that has become actual is something that is compatible with God's love.

(7) Only those compossible possibilities that are compatible with God's love can become actual through God, but since every possibility also implies the possibility of its negation, that which is actually actual is not necessarily compatible with God's love or deserves to be called God's good creation.

(8) Actual reality is deeply ambiguous and always at best on the way to becoming God's good creation by overcoming those aspects that contradict God's love and by increasing and strengthening those aspects that are compatible with or manifest God's love.

(9) What is good or evil for God does not necessarily coincide with what is good or evil for God's creatures, and vice versa. We may (mis)take to be good for us what is evil from God's point of view (i.e. separates us from God's love). And we may (mis)take to be evil for us what in fact is not evil for God (i.e. does not separate us from God). This is why the difference between the old (evil for God) and the new (good for God) in creation is not a difference that can be experienced by creatures. The distinction is not a phenomenological given but a judgment about the given in the light of the distinction between what is good or evil for God.

(10) The way in which God creates makes it necessary to distinguish between what God creates and what becomes possible through what God creates both in a positive sense (by being implied in it) and in a negative sense (by becoming possible through it without being implied in it). God cannot select some compossibilities to become actual (those compatible with God's love) without also making the negation of those possibilities possible (and hence that which is incompatible with God's love).

(11) God's creative activity differentiates at each moment between the merely possible (logical possibility) and the really possible (real possibility) relative to the actual state of creation, and between that which corresponds to God's love in what actually becomes actual (the new) and that which doesn't (the old). Just as God's love is the principle of the possibilities that can and ought to become actual in creation, so the actual state of creation is the principle that defines the range of real possibilities at any given moment of creation; and just as God's love not merely creates possibilities but also makes it

possible to negate those possibilities, so the actual state of creation not only corresponds to God's love but also manifests that which contradicts God's love.

(12) God's goodness is that God creates what is good for his creatures by overcoming what is evil for God in creation and thus undermines the compatibility of divine and created life: God's goodness is the principle of selecting from the totality of possibilities compatible with God's love at any given time (the *factibile*) the set of real possibilities that are in principle compatible with the actual state of creation without being merely implied in it. Since positing those real possibilities also makes their negation possible, God's goodness is creative not by directly determining what becomes actual but by opening up the actual state of creation towards those possibilities that are not (yet) actual but ought to become actual in order to decrease the incompatibilities (the old) and increase the compatibilities between the love of God and the actual state of creation (the new).

(13) God overcomes that which is evil for God in creation (the old) by making it possible that not further evil but something good for his creatures follows from it (the new) – and it will be a different good for the victims who have suffered evil and the perpetrators who have committed evil.

(14) God achieves the good for his creation because he is in complete control of the goodness of the outcome of his divine activity. Whereas creatures cannot safeguard that the good they intend will not result in evil, God has control over the goodness of the effects of his activity. Creatures share with their creator that to be is to be active, but they differ from God in that their being is contingent and a gift from their creator, and that they cannot guarantee the goodness of their actions. They are, to a limited degree, the cause of the effects of their actions, but they are not the cause of the goodness of those effects. They may intend the good, but they cannot guarantee that what they do will be good rather than evil.

(15) Only God is free, not because he can choose (between good and) evil or because he has the capacity to resolve by his "own volition, two or more *possible* courses of action into one *actual* course of

action"[17] but because he is in complete control of the goodness of the outcome of his activity. Creatures, on the other hand, who can and do choose (between good and) evil and have the self-determining power to do the one rather than the other of two or more possible courses of action, are not free in the relevant sense because they cannot guarantee that the good they intend will actually be achieved. Truth, freedom and goodness are divine determinations or attributes and true of creatures only in so far as they are made true, free and good by God.

THE DIVERSITY OF EVIL AND THE LOVE OF GOD

This brings me, finally, to evil. How is it possible, within such a framework of thought, to understand how God prevents or overcomes evil?[18] To ask this question is to assume that there is evil (which nobody will deny), and that God has something to do with it (which is far from clear). Reference to God does not help to explain the fact of evil, and the fact of evil does not necessarily count against God as we know from centuries of intense debate. If theology relates God and evil at all, then not in order to explain evil by reference to God or to question God by reference to evil, but in order to help people to live a human life in the face of inexplicable and meaningless evil. There is no meaning to be discovered in the meaningless, and recourse to God in religious discourse is not part of explaining evil but of helping people suffering from evil to re-orient their lives and find a way back into a meaningful life in the face of the meaningless. This is what theology ought to unfold and what philosophy must seek to understand. I begin by clarifying the notion of evil.[19]

What is evil?

The first thing to be noted is that to *understand something as evil* and *to understand evil as something* must not be confused. It is one thing to identify tokens of evil, i.e. describe what is evil for somebody in a given

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[17] Boyd (2014: 4).

[18] My assignment was to speak on *Divine Action, Theodicy, and the Possibility to Prevent Evil*. All three notions are highly obscure, and combining them is not enough to overcome their lack of clarity.

[19] In the following I make use of what I have written in Dalferth (2006), (2008); (2010); (2011); (2014).

context, quite another to outline a theory of evil, i.e. give an account of what evil is. Most philosophical and theological conceptions of evil are concerned with the latter. In the Western tradition we find three major answers that cannot easily be combined: evil is understood as *privatio boni*, or as *malefactum*, or as *peccatum*, i.e. lack of faith and rejection of the gift of God's love. Instead of starting with them, I shall begin by looking at the structure of particular tokens (acts or facts) of evil. Wherever there is an evil, it makes sense to ask:

(1) What has happened? (occurrence);

(2) To whom has it happened? (victim);

(3) How does he or she experience it? (actual valuation from a first-person perspective);

(4) How ought it to be judged? (normative valuation from a third-person perspective).

To distinguish these questions is important for a number of reasons.

First, *to explain the occurrence* is not to explain the evil in question but only that which gives rise to the experience of evil. Occurrences in nature and history have empirical or historical explanations. But those explanations do not show the phenomena in question to be evil unless we add the further premise that it would have been better (for those concerned, or others, or us) if they had not occurred.

Second, *to give reasons for the valuation* is not to explain the occurrence. The reasons why we think abusing a child is wrong do not explain what has happened but only make plain why we think it is evil. Conversely, *to explain the occurrence* does not tell us anything about how it should be judged or valuated. This is why empirical, historical, economic or political explanations of evil are not enough. They tell us, if successful, why things have happened in the way they did, and perhaps how those involved (victims and perpetrators) understood what happened to them or what they did, but they don't tell us how we should look at what has happened or how we should understand human life or ourselves in the light of what has happened. Not only is there a difference between *giving reasons* and *stating causes*, there is also a difference between *describing and explaining* and *judging and evaluating* an occurrence or a situation. Just as knowing what is the case does not tell us what to do, so knowing our value orientations does not explain the occurrence of a given evil, but only why we think it is evil.

Finally, the difference between the third and the fourth question is important because it is one thing to be a victim of evil, another to reflect on evil. Of course, victims can and do reflect on their own suffering, and they do so from a first-person perspective. But this only underlines the difference between their view of their situation and someone else's view of it, which may but need not coincide. We want to say that slavery is evil even if those enslaved don't think so; and we want to say that husbands who batter their wives do wrong or commit evil even where their wives don't complain. On the other hand, in judging the situation and the suffering of others, we must be careful to take into account how they themselves perceive it. If we think it is evil and they don't, or if we think it isn't evil but they do, we need to give reasons for our view and listen carefully to theirs, and if they reject the way we evaluate their situation, we must be careful not to force a view on them which they have reasons not to hold or, conversely, withhold our views, not name the evil in question, and thus not help them to become aware of the evil in which they are involved.

Evil, good and God

Against the backdrop of this differentiated understanding of evil »God is good« can mean a number of different things, namely: (1) God is *totally different* from anything bad or evil; or (2) God *has delivered his people from evil*; (3) God *fights evil*; (4) God *has overcome evil*; or (5) God overcomes evil not by some counter-evil but by *creating something good* out of evil. In the first case, God's goodness marks the *difference between good and evil*; in the second his *goodness towards his people;* in the third the *antagonism between good and evil*; in the fourth the *victory of the good over evil;* and in the last the *mode of this victory*: the good is achieved not merely by fighting evil but through fighting it by *creating good out of evil and ending evil through good*.

These senses have to be distinguished because they go with different schemes of orientation, have different implications, and correspond to different understandings of evil. Accordingly, evil is seen as that *which is incompatible with God*; or *actively opposing God*; or *has been overcome by God*; or *is incompatible with God's way of doing things*, with the mode of God's activity. In the first case God is totally different from everything else by being wholly and solely good; in the second and third God's

goodness is the divine activity of fighting against evil; in the fourth case ›good‹ is seen as a success term when applied to God; and in the last ›good‹ is a modal term for the way in which God overcomes evil: not by committing some other (greater) evil but by doing something good.

These understandings of evil are the outcome of processes of theological reflection that paradigmatically comprise the following steps.

In an *experiential* or *phenomenological sense* evil is *everything that harms or humiliates a person*. This can involve many things, from the obvious sufferings involved in illness, disasters and evildoing which nobody will and can deny to be evil, to the more subtle cases which have taken centuries to be described and acknowledged as evils (slavery, exploitation of women, child labor, emotional abuse at the workplace).

When these phenomena are seen and evaluated from a religious (Jewish, Christian, Muslim) perspective, the result is a *religious sense* of evil: Evil is *everything that is contrary to God's will*, i.e. – in Christian terms – everything that contradicts the rule of love of God and one's neighbor. Everything that is contrary to God's will separates human beings from God and thus contradicts their distinction as God's creatures made for a special relationship of mutual love with God and one another.

Thus, the decisive question for coping with the problem of evil in actual religious practice becomes how we can know God's will and plan for his creation. The monotheistic religions give different answers to this. Jews point to Moses and the Torah, Christians to Jesus and the gospel, Moslems to Mohammed and the Koran. The difference is not merely that each religious tradition names a different authority and communicator of God's will, but also that in the respective theological traditions God's will is often construed in moral or even juridical terms as a set of divine commandments as to what humans ought or ought not to do.

But this results in a misleading *moralizing view* of evil: Everything that fails to comply with what are taken to be *God's commandments* is then seen as evil. This misses the point of the Torah, the gospel, and arguably also the Koran. They are not sets of divine prescriptions, commandments and prohibitions, which humans must obey solely because God has commanded them. This would be heteronomy at its worst and create an abyss between God's will, God's justice and God's mercy. They are rather to be understood as God's gift of a blueprint of a good and just human life in community with God and one another, the presentation not of *what God demands of* his creatures but what God *has done for them* in enabling and empowering them to live their life no longer way below its best. They

outline a way of life that responds in gratitude to the goods received from God rather than to a set of arbitrary divine commandments and prohibitions that are to be obeyed on pain of punishment.

In short, against the backdrop of God's will thus understood, evil is in a strict theological sense *that which God overcomes by the good he creates for His creation*. The point of evil is not to ignore a divine command but to obscure a divine gift. In all monotheistic religions the best thing for God's creatures is not to be cut off from the divine source of life, i.e. God's creative and redemptive love which enables humans to live a truly human life.

This understanding of evil is not simply coextensive with what harms or humiliates humans. It includes evils done to and suffered by other creatures, and it does not in principle exclude all human suffering as evil. Not everything we suffer cuts us off from God. Just as not every *possibile* is a *factibile*, so not every evil experienced by someone is an evil that separates from God's love and hence an evil overcome by God. From a Christian perspective this does not include death, for example, and it does not include all types of suffering. A world without evil is not a world without suffering but rather a world without suffering that is evil because it cuts humans or any other creature off from God's love.

The modal status of evil

For biblical monotheism it is *not* enough to say that God is *not* the source and cause of evil. In contrast to the cosmotheological monotheisms of the Hellenist philosophies, biblical monotheism holds not only that there is only one God, but also that God's relation to the world is *creation* rather than *correlation*, i.e. that there was a time when the world was not, and that evil is a contingent fact that could and should be otherwise. Thus, the situation is the following:

Cosmotheological monotheism		*Creation-theological monotheism*	
(1)	There is only one God	(1)	There is only one God
(2)	God is the first and ultimate principle of everything good	(2)	God is the Lord of creation, history, and all people
(3)	God's relation to the world is correlation or emanation, the world's relation to God is participation	(3)	God's relation to the world is creation, conservation, and perfection, the world's relation to God is dependence

(4)	It is impossible that there is a world but no God, or that there is God but no world	(4)	It is impossible that there is a world but no God, but it is possible that there is God without a world
(5)	The world is the totality of things and events	(5)	Creation is the totality of actions of finite and infinite agents.
(6)	God is apathetic	(6)	God is pathetic
(7)	It is a necessary fact that there is evil in the world: A world without evil is impossible	(7)	It is a contingent fact that there is evil in the world: A world without evil is possible

Thus, whereas on each side a given individual evil can be a contingent evil that could not have been, there is a deep difference with respect to the fact that there is evil at all in the world and how evil is to be understood – as *privatio boni* or as *malefactum*. For the cosmotheological tradition the *privatio boni* view is intimately bound up with the very idea of the *cosmos,* which differs from God precisely because God alone is totally and exclusively good whereas everything different from God is a mix of good and evil. In this view there is no way of overcoming evil as long as there is a world different or at least distinct from God. But this is more difficult for biblical monotheism and its understanding of the world as creation and of evil as *malefactum*. For if God is the sole creator of everything, whence evil?

Two possible answers are ruled out in principle: First, evil does not originate from God. If it did, God would become ambiguous and recourse to God in times of trouble religiously useless. Second, evil does not originate from some anti-God. Manichean views of an anti-God as the originator of evil are not only incompatible with a strict view of creation but also fail to explain anything: they re-state the problem but do not solve it. However, if God is good and the only God and Creator of everything different from God, how can there be evil in the world?

The standard answer is that it is an unavoidable consequence of created free will (free will defense). But even if the free will defense works for some cases, it does not work for all cases. Indeed, the good of a created free will that not only can choose between good and evil but must do so and in fact chooses evil in no way outweighs the evil of a single child dying of HIV or cancer. It is adding to the amount of evil in the world even to attempt to answer the problem in this way. The correct answer is rather that we have asked the wrong question. We have to construe the problem the other way round: What is surprising is not that there is evil

in the world (this we all know) but that this world is God's creation and that the creator is good (this we all have to discover). The surprising facts are God's goodness and the createdness of the universe, and in the face of evil this poses the problem how God comes to be known to be good and how the world is disclosed to be God's good creation without denying or downplaying the reality of evil.

Ways of preventing evil

As we have seen, for something to be an evil there must be an *occurrence* that causes suffering (an *event in life*); *somebody* who suffers (a *victim*); and an (implicit or explicit) appraisal or *valuation* of this suffering as evil, i.e. as something that is disapproved by a moral observer (a *valuation*). The first underlines that *without life, there is no evil:* A world without life is a world without evil. The second that *without victims who suffer, there is no evil:* A life in which nobody suffers is a life without evil. The third that *without experiencing suffering and pain as evil, there is no evil:* In a life in which suffering and pain are not experienced as evil, there is no evil.

This indicates some obvious ways of bringing evil to an end. The radical solution is: *End life!* Since without life there is no evil, the radical way of overcoming evil is to bring life to an end – in a particular case or life on earth as such. The cultural solution is: *Improve life and end suffering!* Since there is no evil where there is no suffering, an important way of containing evil is to fight and restrict suffering as we attempt to do in medicine, psychology, law, technology, education etc. The existential or hermeneutical solution is: *Understand suffering differently!* Since there is no evil where suffering is not experienced or valued as evil, the existential way of overcoming evil is to change our understanding or interpretation of suffering. We may not be able to stop all suffering, but (in many cases) we can change our attitude towards it and look at it not as evil any more.

The three maxims *End life, End suffering,* and *Understand suffering differently* obviously raise very different problems. But they indicate three possible eschatological scenarios of a world without evil: A world without life; a world with life but without suffering; and a world in which suffering is no longer experienced as evil. The first is not an unlikely future given the actual state of our world. The second is impossible as long as life feeds on other life. The third is not impossible but most difficult to

achieve for bodily creatures such as us whose attitudes are determined by emotions, and whose emotions are not governed by reason alone.

God and evil

What follows from this for the question of how God prevents or overcomes evil?

(1) Not everything that is an evil for us is also an evil that separates us from God. If God overcomes the evil that separates his creatures from their creator, then not everything evil for us is an evil that needs to be overcome by God.

(2) There is evil that we can and ought to avoid. There is evil committed which cannot be made undone. There is evil we cannot understand and have to learn to live with. *End Suffering* (where you can) and *Understand suffering differently* (if you can) are maxims that point the way. But given our human predicament, we cannot stop all suffering or understand all suffering that cannot be avoided differently. With respect to evil, we are not in control of what we do. We cannot guarantee that the good we intend will not result in evil, or that the evil we do will not lead to something good.

(3) We are the cause of the effects of our actions. But we are not the cause of the goodness of our actions. If what we do is good, it is good because God makes it good by judging it to be good. And if what we do is evil, then it is not we but God who turns the consequences of evil into something positive or good.

(4) God is good by making us good; and God makes us good by turning the evil we do and the evil we suffer into something that does not endlessly bring forth further evil but rather something good in ways that cannot be foreseen.[20]

(5) There are many notions of free will and of evil. But with respect to evil in the theological sense, i.e. that which separates creatures from God and is overcome by the good which God does for his creatures, the decisive notion of free will is a will that is in control of the goodness of the outcomes of its actions. Only God is free in this sense, not human beings. If the evil that separates us from God is overcome at

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[20] Schiller (1799: V,1): "Das eben ist der Fluch der bösen Tat, // Daß sie, fortzeugend, immer Böses muß gebären." – "This is the curse of every evil deed // That, propagating still, it brings forth evil" (transl. S. T. Coleridge).

all, then it is overcome solely by God and not by us – by what God does for us and not by what we do for God.

(6) The appropriate Christian attitude to evil is not a version of the so-called 'free will defense' but the well-founded hope that God will secure what we cannot achieve even where we try hard: that evil is overcome by good – a good that will be different for the victims and for the perpetrators of evil.

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GOD'S ACTION IN HISTORY

KLAUS VON STOSCH

University of Paderborn

Abstract. The explication of the Christian hope of resurrection requires Christianity to spell out the way in which God actually deals in the world. Only if we succeed, with regard to past, present, and future, in making the talk of God's special action in history plausible, are we able to reasonably assert essential Christian beliefs. Yet due to past horrors, present ongoing suffering, and a future that promises of little else, it is precisely this talk that has become doubtful. This article tries to describe God's action as a process enabling freedom and love in order to develop a theodicy-sensitive speech about God's action.

I. EXPOSITION OF THE PROBLEM

> The writer Elie Wiesel tells the story of a small group of Jews who were gathered to pray in a little synagogue in Nazi-occupied Europe. As the service went on, suddenly a pious Jew who was slightly mad – for all pious Jews were by then slightly mad – burst in through the door. Silently he listened for a moment as the prayers ascended. Slowly he said: 'Shh, Jews! Do not pray so loud! God will hear you. Then He will know that there are still some Jews left alive in Europe.' (Fackenheim 1970a: 67)

What becomes clear in this narrative written by Jewish Auschwitz-survivor Elie Wiesel is how much the National-Socialist mass murder of Jews has challenged the belief in YHWH's ability to powerfully intervene in history. The Bible testifies to a God who has repeatedly intervened to save his people. Yet this narrative portrays him as an all-devouring demon. If one doesn't want to accept the claim that God's character has changed, the only solution seems to be to infer that God has obviously lost his power and can now only impotently observe evil from the sidelines.

Due to metaphysical developments arguing that God is more limited than traditionally construed this option is admittedly somewhat popular in the contemporary theological and philosophy-of-religion debate. However, this proposal would demand nothing less than that the main strand of Jewish and Christian tradition abandon its identity. For the experience of God's action in history is not only the root of Jewish identity and Israel's testimony of faith; it is also a fundamental feature of Christian belief.

Thus if increasingly many people struggle to conceive of God as acting in history, and if this approach has indeed been 'wholly lost, the God of history is Himself lost' (Fackenheim 1970a: 79). Hence the question arises how traditional Jewish and Christian belief can still be defended at all.

Despite the uniqueness of its horror, the National-Socialist mass murder is but one among many testimonies against God's action in history. For Christian belief, since this atrocity was directed against the very people whose testimony upholds Christians' traditional belief in God's historical action, these unutterable horrors thus threaten belief in the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who, according to Christian testimony, has revealed himself in Jesus Christ as God for all people, today as much as 70 years ago. Historical-critical exegesis of the Bible indicates that, according to Biblical testimony, it is only in retrospect that people understand the ways in which God has dealt with them.

Accompanied by one's grateful memory of God's salvation, it is exactly this view that Auschwitz calls into question. How is it possible to give thanks to God for a full life and his guidance, if innumerable people have, for no reason, been butchered? How to rely on the power of intercession, if so many screams have gone unanswered? Can I still thank God for his signs of love and faithfulness in my life, if innumerable people have waited for these signs in vain? May I still give praise to God's providence and power in history, if this power has done nothing to stop the million-fold murder of innocent children, or if the belief in providence has, because of its abuse in the form of ideologies, been widely discredited?

Caused by Auschwitz, questions of this sort are not only unavoidable for Jewish reflection on faith, but almost even more for Christians. Since the history of horrors and suffering did not stop after the Nazis but has occurred recently – remember the unimaginable cruelties of the Rwandan Genocide of 1994 – it is therefore understandable, that, in both

Jewish and Christian reflection on belief, the confession of God as the loving and powerful guide of history, and the strong leader of his people out of Egypt, rebels against utterance. History as a place of encounter with God has become questionable. What becomes even stronger in the face of these horrors, however, is the yearning for this God and his justice. Believers, therefore, increasingly turn from gratefully remembering God's action in history to deeply longing for it.

With belief reduced to this experience, it makes sense to ask what can ground this hope, if there is so little evidence of God's presence today. On which powerful signs, that can still be experienced today, can the belief in God as someone who directs history, be based? Neglecting this question threatens to expose religious belief to the suspicion of being based on unfounded hopes, offering insight only into what human beings long for. Yet it is deeply unsatisfying to assume without further inquiry that God is active today. Accordingly, the boom enjoyed by the talk of God's action in evangelical groups and mainline charismatic movements is an increasing irritant, as this talk ignores all of the challenges bequeathed by the modern era. Apparently, in searching for comfort, more and more people are turning a blind eye to the horrific challenges of claims to God's action, and in suppressing critical inquiries they surrender themselves to the desire for his presence.

Admittedly, such naive talk of the presence of God and his action is understandable in light of its ability to bring relief. But in the light of the history of suffering it has lost its innocence. Since the aforementioned questions can no longer be put aside (if they ever could), the abovementioned questions make it indispensable for any theology which asserts God's action in history to be sensitive to the question of theodicy.

From what has been said so far, it should have become clear that the explication of the Christian hope of resurrection requires Christianity to spell out the way in which God actually deals in the world. Only if we succeed, with regard to past, present, and future, in making the talk of God's special action in history plausible, we are able to reasonably assert essential Christian beliefs. Yet due to past horrors, present ongoing suffering, and a future that promises of little else, it is precisely this talk that has become doubtful. As the talk of God's action in the world is indispensable for the Christian message, the all important question for me is therefore whether it can be developed side by side with concern for worldly suffering.

II. GOD'S ACTION AS A PROCESS ENABLING FREEDOM AND LOVE

The standard solution of contemporary Christian theology consists in defining God's action from the viewpoint of love and tracing the horrors of history back to human abuse of freedom. The background of this thought is formed by the idea that the relationship between God and man is understood as dialogical and free. In this relationship, it is imagined, God tries to win man's love by means of love alone. From this perspective, God's ultimate goal of creation and the focus of his action consist in his intention to win 'co-lovers'. This relationship is not based on any achievements of the creature or needs of the creator, but forms an end in itself. It is based on nothing other than in the free and original decision to enable freedom for others. Accordingly, God's act of creation is already spelled out in terms of acting out of freedom and creating out of nothing.

> Their connexion [of creator and creature; K.v.S.] is not conditioned by anything except freedom, which means that it is unconditioned. Hence every use of a causal category for understanding the act of creation is ruled out. Creator and creature cannot be said to have a relation of cause and effect, for between Creator and creature there is neither a law of motive nor a law of effect nor anything else. (Bonhoeffer 1959: 31)

If God's relationship to his creation is imagined as free and thus unable to be understood in terms of causal yet personal categories, it must – as Bonhoeffer goes on to explain – be based on creation out of nothing. Moreover, creation out of nothing is to be imagined as the creator's free self-limitation and as a reproduction of the inter-Trinitarian relationship of love. Just as it is the essential characteristic of love 'that the loving person limits her- or himself on behalf of the beloved' (Jüngel 1990b: 154, my translation), God enables the freedom of his creation by limiting himself and creating the world as an end in itself.

God, in every moment of history, must be thought of as the foundation enabling natural evolution and freedom (*creatio continua*). With his work of creation based in nothing but uncaused love, God makes possible a relationship of free and mutual recognition with his creatures, remaining radically true to it in every moment of history.

The radical nature of this faithfulness and the seriousness of God's invitation to love can be seen in the fact that God uncompromisingly and exclusively uses love to win man over. Indeed, God tries to win mankind over even when they strongly deny his goodness:

> God wouldn't be truly serious in his relationship with humankind if he didn't endorse it uncompromisingly; if he, so to speak, had other means than love up his sleeve to exercise his power over humankind. God really banks on the power of love and he does not make recourse to other means. (Werbick 1985: 114, my translation)

On this view (which is centrally anchored in Christian tradition), the freedom to love is thus the fundamental goal of God's creation. God's most important intention, which can therefore help to identify his action, is to promise (himself as) love to mankind, with this promise taking fundamental shape in the action of Jesus. Thus God's intention is realized all the more when people act out of love. Yet love is only itself, if it is not manipulated by others, and can by definition only be based on an independent decision. Therefore, if God's intention is to enable love to set mankind free, and if love is only possible if free, then God can realize his intention in this world only. That is, he must act by setting mankind free and showing them love, without manipulating them into loving him but rather just affirming and encouraging it.

From this perspective, God's will is realized, if human beings, in their words and actions, 'mutually attribute the meaning of their being to each other by making each other aware of their freedom and by affirming and recognizing each other in freedom, i.e. by loving each other' (Pröpper 2001: 238, my translation). And on this view, held among others by Thomas Pröpper, the most radical event of God's special action in the world – which the Christian tradition regards as miraculous – can be nothing other than the realization of God's intention that we freely recognize each other and him.

At this point, it is crucially important not to define divine and human action as being in competition. Otherwise one would always have to ask how divine action can be operative at all if free agents decide in favour of one another. The point of the foregoing, rather, is that, with regard to events in the world, divine and human freedom are directly – not inversely – proportional. The more a human being realizes her or his freedom, the more God acts in her or him, and the more the intention of divine freedom becomes true through his or her action. If a human being loves, God acts through her or him.

> 'Love comes from God' (1 John 4:7), and: 'Ubi caritas, ibi deus est – et agit.' Wherever human beings are enabled to do what they do not naturally tend to do – i.e., overcoming their egotism – and to surpass themselves

so as to become human beings for others, God is acting through human
beings. (Kessler 2002: 290, my translation)

The underlying idea of this personal-action theory must not be
misunderstood. It does not claim that individuals are unfree. It claims
rather that the innermost possibility of free self-determination is
ultimately made possible by God's action. The highest dimension of
human autonomy is, in its very autonomy, willed and supported by God.
Thus the more I change the world in an attitude of love, the more God's
intention with his creation becomes reality. But how can my freedom
and autonomy grow by God's action? Is not my freedom rather restricted
by God's giving a new direction to my life?

III. GOD'S ACTION AS ENABLING NEW OPPORTUNITIES FOR LIFE

I believe that an insight of Jürgen Werbick's can help us see things more
clearly. In defining the notion of God's omnipotence, he ascribes to God
the power 'to overcome the lack of alternatives in times of natural and
quasi-natural inevitabilities' and, in this way, to call upon human beings
to use their freedom. (Werbick 2004: 109, my translation) Werbick adds:

> To enable freedom means to offer opportunities (S. Kierkegaard) and to
> offer real opportunities, to the extent of generating a practicable vision
> for the future that can, against mere necessity, really be chosen. (Werbick
> 2004: 110, my translation)

God's action as enabling freedom can thus be understood as God pointing
out to us new opportunities for living and new alternatives for behaving.
Since men and women are not forced to choose the new alternative, God's
action preserves his or her complete autonomy. The choice is completely
left to her or him. Yet God can try to woo man, to call upon him, and
to attract him, by offering and granting new life opportunities. Precisely
in his perpetual enabling of different perspectives and possibilities of
rescue from impasses, God can therefore realize his freedom without
reducing human freedom but rather increasing it. From this perspective,
God's calling to us can be discovered in all conditions of life, offering to
integrate us into his plan in a way appropriate to us. J. R. Lucas illustrates
this thought, as suggested by Brümmer, by pointing to the allegory of
a Persian carpet maker who, together with his children, manufactures
a carpet. 'In his wisdom and sovereignty the father manages to integrate
all of his children's mistakes into the emerging pattern, by continually

revising the way in which he envisions the final product, thus creating a perfect design. – God acts in a dialogical and responsive way.' (Bernhardt 1999: 156, my translation) Thus from this perspective, God cannot determine his creatures' decisions, but he can motivate and inspire them to do his will.

> In this Trinitarian way, however, God's agency is not coercive but enabling and motivating and therefore does not deny freedom, responsibility, or personal integrity of the human agent through whose action God realizes his will. On the contrary, it is still up to us as human agents to do God's will, and if we decide not to (in spite of being enlightened, enabled, and motivated) then God's will is not done. (Brümmer 2008: 75f.)

God could therefore be understood as the author of a novel, designing a good overall story from the personalities and behaviours of his characters.

It is by inspiring them with his will that God lays claim to the will and the action of human beings, but it remains up to the individual to cooperate with God or not. The effectiveness of God's action and the freedom of the creaturely actors are also combined in the thinking of Austin Farrer. Very much in the sense outlined above of a direct proportional relationship between divine and human freedom, Farrer even assumes that human freedom is strengthened by God's influence.

Assuming a relationship of this kind implies, of course, the basic assumption of relational theism saying that the belief that God wants to have a relationship with us and that he has therefore freely decided to make some of his actions contingent on our needs and actions. According to this conception, there is something like a freely chosen contingency in God. God does not get everything he wants. However, he can always try to realize his intention; he might for instance try to win the free individual by acting through other human beings, or by pointing to new possibilities for life.

> Thus, God influences history through his word and his spirit, but with very flexible plans which always respect the freedom of the individual. Man's free decision to use his abilities and to take control obviously seems to be meaningful to God himself; he does not ignore or force this decision; he tries to win man over for and to ask for it. (Greshake 1997: 302, my translation)

In the light of the considerations advanced so far, there now seem to be two possibilities for defining the relationship between divine and human action. According to the first, there is a strict identity between divine and human action. In this case, the autonomy of creaturely action is maintained, so long as the relationship is conceived as God acting through human actors. In this sense, I believe, we can understand Werbick's aforementioned idea as God's acting where his will is done.

The second possibility construes God's action in pointing out new alternatives to man as being mediated differently. Rather than being identical, human and divine action are dialogically related. The idea is that human action can be understood as response to the divine demonstration of different opportunities for life. We might also appeal to Trinitarian theology to try to define and to substantiate both ways of action more precisely. In the sense of strict identity, we might conceive of God's action through human actors as mediated through God's self-manifestation in the logos. Moreover, we might conceive of God's dialogical action in offering new opportunities for life as mediated through God's self-manifestation in the Spirit.

The liberating impact of the Spirit can therefore always be perceived by those who cease to feel coerced, controlled by circumstances, and who begin to choose their way for themselves. As long as we no longer allow ourselves to be controlled by borders and compulsions, and as long as we stand up against the exploitation of people for whatever means, we can perceive the Spirit. It becomes reality so long as we do not surrender to the hustle and bustle of everyday life, but consciously live according to our own convictions and thus enable community with another being. One could therefore say that the Spirit's action cannot be realized without the concrete performance of freedom – already enabled by that same Spirit – which is what positions one in a dialogical and free relationship.

What is meant here, can, in a limited way, already be experienced in love. Lovers, by performing acts of love and commitment and by living through and for the other person, experience freedom and a new form of being oneself. Love makes the requirements of everyday life seem less important. Habits and circumstances lose the power to shape one's life and all of life's performances are influenced by the image of the other person. In this way new opportunities for life and new beginnings emerge. In this way 'lovers are, at least a little bit and maybe only for a certain time, endowed with independence from other requirements and from the "obsessions" of everyday life, as a future is opened up to

them which offers much brighter prospects than those which could be provided and secured through cunning calculation'.

It is exactly this experience of liberation through love that shows how close the connection is between the freedom worked by the Spirit and the experience of love. Just as freedom is the condition of possibility of love, freedom is actually carried and made possible by love. Yet in the light of the darknesses of history, one can still ask how it is possible to speak this affirmatively of love and freedom. How can God's power in history be spoken of in this way by someone who is sensitive to the history of suffering of this world?

IV. CRITERIA FOR THEODICY-SENSITIVE SPEECH ABOUT GOD'S ACTION

First of all, it is important that our speech concerning divine action contain vulnerability and moments of irritation and uncertainty. Yet from the perspective of practical reason, this vulnerability and uncertainty is not justified, but is based on the ongoing impossibility of become reconciled with God's creation. As long as human beings are tortured to death or perish miserably in floods, theology of history cannot resist bafflement or irritation. Therefore, we must not try to protect our beliefs in God by aiming for an unshakable foundation, but must speak in a sensitive way that takes into account our place in history.

Moreover, we must neither identify the course of history with God's good will, nor try to mask outrageous injustice and suffering that is simply not supposed to be happening. Divine action must rather be understood in such a way that it cannot be identified with the history of the winners. Like W. Benjamin's notion of the 'angel of history' (Benjamin 2003: 392), God's action, in its 'power of powerlessness', has to be conceived as an attempt to put an end to mankind's criminal delusions. It must be imagined as wanting to enable new beginnings even after the most disastrous effects of natural laws. As the angel, God does not look away from the ruins of history, instead remaining to put back together what has been smashed. Yet his efforts are repeatedly ruined by mankind's delusionary belief in the progress of history and men's abuse of freedom related to it. The image of the angel of history portrays God as a lasting authority who can be called upon to act against the wrongdoings and catastrophes of history, even if this means to do what Job does: to call on

God against God. Even though we are faced with a horrendous history tolerated by God, the only possible saving authority is God himself.

The tension of calling on God against God cannot, of course, be maintained endlessly. On the contrary, we must be able to enjoy confidence that God will ultimately in his all-embracing goodness and mercy bring true salvation and justice. Yet history constantly frustrates this confidence, leaving us to express it as eschatological unrest. For only by God's bringing an end to history can we hope that his goodwill will be realized everywhere – for in this case it will be the only remaining power able to shape reality. Only then can we hope that God in his holy power will make his presence felt in all things.

The abovementioned eschatological hope is based on God's self-revelation in the suffering and death of Jesus Christ. The belief in Jesus' resurrection can, moreover, help make it clear that God's saving will can even persevere in the most hopeless of situations. Yet looking at the cross reminds us that there is no certainty that God's will will be done in the world, because (as we have seen) he limits himself to the means of love. It reminds us that his Good News too often seems to be frustrated by the factual course of history. Moreover, looking at the ceaseless repetition of human suffering as unbearable as that of the cross forbids theology from speaking confidently of victory. Because the fullness of God's presence has not yet arrived, theological speech must continually be cognizant of the abovementioned eschatological tension.

Faced with the monstrous extent of human guilt, theological speech, must also avoid spelling out God's goodness and mercy without including mention of his justice. We must not demand God's all-embracing and saving closeness without also demanding that he enforces justice. Otherwise it would be impossible to communicate God's will to save everyone to a concentration-camp survivor. At this point, Christian thinkers and pastors, who sometimes speak carelessly of reconciliation and love, have a good deal to learn from the emphasis placed by Jewish theology on God's justice.

Yet theology will continue to insist, in the tradition of Paul and Luther, on spelling out God's justice as 'making righteous'; it will thus become clear that no amount of guilt can put an end either to God's will for reconciliation or to his willingness to love. Yet faced with the severity and the incomprehensibility of the guilt, one can only warn of thinking divine reconciliation through to the end in an all-too-human way without any irritation. Instead of working out a theory of final

reconciliation in terms of the doctrine of apocatastasis, we must try to maintain the tension between the demand for justice and the hope of reconciliation. Only in God's incomprehensibility, which can only be explicated as limit-concept, can the possibility be maintained that God's love, making just without also dissolving justice, can even seek and be reconciled to the worst of criminals.

Moreover, in this context it is important to consider (as we have seen in history) that we cannot have reconciliation without also remembering injustice. Therefore, another feature of a theodicy-sensitive theology is its anamnetic outline. For not only is the core of Christian belief formed by the remembrance of the passion of Jesus Christ, but the history of the people of Israel, which is so crucial for Christian belief, is characterized by a horrifying history of suffering combined with the Israelites' unparalleled willingness to remember it. Therefore God's action cannot simply ignore past suffering. Accordingly, a theodicy-sensitive talk of God must – non-negotiably – contain the hope that a history of suffering can be inwardly transformed, making it possible to affirm life without turning a blind eye to one's own suffering or that of others. Moreover, by holding fast to the hope of God's transforming power, we must not forget the sufferings of others and must expect transformation and new creation for everyone.

Thus apart from remembering and recognizing our own suffering, it cannot be overemphasized that we must do likewise – and even more so – with regard to the sufferings of others, and indeed even of our enemies. Thus understood, God's action in making one aware of reality would always imply a sharpening of our perception of its painful aspects. Instead of perceiving only reality's pleasant facets, we must perceive its ambivalent entirety. This means being attentive to the perspective of the underdogs and the unfortunate.

Sensitivity to theodicy thus always also means sensitivity to suffering as an indelible part of reality. Only the perception of another person's suffering enables me to see reality fully. If appreciation of reality is meant to be the basic motivation for human beings as well as the basic challenge for human reason, then it is precisely here where an important moment of theodicy-sensitive action of God can be found which has to be explicated. In this context we can notice that it is not only the Christian tradition in which sensitivity to reality, in particular to the sufferings of others, promotes spiritual perfection and encounter with ultimate reality. However, if awareness of the history of another's suffering, and

appreciation of reality in its entirety, are regarded as moments of divine action, they cannot be conceived of without a total respect for the dignity of the suffering person. What follows from this insight is that we must never speak of God's action in the world in a way that loses from view the dignity of the individual with her or his history of suffering. For we misunderstand the Jewish and Christian God if we fail to grasp that his action calls upon us to appreciate every other individual and that he never considers human beings as a means but rather as an end in themselves. Since, if in the logic of the deuteronomistic theology of history, Israel's opponents are regarded as 'instruments of God' and are therefore reduced to mere means in the divine plan of salvation, they cannot be appreciated by God as persons. They turn from subjects to mere instruments of divine action as they realize their devastating intentions and thus forfeit their own dignity. In the context of the deuteronomistic theology of history, when they fulfil God's plan to punish Israel, they do serve a purpose intended by YHWH in calling Israel to turn back to him from their sins. Yet this action does not provide Israel's opponents with any value, and the biblical testimonies are compatible with the insight that, although these people degrade themselves to mere means in this context, God will also call them in their dignity to be enactors of his will elsewhere.

Apparently, however, God has categorically decided himself not to implement his goodwill without his creatures' participation. And it is exactly in this decision in which the highest appreciation of man by God can be found. For man has not only been created as an object of God's love entitled to love him back, but has been empowered to encourage others with the love of God and to therefore himself give shape to the reality of God's action. Only in acknowledging God's action in inviting man to participate in the appreciation of reality and to fight gratuitous suffering is a theodicy-sensitive speech of God's action in the world possible. A final criterion of any theodicy-sensitive talk of God's action in the world finally is that it must be introduced into a practice that anticipatorily makes present what is eschatologically expected from God: to comfort all who mourn, to cure the sick, to encourage the frightened, to overcome injustice and to establish a community that, in reconciled diversity, excludes nobody. We must talk of God as someone who, here and now, rescues us from bondage, who will lead one through the desert to her or his promised land. To do this we must oppose any form of human enslavement, refresh the hungry and thirsty in the deserts of

life, and open up life-perspectives for others which recognize them even when they differ from us.

We can summarize the criteria as follows: Theodicy-sensitive talk of God's action must

- remain vulnerable (by referring to history) and react with uncertainty and shock to suffering
- have an anamnetic outline and, when turning towards God and speaking of his promises, be unwilling to forget the past sufferings of the world
- be mindful of the whole reality, describing God's action as sharpening our perception for the painful aspects of reality. A crucial aspect to be sensitive to, here, is to recognize the dignity of the suffering person
- It must be conceived as resistance and protest against outrageous injustice and take seriously that the claim that man has been appreciated and empowered by God to participate in transforming the world by the power of divine love
- It must be characterized by eschatological unrest, and must point towards the final implementation of God's goodness and justice, while also trying to make it present here and now.

We have yet to see whether these criteria can be sustained in the face of the ultimate challenge to God's action in the world: the barbaric mass murder of Jews during National Socialist rule in Germany. For not only must our criteria reject clearly cynical claims concerning God's action in the concentration camps, it must sustain the possibility of talking about an exceptional action of God's even in the harshest catastrophe. Only if both conditions are met can the criteria be considered justified and can we accept them as basic coordinates for speaking of God's action in the world.

V. AUSCHWITZ AS A TEST FOR
THE CRITERIOLOGY DEVELOPED ABOVE

In the light of Auschwitz, the attempt to offer a comprehensive theory would, of course, be misguided from the outset. Thus the following intends merely to collect a few examples of theological speech of divine action in the interest of ascertaining whether the criteria compiled above are appropriate.

A first example of an attempt to talk about God's action in Auschwitz is that of an inmate thanking God for sparing him during the daily 'selections'. Each day the Nazis selected and killed those who were no longer capable of hard labour. In this situation, a behaviour that is very likely for a pious Jew (just as it is for a Christian in a comparable situation) is to pray that God spare him. However, the Nazis (at least in the example discussed here) deliberately and perversely always sent a fixed number of forced labourers death, so that God's answer to one person's prayer would have meant another person's death. Hearing a fellow inmate's prayer of thanksgiving after such a selection, Primo Levi, an Auschwitz-survivor, describes his thoughts:

> Silence slowly prevails and then, from my bunk on the top row, I see and hear old Kuhn praying aloud, with his beret on his head, swaying backwards and forwards violently. Kuhn is thanking God because he has not been chosen.
>
> Kuhn is out of his senses. Does he not see Beppo the Greek in the bunk next to him, Beppo who is twenty years old and is going to the gas-chamber the day after tomorrow and knows it and lies there looking fixedly at the light without saying anything and without even thinking anymore? Can Kuhn fail to realize that next time it will be his turn? Does Kuhn not understand that what happened today is an abomination, which no propitiatory prayer, no pardon, no expiation by the guilty, which nothing at all in the power of man can ever clean again?
>
> If I was God, I would spit at Kuhn's prayer. (Levi 1960: 151)

Comparing Levi's criticism with the criteriology developed above, one could say that Kuhn's prayer of thanks violates at least two of the abovementioned criteria. Therefore his prayer cannot be regarded as legitimation for a theology after Auschwitz. I do not want to be misunderstood here. It would be patronising in the extreme to say how a person facing death must pray, and I am in no position to do so. But one needs to consider Metz's frequently invoked dictum that after Auschwitz we may only speak of and to God because the inmates at Auschwitz prayed. And faced with Metz's dictum, we must also consider which forms of prayer and confession can, faced with these horrors, carry the burden of legitimation and which can definitely not.

We have seen two reasons why Kuhn's prayer seems unable to carry this burden. First, it neglects the suffering of the other person. Kuhn does not take into account that he has been saved only because Beppo will die.

In this case, God's saving intervention is impossible: one cannot be saved without the other being killed. With God loving every person equally, he will never overrule creaturely autonomy for the sake of exchanging one person's life for another person.

It would be a different story if an inmate prayed that God free the Nazis from their logic of death and destruction and release all prisoners. If we grant that human beings have free will then, as we have argued above, we must realize that God will not fulfil this prayer by manipulating the Nazis' minds. He will instead try to motivate him with love to abandon his criminal behaviour. If the Nazi closes his mind to God's pleading, however, Kuhn cannot be helped. There are thus no grounds to thank God for having been spared. As a result of the criminal madness of the Nazis, in the situation depicted above God accordingly has no direct possibility of intervening to change Kuhn's fate. At the same time, Levi expressly states that it is impossible for human beings to make this catastrophe right again. Therefore, he does not criticise to expect the final and eschatological implementation of God's goodness and justice in eschatological unrest.

At the end of the same book about his experiences in Auschwitz, Primo Levi mentions another example of speech about God's action in Auschwitz. At the time this incident happened, Levi took it to involve God's action, rejecting this interpretation only when he later lost his faith in God. In it, at the end of his shocking descriptions of everyday life in Auschwitz, he describes an Allied air raid on the concentration camp which SS officers had already abandoned, reporting that the wind prevented the still inhabited barracks from being burned. After all the horrors he experienced, when recalling this event he does not dare to explain it in terms of God's action. But nevertheless he acknowledges: 'But without doubt in that hour the memory of biblical salvations in times of extreme adversity passed like a wind through all our minds.' (Levi 1960: 187)

Even if Levi, due to losing his faith, does not want prayers of thanks to be offered in this situation, they can, in fact, be used as a basis for discussion about talk of God's action in Auschwitz. So long as this speech does not paper over the ungodly horrors of Auschwitz, and so long as it does not ignore the suffering that continues in spite of alleged divine action, the above criteria for theodicy-sensitive speech about divine action would probably be met. At the same time and in contrast to the example of Kuhn's prayer, no manipulation of human freedom of will

would be required. Influencing the wind could rather occur within the randomness of natural law and therefore remain hidden to science.

Action in the randomness of the laws of nature thus allows for God to offer some form of limited help amidst such horrors. It cannot, however, assuage matters altogether. A third example reports how, after an extermination campaign in the gas chambers of crematorium I in Auschwitz, a sixteen year old girl is found still living under the dead bodies. The physician reporting on this incident remarks that nothing like this had never happened before and could only be explained by a whole series of fortunate events.

This incident interrupts the usual mania of extermination and powerfully reminds those involved in the 'Sonderkommando' of what they are actually doing. With the members of the 'Sonderkommando' still thinking what to do now, 'Oberscharführer' Mußfeld, the SS supervisor, discovers the girl. Mußfeld's job is to manage crematorium I and those who daily murder small groups of inmates. The physician in charge has a good relationship with him and implores him to spare the girl. He suggests that the girl might be secretly integrated into a group of women engaged in road building.

In this situation, Mußfeld is confronted with the possibility of ceasing his murderous behaviour at least once. This singular incident even forces him to face up to his criminal behaviour altogether. He must and can choose, and does not have the excuse that he has no choice.

For me, everything said above, seems to point toward understanding this situation as God's calling Mußfeld, trying (without force) to move the murderer and so win his freedom. He does not use force to change the SS man but powerfully tries to win him over. But his call remains unheeded. Mußfeld fears that the girl 'in her naivety' will talk of her rescue and cause difficulties for him. His fears deafen him to God's call and he resumes his murderous mania. Yet his courage to kill the girl has vanished, maybe because he feels that in her the face of God has become so close to him. So he recruits a colleague to commit the murder and continues to function in the killing machinery of the camp.

Many such examples can be found in which perpetrators had choices to stop but did not. For me, they seem to make it possible, even when faced with Auschwitz, to confess God as someone trying to win over human beings even in the deepest misery and as someone trying to free them from their barbaric mania of extermination. But he does not force people. He does not prevent the gas from pouring out by intervening in

the natural laws, but tries to stop the murderous action by confronting the murderers with the face of the girl. If, therefore, the SS men refuse to be freed, then even God's ability to rescue is thwarted.

However, we are not only baffled with the question whether God's mercy on the murderers goes too far. We can also ask why he seems to remain silent when people cry for help. In this respect, Awraham S., an Auschwitz-survivor, reports:

> There was a Hungarian rabbi, and we came back from the square, fewer children, far fewer. Then he said that we should start the prayer. And suddenly he looked up at the sky and half in Yiddish, half in German, he said: 'My dear God, if you exist, if you are there, give a sign! Now is the time! Have you seen what they have done to our children? Is a God there in heaven? Then answer! Do something!

No one knows whether the rabbi was given an answer. In any case, he did not receive the sign he wanted, which was that children be saved. The author of this collection of testimonies therefore remarks:

> Of an answer nothing is reported. Who could look these children in the face, blue from the gas and with their fingernails torn open from suffocation, and say to them: your death makes sense. (Fruchtmann 1982: 16)

Yet we must take care here. With regard to the current discussions of the question of theodicy this problem can be solved without making the perverse claim that sense can be made of the death of innocent children: we can maintain the claim that God is active even in Auschwitz. With regard to the sign demanded by the rabbi, we must only note that such a sign could not have consisted in stopping the Nazis against their will. For this is impossible if God is conceived as someone who is indeed willing to forgive unconditionally and who wants to use only love to win people's freedom. Whether the rabbi was given an answer is left open by the witness whom Fruchtmann quotes and cannot be speculated upon. Signs on one's own journey cannot be recognized from the outside.

What should be clear by now, however, is that neither the examples we have discussed, nor the need to allow for the possibility of signs unnoticed by others, allows us to maintain belief in providence in its traditional form. We must agree with Leo B., another survivor:

> There is no providence. And if providence exists, and if God exists, then he is not a good God, he is a God of destruction, a God of vengeance, no good God!

> For, I saw people dying in Auschwitz, children dying in Auschwitz, who were good, who had done nothing yet, and who did not even have the opportunity of doing anything. I knew people who were the best people one can ever imagine and who perished – who were beaten to death or were killed or starved, starved without anyone – without a godly hand – ever doing anything!

In light of the unfortunate situation that God time and again does not intervene to save, and in light of our repeatedly frustrated prayers, we are forced to diverge from the traditional belief in providence. Speaking of God must leave room for protest, and the belief in some form of providence can only be developed if it does not lead us to reconcile ourselves with what is happening.

However, it seems to me that the suggestions developed here can, even in light of the testimonies from Auschwitz, allow for theodicy-sensitive talk of God's action in history. People's agony – and their hope to be saved from it – should forbid an abandonment of the eschatological unrest and the hope in God's powerful presence by eliminating the possibility to speak of a special divine action in the world.

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THE OPEN FUTURE, FREE WILL AND DIVINE ASSURANCE: RESPONDING TO THREE COMMON OBJECTIONS TO THE OPEN VIEW

GREGORY A. BOYD

Abstract. In this essay I respond to three of the most forceful objections to the open view of the future. It is argued that a) open view advocates must deny bivalence; b) the open view offers no theodicy advantages over classical theism; and c) the open view can't assure believers that God can work all things to the better (Rom. 8:28). I argue that the first objection is premised on an inadequate assessment of future tensed propositions, the second is rooted in an inadequate assessment of free will, and the third is grounded in an inadequate assessment of God's intelligence.

In this essay I'll address three of the most forceful and most frequently voiced objections to open theism (or, as I prefer, 'the open view of the future', which I will henceforth abbreviate simply as 'the open view'). The first objection is that, to render their view coherent, advocates of the open view must accept one or the other of two strongly counter-intuitive and otherwise problematic conclusions: they must either accept (i) that bivalence doesn't apply to propositions about future free actions, or (ii) that the truth value of such propositions is unknowable to God. The second objection I'll address is that the open view offers no advantage for resolving the problem of evil over the view that God possesses exhaustively definite foreknowledge (EDF), for denying that God eternally foreknew an evil deed leaves unexplained why God didn't intervene to prevent the deed once God saw it was inevitable, or at least highly probable. And the third objection I'll consider is the frequently voiced claim that, if God doesn't foreknow all that will come to pass in the future, God cannot assure believers that God can bring good out of evil and work all things together for the better (Rom. 8:28). It is rather argued that the open view must accept that our suffering may be completely outside God's purposes and therefore gratuitous.

In what follows I shall argue that the first two objections are grounded in oversights regarding the logic of the future and of free will, while the last objection is grounded in a limited view of God.

THE THREE CATEGORIES OF FUTURE TENSED PROPOSITIONS

To begin, the objection that open view advocates must either deny bivalence or accept that certain truths are impossible for God to know is grounded in the traditional conviction that omniscience implies that God's knowledge of the future must be expressed exhaustively in terms of what either *will* or *will not* come to pass. The basic line of reasoning behind this conviction is as follows.

  P1: All propositions asserting factual claims are either true or false (bivalence).

  P2: Being omniscient, God knows the truth value of all meaningful propositions.

  P3: The future can be exhaustively described in terms of what either *will* or *will not* come to pass.

  C: Therefore, God foreknows the future exhaustively in terms of what either *will* or *will not* come to pass. In other words, God possesses EDF.

The argument is formally valid. Accordingly, those who deny the conclusion (C) must deny one or more of the premises. Some advocates of the open view deny (P1) and instead argue that propositions expressing future free actions are neither true nor false until the free agent renders them true or false by their free decision. Opponents point out that, among other problems, denying bivalence to propositions about future free actions is a drastic and strongly counter-intuitive strategy. Other advocates of the open view attempt to avoid (C) by denying (P2), arguing instead that, while propositions about future free actions are indeed either true or false, this truth value is logically impossible to know, even for God. Opponents point out that, among other problems, the postulation of propositions whose truth value cannot be known seems to undermine the very definition of omniscience.

Whether or not one considers these objections to be decisive, I contend that there is no reason for advocates of the open view to embrace either of these questionable strategies. I submit that the real flaw in the above-mentioned argument resides not in (P1) or in (P2), but

in (P3). The traditional assumption that the future can be exhaustively expressed in terms of what will and will not come to pass overlooks an entire category of future tensed propositions whose truth value an omniscient God must know. It may be the case that (i) a future event *E will certainly* come to pass, and it may be the case that (ii) a future event *E will certainly not* come to pass. What was overlooked, however, is that it may also be the case that (iii) a future event *E might and might not* come to pass, in which case it would be false *both* that *E will certainly* come to pass and that *E will certainly not* come to pass.

So far as I can discern, the primary reason for this oversight was that it has been customarily assumed that propositions such as '*E will certainly come to pass*' are the logical contradictory of propositions such as '*E will certainly not come to pass*'. If they are indeed contradictory, they exhaust all the possibilities. Hence, one of the propositions must be true and the other false. From this it followed that propositions asserting what will and will not certainly come to pass exhaust the field of meaningful propositions about the future whose truth value an omniscient God must know. Hence God must possess EDF.

Against this, I contend that the contradictory of '*E* will certainly come to pass' is not '*E* will certainly not come to pass', but rather, '*It is not the case* that *E* will certainly come to pass'. This logically entails that '*E might not* come to pass'. So too, the contradictory of '*E* will certainly not come to pass' is not '*E* will certainly come to pass', but rather, '*It is not the case* that *E* will certainly come to pass'. This logically implies that '*E might* come to pass'.

If we apply the Square of Opposition to this assessment (see the Appendix), it becomes apparent that '*E* will certainly come to pass' and '*E* will certainly not come to pass' are contraries, not contradictories. As such, both cannot be true, but *both may be false*. So too, it becomes clear that '*E* might come to pass' and '*E* might not come to pass' are sub-contraries, not contradictories. As such, both cannot be false, but *both may be true*. And in cases in which 'might' and 'might not' propositions are conjointly true, both of their logical contradictories – viz. '*E* will certainly come to pass' and '*E* will certainly not come to pass' – are necessarily false.

If this assessment is correct, we must accept that there are three, not merely two, categories of meaningful propositions about the future whose truth value an omniscient God must know. An adequate mapping of propositions expressing possible future state of affairs must include:

(i) propositions asserting a *determinate affirmation* – viz. 'will certainly occur';

(ii) propositions asserting a *determinate negation* – viz. 'will certainly not occur'; and

(iii) propositions asserting an *indeterminate affirmation and negation* – viz. 'might and might not occur'.

Moreover, if this assessment is correct, it means the traditional view of divine foreknowledge is anchored in the fact that an entire domain of logically possible worlds that God could have created was overlooked: namely, all logically possible worlds that include, to one degree or another, an indeterminate future. The distinct claim of open view advocates is that, not only is a world with an indeterminate future logically possible, but we have compelling biblical, philosophical and experiential reasons to believe that this is, in fact, the kind of world God decided to create.

In this light, I trust it is clear why open view advocates need not deny that bivalence applies to future tensed propositions about future free actions. We simply need to apply bivalence to three categories of future tensed propositions rather than to two. Open view advocates can thus affirm that God knows the truth value of all meaningful propositions, including propositions about future free actions. The only distinct claim of open view advocates should be that propositions asserting what might and might not come to pass can be conjointly true, in which case corresponding propositions asserting what will and will not come to pass must be conjointly false.

THE IRREVOCABILITY OF FREE WILL

The second common objection to the open view that I'd like to address concerns the allegation that the open view offers no advantage in terms of resolving the problem of evil compared to the view that ascribes EDF to God. Even if we grant that God didn't eternally foreknow a particular evil deed would take place, the argument goes, we yet have to explain why God didn't intervene to prevent the deed once God saw it was inevitable, or at least saw that it was highly probable. And the latter problem, it is plausibly argued, is as great as the former. What real difference does it make whether God decided to allow Hitler to embark on the Final Solution an eternity before it took place or merely a year or a week before it was certain to take place? So long as we believe God has the power

to intervene, which seems to be implied in omnipotence, it makes no difference *when* God makes the decision not to intervene to prevent an evil.

I shall argue that this objection is rooted in an inadequate assessment of the logic of libertarian free will that leads to the mistaken assumption that an all-powerful God must be able to prevent any event God would like to prevent.

While there is a multitude of contested philosophical issues surrounding the concept and conditions of (libertarian) free will, for our present purposes the following minimalistic definition will suffice: Agents possess free will if and only if they have the capacity to resolve, by their own volition, two or more *possible* courses of action into one *actual* course of action. Libertarian free will, in other words, refers to an agent's God-given self-determining capacity to actualize *this* possible course of action *or that* possible course of action.

If this basic understanding of free will is accepted, I believe we can begin to understand how an all-powerful God would be unable to prevent events God wished could be prevented. Suppose God has endowed a particular agent (x) with the self-determining capacity to choose to go *this* way or *that* way – *this* way representing a way God approves of and *that* way representing a way God disapproves of. If God were to then prevent agent (x) from going *that* way because God disapproved of it, it would then become clear that, as a matter of fact, God *didn't* endow agent (x) with the self-determining capacity to choose to go this way *or that way*. Conversely, if God truly endowed agent (x) with the self-determining capacity to choose to go this way *or that way*, God must, *by definition*, allow agent (x) to go *that* way, if agent (x) so chooses.

Another way of stating this is to say that free will is, by definition, *irrevocable*. The concept of God preventing an agent from freely going *that way* once God has endowed the agent with the self-determining capacity to choose to go this way *or that way* is self-contradictory, no different from the concept of a round triangle or married bachelor. And just as God's omnipotence isn't limited by God's inability to make a round triangle or a married bachelor, so too, I contend, God's omnipotence isn't limited by God's inability to revoke free will once God's given it. Moreover, it's important to realize that in the initial decision to give agents free will, God is granting them the capacity to freely resolve every possible course of action they might face in the future, for as we'll see below, an omniscient God would know every possible decision the

agent might make when God gives them scope of free will he gives them. The irrevocability of free will, therefore, must apply to every possible decision that falls within the scope of the God-given free will of an agent throughout the duration of that agent's life.

If this much is accepted, it seems to me that the open view can be shown to offer a distinct advantage explaining evil over and against all traditional views that hold that God merely *chooses* not to intervene to prevent each particular episode of evil. For if God merely *chooses* to not prevent a particular episode of evil, God must in some sense *want* that particular episode of evil to take place, at least more than God wants to prevent it. And since God is all-good, every decision God makes, including the decision to not prevent a particular episode of evil, must be good. This perspective thus requires us to accept that there is a specific good divine reason behind each and every episode of evil throughout history. In my opinion, this constitutes the most challenging aspect of the classical theistic solution to the problem of evil. If we accept the essential irrevocability of free will, however, we no longer have to claim that God merely chooses not to prevent evil. We would instead claim that, given the kind of world God decided to create – viz. a world populated with free agents – God is unable to unilaterally intervene to prevent freely chosen evil, as much as God would like to.

While we may specify reasons as to why God decided to create a cosmos that was populated with free agents, this view does not require us to suppose there is a specific good divine reason behind episodes of evil. Rather, the ultimate reason why any particular episode of evil came to pass lies in the agent who chose to bring it about, not in God. Hence, in the face of any particular evil, it would make sense in this view to ask: 'Why did God decide to create a cosmos populated with free agents?', a question that has a plausible answer, in my opinion. And it would make sense in this view to ask: 'Why did this particular agent bring about this particular evil?' But it would not make sense in this view to ask: 'Why did God allow this agent to bring about this particular evil?' For this irrevocable permission is already implied in asserting that God endowed the agent with free will. Hence, the ultimate reason for each episode of evil, in this view, ends with the agent(s) who chose to carry it out. God had no reason for whatever evil an agent freely brings about: God simply could not stop it, given that he decided to create this kind of world populated with these kinds of agents. And that great advantage of this perspective is that it completely relieves us of the torturous burden

of positing a specific good divine reason behind every specific episode in history.

DIVINE ASSURANCE AND THE OPEN FUTURE

The third and final commonly raised objection against the open view also concerns God's inability to intervene to prevent evils in the open view. It is frequently argued that a God who faced a partly open future could not promise believers that there is a divine purpose for their suffering or that God can ultimately bring good out of evil (Rom 8:28). Indeed, some conservative critics have argued that the open view posits a 'limited, passive, hand-wringing God' who can do little more than hope for the best. '[W]hat is lost in open theism,' Bruce Ware contends,

> ... is the Christian's confidence in God ... .When we are told that God ... can only guess what much of the future will bring ... [and] constantly sees his beliefs about the future proved wrong by what in fact transpires ... Can a believer know that God will triumph in the future just as he has promised he will? (2000: 216)

Opponents of the open view have done an excellent job preventing people from seriously considering this view by installing fear in them with frequently voiced terrifying claims such as this. Most people have an understandable desire, if not need, to believe that their suffering and/or the suffering of loved ones is not simply random and gratuitous, but rather serves an ultimate, good divine purpose. They thus long for the assurance that God can work all things together and bring good out of evil, and any view that can't deliver on these promises is simply a nonstarter.

I think open view advocates must frankly admit that our view does in fact entail that suffering happens randomly. Once one denies that there is a specific divine reason behind each specific episode of suffering that comes to pass and instead affirms that the final reason behind any episode of suffering resides in the agent(s) who carried it out, this conclusion is unavoidable. At the same time, I do not believe that acknowledging this entails that God cannot promise to bring good out of evil or to have an ultimate purpose for all suffering. Indeed, I will now argue that, so long as we are confident that God possesses unlimited intelligence, the open view can offer believers the same level of assurance as the traditional view that ascribes EDF to God and believes this gives God a providential advantage.

I submit that the reason why so many assume God is less able to have a plan to bring good out of evil if the future is partly comprised of possibilities than if the future is exhaustively settled is because they project their own human limitations onto God. We humans are obviously less able to effectively prepare for a multitude of possible future events than we are a single future event that is certain, and the reason is that we only have a finite amount of intelligence to anticipate the future with. Hence, the more possibilities we have to anticipate, the thinner we have to spread our intelligence to anticipate each of them. This is why, for example, playing a formidable opponent in an important game of chess is more stressful than (say) working on an assembly line where a person knows exactly what is coming.

If we affirm that God has *unlimited* intelligence, however, God would not have to spread thin God's intelligence to cover any number of possibilities. A God of unlimited intelligence could attend to *each* and *every one* of a gazillion possibilities (to the gazillionth power!) as though each and every one was *the only possibility* – viz. as though each was an absolute certainty. There is therefore no functional difference between the way a God of unlimited intelligence would anticipate a future possibility and a future certainty. There is therefore no functional difference between the way the open view of God anticipates each and every one of the possible future story lines that comprise the open future and the way the traditional God who possesses EDF anticipates the single, exhaustively settled, future story line. To put it in other words, since God's intelligence has no limit, it is as though *all* of God's attention is on *each* possible story line – exactly the same as it would be if each possible story line was the *only* possible story line, viz. as if each was the one and only exhaustively settled story line of the traditional view.

This means that the advocate of the open view can affirm as robustly as any defender of the traditional view that, whatever comes to past, God has been preparing a plan, from the foundation of the world, as to how God would respond to bring good out of this event, however evil the event itself may be. It's just that the open view advocate is confident enough in God's intelligence to affirm that God didn't need to foreknow this event *as a certainty* to prepare for it *as if* it were a certainty. Any number of other possible events might have taken place, and if they had, the open view advocate would be claiming the exact same thing about them!

We might say that a God of unlimited intelligence doesn't need to have a specific eternal purpose *for* specific events in order *to bring* an equally specific eternally prepared purpose *to* these events. Hence, whereas the traditional view has always affirmed that everything happens *for* a good divine purpose, open view advocates can affirm that everything happens *with* a good divine purpose. And the good purpose God brings *to* events is just as perfect as it would have been had God specifically allowed that event *for* this good purpose. The open view advocate can thus affirm the same divine assurance as classical theists, but without the terrible burden of claiming that God specifically allowed, or ordained, evil events for a good divine purpose.

I trust it's apparent why only a God of limited intelligence would lose a providential advantage by virtue of knowing a future that included possibilities as opposed to a future that was exhaustively settled. When Bruce Ware asserts that a God who faced a future comprised of possibilities would be a 'limited, passive, hand-wringing God' who could do little more than 'guess what much of the future will bring', he is unwittingly tipping his hand to his own limited view of God's intelligence while telling us nothing about the actual view of God that open view advocates embrace (or at least ought to embrace). And given his and others' limited view of God, it's hardly surprising that Bruce Ware and others continually express great fear when they consider the consequences of God facing a future that isn't exhaustively settled ahead of time.

If we simply remain confident in God's unlimited intelligence, the last thing we can ever imagine God doing is wringing his hands and making guesses in the face of a partly open future.

APPENDIX

THE HEXAGONIC LOGIC OF AN OPEN FUTURE[1]

Whereas the Aristotelian Square assigns no primitive operator to a future indeterminate state of affairs, thus exemplifying a prejudice toward determinism, we will use Q as a primitive operator meaning, 'It is indeterminately the case that ...' alongside primitive operator Z meaning,

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[1] From G. Boyd, T. Belt and A. Rhodes, '*The Hexagon of Opposition*: *Thinking Outside the Aristotelian Box*' (unpublished manuscript).

'It is determinately the case that ...' We will thus revise the Square in such a way that Q will be granted the same logical status as Z.

Using Q and Z as defined, we arrive at:

Z(S) = It is determinately the case that state of affairs S occur ('S will obtain')

Z(~S) = It is determinately the case that state of affairs not-S occur ('S will not obtain')

Q(S) = It is indeterminately the case that state of affairs S occur ('S might and might not obtain')

Each of these propositions affirms a distinct metaphysical possibility concerning any possible future state of affairs. These possibilities are jointly exhaustive and mutually exclusive. As jointly exhaustive, at least one must be true for any meaningful future tense proposition. Thus we arrive at our first theorem:

– (S) [(Z(S) v Z(~S) v Q(S)].

As mutually exclusive, if any one is true, then the other two must be false, giving us three additional theorems:

– Z(S) ⇔ ~Z(~S) ∧ ~Q(S)
– Z(~S) ⇔ ~Z(S) ∧ ~Q(S)
– Q(S) ⇔ ~Z(S) ∧ ~Z(~S)

Because no two can be true at the same time, while any two can be false at the same time, these three possibilities are related as *contraries*, which we can represent by the following *Triangle of Contrary Relations*.
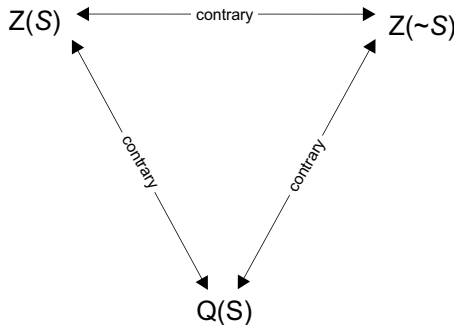

Fig. 1: Triangle of Contrary Relations

This *Triangle of Contrary Relations* generates a *Triangle of Subcontrary Relations* when we associate each possibility with its the contradictory. Consider first *Z*(*S*) ('It is determinately the case that state of affairs S obtain'). The contradictory of *Z*(*S*) is, of course, ~*Z*(*S*) ('It is not determinately the case that state of affairs S obtain') and can be illustrated as follows:
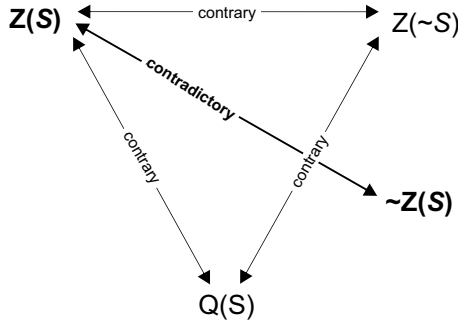

Fig. 2: Contradictory of Z(S)

The contradictory of *Z*(~*S*) ('It is determinately the case that state of affairs not-S obtain') is ~*Z* (~*S*) ('It is not determinately the case that state of affairs not-S obtain') which we locate opposite its contradictory:
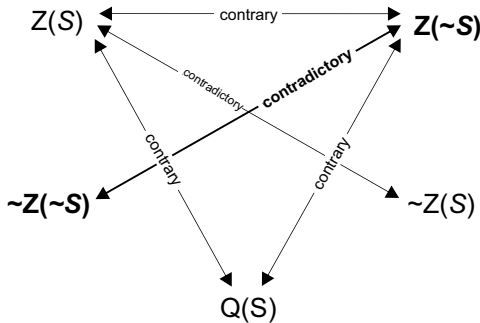

Fig. 3: Contradictory of Z(~S)

Lastly, the contradictory of *Q*(*S*) ('It is indeterminately the case that state of affairs S obtain') is ~*Q*(*S*) ('It is not indeterminately the case that state of affairs S obtain'), illustrated as follows:
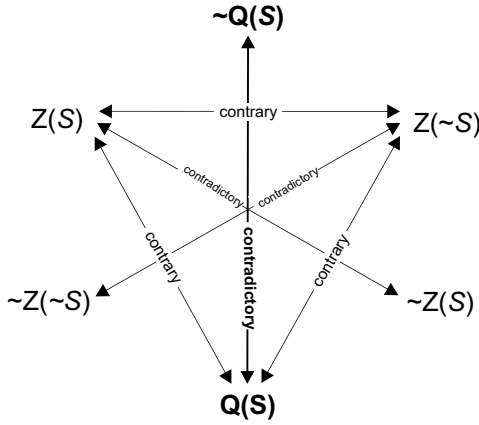
Fig. 4: Contradictory of Q(S)

Note that the first two propositions above, $Z(S)$ and $Z(\sim S)$ ('will' and 'will not') and their contradictories are explicit on the traditional Square. But the third proposition, $Q(S)$ ('might and might not') and its contradictory $\sim Q(S)$ have now been made explicit.
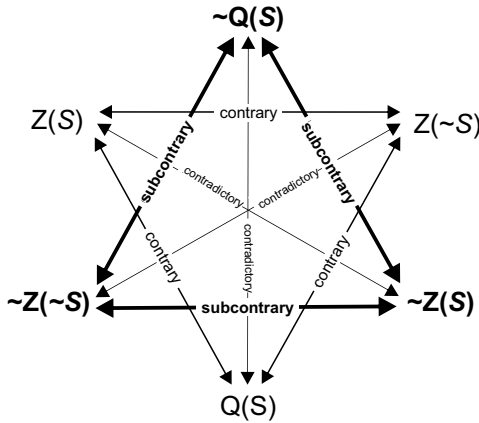

Fig. 5: Triangle of Subcontrary Relations

Now let's consider how the contradictories $\sim Z(S)$, $\sim Z(\sim S)$ and $\sim Q(S)$ are related to each other. Consider the pair $\sim Z(S)$ and $\sim Z(\sim S)$. Since $Q(S)$ entails both $\sim Z(S)$ and $\sim Z(\sim S)$ (by Theorem IV), it is clear that they are conjointly true when $Q(S)$ is true. It is equally clear that $\sim Z(S)$ and $\sim Z(\sim S)$ cannot be conjointly false. For if $\sim Z(S)$ is false, then $Z(S)$

is true, and if ~Z(~S) is false, then Z(~S) is true. But Z(S) and Z(~S) cannot be conjointly true (by Theorems II and III), so ~Z(S) and ~Z(~S) cannot be conjointly false. The same results obtain *mutatis mutandis* for the other pairs, (~Z(S) and ~Q(S); ~Z(~S) and ~Q(S)). So, for each pair, it is possible that both be true and not possible that both be false, which means that they are *subcontraries*. We thus arrive at a *Triangle of Subcontraries* overlapping with the *Triangle of Contrary Relations*.

Thus far we have considered contrary, contradictory, and subcontrary relations. There remains one more logical relation to consider, namely, subaltern relations, which run outward from Z(S), Z(~S), and Q(S). We already know from the Square that ~Z(~S) is the subaltern of Z(S). Thus, if Z(S) ('will') is true, the subaltern ~Z(~S) ('might') is necessarily true. The same now applies to the relationship between Z(S) and the adjacent ~Q(S) ('not "might and might not"'). If Z(S) is true, ~Q(S) must be true. Likewise, if Z(~S) ('will not') is true, the subaltern ~Z(S) ('might not') is also true. The same subaltern relationship exists between Z(~S) and ~Q(S). If Z(~S) is true, ~Q(S) must be true. Lastly, Q(S) ('might and might not') also has subaltern relations with the adjacent propositions. If Q(S) ('might and might not') is true, both subalterns ~Z(~S) ('might') and ~Z(S) ('might not') are true.

As figure 7 illustrates, the subaltern relations run *from* each of the three propositions forming our *Triangle of Contrary Relations to* each of the propositions forming the *Triangle of Subcontrary Relations*, completing a *Hexagon of Subaltern Relations*:
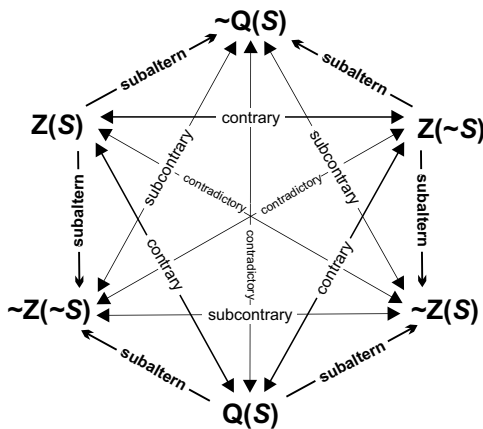

Fig. 6: Hexagon of Subaltern Relations

Note that the traditional Square of Opposition is still present in the Hexagon. We have simply enlarged and completed it. Indeed, one should notice that in completing the traditional Square we have uncovered two other intersecting Squares of Opposition, each exhibiting different truth functions but preserving the same logical relations. The traditional Square of Opposition is composed of contraries Z(*S*) and Z(~*S*) and subcontraries ~Z(~*S*) and ~Z(*S*). A second Square is composed of contraries Z(*S*) and Q(*S*) and subcontraries ~Z(*S*) and ~Q(*S*). A third Square is composed of Z(~*S*) and Q(*S*) and subcontraries ~Q(*S*) and ~Z(~*S*). The three squares may be highlighted as follows:
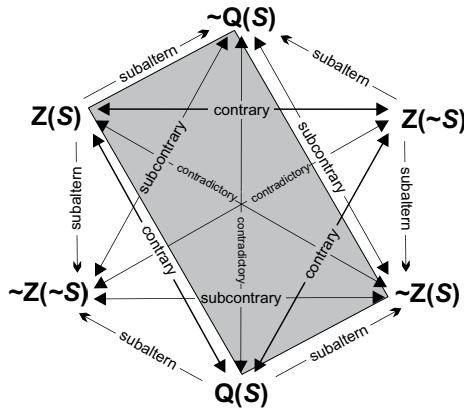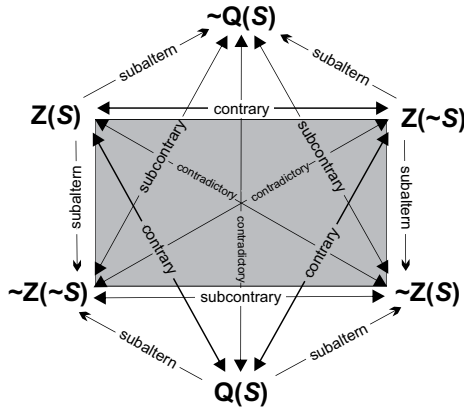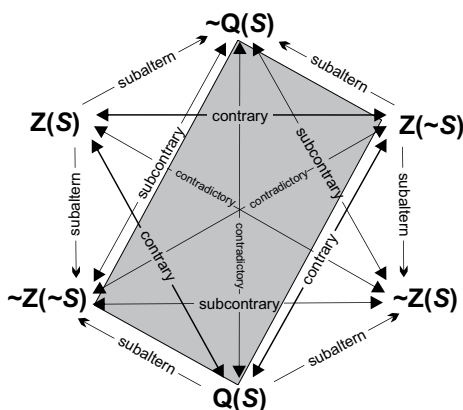
Fig. 7: Three Squares of Opposition

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COOPERATIVE GRACE, COOPERATIVE AGENCY

KEVIN TIMPE

Northwest Nazarene University

Abstract. In an earlier paper, I argued for an account of the metaphysics of grace which was libertarian in nature but also non-Pelagian. My goal in the present paper is to broaden my focus on how the human and divine wills relate in graced activities. While there is widespread agreement in Christian theology that the two do interact in an important way, what's less clear is how the wills of two agents can be united in one of them performing a particular action via a kind of joint or unitive willing. Insofar as the goal in these unitive willings is to have the human will and the divine will operating together in the human bringing about a particular action, I refer to this kind of volition as 'cooperative agency'. I explore two different models – an identificationist model and an incarnation model – regarding how the human agent is aligned with God in cooperative agency. I then argue that there are significant reasons for preferring the incarnational model over the identificationist model.

I. INTRODUCTION

In an earlier paper, I argued for an account of the metaphysics of grace according to which the following two claims are true:

Claim 1: divine grace is the efficient cause of saving faith, and

Claim 2: humans control whether or not they come to saving faith.[1]

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[1] There are, of course, different kinds of grace and what follows will not be relevant to all of them. My focus on grace should be restricted to just those cases involving human action and excluding, among other things, the grace of creation.

The motivation for Claim 1 was to avoid running afoul of the anti-Pelagian constraint (APC), a constraint I think Christian philosophers and theologians have good reason to try to satisfy:

> (APC): No fallen human individual is able to cause or will any good, including the will of her coming to saving faith, apart from a unique grace.[2]

The motivation for Claim 2 was to be able to preserve the compatibility of that account with a libertarian account of free will, thereby avoiding commitment to theological determinism in the affirmation of Claim 1.

In that paper, I focused on just those acts of will involved in coming to saving faith. I confess that I've always been somewhat uncomfortable with that earlier view given the metaphysical cost it required – namely the truth of certain controversial (but, I still think, plausible) claims about causation (e.g., that omissions can't be causes but instead are merely quasi-causes). If there's another account that can preserve both Claim 1 and Claim 2, I'd welcome it;[3] I suspect that what I say in the present paper could be joined with such an account as well. But assuming for now the model that I developed earlier, my goal is to broaden my focus on how the human and divine wills relate in graced activities.[4] Rather than focusing simply on how the two relate to the act of coming to saving faith, I here want to think about the relationship between the human will and the divine will more broadly.[5] While there is widespread agreement in Christian theology that the two *do* interact in an important way, what's less clear is *how* the wills of two agents can be united in one of them performing a particular action via a kind of joint or unitive willing.

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[2] For my defence of (APC), see Timpe (2007).

[3] For other accounts of how the human will relates to grace, see Stump (2001) and Ragland (2006). See Timpe (2007) for why I reject these accounts.

[4] The relationship here will be something other than mere concurrence, even though this is a minimal condition for the exercise of created agents' powers: 'However great created functional powers may be, they can do nothing without Divine concurrence .... In general concurrence, genuine Divine agency does not compete with genuine created agency .... God creates, sustains, and concurs with any created agent whatever.' (Adams 2013: 23f.)

[5] For instance, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* gives the following example: 'God inspired the human authors of the sacred books. "To compose the sacred books, God chose certain men who, all the while he employed them in this task, made full use of their own faculties and powers so that, though he acted in them and by them, it was as true authors that they consigned to writing whatever he wanted written, and no more".' (144)

Insofar as the goal in these unitive willings is to have the human will and the divine will operating together in the human bringing about a particular action, I will refer to this kind of volition as 'cooperative agency'. While there may be many other examples of cooperative agency broadly speaking (e.g., a husband and wife willing in tandem regarding the raising of their children), my focus here will only address cooperative agency regarding humans and God. In addition to satisfying both Claim 1 and Claim 2 above, I think any satisfactory account of cooperative agency needs to capture a tight connection between the human agent's will and God's desire for what the human agent should do. Furthermore, I think that the agent should identify with God's desire in her willing. That is, there should not just be a parallel between the divine and the human wills, but a genuine alignment (which will be described below in terms of identification). It is in virtue of this that a true union will be at the heart of cooperative agency.

In what follows I'll look at two different models – an identificationist model and an incarnation model – regarding how the human agent is aligned with God in graced willings. It is also important to keep in mind that both models are just that – models, rather than fully spelled out positions. Each could itself be developed in a number of more specific ways. But at the level of detail that I'll be able to specify these models here, I think there are significant reasons for preferring the incarnational model over the identificationist model.

II. IDENTIFICATIONIST MODELS

The first model of cooperative agency is built on identificationist accounts of free will, such as that found in the work of Harry Frankfurt. In this section, I first outline Frankfurt's identificationist view of free will. I then show how one could model an account of cooperative agency on that view. I then argue that while the identificationist account of cooperative agency has a number of important positive features, it ultimately fails.

Harry Frankfurt advances an influential hierarchical account of freedom of the will. [6] (Frankfurt's view is often also called a 'structuralist' or 'mesh' account of the will, since, as detailed below, a will is free if it has a certain internal structure or 'mesh' among the various levels of

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[6] See Frankfurt (1988), particularly chapter 2.

desires and volitions.) For Frankfurt, free will (or what Frankfurt calls 'freedom of the will') isn't simply about a person forming a volition on the basis of a desire. Free and responsible agency is not 'a simple act that merely implements a first-order desire. It essentially involves reflexivity, including desires and volitions of a higher order' (Frankfurt 1988: 176). According to Frankfurt, 'the enjoyment of a free will means the satisfaction of certain desires – desires of the second or higher orders' (Frankfurt 1988: 22). Second-order desires are 'desires concerning what first-order desire they want to be their will' (Frankfurt 1988: 164).[7] For Frankfurt, just as freedom of action is being able to do what one wants to do, freedom of the will is being able to have the kind of will that one wants to have. If a second-order desire moves the agent to act on the first-order desire that is the object of that second-order desire, then she has a second-order volition. In such a case, Frankfurt writes,

> *A* wants the desire to *X* to be the desire that moves him effectively to act. It is not merely that he wants the desire to *X* to be among his desires by which, to one degree or another, he is moved or inclined to act. He wants this desire to be effective – that is, to provide the motive in what he actually does. (Frankfurt 1988: 15)

On this view, for example, Allison freely decides to take her dog for a walk in the park if she desires to go for a walk with her dog, and she desires that the previously mentioned desire be the reason why she actually goes for a walk; that is, she identifies with that desire.[8] If, on the contrary, the desires that lead individuals to act are desires with which the agents do not identify, then we are 'moved to act by something other than what we really want' and 'moved by a force that is not fully our own' (Frankfurt 1988: 164).

Frankfurt's hierarchical view has been subject to much (and I think compelling) criticism.[9] For present purposes, the most important is the

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[7] As indicated above, Frankfurt also thinks there can be higher-order desires as well.

[8] For how Frankfurt understands identification, see, for instance, Stefaan Cuypers: 'Frankfurt further describes the formation of second-order volitions in terms of identification. A person who desires that a certain desire constitutes his will, identifies himself with it; conversely, he withdraws himself from it when he does not desire to be motivated by such a desire. There is an important sense in which a desire with which a person identifies himself is more truly his own, whereas a desire from which he withdraws himself is not really his own, although it may still remain part of his ongoing stream of consciousness' (Cuypers 1998: 46).

[9] For some of them, see Timpe (2012a), particularly chapter 8.

idea that desires of a higher order are themselves insufficient to account for free will. Susan Wolf, for instance, writes that 'no matter how many levels of self we posit, there will still, in any individual case, be a last level – a deepest self about whom the question "What governs it?" will arise, as problematic as ever' (Wolf 1987: 52). And a similar criticism has been raised by Gary Watson.[10] Responding to this line of criticism, in 'Identification and Wholeheartedness' Frankfurt writes that

> Someone does what he *really wants* to do only when he acts in accordance with a pertinent higher-order volition. But this condition could not be sufficient unless the higher-order volition were *itself* one by which the person *really wanted* to be determined. Now it is pretty clear that this requirement cannot be satisfied simply by introducing *another* desire or volition at the next higher level. [...] The mere fact that one desire occupies a higher level than another in the hierarchy seems plainly insufficient to endow it with greater authority or with any constitutive legitimacy. (Frankfurt 1988: 166)

But if identification is to help avoid the worry that Wolf and Watson raise, it must involve more than just higher levels of desire. It is for this purpose that Frankfurt introduces the concept of being 'wholehearted'. The idea of being wholehearted about a particular desire aims to illustrate that the person is not divided about that desire; that is, there are no higher-level conflicts about it.[11] Robert Kane nicely captures Frankfurt's view here as follows:

> Persons are 'wholehearted' when there are no conflicts in their wills [at the various levels of desires] and they are not ambivalent about what they want to do. Ambivalent persons, by contrast, are of two (or more) minds about what they want to do and cannot make up their minds. Reflection on our desires stops, says Frankfurt, when we reach desires to which we are wholeheartedly committed and to which we have no ambivalence. It is not arbitrary, he insists, to identify with such wholehearted desires because they are the desires with which we

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[10] 'Since second-order desires are themselves simply desires, to add them to the context of a conflict is just to increase the number of contenders; it is not to give a special place to any of those in contention.' (Watson 1975: 218)

[11] Frankfurt thinks there is another kind of division within an agent's volitional structure – one that involves a conflict between 'how someone wants to be motivated and the desire by which he is in fact most powerfully moved' (1988: 165) – but this kind of division need not concern us at present.

> are 'fully satisfied' and we have no 'active interest' in bringing about
> a change in them. (Kane 2005: 96f.)

Wholeheartedness, for Frankfurt, does not require the complete absence of conflicts among an agent's desires. Rather, Frankfurt understands that an agent can be wholehearted even if his desires conflict so long as he decisively identifies with one of these desires and separates himself from the other. Instead, wholeheartedness involves a person endorsing a particular desire 'in the belief that no further accurate inquiry would require him to change his mind' (Frankfurt 1988: 169). The agent is 'committed' to that desire. As a result of this commitment, 'terminating the sequence at that point – the point at which there is no conflict or doubt – is not arbitrary.' (Frankfurt 1988: 169)[12] Thus, in answer to Wolf's question 'What governs the hierarchy?', Frankfurt holds that the agent in question does in virtue of endorsing wholeheartedly a particular level of desire past which there is no more conflict in the agent's volitional structure and past which she thinks no further reflection is necessary.

More could be said about Frankfurt's view of freedom of the will, but the above should be sufficient for developing the first model of cooperative agency I want to explore. Drawing on his account, an identificationist model of cooperative agency can be understood along the following lines. An agent A wills cooperatively with God regarding some action x only if A's second-order desire is for God's first-order desire regarding x. That is, even if A can't bring herself to have the first-order desire to x, she wants God's desire for her to x to move her to action. Merely having such a second-order desire will be insufficient, of course, for cooperative willing for the same reasons that merely having a second-order desire is insufficient for free will. Building then on Frankfurt's developed view, we might add that cooperative agency requires not just the second-order desire for God's desire to become the agent's will, but also that the agent wholeheartedly identify with that desire. To put it schematically, we can say:

Identificationist Cooperative Agency:
Agent A and God are engaged in cooperative agency regarding some action x if and only if:

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[12] Here, Frankfurt notes the etymological root of 'to decide' as 'to cut off': 'This is apt, since it is characteristically by a decision [...] that a sequence of desires or preferences of increasingly higher orders is terminated. When the decision is made without reservation, the commitment it entails is decisive.' (Frankfurt 1988: 170)

   (i) God desires *A* to do *x*;

  (ii) *A* has a second-order desire, *D*, for God's desire for her to do *x* to become her volition;

 (iii) *A* identifies with *D*;

 (iv) *A* is wholehearted regarding *D*; and

  (v) *A* subsequently forms a volition to *x* as a result of her wholehearted identification with *D*.

Using Frankfurt's terminology, we can also say that because of (v), the second-order desire in (ii) becomes the agent's second-order volition. And, in light of (iii) and (iv), this is a second-order volition with which the agent wholeheartedly identifies. Let me give an example here to illustrate. First, suppose that Emmaline has $20. She desires to spend it on something for herself that, while she would enjoy it, she does not need. She also knows that God desires His people to engage in acts of charity, say by giving the money to Oxfam. She wants her volition to be in line with God's desire, even if she also has a conflicting first-order desire to spend the money on herself. She has no further higher-order desires which conflict with her second-order desire for God's desire to become her will. That is, she wholeheartedly identifies with God's desire to give her money to charity. As a result of her identifying wholeheartedly with God's desire in this way, she forms the volition to give the money to Oxfam, cooperatively acting with God to bring about an act of charity.

    I think this model gets a number of things correct regarding cooperative agency. For one, I think it's right that the agent identifies in an important sense with God's desire for her.[13] Second, I think that identification needs to play an explanatory role in *why* the agent does the action in question; this explanatory role is captured by (v) in the above schema. Furthermore, in virtue of this explanatory role, the individual is united with God's will in an important way – the agent is making God's desire be her will.[14]

    Despite thinking that the identificationist model is right in these regards, I think that ultimately it fails as an analysis of cooperative agency when we look at an example of the volition involved in coming to faith.

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[13] See Stump (forthcoming) for an excellent account of how an agent's identifying and aligning herself with God will lead to psychic integration.

[14] This point is inspired by a comment by Alex Pruss: 'When one participates in a popular devotion *because* it is popular, one is thereby united in will with the community in which the devotion was popular.'

In particular, I think the conditions outlined above are neither necessary nor sufficient to explain an agent's act of coming to saving faith.

To see why these conditions are not sufficient, consider the case for Magdalen's conversion, that is, going from *status corruptionis* to *status gratiae*.[15] Creatures in the *status corruptionis* suffer from a 'spiritual illness of the post-Fall human condition'.[16] While being in this state affects many – perhaps even all – aspects of human nature, 'the foundational defect is in the will. One hallmark of this defect is the will's internal fragmentation, its intractability to itself, its proneness to moral wrong even against its own desires for the good'.[17] According to Christian theology, given this defect in the will an agent is not able to be the efficient cause of her moving from the *status corruptionis* to *status gratiae*. This is why, in his writings against Pelagius and his disciples, Augustine repeatedly emphasizes that 'cooperative grace' or what Augustine calls 'a unique grace'[18] is needed.[19] Similarly, Aquinas writes that 'a man cannot perform meritorious deeds without grace'.[20] And the Council of Trent declares that 'the efficient cause [of our justification is] the God of mercy who, of his own free will, washes and sanctifies, placing his seal and anointing with the promised holy Spirit who is the guarantee of our inheritance'.[21] These sorts of considerations are what motivates (APC). So Magdalen is not able to form the first-order volition to come to saving faith on her own. The identificationist model aims at getting around this by making the effective first-order desire God's desire, with which the agent identifies with at a higher order.[22] But here

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[15] For more on the role these two states play in philosophical anthropology, see Timpe (2014), chapter 1 and Timpe & Jenson (2015).

[16] Stump (forthcoming), p. 1 in draft.

[17] Stump (forthcoming), p. 1 in draft.

[18] See for example Augustine's *On Nature and Grace* in (1992), *Saint Augustine: Four Anti-Pelagian Writings*, 69.

[19] For why I think Pelagius' view is often misunderstood on this point, see Timpe (2007).

[20] Aquinas, *Truth*, 24.1 ad 2 in Schmidt, ed. (1954: 139).

[21] Council of Trent, Sixth Session, Chapter VII, as quoted in Tanner (1990: 673). Also note that efficient causation is the only kind of causation that I am concerned with in the present paper.

[22] Maximus the Confessor writes that, in the Garden of Gethsemane, the human will is subjected to the divine will: 'Earlier reflection on the Agony in the Garden had interpreted this in terms of the human submission of the Incarnate Will to the divine will: in making explicit that this must involve the submission of a human will to the divine will Maximus was breaking new ground' (Louthe 1996: 58). I want to suggest

the identificationist model of cooperative agency faces a dilemma. Either the agent is the efficient cause of her coming to faith, or she's not. On either horn, the initial constraints of a satisfactory account of cooperative agency are violated.

Consider first that the agent is the efficient cause of her second-order volition to make God's desire her will. In such a case, (APC) is violated, not at the level of first-order volitions, but instead at the second-order of volition.[23] For willing that God's desire becomes one's will is itself to will the good, since one's alignment with God's desires is a good thing. And according to (APC), no human in the *status corruptionis* is able to cause or will any good apart from a unique grace.

Consider then the second horn of the dilemma. On this horn, it is not the agent herself that is the cause of her second-order volition for coming to saving faith. Given that we're talking about cooperative agency between human agents and God, the natural alternative explanation is that God is the efficient cause of the volition in question. Were Frankfurt himself a theist, I think that this is the horn of the dilemma he'd prefer – that is, that God can cause the agent to have the required second-order volition to come to saving faith. Frankfurt candidly admits that he only cares about the internal relationships within an agent's volitional structure, not how her volitional structure got to be the way it is; so presumably he'd say that the relevant volition could be caused directly by God:

> The only thing that really counts is what condition I am in. How I got into that condition is another matter. If I'm in the condition where I'm doing what I want to do and I really want to do it, i.e., I decisively identify with my action, then I think I'm responsible for it. It makes no difference how it came about that that is the case. [...] If the person is wholehearted in the action, let us say performs the action because he wants to perform it and the desire to perform it is a desire that he really wants to have and there's no reservation, there's no imposition, no passivity: the person is completely, fully, wholeheartedly identified with what's going on. What more could there be? What more could you want? That's all the freedom that's possible for human beings to have, in my opinion. [...]

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that something similar happens in cooperative agency, and I think that this can best be accounted for by the incarnational model below.

[23] See also Stump (forthcoming), footnote 1. It wouldn't resolve the problem here to push the issue up to the third-order level or higher, for reasons related to Wolf's criticism of Frankfurt's view above.

What accounts for the fact that he's completely wholehearted is no longer relevant. The only important consideration is that he is doing exactly what he wants to do and he's totally satisfied with doing this. (Frankfurt 1988: 32ff.)[24]

And in another article, Frankfurt writes that 'the degree to which his choice is autonomous and the degree to which he acts freely do not depend on the origin of the conditions which lead him to choose and to act as he does' (Frankfurt 1988: 46).

This might be an option for the compatibilist, though not all compatibilists find such a view plausible. Al Mele, for instance, finds this aspect of Frankfurt's view 'difficult to accept' (Mele 2008: 270)[25] despite being sympathetic with much of the rest of it, insofar as Mele thinks that such direct manipulation would undermine free will. But it's especially hard to see how an incompatibilist could accept this horn of the dilemma. For starters, incompatibilists think there are problems with Frankfurt's hierarchical analysis of freedom of the will.[26] As an account of cooperative agency and not free will in general, this view also conflicts with Claim 2, which is itself motivated by incompatibilist concerns: humans control whether or not they come to saving faith.

So no matter which horn of the dilemma one takes, I think we have good reason for rejecting the identificationist model of cooperative agency as sufficient for cooperative agency. But I also think we have reason to think that it isn't necessary either. Criterion (iv) requires the agent to be wholehearted regarding her second-order desire for God's desire for her salvation to become her will. And while I don't want to rule out that religious conversations can be wholehearted in this way, and I think that ultimate perfect union with God would be wholehearted in this way, I don't see why coming to saving faith would require it. Remember from above that as Frankfurt understands wholeheartedness, it can involve conflict among an agent's desires so long as the agent identifies decisively with one of them and separates herself from the other. In this context Frankfurt writes that

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[24] In 'Identification and Wholeheartedness,' Frankfurt also criticizes Aristotle's account of responsibility given its 'preoccupation with causal origins and causal responsibility' (1988: 171).

[25] See also McKenna (2011) for a worthwhile discussion of Frankfurt's view on this point.

[26] See footnote 9 above.

> When someone identifies himself with one rather than another of his
> own desires, the result is not necessarily to eliminate the conflict between
> those desires, or even to reduce is severity, but to alter its nature. [...]
> The conflict between the *desires* is in this way transformed into a conflict
> between *one* of them and the *person* who has identified with its rival.
> That person is no longer uncertain which side he is on, in the conflict
> between the two desires, and the persistence of this conflict need not
> subvert or diminish the wholeheartedness of his commitment to the
> desire with which he identifies. (Frankfurt 1988: 172)

But surely those who are united to God in faith can be conflicted not
just between a desire and the self but rather within the self. Thus, by
extension, it seems that people could also be conflicted in the act of
coming to faith. Paul, for instance, writes that he does not do the good
that he wants, but instead the evil that he does not want (Romans 7:19).
Surely there is a sense in which Paul wants (and thus sees as good) the
evil in question; so I think we should interpret Paul as making a second-
order claim here. And so it seems that Paul is indeed 'uncertain which
side he is on'.[27]

    While I'm less certain about this claim that the identificationist
criteria are not necessary for cooperative agency, even if they merely
aren't sufficient, I think the identificationist model should be rejected as
an *account* of the very nature of cooperative agency.

III. INCARNATIONAL MODEL

The other model, and the one that I think is ultimately more promising,
understands cooperative agency between humans and God along
the lines of how the divine and human wills relate to each other in
the Incarnation. For this reason, I shall refer to it as the incarnational
model. Before I can get to the model, however, I have to address the
norms governing one's reflection on the Incarnation. Following Scott
MacDonald, my methodology in approaching such topics is what he
calls 'clarification'. The philosophical theologian engaged in clarification

> can legitimately undertake the investigation of not only the question
> of God's existence and attributes – issues associated with traditional

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[27] I think a similar claim could be made regarding Augustine in the *Confessions*
shortly after his conversion.

natural theology – but also doctrines such as trinity, incarnation, and atonement – traditional paradigms of doctrines inaccessible to natural reason. When the philosopher takes up these kinds of issues with the aim of articulating and developing them, probing their internal coherence, joint consistency, and systematic connections, and exploring their relations to other theological and nontheological doctrines, she will be engaged in appropriately philosophical reflection on specifically Christian theological matters. (MacDonald 2009: 23)

In light of this methodology, I have certain constraints that I take to govern what is acceptable to say regarding the Incarnation, even if I do not defend the normativity of those constraints here. I'm going to take as my primary guiding constraint the Christology found in the earliest seven Ecumenical Councils – the Councils held as binding by both Catholic and Orthodox Christians.[28] More specifically, what I have in mind is what Oliver Crisp calls 'dogmatic minimalism'. Speaking of the Chalcedonian definition, which he takes to be a good example of this sort of theological approach that he's advocating, Crisp writes that 'it is minimalistic because the definition says as little as doctrinally possible about the hypostatic union, while making clear that certain ways of thinking about the person of Christ are off-limits, or unorthodox' (Crisp 2013: 27).[29]

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[28] As Sturch (1991) argues, the primary purpose of the early councils was not to establish a single orthodox position, but to rule out positions that are not orthodox (1991: 214). Similarly, Crisp (2013) writes that 'if we bear in mind that the dogmatic hardcore of classical Christology is rather thin, and deliberately so, it should help us to see that there may be many different Christologies that are consistent with the canons of Chalcedon' (2013: 28).

[29] Relatedly, Crisp writes: 'God would not permit the church to come to a substantially mistaken account of the person of Christ and to encode this in a canonical decision in an ecumenical doctrine, for what we think about the person of Christ touches the heart of Christian doctrine, and therefore the heart of the gospel. It is an impoverished doctrine of providence that claims otherwise.' (2013: 24)

Crisp's dogmatic minimalism is a weaker claim than Tim Pawl's 'Conciliar Christology,' which refers to the conjunction of the teachings from the earliest seven Ecumenical Councils. 'The conjuncts of this conjunction come from definitions and expositions of faith, creeds, canons, and anathemas of the councils. If such conciliar statements include other documents [...] then I will include the Christological teachings from those documents as conjuncts of Conciliar Christology, too' (Pawl, in progress), chapter 1, p. 2 in draft). While I am inclined to strive to meet compatibility with Conciliar Christology, for purposes of expediency I'll restrict myself to Crisp's dogmatic minimalism.

There are, of course, complicated questions in the vicinity regarding the exact boundaries of Christological orthodoxy. But I don't think I need to demarcate them further for my present purposes. It is clear that dogmatic minimalism includes the following from Third Constantinople, which canonized dyothelitism, the claim that Christ has two wills:

> [W]e proclaim equally two natural volitions or wills in him and two natural principles of action which undergo division, no change, no partition, no confusion, in accordance with the teaching of the holy fathers. And the two natural wills not in opposition, as the impious heretics said, far from it, but his human will following, and not resisting and struggling, rather in fact subject to his divine and all powerful will. For the will of the flesh had to be moved, and yet to be subjected to the divine will, according to the most wise Athanasius. For just as his flesh is said to be and is flesh of the Word of God, so too the natural will of his flesh is said to and does belong to the Word of God. [...] For in the same way that his all holy and blameless animate flesh was not destroyed in being made divine but remained in its own limit and category, so his human will as well was not destroyed by being made divine, but rather was preserved.[30]

And regarding the two wills in the Incarnation, Cyril of Alexandria writes (in a letter that Chalcedon would latter accept as authoritative) that in Christ 'two different natures come together to form a unity'.[31]

Drawing on earlier work by Garrett DeWeese, Crisp affirms an axiom that he calls the Chalcedonian Axiom (CA):

> (CA) Christ has *one* of whatever goes with the person and *two* of whatever goes with natures.[32]

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[30] In Tanner (1990: 128). Though not an ecumenical council, the Lateran Council in 649 asserted the following:

Canon 10: 'If anyone does not properly and truly confess according to the holy Fathers two wills of and the same Christ our God, united uninterruptedly, divine and human, and on this account that through each of His natures the same one of His *own free will* is the operator of our salvation, let him be condemned.' (Denzinger, *The Sources of Catholic Dogma*, para. 263; as quoted in Pawl (2014: 236)).

[31] As quoted in Pawl (in progress: chapter 1, p. 5). The Second Council of Nicea would later 'declare that there are two wills and principles of action, in accordance with what is proper to each of the natures of Christ'.

[32] Crisp (2013: 32); DeWeese (2007: 115). One can find an affinity, it seems to me, between what Crisp and DeWeese are advocating and the doctrine of 'double consubstantiality'.

And insofar as each nature has a will, Christ must have, via (CA), two wills.[33] When Chalcedon speaks of 'two principles of action' it means 'two things by which action can come', referring to the two natures. When these two principles of action align in a particular action, there are not two actions but one – one action of the one person who has two natures. We can speak, in this one person, of the divine will being united to a created will as God being united with a human agent – after all, this is how Aquinas speaks of the human soul: 'We do not call Christ a creature, speaking absolutely, since his name signifies the hypostasis. But we say that Christ's soul or body is a creature.' (Aquinas 2009: 172) While there may be two wills willing an action, there are not therefore two actions.[34] So in the Incarnation we have two wills united in such a way as to produce one singular action. Jesus Christ 'goes up' to Jerusalem in virtue of both His human nature and divine nature willing His body to so walk. And this, I shall argue, provides a way of understanding how human wills and divine wills align in cooperative agency. When Emmaline gives her $20 to Oxfam, this one act of charity is accomplished by her uniting her will with God's will in a single act.

At this point, I think it will be helpful to pause to address a worry that may arise. The worry can be understood in two ways, one of which I think can be dispatched with pretty easily. The second version of the worry will lead to the need to be explicit about two disanalogies between the Incarnation and cooperative agency more generally. My discussion of the second disanalogy will then lead to further development of the Incarnational Model.

The worry is about the attempt to use the Incarnation to elucidate and explain cooperative agency. This worry might be understood in two ways. The stronger way of understanding the worry is that reflection on the relationship between the human will and nature, on the one hand, and the divine will and nature on the other is misplaced. After all, Cyril describes the hypostatic union of the two natures as an 'ineffable union' (Tanner 1990: 41, 72) and Second Constantinople declares as anathema

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[33] Louth (1996) refers to the doctrine of two wills in the Incarnation as 'an entailment of the doctrine of the two natures' (1996: 17). The Council of Chalcedon in 451 affirmed that the Incarnate Christ has 'two natures which undergo no confusion, no change, no division, no separation; at no point was the difference between the natures taken away through the union, but rather the property of both natures is preserved and comes together into a single person and a single subsistent being.'

[34] See also Stump (2003: 447ff.).

anyone who does not 'confess a belief in our one Lord, understood in both his divinity and his humanity, so as by this to signify a difference of natures of which an *ineffable union has been made*' (Tanner 1990: 117).[35] The worry about ineffability here can be seen as a demanding version of negative theology that eschews all positive claims about the divine nature. I don't see the strong version of the ineffability worry as a genuine worry. After all, the reflection that the early ecumenical councils engaged in not only made claims about the divine nature and hypostatic union, but this was in fact the point.[36]

The weaker way of understanding the worry, one that I have some sympathy with, is that even if speaking of the relationship between the two natures in the Incarnation isn't inappropriate because ineffable, we're attempting to understand something more common (namely, cooperative agency in general) via something considerably less common, indeed singular (namely, the Incarnation). As mentioned above, I have some sympathy with this way of understanding the worry. But here's why I don't think the worry undermines the present project. Christians are already committed to the interaction of the two wills in the Incarnation. Indeed, as pointed out earlier, it's a requirement of dogmatic minimalism. As I've argued elsewhere regarding free will, even if we are more familiar with human freedom than we are divine freedom, there is still reason to think that the latter is the primary sense of free will.[37] And so, given commitment to dyothelitism, I don't think it inappropriate to use the relationship between the two wills as a model for understanding

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[35] Maximus the Confessor, whose view I reference below, also referred to the hypostatic union as 'the great mystery' (Louth 1996: 55).

[36] For more on this, see Pawl (forthcoming: chapter 1).

[37] In Timpe (2012b), I wrote the following: 'To use a common example from Christian theology, the meaning of the predicate involved in saying "God is a loving father" is not univocal with the meaning of the predicate involved in saying "Brent is a loving father". But neither are the two meanings completely equivocal, for presumably what it means for God to be a loving father bears a significant relationship to what it means for Brent to be a loving father. Saying what exactly this relationship is is at the heart of an analogical approach to religious language. Analogical predication can be approached either through the order of being or the order of knowing. So, to return to our example, what it means for Brent to be a loving father is grounded in, or dependent upon, what it means for God to be a loving father. The order of being is thus grounded in God. But epistemically, we first become aware of what it means to be a loving father through humans such as Brent and then later come to realize what it means for God to be a loving father. This is the order of knowing.' (Timpe 2012b: 89)

cooperative agency more generally. But it is exactly at this point that the two disanalogies must be addressed.

The first disanalogy is this: the union in the Incarnation is the union of two wills (and two complete natures more fully) into one person – it is a hypostatic union. 'There is one person in Christ. So there is one subject of predication, one fundamental entity to which we refer when we speak of Christ. But this person has two complete, unconfused natures.' (Crisp 2013: 32) While our cooperation with God unites us with God in an important sense, we neither become the same person as God nor have our personhood taken up into the divine person in the sense that our personhood becomes a part of the three persons that are the Divine Nature. So far as I can tell, nothing of importance for the incarnational model of cooperative agency hangs on this disanalogy.[38]

The second disanalogy will require a more lengthy response. In the case of the Incarnation, the human will that was engaged in cooperative agency with the divine will was untainted by sin, original or actual. The two wills were always, as a matter of fact, aligned with each other.[39] But this is not so of normal cases of cooperative agency: other human wills

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[38] There is a tradition in parts of Christianity that appears to endorse that we can approach such a hypostatic union. Maximus the Confessor was shaped by Evagrius, who held that 'we can attain equality with Christ, become *isochristoi*' (Louth 1996: 24). While I find this a fascinating suggestion and think that the Eastern Church's understanding of deification may also lead in this direction, I will not pursue this option in greater detail here. See also pages 34f., as well as Opuscules 3 and 7 reprinted therein for Maximus on deification. I think that the connections between Maximus' understanding of deification and the above treatment of cooperative agency are deserving of further attention. And compare Adams's discussion of Peter Lombard's view of the hypostatic union between the Holy Spirit and the human will in Adams (2013: 28f.).

[39] I'm inclined to think that it is only a contingent truth that the human will and the divine will in the Incarnation were always aligned. So far as I can tell, both this and the stronger claim that they were necessarily aligned are within the bounds of dogmatic minimalism. In personal correspondence, Tim Pawl has suggested the following middle position between the two above options: 'My view is that Christ's human nature [CHN] was not essentially morally perfect, but the person of Christ is impeccable. CHN is not essentially morally perfect because, on my view, it could have existed but not been assumed. In such a case, it would fulfill the conditions for being a supposit, and so also for being a person. That person, call him Walter, would not have been essentially morally perfect. He could sin. And so CHN is not essentially morally perfect. If that sounds scandalous, we can note that it is something in the neighborhood of essentially morally perfect. It – and any nature that is assumable – is such that, necessarily (if it is assumed, then it is unable to sin in that circumstance).' See also Stump (2003: 417f.).

fail to be aligned with the divine will.[40] And so we need an account of what happens with the wills which do not align in such a case.

The matrix for understanding the possibilities here is going to be complex: there are a number of different moral valences for what is being willed (morally good, morally bad, morally neutral); two wills; three 'settings' for a particular will (willing x, willing $\sim x$, being quiescent regarding x); as well as two different stages of theological anthropology that need to be incorporated: the *status corruptionis* and the *status gratiae*. I'm going to narrow down the options in ways that I think are well motivated.

The first way to narrow down the possible permutations is by eliminating all those options according to which God wills against what is morally good. Given essential moral perfection, I don't see it as an option for God to will in such a way. I'm also going to, for purposes of simplicity, eliminate those options where what is being willed is morally neutral.[41] Also, given essential moral perfection, I take it that God would never be quiescent regarding a good.[42] This leaves the following options, where x is an all-things-considered good option:

(A) a corrupt human will wills x and God wills x[43]

(B) a corrupt human will is quiescent regarding x and God wills x

(C) a corrupt human will wills $\sim x$ and God wills x

(D) a graced human will wills x and God wills x[44]

(E) a graced human will is quiescent regarding x and God wills x

(F) a graced human will wills $\sim x$ and God wills x.

(APC) rules out possibility (A), and so I will not consider it further.

First, I want to consider the two options where the human will wills in opposition to the divine will, options (C) and (F). In these cases, the

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[40] Depending on one's theological views, Mary may be another counterexample to the claim that human wills fail to be aligned with God's will.

[41] Those instances that involve an agent coming to have saving faith won't be morally neutral. Whether or not one thinks that a redeemed human can engage in cooperative agency towards something that is morally neutral in other cases will depend on other aspects of one's theology.

[42] I mean something that is *pro toto* good, not just *pro tanto* good. See Wiland (2012) for the difference between *pro toto* and *pro tanto*.

[43] Here and in (B) and (C), by 'corrupt human will' I mean the will of a human who is in the *status corruptionis*.

[44] Here and in (E) and (F), by 'graced human will' I mean the will of a human who is in the *status gratiae*.

human willing wins out and the agent fails to do x freely. (I presume that God can determine an agent to do x, even if He cannot determine the agent to freely do x. But in such a case, we're talking coercion rather than cooperative agency.) So in cases involving contrary wills regarding the relevant human free action, the human will trumps the divine will. On the assumption of incompatibilism, God cannot make a human freely do x by an act of His will.

Consider then option (B). This is the kind of example I had in mind in my earlier paper on grace. That view gives the correct output – if an agent is quiescent regarding x and God wills x, then God can bring about x – while it is also the case that the human agent controls (in the relevant sense of 'control' spelled out there) x. But in general I don't think this control is sufficient for our cooperating with God's volition in the sense at issue in the present paper. What we don't have yet, however, is an account of how the two agents are *cooperative* in bringing about x since the human agent isn't willing it (even if she's not actively resisting it).

Here, I think some suggestions regarding joint intentions by David Velleman might be useful. In a paper on shared intentions, Velleman's goal is to given an account of 'a plural subject that isn't just a plurality of subjects. That is, it ought to involve two or more subjects who combine in such a way as to constitute one subject, just as two or more referents combine to constitute one referent when subsumed under a plural pronoun' (Velleman 1997: 30).[45] And while Velleman talks about intentions rather than acts of willing, he understands them as what 'resolve[s] deliberative questions, thereby settling issues that are up to you' (Velleman 1997: 32).[46] He also talks about intentions as what can 'cause action', and thus a joint intention (in his sense of the term) can I think plausibly be understood as a volition. Similarly, his goal isn't to give an account of how two or more people can share the goal of producing a particular joint result (he gives the example here of two people deciding to lift a heavy sofa together), but rather it's being up

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[45] What Velleman is trying to avoid is having 'a plural subject as a mere *façon de parler*, a convenient way of summarizing facts about a collection of subjects who never actually meld' (1997: 31). There are other aspects of Velleman's account that I find problematic, such as his apparent conflation of a reason and an intention (the former might be necessary for the latter, but it's not sufficient; see 39f.). But these problems need not concern us at present.

[46] Granted, he takes intentions to be attitudes, but this feature of his view is detachable from the rest of his account for my present purposes.

to the two or more individuals whether or not a single joint intention or volition is formed. Velleman suggests that two agents might form a single intention to x by each having an intention of the following sort: 'I will [x] if you will' so long as such an intention is understood in the following way:

> It means, 'I hereby frame an effective intention that's conditional on your framing an effective intention as well' – that is, 'I hereby *will* it, conditional on your willing likewise.' And this statement just is the conditional willing that it describes itself as being. (Velleman 1997: 45)

Now, obviously this account by itself would not serve as a complete explanation of option (B). But perhaps we can modify it as follows, incorporating an insight from the hierarchical model examined earlier. In the hope of making this clearer, I'll frame it regarding a particular agent (Magdalen) willing a particular thing (x), but hopefully the way to schematize it will be relatively obvious:

> In option (B), Magdalen is unable (given (APC)) to will x. She is, instead, quiescent regarding x. But suppose that her will includes the following higher-order intention: 'I will accept God's volition regarding x so long as I don't will against it.' That is, if God wills me to x, I have the higher-order desire to let God's desire become my volition.

Now, note that this is a conditional desire, and not an actual desire (and thus not an actual volition in Frankfurt's sense). It is possible to have such a desire for a good without having, *simpliciter*, a good desire. In forming such a conditional desire, the agent is aligning with God's volition via the higher order desire in question (e.g., 'I will accept God's volition regarding x so long as I don't will against it').[47] But there's more here than just *mere* alignment insofar as the agent's will plays a crucial and irreducible role (namely, that she doesn't will against God's will). Both the agent and God thus are working together to bring about a single volition in the agent, thereby genuinely cooperating. Hence, cooperative agency. And this account of (B) is explicitly constructed to avoid violating (APC). Thus, I see nothing problematic in such a view.[48]

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[47] This is one reason that, despite my earlier arguments, I think that the identificationist model gets something importantly right.

[48] Robert Garcia, in personal correspondence, has asked if the schema would allow for the agent to be quiescent in the higher-order intention, such that the agent would accept God's volition regarding x if she was merely quiescent regarding accepting God's

Now, if this is an acceptable account of (B), it can also serve as an acceptable account of (E). The difference between the two was that on (B) the agent lacked the further grace that Augustine and Pelagius disagreed about. We don't have to worry about the uniquely graced agent violating (APC), for reasons addressed in my earlier paper. And if God can cooperate with an ungraced (in the relevant sense) agent as spelled out above regarding (B) to bring about *x*, then surely God can cooperate with a graced agent in the same way to bring about *x*.

Finally, option (D). Here too I'll begin with a conditional: if the account here can give an account of (B), then the account can also give an account of (D). Why think this conditional is true? Well, in the discussion of (E) I argued that the addition of the unique grace to the agent's will makes the account easier, not harder, since the Pelagian (and semi-Pelagian) worry is now off the table. Similarly, if an agent can engage in cooperative agency with God via her quiescence, then surely her actually willing what God wills (rather than not resisting it and being willing to endorse God's willing at a higher-level of volition) doesn't make that cooperative agency more difficult. On this option, the agent's will and the divine will are engaged in a joint volition. And I've suggested that Velleman's account of this might be *a* (though certainly not the *only*) way that this might work. In willing what God wills, the agent is 'forming an effective intention to *x* that's conditional on God's forming an intention for the agent to *x* as well and thereby conditionally willing *x* on God's willing *x* likewise'. Both wills are united to bring about a single volition for the agent to *x*.

IV. CONCLUSION

I think that such an account is not only a plausible reconstruction of what happens regarding the two wills of Christ in the Incarnation, but

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volition regarding *x*. I confess that I'm not completely sure what I should say about such a case, though I'm inclined to think that mere quiescence, rather than acceptance at some level, would not be sufficiently strong to unite the agent's will with God's volition in the relevant way. On the other hand, given my thoughts about God's essential loving nature, I also think that God would give all agents the benefit of the doubt, and this gives me some reason to think that higher-level quiescence rather than acceptance might be enough. After all, I'm inclined to think that God will redeem those who, despite suffering from original sin, are not able to wilfully reject God (because of young age, impairment, or other limitation).

also gives an account of how we humans can participate with God – in a very real sense – in bringing about His Kingdom, both in our own wills and also in the larger world. It also gives an account of cooperative agency that gets right those features that the identificationist model gets right, but provides a better way of reconciling a union between the divine and human wills in a way that preserves incompatibilism while also not violating the (APC). On this model, cooperative agency is truly a form of unitive agency, since the grace at the heart of the account aims at uniting us with God. We come to will and love what God wills and loves, not just alongside Him but united with Him. And especially for the Christian libertarian, this is a robust and cooperative sense of divine action in the world that I think we have positive reason to endorse.[49]

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THE POWER OF GOD AND MIRACLES

GEORG GASSER & JOSEF QUITTERER

University of Innsbruck

Abstract. In this paper we explicate the notion of a miracle and highlight a suitable ontological framework for it. Our proposal draws on insights from Aquinas's discussion of miracles and from the modern ontology of powers. We argue that each substance possesses a characteristic set of natural powers and dispositions which are operative or become manifest in the right circumstances. In a miracle divine intervention activates the fundamental disposition inherent in each creature to be responsive to God's call. Thus, a miracle brings something about which a substance's set of natural powers and dispositions could not bring about by itself.

INTRODUCTION

In Quentin Tarantino's cult movie *Pulp Fiction* an alleged miracle plays a central role: Vincent and Jules, two hitmen employed by crime boss Marcellus Wallace, are ordered to retrieve a stolen briefcase from a group of drug dealers. The hitmen arrive at their dealers' apartment and execute two of them but fail to notice that a third person is hiding in the kitchen. Suddenly this person jumps out and shoots at Jules and Vincent from close range. Miraculously, neither Jules nor Vincent receives a hit; both remain unhurt, even though the bullets hit the wall behind them. Here is the central dialogue about this event:

> Vincent: [...] Lighten up a little. You been sittin' there all quiet.
>
> Jules: I just been sittin' here thinkin'.
>
> Vincent: About what?
>
> Jules: The miracle we witnessed.
>
> Vincent: The miracle you witnessed. I witnessed a freak occurrence.
>
> Jules: Do you know that a miracle is?

Vincent: An act of God.

Jules: What's an act of God?

Vincent: I guess it's when God makes the impossible possible. And I'm sorry Jules, but I don't think what happened this morning qualifies.

Vincent: [...] You're judging this thing the wrong way. [...] You don't judge s*** like this based on merit. [...] What is significant is I felt God's touch, God got involved.

Vincent: But why?

Jules: That's what's f***in' wit' me! I don't know why. But I can't go back to sleep.

In this short dialogue Vincent provides a preliminary definition of a miracle: It is when God makes the impossible possible. In this paper we aim at explicating this notion. We do so by contrasting it with Hume's famous definition of a miracle and by specifying a suitable ontological context of "making the impossible possible". Finally, we address some worries which might arise from this account.

THE HUMEAN CONCEPT OF A MIRACLE

In *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* David Hume states:

A miracle is a violation of the laws of nature; and as a firm and unalterable experience has established these laws, the proof against a miracle, from the very nature of the fact, is as entire as any argument from experience can possibly be imagined.[1]

Without analyzing Hume's argument against miracles in detail, it is safe to say that it depends on the assumption that the existence of a supposed law of nature is supported by our experience and that the latter receives the highest degree of rational assurance. The idea is that the observation of events of type X being followed by events of type Y justifies the conclusion that there is a law of nature stating that all Y-like events are preceded always and everywhere by X-like events. Laws of nature are exceptionless regularities. Thus, if we notice an event of type X, we have the highest degree of rational assurance that the next event will be of type Y. As Hume puts it, we have "a firm and unalterable experience" according to which Y follows on from X.

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[1] Hume (1999), section x, § 12.

However, it is easy to imagine that our observations were mistaken. Maybe we took it that all X-like events are followed by Y-like events but in fact some X-like events were followed by Z-like events which are very similar to Y-like events and therefore we didn't distinguish accordingly, thus rendering our conclusion false. Or we rightly observed that so far all X-like events are followed by Y-like events but this past observation does not guarantee that the course of nature remains the same in the near or remote future. In other words, the assumption that it is rational to assign the maximal degree of assurance to the existence of a law of nature is hardly convincing. Yet to substantiate his view, Hume would have to show that it is always less rational to believe that an event *e* is an event not subsumable under a law of nature than to believe either (i) that *e* did not occur, or (ii) that the occurrence of *e* is at the end consistent with the law of nature, or (iii) that the alleged law of nature is not a law after all.

Among others, philosopher of science Nancy Cartwright argues that the Humean conception of a natural law as exceptionless and universally true should at best be considered an idealization of and abstraction from natural events which we are able to examine under highly specific and artificial laboratory conditions.[2]

If the best places to look for Humean natural laws are highly artificial lab conditions where potential interfering factors can be prevented, then it appears reasonable to be careful to apply Hume's formulation to real world instances. It would be less contentious if Hume had said that our observation that all X-like events are followed by Y-like events gives us a high degree of rational assurance that this particular instance of X's occurrence will be followed by an instance of Y's occurrence. It is reasonable to expect this course of nature, but a possible alternative course – however minimal its probability – shouldn't be excluded either. The difference between ascribing the maximal degree of rational assurance and a merely high one to a general statement taken for a law of nature is not as small as it might first appear: It separates a highly unconvincing claim with a not particularly controversial one.

Consider the case of an alleged miracle: The Humean notion of a natural law does not make miracles merely highly improbable (an assumption which easily can be accepted) – but utterly impossible as the above options (i)-(iii) show. The Humean notion of a miracle as

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[2] Cartwright (1999), 2-3.

a violation of a law of nature renders a miracle logically impossible, for by definition laws of nature cannot be violated. In addition, miracles appear on this view to be not only logically but also naturally impossible. The reason is simply this: If a miracle is a violation of a law of nature and laws of nature tell us which events are naturally possible, then a miracle is tantamount to a naturally impossible event.

A proponent of a Humean account might try to avoid the worrisome collapse of logical and natural possibility with the help of possible worlds. He could argue as follows: A naturally impossible event can be distinguished from a logically impossible by being impossible only in those worlds with the same natural laws as ours. In possible worlds with other natural laws, an event which is naturally impossible in our world may be naturally possible. Thus, the distinction between logical and natural possibility can be maintained by specifying the set of possible worlds we are referring to. Though this proposal is able to catch the meaning of "naturally impossible" in some worlds in contrast to others, it doesn't capture what most people traditionally think of as a miracle, that is, a logically possible but naturally impossible event caused by God.[3] For a translation into possible-world jargon says that there is a type of event which cannot happen in our world (or in a set of possible worlds with similar laws of nature) but which could well happen in a world with very different natural laws. Imagining that a miracle happened, however, does not mean imagining an alternative world with alternative laws; it means distinguishing between the realm of the logically possible and the realm of the naturally impossible and to imagine that a logically possible but naturally impossible event can actually occur in *our* world. There are several reasons for preferring this notion of miracle to a Humean one:

First, our preferred notion is conceptually broader because a miracle is an event beyond the reach of any natural laws. It is divinely caused and not resulting from a comparison between the effects possible because of the natural laws in our world and those possible because of any possible natural laws in any other possible world.

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[3] A less demanding meaning of a miracle is that an event is caused by God – irrespective of whether it is naturally impossible or possible. In ScG 101 Thomas Aquinas distinguishes between logically possible but naturally impossible and logically and naturally possible events caused by God. The latter is a miracle in a weaker sense than the former, but it is still a miracle because it is caused by God and not by a natural cause. Such account is also proposed in Mumford (2000), 280, where a miracle is defined as "natural events or facts which have a supernatural cause".

Second, our preferred notion captures the traditional meaning of a miracle as divinely caused and no sophisticated naturalistic re-interpretation is necessary. Avoiding such a re-interpretation suggests also that the traditional notion is neither flawed nor in need of replacement.[4]

Third, the occurrence of a miracle requires that an alleged Humean natural law be abandoned even though it would still be applicable to all other similar instances. If Jules and Vincent did indeed experience a miracle, then a Humean would have to abandon a law like "If someone fires live ammunition at a big animal at very close range, then this animal will be at least severely injured", even though this law might still work perfectly well for all other instances where someone aims at an animal with a firearm at close range. Wouldn't it be easier to acknowledge a miracle as an exception from a suitable natural law instead of jettisoning the law altogether? For how should a general law be formulated so as to encompass a singular divine intervention at a particular moment in history? Yet with no general law, a Humean is left empty-handed.

These considerations provide reasons to prefer a notion of natural law which allows for exceptions to general regularities for if there should be miracles then the Humean has no proper resources to integrate them into his or her account. In the next section we provide an account of natural laws along these lines – the normative account of natural law.[5]

LAWS OF NATURE, DISPOSITIONS, AND MIRACLES

According to E. J. Lowe natural laws have important structural parallels with moral or legal laws. Normative terms suggest that something should (or shouldn't) be the case: If the state legislates payment of one's taxes, then I should pay my taxes; if moral goodness requires me to help those in need, then I should help those in need; if it is forbidden to smoke in a public area, then I shouldn't smoke there. Similarly, a natural law states how an individual x of the substantial kind K is disposed to exhibit a range of characteristic dispositions under given circumstances, that is,

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[4] See, for instance, Lowe's harsh evaluation of the Humean proposal in his (1987), 272: "The [Humean] proposal is therefore an insult to the intelligence of those who believe that they *can* imagine a miracle to have occurred, implying as it does that they are simply confused."

[5] For a detailed discussion see the work of Lowe (1987), Mumford (1998a), (2000) and (2001) to which we orient ourselves.

how this individual should react given these circumstances. When we say, for instance, that a particular chemical x is explosive, we are saying that x possesses specific dispositions because x belongs to a certain kind K, so that a natural law expresses what kind of behavior is expected from x as a typical individual belonging to K under specific circumstances.[6] That is, a law of nature refers to the dispositions of "normal" individuals of some kind K to behave under specific circumstances. It does not state how an individual of a certain kind will *necessarily* act or react; rather, it tells us only what behavior or reaction should be expected from an individual of this kind. Accordingly, examples of natural laws like "Pure water reaches its maximum density at 4 °C" or "Polar bears have white coats" can be true even though for some reason not all instances of pure water reach their maximum density at 4 °C, or if some polar bear is born with a brown coat due to particular circumstances. Thus, a crucial advantage of a normative account of a natural law, as opposed to a regularity view, is that the former can allow for exceptions. The reason is that a law of nature, on this view, indicates a specific standard from which deviations are possible.[7]

It is important to note at this point that a normative account can distinguish between exceptions from the norm, on the one hand, and the deviation of normal members from their kind, on the other. Take for instance a polar bear with a brown coat. Assuming that all normal polar bears have white coats, this deviation from the standard could be due to a genetic abnormity affecting this particular polar bear. Such a case does not falsify the general law that polar bears tend to have white coats. There is only one situation in which the discovery of an exception cannot peacefully co-exist with a natural law – when the exception represents a norm of its own. Imagine that scientists discover that, in a closed-off Arctic costal strip, an entire group of polar bears is disposed to be born brown-coated. In this case, the general law "Polar bears have white coats" would be falsified, and a new law to the effect that a certain sub-kind of polar bears have brown coats would have to be added. Indeed, if a polar bear of the brown-coated variety were to grow a white coat, then this

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[6] Lowe (2006), 8.4.-8.6.

[7] Lowe (1980), 257, writes: "As I see it, the most that a law like 'Ravens are black' purports to tell us concerning individuals is what we should expect any normal individual raven be like [...] Such a law is 'normative' or regulative in force with respect to individuals, and it is precisely in this that its 'nomic' character resides."

would amount to an exception from the newly discovered brown-coated law. In short, natural laws can peacefully co-exist with exceptions as long as these exceptions do not constitute a normative value of its own.

One might worry about a normative account of natural laws on the grounds that it puts too much normativity into the natural world. The worry derives from the intuition that normativity is not simply "out there". Analyzing the natural world reveals substances, properties, events, relations and regularities among them, and these are descriptive facts, not normative ones. One might add that it is reasonable to presume that norms are instead the result of a specific norm-giving process as the issuing a law makes apparent. Without a specific legislative process a legal law cannot come into force.[8]

How might we set this worry aside? One way is to argue that natural laws are a species of normative laws, because they are given by God. Within a theistic framework, such a view is neither bold nor particularly controversial. However, it is hard to swallow for someone who wants to remain neutral regarding the existence of God or who for other reasons would shrink from making natural laws depend on a supernatural lawmaker.[9]

Arguably the easiest way to meet this concern is to ground the normative character of natural laws in a dispositional understanding of reality.[10] Recall that Lowe's normative account says that a natural law involves both a dispositional predication and a substantial-kind term; that is, it states the dispositions that are characteristic of a specific substantial kind. On this view, a given instance of predication asserts that an individual object of a particular kind has actualized its characteristic dispositions. "Polar bears are white" means that members of the substantial kind "polar bear" tend to be white. "This polar bear is white", instead, means that an instance of the substantial kind "polar bear" has actualized the typical disposition of being white. Assuming that dispositions are real properties in the world, we can argue that the

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[8] A similar account might apply to moral norms..

[9] See, for instance, Mumford (1998a): The notion of a law of nature as a prescription has obvious connections with the possible existence of a supernatural being that is the lawmaker.

[10] For a long time dispositions were kept out of most ontologies, but in recent decades they have made an astonishing comeback. See, for instance, Mumford (1998b), Kistler and Gnassounou (2007), Handfield (2009), and Marmadoro (2010), among many other publications.

normative character of natural laws indicates which dispositions reside in a specific substantial kind.

Take, for instance, a probabilistic law describing an individual's behavior, say a chemical *c* with a 0.5 probability of exploding under a type of circumstances x. The probabilistic law describes *c*'s tendency to react under x-type circumstances, not the way in which *c*'s instances have actually reacted in the world history under circumstances of type x. The reason is that dispositions need not be manifested. It might even be that there is no single instance of *c*'s actually exploding; even so, the law describing *c*'s 0.5 probability of exploding under x-type circumstances will remain true as long as it is indeed *c*'s disposition to explode with 0.5 probability under circumstances of type x.

The advantage of a dispositionalist understanding of natural laws is also apparent when we compare two identical world histories. The regularity theory regards natural laws as supervening on those histories. Two world histories containing the same actualized events have the same laws of nature because actualized events are the only ontological resources for construing such laws. Within an ontology that accepts dispositions, by contrast, one might argue that these two world histories, although identical in their actual unfolding, are not identical *simpliciter* because the worlds might differ with regard to unrealized laws, on account of dispositions which have not yet been manifested.[11]

Let us take stock: We argued that there are good reasons to construe a law of nature as a description of the dispositions or powers which a thing has in virtue of being an instance of a determinate substantial kind. A law of nature tells us, so to speak, how a normal individual of a certain substantial kind typically behaves or interacts because of its the dispositions and causal powers. Talk of a thing's "normal behavior" does not presuppose any prescriptive rules, but merely a dispositionalist ontology. A law of nature is a norm which indicates the dispositional character or range of powers residing in individuals belonging to the kind in question. Exceptions to the norm are surprising but not excluded because they can simply be thought of as the manifestation of other, less common, dispositions.

How does this view relate to miracles? We propose that, in a miracle, God activates the under normal circumstances hidden dispositional setup of a substance, so as to make it the case, for instance, that bullets

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[11] Mumford (1998a), 93.

cause no damage to an organic body. Consider Daniel 3: 27, which says that "the fire had no power" over the bodies of the three young men in the fire. This formulation captures the essence of the miracle: The fire had no power over the bodies because in this particular situation an additional power of the body was activated by divine intervention. Consequently, the fire's characteristic power to cause great harm in a living body remains unmanifested. Due to divine power the mutual exercise of the causal powers of the substances involved is affected, that is, the power of fire and of living bodies.

In such a situation the laws of nature remain valid; but, since they supervene on the dispositions of the substances involved, they are not manifested. God's additional intervening power alters the original subvenient base of the laws of nature. Divine (and also non-divine) intervention is no violation of the laws of nature because these laws express the manifestation of dispositions under specific circumstances. The addition of a new power to the mix, however, unsurprisingly changes the outcome from what we would have expected.

In his discussion in the *Summa Contra Gentiles* of the possibility of God's acting beyond (*preater*) the natural order, Aquinas elaborates this view. For him, a miracle would violate the natural order (*ordo naturalis*) only if natural causes were to produce their effects necessarily. This is not the case, however, because the intrinsic dispositions of things manifest their characteristic effects with a particular probability between 0 and 1. There is a certain inclination of a thing to "do more this than that" [12] which establishes regularity in nature but not necessity.[13] He says:

> Now, if someone says that, since God did implant this order in things, the production in things of an effect independently of its proper causes, and apart from the order established by Him, could not be done without a change in this order, this objection can be refuted by the very nature

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[12] See ST Ia IIae q1, a2: For if an agent were not oriented toward some effect, then it would not do this more than that.

[13] For Aquinas, the best available explanation for the regular behavior of entities requires the positing of (active and passive) powers and inclinations. The existence of powers in a thing grounds facts about the kind of effects which that thing can cause. Reference to the thing's inclination explains the intrinsic feature disposing it to cause some forms of effect more than others. This view has structural parallels to recent debates in the metaphysics of causal powers. For instance, Molnar (2006, chap. 3) discusses the physical intentionality of powers and Mumford & Anjum (2011, chap. 3) think of causes as tending toward an effect of a certain kind.

of things. For the order imposed on things by God is based on what
usually occurs, in most cases, in things, but not on what is always so. In
fact, many natural causes produce their effects in the same way, but not
always.[14]

In the light of such a view, any talk of "breaking the natural order" or
"violating the laws of nature" is misleading, since the modal force of
necessity is not present in nature.

Aquinas goes on to mention various conditions that are responsible
for the production of an effect which deviates from the *ordo naturalis*.
One such condition is that the agent has greater strength than the patient.
Aquinas gives the example of the tidal ebb and flow. Here, a celestial
"higher" body acts upon a natural "lower" one. The natural inclination
of water to move toward the center is in this way overcome by the more
powerful inclination of the celestial body to attract other bodies. This
interaction between the two bodies is not "violent" (*non violentus*) but
according to their respective natures.[15] Analogously, God – who has
maximal strength and is the highest power – can freely act upon any
creature without thereby acting contrary to that thing's natural powers.

DIVINE POWERS AND MIRACLES

The view presented so far is widely in accordance with dispositionalism or
a metaphysics of powers. Along with modern dispositionalists, Aquinas
holds that causation consists in the manifestation of a thing's powers.
If supernatural causes are added to this picture of powerful particulars,
then miracles become real possibilities.[16]

Embracing a metaphysics of powerful particulars, however, does not
suffice to account for miracles as traditionally understood. If causation
is analyzed exclusively in terms of a combination of powers, then the
causal effect would be the result of a set of powers exercised at specific
levels of intensity. The effect will occur when the powers taken together
reach a specific threshold required for a specific effect. However, on this
picture of aggregating powers, there is no qualitatively different role for
a supernatural cause. It would be just one additional power in the set of

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[14] ScG. III, 99, n. 9.

[15] ScG. III, 100, n. 4.

[16] It is a matter of dispute whether a supernatural cause is personal. At least *prima
facie* nothing speaks against the notion of an a-personal supernatural cause.

already existing natural powerful particulars acting upon each other. The specific causal role of the supernatural power would be to bring about (or to obstruct) a manifestation of a disposition had by that particular where that disposition is only realized (or obstructed) in circumstances which the supernatural power brings about.

At this point an immediate problem lurks: If the supernatural power is all-powerful, then it is hard to see how it could interact with natural powers at all because nothing could interfere with its causal agency. The consequence would be that all possible effects of natural powers to produce other effects than those the supernatural power causes would be completely neutralized. In order to avoid this consequence, we must assume that the supernatural power is not just an a-rational powerful particular with maximal strength but an entity that is able to determine and regulate its powers by will. Such an entity is a rational and free agent and as such fundamentally different from a causal power.

Causal-dispositionalist metaphysics tends to underappreciate this crucial difference between natural and rational powers. Take, for instance, the account recently proposed by Mumford & Anjum.[17] They argue that substances, in virtue of their causal powers, have a tendency or propensity towards a "preferred" outcome which is neither contingent nor necessitated but is rather a *sui generis* modality falling somewhere in between. The idea is that, in the space between contingency and necessity, causation has ample opportunity to operate. This is as true of natural substances as it is of agents empowered with free will. In both cases, any alternative possibilities there may be can be attributed to the kind of substance at issue. The reason is that a "preferred" outcome is not guaranteed but merely more or less likely to happen. Whether it does happen depends on the substance's causal set-up and on any causal interferers that may interact with it. Yet there is something that such an account doesn't seem to grasp. This is that a being endowed with free will is fundamentally different from other beings that lack these powers. Thus, it is likely that two different senses of alternative possibilities" are invoked when we attribute such possibilities to free agents, on the one hand, and to natural substances, on the other. Natural substances tend towards one effect only, as Aristotle noted in his Metaphysics. A hot thing is only capable of heating other (cooler) things, and if this "preferred" outcome is not manifested, then it is not because of the hot thing itself

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[17] Mumford & Anjum 2015.

but because of other interfering factors, say cold water or an icy wind, which inhibited the manifestation of the hot thing's power of heating. Rational powers, on the contrary, are "capable of opposite effects"[18] because a rational agent can possess a number of different reasons and accordingly a plurality of different options. Alternative possibilities are inherent in rational powers but external to natural ones; alternative possibilities are a distinctive feature of the structure of rational powers, whereas they only come into play in natural powers in the form of external interfering causal factors.

Properly understood, therefore, a miracle is not merely an effect of a cause that eludes the entire system of natural laws, but one which results from a cause that is essentially agential in character. A maximally strong power that is unable to control its own power-manifestations is ultimately unable to maintain entities with weaker powers in their existence because the maximally strong power would simply supersede them. Metaphorically speaking, all created substances with their respective powers would be swallowed by God as the supreme and ultimate power, in the same way that a black hole exercises such a strong gravitational effect that nothing physical can escape from inside it. Aquinas discusses in this context the idea of intermediate powers exercising a kind of buffering effect which enables a very powerful being to bring about small-scale effects.[19]

This strategy might be helpful in regard of a very powerful thing – say the blast of an explosion which manifests itself as a gentle wind at a far distance – but it is of little help when it comes to God. This is so because God is not just a great but *the supreme* power. No intermediate power could resist God's power so as to buffer God's small-scale interventions against God's full power. Any substance that is not all-powerful is inefficacious against a being which is all-powerful. For this reason, a complete understanding of the sort of modality operative in miracles points strongly toward causation by a powerful, free, and rational agent. Only as a free rational agent is God able to control the way in which, and the extent to which his powers are manifested at all levels of creation,

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[18] Aristotle 1046b, 4-5.

[19] ScG. III, 99, n. 2. Aquinas discusses what modern philosophers might call a "physical transference" theory of causation (see, for instance, Dowe 2000). He argues that a great power without free will can only produce effects in accordance to its power. The power of the effect, however, is sometimes less than that of the cause and therefore, by means of many intermediate causes, it is possible for a great power to produce a small-scale effect.

and it is because God is such an agent that he can act directly act upon natural things. Aquinas writes:

> Now, universal active power can be limited in two ways for the purpose of producing a particular effect. One way is by means of a particular intermediate cause: thus, the active power of a celestial body is limited to the effect of generating human beings by the particular power which is in the semen [...] Another way is by means of understanding, which apprehends a definite form and produces it in the effect. But the divine understanding is capable of knowing not only the divine essence which is like a universal active power, and also not only of knowing universal and first causes, but all particular ones, as is clear from the things said above. Therefore, it is able to produce immediately every effect that any particular agent can bring about.[20]

Let us take stock: We argued that an ontology of powerful particulars offers a model of causation that is well suited to accommodate miracles. There is no need to presuppose universal laws of nature that are broken by God's performing a miracle. On the contrary, a model which appeals to a modality somewhere between contingency and necessity provides the resources for a notion of causation enacted by powers that tend toward particular manifestations. This tendency allows for different causal paths given a variety of circumstances. It makes sense to think of God as one such circumstance that can change a thing's original causal setting. However, an ontology limited to powerful particulars is insufficient to cope with the classical notion of a miracle, for God – as an unlimited power – could not directly intervene in a world of particular and limited powers without destroying them. This makes it necessary to conceive of God as a (maximally) rational and free being which is thereby able to limit and adjust his otherwise limitless powers according to the specific circumstances in which the miracle is to occur.

MIRACLES: OBSTRUCTION OR TRANSCENDENCE OF NATURAL DISPOSITIONS?

For a realist account of dispositions and powers it makes sense to assume that a thing's existence and persistence conditions depend on its dispositions and powers. For a thing to persist in time, the existence of

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[20] ScG. III, 99, n. 3.

a sort of internal causal connection between the thing's earlier and later states seems necessary. This internal causal connection stems from the thing's inherent powers.[21]

An elm tree which for some reason is not disposed to grow the leaves characteristic of elm trees, but suddenly grows pine needles instead, can hardly be regarded as elm tree anymore: a a substantial change appears to have taken place. An animal which for anatomical reasons lacks the power to bark, being able only to meow, is a cat and not a dog, because dogs – for anatomical reasons – have no inherent power to meow. A substance is what it is in virtue of its dispositions and powers, and if these dispositions and powers suddenly change[22], then it makes sense to ask whether this change is not merely accidental but rather substantial. Given this understanding of a thing's existence and persistence, one might worry that God's acting upon a substance's natural dispositions might threaten its very existence. If Jules's and Vincent's body, due to divine intervention, acquires the power to be unharmed when penetrated by bullets, then one might wonder what kind of thing these miraculous bodies are. Along the same vein, one might wonder whether the bodies before and after the miraculous intervention are identical.[23] If getting hurt when being penetrated by a bullet is a direct consequence of the very nature of an organic body, then removing this power appears to amount to a substantial change – that is, the original body ceased to exist. Should we thus say that God, by performing a miracle, causes one thing to cease to exist and replaces it with a new one? Let us consider some possible answers to this question.

Here is a first answer: Imagine a natural inhibitor, such as a disease, attacking your nervous system and preventing you from moving your limbs. Though this change sadly affects your life considerably, it is not so fundamental a change that you cease to exist. Similarly, God's intervention prevents the manifestation of certain natural powers but does not affect others. As long as a big enough set of naturally functioning powers is retained, the existence of the substance upon which God acts remains unthreatened.

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[21] In the persistence debate this is sometimes called the "immanent causation requirement". For a detailed discussion on this topic see Zimmerman (1997), 433-471.

[22] Our intuitions might be different if a change takes place over a longer period of time, step by step, as Parfit (1984, 231-237) describes in the so-called spectrum cases.

[23] Adams (1992), 221-223, raises these concerns.

But this analogy is unconvincing, one might object, because it is reasonable to assume that there is a kind of natural fit between an inhibitor such as a disease that affects your nervous system, and your nervous system itself. Whereas your nervous system has a natural disposition to be affected by this disease, and the disease has a natural disposition to affect a human nervous system, in the case of a miracle there seems to be no corresponding natural disposition on the part of the creature. In addition, miracles appear to involve a more fundamental change than the one suggested in the example. Water turning into wine, people who rise from the dead, fire that doesn't burn, bodies that aren't injured when penetrated by bullets ... in all such cases, the set of naturally functioning powers of the substances involved shrinks to a minimum. What is retained from water once it has become wine, from a corpse once it is becomes a living person again, and so forth?

Here is a second answer: E. J. Lowe distinguishes between an individual substance's sortal persistence-conditions and its identity-conditions.[24] The former are the conditions under which an individual substance persists as an instance of a substantial kind. The latter are the conditions under which an individual substance is reidentifiable over time. Distinguishing these two types of condition enables us to account for the metaphysical possibility of radical change. It might be metaphysically possible for an individual living being, say Actaeon, to start life as a human and yet to survive a process of metamorphosis into a deer. However, since the sortal persistence-conditions of human beings do not allow for this type of change, the post-metamorphosis Actaeon is not a human being in the gestalt of a deer, but rather a real deer. He does not undergo a mere phase change, but rather a substantial change. If Proteus were to undergo this kind of transformation instead of Actaeon, by contrast, it would be a mere phase change, because it is part of the very nature of Proteus (and of other deities of his kind) to be able to undergo varied and repeated gestalt-changes.

Sortal persistence-conditions and identity-conditions can be brought into service to account for miracles. One might argue that the natural substantial kinds we are familiar with are sub-species of the higher-order supernatural substantial kind "creature" for all natural substantial kinds

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[24] Lowe (1998), 183-184. For Lowe the sortal-persistence-conditions are a matter of natural law, that is, the laws of nature determine what kind of development and change an instance of a specific substantial kind can undergo.

were created by God. Focusing on natural kinds alone, thus, provides a limited perspective on a thing's ultimate persistence conditions because those of "creature" allow that all instances falling under it can undergo a miraculous change while still remaining the same. Or one could argue that a miracle is a case of transubstantiation,[25] since one and the same individual is able to change its substantial kind.

Which interpretation is to be preferred, shall not be discussed at this point; the crucial insight is that Lowe's distinction provides conceptual resources for addressing the worry that ultimately a miracle amounts to a destruction of the thing in question.

Here is a third answer: The views discussed thus far have aimed to account for a substance's existence- and persistence-conditions from within, that is, by drawing on the substance's own metaphysical resources. Yet these accounts miss the crucial point that each creature depends fundamentally on the divine will. The claim that, necessarily, there is a core of natural powers which must be operative in order to maintain a substance in existence (or at least to retain the disposition of the substance's characteristic *modus operandi*) is reasonable within the framework of the natural order. A theistic framework, however, must also take into consideration the claim that God is the primary cause of all creation and that every moment of a thing's existence depends ultimately on the divine will. Hence any search for a form of natural self-maintenance grounded in a creature itself is idle. What the few occurrences of a miracle show, is precisely this ultimate dependence on the divine will. For this reason we shouldn't say that God is obstructing or deleting the causal powers of a creature when he performs a miracle. Rather, God acts on the creature in a way that is impossible relative to the creature's set of natural powers, but not relative to its *total* set of powers. Adams proposes this line of thought and reconciles it with the view that created beings are constituted by their natural powers and dispositions. He surmises

> that the most fundamental natural faculty of any created substance is its liability to be affected by God.[26]

In order to avoid any confusion, we propose to drop the term "natural" in this case. If God creates the world with regard to an eschatological purpose,

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[25] Lowe (1998), 184 and 186 uses this apt term.
[26] Adams (1992), 224.

then it isn't bold to claim that each creature possesses the fundamental disposition to be open to God's salvific action. This disposition is not deducible from the natural but the supernatural order. If this is the case, then a miracle does not contravene a substance's nature; rather it is in deep harmony with that nature, because it is a manifestation of the most fundamental disposition of any creature.[27] Accordingly, the causal profile familiar from scientific observation and personal experience is just one part of a substance's total creaturely dispositional set-up, where this set-up is ultimately directed toward our eschatological transformation. By virtue of this fundamental disposition, a creature continues to exist and to operate even if all of its natural powers are inoperative. Creatures are more protean than the natural order we are familiar with lets on. Only if God created a substance without the disposition to be affected by God would God's actions upon it "break up" its original causal profile and thus destroy it. In this case one might ask, however, why God would create such a substance in the first place because it doesn't seem to have a proper place within God's eschatological purpose. This is the answer we find most convincing and in good harmony with our ontological considerations on the one hand and the ultimate theological framework of the discussion on miracles on the other hand.

Here is a fourth answer which refers again to the creation's dependence upon the divine will but draws a more radical voluntarist conclusion from it: The worry that a thing's existence- and persistence-conditions are in tension with a miracle is a wrong starting point, for there is no need for God to respect any of these conditions. A creature's nature is something which God creates deliberately and which is therefore subject to change in accordance with his will. Aquinas flirts with this thought at least when he says that

> all creatures are related to God as art products are to an artist [...] Consequently, the whole of nature is like an artifact of the divine artistic mind. But it is not contrary to the essential character of an artist if he should work in a different way on his product, even after he has given it its first form.[28]

It makes sense to suppose that the existence- and persistence conditions of artefacts depend on the conscious being which uses them. If x used to

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[27] One might think of Rom 8, 18-22. The entire creation suffers and longs that its deepest inclination, being close to God, be realized.

[28] ScG III, 99, n. 6.

be a washing machine but, due to collective amnesia, is no longer used by anyone to wash clothes but rather as a storage space for dry clothes, then washing machines have gone out of existence and new artefacts have come into being. If this reasoning about the conventionality of artefact's existence- and persistence conditions is correct, and all creatures are artefacts with respect to the divine mind, then all creatures' existence- and persistence-conditions are from God's perspective conventional. The only fixed point is the divine power itself, as Aquinas observes:

> Hence, by nature's operation, what was corrupted cannot be restored with numerical identity. But the divine power which brought things into existence operates through nature in such a way that it can produce an effect of nature without it, as was previously shown. Hence since the divine power remains the same even when things are corrupted, it can restore the corrupted to integrity.[29]

CONCLUSION

In the dialogue between Vincent and Jules, Vincent defines a miracle as an event in which God makes the impossible possible. In this article we aimed to explicate this suggestion and to provide a suitable ontological framework. Our proposal draws on insights from Aquinas's discussion of miracles and argues that each substance possesses by nature a characteristic set of powers and dispositions which are operative or become manifest in the right circumstances. In a miracle, the impossible happens in the sense that divine intervention brings something about which a substance's characteristic set of natural powers and dispositions could not bring about by itself. Finally, we presented a variety of solutions to the worry that divine intervention threatens a creature's existence and persistence conditions. Our favorite solution is that each creature disposes of the fundamental capacity to be responsive to God's salvific action, and that a miracle is something like a triggering cause for the actualizing of this capacity. We take this account to be the most in line with a metaphysics of powers in a theistic framework.

This takes us back to the beginning. In the final scene of *Pulp Fiction* Jules and Vincent sit in a café having breakfast, when Pumpkin and Honey Bunny, two petty criminals, stage a robbery. It ends in a failure when Jules sticks his .45 under Pumpkin's chin. Here are excerpts from

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[29] ScG IV, 81, n. 5.

Jules's final monologue, in which he explains to Pumpkin why he is not going to kill him as he still would have a few hours ago:

> Jules: [...] You read the bible?
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> Pumpkin: Not regularly.
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> Jules: There's a passage I got memorized. Ezekiel 25:17. "The path of the righteous man is beset on all sides by the inequities of the selfish and the tyranny of evil men. Blessed is he who, in the name of charity and good will, shepherds the weak through the valley of the darkness." [...]
>
> I never really questioned what it meant. [...] But I saw some s*** this mornin' made me think twice. [...] The truth is you're the weak. And I'm the tyranny of evil men. But I'm tryin'. I'm tryin' real hard to be a shepherd.
>
> [*Jules lowers his gun, lying it on the table*]

Jules experienced what he believes to be a miracle. He felt what he took to be God's touch in his life. He cannot continue his present life as a killer but wants to discover where God wants him to be. His inherent disposition to be affected by God has been activated – and this, and nothing less, is the ultimate aim of a miracle. What this scene of *Pulp Fiction* correctly adds is that miracles are neither based on merit, as Jules notes, nor is the disposition towards man's ultimate end activated automatically as Vincent's reaction to the same event indicates. If a human being does not allow himself or herself to be touched by God, then even divine intervention is futile.[30]

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ON AN ALLEGED PROOF OF ATHEISM:
REPLY TO JOHN PARK

JEROME GELLMAN

Ben Gurion University of the Negev

In a recent article in this journal[1], John Park presents what he takes to be a deductive proof that the theistic God does not exist. That is because the theistic God is supposed to be omnibenevolent, and Park argues against this being so. Since God is not omnibenevolent, concludes Park, the God of theism does not exist.

Park summarizes his argument as follows:

> Like the logical problem of evil, the moral epistemological argument is a logical contradiction problem for theism. There is a contradiction in the fact that God is omnibenevolent, God has the power to provide knowledge of good and evil to human beings, and God at times gives immoral laws to people. (p. 127)

Park goes on to spell out the argument further, where 'God' is shorthand for 'the God of theism':

> God's omnibenevolence means that he has full knowledge of what is objectively right and wrong and that when God provides humans with laws and commands, they always should be moral rather than immoral ones. Given that God has full knowledge of what is objectively right and wrong and that he has the power to perform divine revelation, when he does provide humans with moral precepts and orders, they must be moral rather than immoral. However, God apparently does not always provide human beings with beliefs of objectively virtuous laws and commands. At times God seemingly gives people maxims of utter depravity and

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wickedness. The contradiction lies in the fact that some of the purported moral knowledge that is given to humans by divine revelation is at times ethically and objectively wrong. Therefore, the existence of God and the existence of the supposed immoral mandates are incompatible with each other, where given the immoral mandates, we may conclude that the omnibenevolent God really does not exist. Notice that in order to form the contradiction, one merely needs only one immoral command from God. (p. 127)

For the sake of the discussion, I lay out the main lines of the argument as follows:

(1) God is omnibenevolent. (Assumption to be disproven)

(2) If God is omnibenevolent, then if God provides humans with laws and commands, they will always be moral. (Premise)

So,

(3) If God provides humans with laws and commands, they will always be moral. (1,2,)

However,

(4) At times, God seemingly gives people laws and commands of utter depravity and wickedness.

So,

(5) It is not the case that if God provides humans with laws and commands they will always be moral. (3,4)

So,

(6) God is not omnibenevolent.

So, (7) the God of theism does not exist.

A few preliminary notes:

– Although Park is otherwise categorical in asserting that God does sometimes give morally depraved commands, in his summation Park states only that this is 'seemingly' the case. This is unfortunate, since there is no logical contradiction between a proposition p and a proposition that states that *seemingly* not-p. That is because *seemingly* not-p is consistent with the seeming being deceptive or otherwise discounted. So, no contradiction results. So, I delete 'seemingly' in (4) in favour of a categorical assertion.

  – Park apparently intends that God fully knowing right and wrong
    and being able to reveal such are included as part of what he
    means by God being omnibenevolent. Then one could deny
    that God is omnibenevolent by denying any one component of
    omnibenevolence.

Now, premise (1) states the premise to be rejected because it will generate
a contradiction. (2) states what Park takes, apparently, to be a conceptual
truth. (3) follows deductively from (1) and (2). Park spends several pages
to establish premise (4) categorically, without 'seemingly'. His examples
of horrid commands are from the Bible. Park cites chapter and verse
from the Old Testament, in the main, and some from the New Testament.
Park observes that God allows for slavery and blood vengeance, that God
commands unjustly the death penalty for a wide number of actions, and
does not deal well with women. God commands immoral warfare, such
as the eradication of Amalek, and commands Moses to kill innocent
people in war, tantamount to ethical cleansing. And so on. Given (4), (5)
and (6) follow in turn.

    Let us look at the overall logic of the argument. Park argues for
a contradiction between two propositions:

    (1) God is omnibenevolent.

And

    (4) At times, God gives people laws and commands of utter depravity
and wickedness.

    Now, from the fact alone that two propositions are contradictory it
follows that one must be false. However, nothing yet follows about which
of the two is false. As far as the above argument is concerned, one could
just as well deny (4) as deny (1). And, indeed, there are many people
who deny (4) in any case. There are those who do not believe in God in
the first place. Some believe in God but do not give credence to stories
of the Bible. Marcion and some Gnostics believe that YHVH of the OT
is not God. People of Eastern religions fail to believe in God or the Bible
at all. To none of these will Park's argument constitute a proof for the
non-existence of God. In fact, Park himself does not believe (4) to be
true. Altogether, we are talking about a vast number of people. They will
simply deny (4). No contradiction arises for them.

    The situation here is quite different from what it is with the logical
problem of evil. There the existence of evil is manifest to all, while God's

existence is not. So it makes sense to try to use evil to get a contradiction with the existence of God and then to conclude that God does not exist. But here that the stories of the Bible depicting YHVH as giving immoral commands are true is not manifest to all and easily denied by a great proportion of humankind, as it is by Park.

What Park's argument really does is present an *ad hominem* dilemma for believers in the Bible, who, if Park is right, will be caught in assenting to both of the contradictory propositions. That this is the true import of the argument is clear from the way Park deflects some of the attempted rejoinders to his argument. He can write in response to a suggestion of how to get out of his conclusion things like: 'I take it that most theists will not espouse this strategy' (p. 132). Or 'The burden of proof falls squarely on the theist' (p. 134). These quotations show that Park is after showing a contradiction in the beliefs of most theists, from which, the argument would be, it follows that most *theists* must give up their belief in God. This falls short, though, of being a *proof* of God's nonexistence, *per se*.

This way of understanding Park, and I can think of no better, has several problems. As an *ad hominem* dilemma against a theist, the theist could give up either one of the propositions forming the contradiction. It need not be the one that says God is omnibenevolent. Indeed, for the theist, that God is omnibenevolent might well be more entrenched, more foundational, to her thinking than that the Bible truly reports on God's evil decrees. Park has given an ostensible dilemma for the theist, but without providing any reason why a theist should reject one specific proposition in the contradiction rather than the other.

Secondly, Park misconceives the logic of some of the rebuttals to his argument. Park considers a theistic rejoinder that says that passages in which God is reported to have given immoral commands are simply not to be believed. God never really gave these commands. The passages are fabricated or misunderstandings and are not to be taken as revelatory. Park objects that the Bible is said to be 'holy', which should include all passages. So, Park avers, the theist cannot take this tack. But this reply is not to the point. Park should accept this rejoinder as showing that one *could* believe in God's omnibenevolence by denying premise (4). And the theist can do so simply by giving up the idea that every single Biblical passage truly reports God's commands and actions. The theist then will have to modify only the idea that the Bible being 'holy' implies that every word is to be affirmed. On what grounds *must* the theist give up on her central belief in God's omnibenevolence in order to solve the dilemma,

rather than make this secondary adjustment about the Bible being 'holy'?
Park offers no grounds.

Park further objects to the above rejoinder:

> The theist may respond that since God is omnibenevolent, only the
> moral commands are really from God while the immoral ones must
> be fabricated or must be misinterpretations. This is the criterion for
> separating legitimate holy passages from the illegitimate ones.
>
> However, the question at hand is whether the supposed God gave
> immoral commands or not. If one states that the supposed God did not
> do so because he is omnibenevolent, then one has simply begged the
> question at hand.

Park does not tell us just what question is being begged here and until
he does so his reply is not very helpful. For there does not appear to be
any question being begged. If the question is whether God gave immoral
commands, then to say that God could not have done so because God is
omnibenevolent does not beg any question. It is to give a direct *answer*
to the question, and one justified from a theistic point of view. For this
reply by Park to have plausibility he should explain why any question is
here being begged.

Park also considers a theistic rejoinder that he calls an 'appeal to
ignorance':

> God works in mysterious ways, and human beings are ignorant of his
> 'big picture', purposes and final educational means. One cannot know
> God's ultimate plan or purpose similar to how a small child cannot fully
> understand her parents' intentions, but one must be assured that the
> ultimate plan is such that somehow no logical contradiction exists.

Park rejects this rebuttal as follows:

> However, the fact that God works in mysterious ways does not
> necessarily mean that no contradiction exists. For, in making such
> a move, the theist does not take into account that it could equally be
> the case that even though the supposed God works in mysterious ways,
> the apparent contradiction still persists. It does not immediately follow
> from the appeal to ignorance that the contradiction has been eliminated.
> The property of 'working in mysterious ways' does not in-and-of-itself
> necessarily lead to the fact that the supposed contradiction must then
> be eradicated. Rather, at this first initial stage of assessing the appeal to
> ignorance and the property 'working in mysterious ways': it is equally

rational to conclude that there still may be a supposed contradiction or there may not be one, and thus, an agnosticism is warranted regarding the efficacy of the appeal to ignorance. It is equally rational that God works in mysterious ways always towards good or perhaps, on the other hand, sometimes towards evil. If the theist then claims that the supposed contradiction must be eradicated if God works in mysterious ways because the purported God is omnibenevolent, then this is once again begging the question.

I take Park's point to be that:

(8) God works in mysterious ways

does not give us a reason for thinking that the contradiction does not exist. That is because (8) is consistent with the truth of (4) and any other component of Park's argument. And that is correct. (8) is consistent with God being evil, in whole or in part. God might work in mysterious ways and yet be evil. Hence, (8) gives us no reason to think that the contradiction does not exist.

However, (8) fails to do justice to the position Park is rejecting. Consider the view of Mark Murphy, whom Park cites as an advocate of (8). Regarding the charge of wrongdoing by God in destroying the people of Jericho in the OT, Murphy invokes the view of sceptical theism to deflect this accusation. Murphy writes:

> The sceptical theists have argued against the claim that the existence of these worldly evils calls into question the existence of a perfectly good God by denying that we have adequate reason to believe that we are well positioned to assess whether there are goods that justify the permission of those evils ... . There is no reason to suppose that the human being's grasp of intrinsic value and the means of realizing it is sufficient to give us justified confidence that God inadequately responded to the intrinsic value of the Jerichoites. To take the most obvious point, the destruction of the Jerichoites is, so far as we know, part of or the best means to an organic unity that has greater (or not lesser) intrinsic value than would be available by leaving Jericho more intact.

Murphy's argument is that human beings are not in a position to assert that when God destroyed the people of Jericho God was doing something morally reprehensible. We are not able to make such a judgment, Murphy is saying, because we are not in a position to know what God knows and plans, and what justifying goods God brings about in the larger picture

as a result of the destruction of Jericho. *For all we know*, God's action against the people of Jericho was well justified from a moral point of view. Applying this argument here, what will be said is that we are not in a position to assert

(4) At times, God gives people laws and commands of utter depravity and wickedness.

While the laws and commands *appear to us* to have been wicked, we are not in a position to say so. *For all we know*, God, could have been acting in full moral justification when giving those laws. That is because God, in God's immense power and knowledge, could have been acting in a good way, given the total, organic picture of reality. Since that is the rejoinder, what a full understanding of (8) is saying is that Park does not have a right to premise (4). Whether (4) is true or not is, on this rejoinder, beyond Park's or anybody else's ken.

Understood in this full way, contrary to Park, the rejoinder, to be successful, need not prove that there is no contradiction between (1) and (4). It would be enough to have neutralized (4) as assertible and thereby block the deduction from going forward. So, Park's reply to this rejoinder fails. There may be other ways to attack this rejoinder, for example, by saying that God's evil decrees are deontologically evil and cannot be overcome consequentially in the long run. However, Park provides no convincing reply in his discussion of this rejoinder.

I suspect that Park might have had in the back of his mind some additional premises that he failed to have appear in his argument. If so and if these were added, perhaps the problems I have raised would not be telling. If my suspicion is true, it would be good for Park, if he can, to flesh out his argument in a way that would avoid the problems I have raised.

Although Park does not succeed to prove that God is not omnibenevolent, there does remain a question about the issue Park raises. One might ask: Why does the OT, inspired by God, depict *so many* apparently cruel and vicious acts and commands of God? God should have inspired only books that recorded acts of God that people could hope to emulate in their own lives. God should be presented as demonstrably and convincingly supremely merciful and gracious, in ways with which we earthlings could identify. Even if God's apparently evil acts of the OT were not, for very deep reasons, evil but the epitome

of good, they did not have to be written, or should have been but minor themes in the OT. Has a loving God truly inspired the OT?

Imagine that an 'OT$_e$' had presented God as acting and commanding *exclusively* – or nearly so – in ways that ordinarily if a human person acted in those ways they would be exceedingly *evil*. Then, surely, the above-discussed rejoinders would not be attractive to almost any theist. That would mean judging God to be omnibenevolent in the face of revelation that presents a radically different *picture* of God over all or it would mean dismissing the OT as a whole, or nearly so, as genuine revelation. And if an 'OT$_g$' had presented God *exclusively* in ways that ordinarily if a human person acted in those ways they would be admired as exceedingly *good*, then the challenge would not arise at all. Now imagine OT's with a gradual gradation from OT$_e$ to OT$_g$ on the scale of 'evil' divine acts versus 'good' divine acts as the content of these works, respectively. At what point of the proportion of apparently bad to good would the balance tip to where the proposed solutions might be convincing? No algorithm determines where the tipping point would come. Where it comes for a particular person will depend prominently on a number of factors, including whether a person believes independently that God is omnibenevolent, that the OT really *is* about God, that God inspired the OT, and their judgment about the amount and horrendous quality of the apparent divine evil depicted.

So, my question is this: Suppose a theist becomes deeply shocked and thoroughly bewildered by what he takes to be the inordinate extent to which (on the face of it) massive evil is perpetrated and commanded by God in the OT. It is not a matter of his judging the right or wrong of an individual law or divine action or even a series of such. To his reflected judgment, the OT as a *whole* is now much closer to OT$_e$ than to OT$_g$. The balance has lurched strongly in the wrong direction. Could such a theist then be warranted in coming to deny that God is omnibenevolent or that the OT cannot truly be depicting God?