THE IDEA OF A TRANSCENDENT GOD

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ABSTRACT

Part I - Theological Strands in Transcendence-Talk

Chapter I - The Concept of Transcendence

'Transcend' comes from the Latin 'tran(s)scendere': 'to climb over or beyond, surmount.' Obsolete uses of 'transcend' reflect this origin, having to do with the surmounting of some obstacle. 'A transcends B' has also been used to imply the relative superiority of A to B. 'Transcendent' has had a technical use in philosophy, where it tends to represent that which falls outside the bounds of some standard classification.

Running through the various senses of 'transcendent' is the idea of surmounting limits of various kinds. These may be spoken of in a 'neutral' or a 'loaded' way. In the loaded sense, limits constitute relative disabilities; in which case we are apt to call them 'limitations'. In general, transcendence has to do with rising above limits or limitations. Talk of divine transcendence broadly accords with this. God's being 'above', independent of and distinct from the world, may be construed as his being unbounded in many ways that the world and its parts are bounded.

Chapter II - God Transcends the World

One of the world's bounds that is transcended by God is the conceptual boundary delimiting the world as a whole. This is entailed by the doctrine of creation, and is also evident in the "Christian epistemology".

God also surmounts those conceptual boundaries that mark off the world's character, of which one aspect is its spatial character. 'God' does not take spatial predicates, whether concerning location or extension.

God's incorporeality is entailed by his non-spatiality and his numerical distinction from the world, but it evinces more clearly than these the understanding that God is personal, and therefore might have been expected to be embodied.

The Biblical view of God's relation to time is that he is eternal. Some notable theologians have adopted a view more obviously linked with transcendence, holding that temporal predicates, whether related to location or duration in time, are ruled out of association with God.

In the expression 'God is above the world' there is evident a new aspect of transcendence-talk. Like the utterance 'God is holy', this expression is essentially rooted in certain attitudes; e.g. of awe and worship. Talk of God's transcendence may thus be recognized as not simply descriptive, but to some extent expressive. The expressive content, however, involves implicit claims as to the character of God; for there are canons of appropriateness governing attitudes and responses. Their source in attitudes toward God allows us to discern new dimensions to the doctrinal strands already mentioned. Related to their common concerns are the claims that God is (1) free from limitations, (2) 'ontologically independent', (3) a necessary (i.e. imperishable) being, and (4) the object of one-way dependence.

That God is everywhere, is jointly entailed by his transcendence

of space, the Christian epistemology, and God's role as creator. This suggests that transcendence and immanence are not totally irreconcilable. The epistemological point also helps reconcile God's transcendence of space with the use (e.g. in the Bible) of spatial predicates in connection with God.

Chapter III - Unlimited Personality

God transcends not only the world, but also human personality. One manifestation of this claim is the doctrine of his omniscience. Others are doctrines of divine omnipotence, and unlimited goodness. God's freedom from man's moral shortcomings is expressed in such doctrines as divine impassibility. His moral transcendence lies not just in his greater opportunity for doing good and the use he makes of it, but also in his supreme moral insight and authority.

Chapter IV - God Transcends Human Understanding

The statement that God is absolutely incomprehensible is unintelligible, though the connection between it and the attitude of worship help explain its arising. Short of this, there is the view that God's nature does not readily take the application of familiar conceptual frameworks. This point also grows from the attitude of worship. There is a conceptual connection between holiness and intellectual impenetrability.

Chapter V - God is Holy

'God is Holy' is not straightforwardly descriptive. It is primarily an expression of praise, though it may seem descriptive because of (1) its grammatical form, (2) its 'second order' uses, and

(3) the existence of criteria governing its use. The last point shows how 'God is holy', though primarily expressive, implicitly involves objective claims about God; viz. that something about him merits the response expressed therein. By attending to the responses made by Christians to God and expressed in holiness-talk, one may learn something about what is implicitly claimed about him. Otto has undertaken such an analysis in The Idea of the Holy.

Otto centres his study on experience of "the numinous". The phrase 'mysterium tremendum et fascinans' is used as a guide to its exploration. 'Tremendum' is connected with the idea of 'fear' in the typical response to numinous experience. It suggests the attribute of awesome sublimity in its object. 'Mysterium' is also connected with this response, but is also associated with 'blank wonder' and 'stupor'. These point to the 'unfathomable otherness' of the numinous. 'Fascinans' picks out the element of 'profound longing' in such experience, which suggests the graciousness of its object. As well, there is a note running through all these elements which implies the extreme 'value' of the holy.

Holiness and transcendence differ in some respects, but are not sharply distinct. The logical content of transcendence-talk arguably springs from similar responses to those underlying the discourse of holiness.

Part II - Divine Timelessness

Chapter VI - Time and Times

The following are reminders about the conceptual scheme denied application to God by advocates of his timelessness. Time concerns

one way of locating things relative to one another. It is one-dimensional, uni-directional, and genuinely continuous. Temporal predicates may concern either location in time, or duration. Temporal particulars may be divided into (1) material bodies and persons, (2) states, processes and activities, and (3) 'happenings' (durationless events). Continuents may have either 'open-ended' or 'restricted' location. Duration entails open-ended location; also restricted location except in the case of eternal things. But location does not in general entail duration; though some particulars seem necessarily to be continuants, and some happenings are necessarily happenings to some continuant.

Chapter VII - Time, Planning, Intending and Acting

One use of 'plan' refers to an activity; one in which a person considers and decides what to do in order to bring something about. 'Something' here must be a future thing. For to plan is to presuppose a contingency about what is planned that does not obtain in the case of the present or past. 'A intends x' therefore locates an activity of A in time.

A logical requirement of saying that A intends x is that x lies in the future relative to our ascription. This is so, again, because of a contingency in x that is necessarily assumed in intending. This point indicates the temporal location of one who intends, via the logical requirement that there be a referent for 'A' during the limited time when 'A intends x' may be used. Ascriptions of intention with which something is done are different. Some of these involve mention of another event or state, and the intention may be viewed as one to

bring about that other event or state. Thus the temporal implications here are those involved in saying 'A intends x'. But any temporal implications of 'act' would also infect this sort of intention, since giving the intention with which is a way of explaining actions. This point also applies to a second form of intention with which; that in which a re-description of the action serves to identify the intention. The temporal entanglements of 'act' are obviously relevant as well to 'intentional action'.

Regarding 'act': an agent need not do something at exactly the time something describable as 'his action' occurs. But he must do something which is either prior to or simultaneous with 'his action'. Construing divine actions as 'timeless decrees' provides no exception, for decrees are effective in being issued.

It appears that planning, intending and acting all have inescapable temporal implications, and therefore could not be ascribed to a timeless God.

Chapter VIII - Timelessness and Conceptual Change

Talk of God's timelessness may be defended as an implicit appeal for conceptual change. One sort of change would be to continue regarding temporal becoming as an objective feature of the world, but not of God. But this proposal invites the breakdown of such concepts as those investigated in the previous chapter. This is underlined if we ask how a timeless God could know what is happening now. It seems he could not, for there is no way of expressing such knowledge which is free of temporal entanglements.

An alternative change would be to regard both God and the world as timeless. 'Becoming' would then be a subjective feature of human experience. Objectively, there would be only the relation of 'earlier (later) than' between events. Two arguments drawn from contemporary physics appear to support such a view, but on closer examination do not. This change would also involve some prima facie difficulties; e.g. it leads to an extreme dualism, for human mental events undeniably undergo becoming. Given this proposal, God might be seen as either having an unchanging mental life, or realizing that the changes occurring in it are subjective. But both of these options lead to an apparently intolerable upheaval in a wide range of concepts.

The conclusion is that divine transcendence must stand, if at all, independently of God's timelessness.

Part III - On Omniscience

Chapter IX - Omniscience, Knowledge and Perceptual Experience

Some things appear knowable only by perceptual experience. How can an incorporeal being, lacking sense organs, know these things? Knowledge without observation of one's intentional actions does not suggest an answer, for (1) some empirical happenings (e.g. some human free actions) are not the product of God's intentions, and (2) if we know without observation what we are doing, it is only because we have learned by observation what we can do.

The proposal that God 'just knows' all empirical facts might seem to deprive him of grounds for his beliefs and therefore of knowledge. But the need for grounds may be obviated if we assume a direct causal relation between states of affairs and God's beliefs.

Perhaps God's lack of sense organs need be no bar to his having sense-experiences. God could then have 'grounds' for his beliefs, though where these were sense-experiences they would differ from ours in being directly caused by states of affairs.

Chapter X - Omniscience, Foreknowledge and Freewill

A formula for God's omniscience is: For every p, if p, then God knows that p. This would include foreknowledge, as in (1) If, at any time, it is the case at that time that it will be the case that p, then God knows at that time that it will be the case that p. If states of affairs always (logically) permit true description in advance, then (2) For every p, if p, then it has always been the case that it would be the case that p. From (1) and (2) it follows that (3) For every p, if p, then God has always known that it would be the case that p. Together with (4) (some bridge premises), these are often taken to suggest (5) There can be no voluntary action.

Premise (2) may be challenged on the ground that statements regarding the future are not true until what they predict is causally determined. But this confuses the matter of a prediction's truth-value with the matter of what it predicts being determined and/or knowable. It may always have been true that p, without p's having always been determined or warrantedly assertible.

Premise (1) is defective if we grant that 'A knows (strong sense) that p' is not true unless A has conclusive evidence for p, where p is an item of non-basic knowledge. Although at any time it may be the case that it will be the case that p, it is not necessarily true that at that time there is conclusive evidence for p. Free human

actions are a case in point (assuming the incompatibility of freedom with determinism). It seems inconceivable that future contingencies should be the object of anyone's 'basic knowledge'. The limitation is in what is knowable, and not what God knows. Which suggests an amended formula for divine omniscience: For every p, if p, and p is knowable, then God knows that p. Thus omniscience need not include foreknowledge of free actions.

Chapter XI - Knowing and Acting

What we ascribe in ascribing knowledge cannot be understood without concepts of relevant behaviour. Although someone who knows that p may fail to act appropriately in relevant circumstances, we normally ask for an explanation of this failure. The fact that the requirement of appropriate behaviour may be suspended on occasion does not remove the need for a concept of how someone's knowledge inclines him to act (were it not for...). One who knows must (logically) be at least capable of action. But if God is incorporeal, surely he is disqualified (logically) as an agent, and hence cannot be said to know at all.

Part IV - God as Incorporeal Agent

Chapter XII - On Incorporeal Activity

A simple appeal to the possibilities of analogy is not enough to answer the question of how an incorporeal person may be said to act. The case for the necessity of a body to an agent begins to be met when the logical disparity between talk of action and talk of bodily movement is recognized. It is further undermined when we notice that talk of action applies to the movements of a body other than the putative agent's,

as well as to movements of material other than bodies, and to events that are not material movements. It may be thought that a body is still needed to (1) distinguish actions from other events, and (2) determine who the agent is. But this is true only given the contingent facts of human agency: (1) that humans have the limited repertoire of basic actions they have, and (2) that there is a plurality of potential human agents. Events may be distinguished as divine actions according to their (1) unlikelihood apart from agency, (2) apparent purposefulness, and (3) accord with beliefs about God's intentions and character. Viewing some of the world's events as divine actions may seem to entail viewing the world as God's body. But there are aspects of God's alleged relation to the world that offer a contrast with the relation of persons to their bodies.

Chapter XIII - Persons, Bodies and Identification

'Incorporeal agent' may be challenged via the notion it assumes of 'incorporeal person'. Arguments in Strawson's Individuals provide a foundation for the challenge. According to Strawson, the concept of any specific kind of particular must allow for means of identifying particulars of that kind. The spatio-temporal scheme with ourselves and surroundings as reference point provides the unified system for identifying all the particulars we recognize. They are all either material bodies or uniquely related to some body. Re-identifiability is also required of particulars, and bodily continuity provides the basis for meeting this need. 'Person' is a primitive concept. It refers to an entity such that it necessarily possesses both consciousness-entailing and corporeal attributes. In the latter are necessarily found the means

of identifying and re-identifying persons, and of providing logically adequate criteria for the ascription of consciousness-entailing characteristics. How, then, can an incorporeal God be (1) identified, (2) re-identified, and (3) spoken of in a way that entails particular states of consciousness?

Part V - Transcendent Personality

Chapter XIV - God: Identification, Re-Identification and Mentality

In identifying God, we are not selecting one individual from the world, but an individual distinct from the world. He is therefore identifiable by his being of a unique kind; a kind that does not in logic admit of individuation within it. (Bodies are normally needed for identification largely because kinds normally admit of duplication.) There could, logically, be one incorporeal person at most. If God is seen as related to all the world, there may in principle still be a logic of discovery about him.

Since the possibility of a plurality of gods may be logically excluded, there is no need for a criterion of re-identification.

The possibility of criteria for applying consciousness-entailing predicates to God is supplied in the possibility of his acting defended in Chapter XII. Hence God without a world apparently could not be a person. But God could (logically) act without a world. He can at least have the general capacity for action even if there is no world. And if he can create, then in the absence of a world he does not lack even the opportunity for action. (A 'remediable' lack of opportunity is not a real lack.) Hence the world is not necessary to support the idea of God as a person.

Footnote references in the thesis are made according to the following convention. On the first occasion of reference, the author's surname (where appropriate) is followed by the title of the article or book, then the page or section number. Subsequent references will include only the author's surname and the page or section number, unless more than one work by that author is referred to in the thesis, in which case the particular title will also be given. Publishing details for articles and books are available in the Bibliography.

INTRODUCTION

There are two faces to this thesis. On the one hand there is a theological interest evident in its subject and in some aspects of its method. On this side, I want to tackle part of the question of what Christians mean by the word 'God'. Specifically, I should like to uncover some of the things that Christians say and believe about God which are represented in speaking of him as 'transcendent'. On the other hand, it is undesirable as well as impossible to keep that investigation insulated from the sort of questions that philosophers might ask; questions about the intelligibility of those things which are exposed by our theological investigation of transcendence-talk. In Part I of the thesis I shall try to give an account of the doctrines which contribute to the Christian view of divine transcendence, and to suggest something of their common roots. Parts II to V deal with a variety of philosophical problems which spring in one way or another from the statement of those doctrines. There are, of course, other views of God than the Christian one, and other Christian views than what I shall call the 'traditional' one. If the conceptions we examine turn out to be basically unsound there are clearly others to be canvassed. Even if we get a more positive result, we must not forget that we have looked at only one rough set of alternatives.

I have singled out <u>Christian</u> beliefs about God as the subject of my enquiry. There are reasons against confining ourselves to Christian views on this subject. For one thing, it is all too easy to assume what has frequently been taken for granted in western approaches to religion; namely that the options in religious belief

are exhausted by that faith which is most prominent in one's own culture. For another, there is (paradoxically) a discernible growth in western cultures of interest in religions other than Christianity.

But there are better reasons, in a study like this, for confining our attention to Christianity. On practical grounds, it is important to keep our enquiry manageable by limiting its scope. And even if we must avoid being provincial in our consideration of religion, there is some sense in starting with an analysis of that faith most accessible to us, provided we keep in mind the dangers of religious tribalism.

I shall be taking a number of things for granted in this study; among them one unspectacular cluster of points which may nonetheless be worth making explicit. I shall assume, for one thing, that whatever else being a Christian entails it involves believing that certain utterances such as 'God exists' and 'God loves us' are genuine (and true) assertions concerning matters of fact. That is, such utterances are not simply dressed up expressions of how one views the world or how one resolves to behave, nor are they disguised recommendations to others of a particular world-view or a way of behaving. I shall further assume that the term 'God' in the Christian framework is used to represent an individual entity,* a being of some sort, though of a very special sort. I know that a number of influential

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* It may seem at least bloodless and perhaps even blasphemous to speak of God in this way. But I am not trying to represent adequately the full Christian view of God, simply the rough logical order to which talk of God is held in traditional Christianity to belong.

theologians, including Rudolf Bultmann, John Macquarrie and Paul Tillich, would challenge this assumption. Briefly, I can only submit that such a notion seems fundamental to the bulk of Christian practice and theological thinking. To make this point against one who doubts it would obviously require a good deal of careful argument. But that is not the ground I have chosen to cover. A third and related point in this cluster is my assumption that according to the Christian view, that unique individual being whom Christians call God is appropriately thought of as in some way personal. The qualification 'in some way' is necessary, for Christians do not believe that God is a person just like human persons. But in responding to God, and therefore in speaking of him, Christians believe themselves justified in regarding him as more like a person than anything else.

In summary, I have assumed that Christianity includes in its fundamentals some alleged truths concerning a unique personal being called God.

A comment on the word 'transcendent' which appears in the title of this thesis. 'Transcendent' is a word belonging to the vocabulary of technical theology. Even in that specialized discourse it may seem to occupy an especially remote place. 'Transcendent' is not a word that figures much, if at all, in the language of prayer or of the Bible, or in the common parlance of ordinary Christians. Indeed the specifically theological use of this word apparently dates only from the latter half of the nineteenth century.* For these and other reasons it may appear

* See The Shorter Oxford Dictionary, Vol. II, p. 2229. Also Hastings (ed.), Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics, Vol. III, p. 167.

that to launch an investigation of this concept is to embark on a singularly esoteric example of the philosopher of religion's craft.

It is part of my argument, however, that the role of this notion in technical theology is to gather together a number of strands of religious belief which have from the beginning been held by Christians to be among the essentials of their faith. (It is significant that G. L. Prestige devotes a chapter of God in Patristic Thought to 'Divine Transcendence' - he translates ὑπεροχή as 'transcendence' - under which heading he considers a number of patristic doctrines about God.) Accordingly, I intend to use this word as a conceptual heading for a group of closely-related beliefs about God. This explains the fact that while I shall pay some small amount of attention to the word 'transcendent' itself, my chief concern is with the extended family of beliefs which in various ways is housed under that term. For it seems to me that under this heading can be placed some of the things which Christians seem most anxious to maintain about God, which at the same time give the most trouble to one who reflects on the subject of God, whether from within or outside of the Christian faith.

Part I, in which I have tried to set out the major components of talk within the Christian tradition of God's transcendence, poses a methodological problem. Christian theology has never spoken with one voice, perhaps least of all in the twentieth century. There are, to begin with, straightforward disagreements among Christians as to what the truth is concerning God, and which truths among those that might be agreed upon deserve

the greatest relative emphasis. This fact alone makes it difficult to say with assurance that this or that belief about God is held by Christians and moreover held by them to be important. More troublesome is the fact that in many cases theologians have differed over the sense to be assigned to a particular doctrinal utterance. In some instances, such as the Virgin Birth, this may help to account for differences over the acceptability or importance of a particular doctrine. But in others, such as the Incarnation, there seems to be substantial agreement on the importance of a doctrine, amidst disagreement as to its precise sense. But there is another and still more troublesome difficulty evident in the history of Christian doctrine. It is that theologians not only contradict one another about the truth or importance or sense of particular beliefs, they frequently appear to base their disagreement on allegiances to differing conceptual or metaphysical schemes. It is clear that in the course of Christian theologizing a number of such conceptual frameworks have passed into and out of acceptance. It seems a feature of the contemporary theological scene that a variety of these viewpoints find favour amongst theologians, crossing the purposes of many a theological discussion. All of which makes any attempt to report the views of Christians under a heading like 'transcendence' difficult indeed.

In the face of this complex difficulty I have adopted a fairly summary solution. What I have attempted to do is to trace out the bare bones of what must be agreed to be at least a prominent member of the Christian theological tradition; a creature I shall, without any pretension to precision, dub the 'traditional' or

'classical' view of God. In attempting this, I have tried to do without any metaphysical or conceptual assumptions that seem specific to a particular epoch of theology and not an essential part of this ongoing 'tradition'. Practically, this means eschewing as far as possible any dependence on the specialized vocabulary and conceptual apparatus (such as 'substance' and 'form') peculiar to some such view. It would be naive of me to suppose that expressing this tradition as informally as possible renders it free from metaphysical assumptions. I can only argue that the assumptions left in the sketch I make are assumptions that seem consistent with those made in this theological tradition.

Part I of the thesis is largely expository. Where argument occurs it is accordingly sketchier than would be appropriate in Parts II through V. I have done little to substantiate my judgement as to what the doctrinal components of divine transcendence are, or to suggest how the outlines of traditional Christian theism are to be determined. This is so because I hope to produce a sketch which is, in the main, uncontroversial and obvious, at least in the doctrines it includes.

Confining my attention to one brand of Christian theology, particularly when there seems almost a glut of newer models on the market, may require some defense. My first reason for choosing this ground is that the 'traditional' elements in theology which I shall try to explicate <u>are</u>, I think, traditional. They constitute an important part of the faith of a majority of Christians throughout the history of the Christian movement, and unless I am mistaken are still prominent in the beliefs of at least a great many

ordinary Christians as well as theologians today. A second reason follows from this. It is that the most troublesome intellectual difficulties attending Christian belief seem to take as their starting point something like this traditional conception of God, a fact which appears to surface in the debates amongst philosophers as to the content and credibility of Christian belief. The liveliest discussions amongst philosophers on this subject still seem to centre, rightly or wrongly, around the classical Christian view of God. Finally, one factor in the emergence of 'new theologies' has clearly been the view of some theologians that the traditional picture is no longer rationally tenable. In fact, 'new theology' frequently grows from an explicit acceptance of criticisms brought to bear on the traditional view by some contemporary philosophers. The criticisms may, in the end, stick. But the matter is worth a closer look than has sometimes been given.

PART I

THEOLOGICAL STRANDS IN TRANSCENDENCE-TALK

CHAPTER I

THE CONCEPT OF TRANSCENDENCE

> The language of 'transcendence', the thought of God as a personal being, wholly other to man, dwelling apart in majesty -- this talk may well collapse into meaninglessness in the last resort. And yet to sacrifice it seems at once to take one quite outside Christianity. (In saying that I do not feel guilty of making an arbitrary definition of what Christianity is.)*

Let me draw attention to two things in this quotation. The first is its author's belief, which seems to me both widespread and substantially correct, that the notion of 'transcendence' is absolutely fundamental to Christianity. The second is that the writer finds it worth amplifying his use of this word with a number of phrases to indicate something of what he has in mind as so essential.

On the first point, while it does seem true to many that Christianity is dependent on some notion of 'transcendence', there is considerable controversy in contemporary theology as to whether this notion is indeed essential to Christianity, as well as to how, if it <u>is</u> in some way essential, it is to be understood. "The question of God is the question of transcendence" said John Robinson in <u>Honest to God</u>.** And Robinson is not alone in seeing the current debate in theological circles concerning the notion of 'God' as centred around the idea of his alleged transcendence. A persistent theme in this debate has been the

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* Hepburn, <u>Christianity and Paradox</u>, p. 193f.

** p. 51.

discontent of many theologians with the characterization of God they find in traditional Christianity. And one way in which this discontent has been expressed is as an objection to the traditional insistence upon, or interpretation of, God's transcendence.

But it is not altogether clear just what the debate is about from the simple description that it concerns transcendence. Which brings us to the second point in the quotation with which I began. It is important to specify just what things are included in the idea 'transcendence' when used of God, for it is difficult to avoid the impression that there is a considerable variety in the views being attacked or advanced under this banner. Indeed it seems likely that the 'current debate' stems not simply from disagreements as to the merits of the notion but also from deep-seated differences as to what is to be included and/or emphasized in its scope. In A Handbook of Theological Terms, the entry on 'transcendence' is prudently introduced with the following remark:

> An inspection of the history of philosophy and theology reveals that the precise significance of the term in any particular work must be determined from the context.*

It seems clear that in the literature of theology the word 'transcendent' functions as a sort of umbrella, lacking a standard model amongst those who use it, and offering shelter to a varied assortment of conceptions as to the nature of God. The concept of 'family resemblances' as applied to word-meaning could hardly find a more ready application.

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* Harvey, p. 207.

What I shall attempt to do in Part I is to identify the most prominent and important candidates for inclusion in the family tree, as well as to suggest some of the ways in which they seem to be related. In attempting this, it is important to avoid a compound danger to which Professor Ninian Smart has drawn attention.* The danger is that we may ignore the fact that religious doctrinal statements tend to be embedded in (a) some <u>scheme</u> composed of a number of beliefs, many of which impinge upon one another in complex ways, and (b) a faith which is typically expressed in certain activities, such as worship and 'good works'. Regarding (a), the point is that the impact of any particular doctrine is determined partly by <u>other</u> doctrines which figure in the body of beliefs of which it is a part. Any attempt to grasp such an item of religious belief must therefore take into account the doctrinal context in which it is set. Part of the import, for instance, of the Christian doctrine of creation is that a fundamentally affirmative attitude toward the world is appropriate. But this is clear only when attendant doctrines about God, e.g. his goodness and power, are added to the bare assertion that the world owes its existence and character to him. In the same way, as we shall see, those beliefs about God which may constitute a belief in his transcendence show the influence of other Christian beliefs about his nature and activity. But, as part (b) of this caution should remind us, it is not just their surrounding doctrinal pronouncements which throw light on particular religious beliefs. A key to understanding

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* <u>Reasons and Faiths</u>, pp. 11-14.

these beliefs is also some awareness of the kinds of behaviour which are seen as consistent with or even entailed by the faith of which they are a part. Smart points to an obvious example: "to gain an inkling of the nature of the concept God it is surely requisite to look to the worshipping activities that surround, so to speak, belief in the divine."*

Considerations like these inevitably mean that this investigation will be less tidy than one might like. They also mean that the outcome is certain not to be a meaning for the word 'transcendent' as applied to God in the Christian tradition, but something more like a conceptual network.

A. The Word 'Transcendent'

I have already indicated that the word 'transcendent' is not to be the chief object of scrutiny in this thesis. I have suggested that it be used as a convenient heading under which to assemble several connected beliefs as to what God is like. It may nevertheless be worth spending a few pages in considering the etymology and history of this term and its relatives, so as to get some feeling for the sort of umbrella it might be and therefore of the kinds of things that might be found beneath it.

'Transcend', 'transcendence' and 'transcendent' are not words that appear frequently in contemporary 'ordinary' English. They do occur, and in contexts other than theological. But their use is not so rich or so central that it seems worth attempting the

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* Ibid., p. 14.

sort of logical map that philosophers produce of words like 'free', 'action', 'know', 'explain', and so on. However, a look at the dictionaries does throw light, I think, on the theological senses of 'transcend', etc.; both from the contemporary secular employments of this family of expressions and from its history.

'Transcend' comes from the Latin 'tran(s)scendere': "to climb over or beyond, surmount".* This origin is most clearly borne out in a now obsolete sense of the verb: "to pass over and go beyond (a physical obstacle or limit); to climb or get over the top of (a wall, mountain, etc.)" as in "That we may transcende this ryver safe and sure".** A second sort of use, one which survives in contemporary speech, abandons the idea of a physical barrier or limit in favour of some non-physical limitation or obstacle, while retaining the idea that this limit is somehow risen above or surmounted. So someone may be described as "a genius almost transcending human nature",† or it may be said that "it was part of Pascall's achievement to include and ultimately transcend the attractive and persuasive scepticism of Montaigne."††

Not all uses of 'transcend' and its derivatives lay such stress on the overcoming of obstacles or limitations. It may be that in saying "A transcends B" there is merely the intention to assert a relative superiority of A to B in some respect or other.

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* A New English Dictionary, Vol. X, Part I (TI-U), p. 252.

** Ibid. The example is ascribed to Bradshaw, 1513.

† Ibid.

†† The Times Literary Supplement, p. 1314.

Thus it was noted in a late nineteenth-century book on electricity that "Electromagnets far transcend permanent magnets in power."* There is obviously no suggestion here that the limited magnetic power of permanent magnets acts as any kind of barrier or constraint. Another use, not unconnected with this example, is illustrated in the form 'A is a transcendent ϕ'. Milton, for instance, referred to "That transcendent Apostle St. Paul."** The point of an utterance like this is plainly that A is an outstanding member of its class. It seems unlikely that uses of this latter sort figure largely, if at all, in contemporary speech about transcendence. But they are at least members of the family, and we may find that some of their features live on in more lively members.

'Transcendent' has of course seen employment as a technical word in philosophy. According to Aristotle there are concepts (of which 'being', 'unity and 'goodness' are examples) which are, in his terminology, neither categories nor members of categories. These predicates came to be called <u>transcendentia</u> by the Schoolmen, on the view that they 'transcended' or failed to fit within any one of the traditional categories. In a way that appears similar but is importantly different, Kant labelled as 'transcendent' that which lies outside <u>his</u> list of 'categories', the <u>a priori</u> forms of experience. He thus distinguished the 'transcendent', that which lies beyond any possible experience or knowledge, from the 'transcendental', that which provides the <u>a priori</u> requirements of

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* <u>A New English Dictionary</u>, p. 252.

** <u>Ibid.</u>

any experiencing. These specialist uses in philosophy seem to have fostered a less technical sense which has passed out of common usage. In 1646, Bishop Maxwell greeted what he considered to be a theological extravagence with the words: "I confesse, this Divinitie is so transcendent and metaphysicall, that it exceeds my capacitie."* Akin to this appears another non-specialist sense, also obsolete. An entry under "'transcendent', the adjective used absolutely," reads "A person or thing that transcends classification", as in a sermon preached in 1608, "Both were transcendents not to be placed in the classes or rankes of hitherto experienced or practised wickednesse."** The non-technical notion of something's being of such a kind that it does not lend itself to the usual classifications is clearly related to the philosophers' idea of a concept lying outside the conceptual framework with which he begins.

There are other and more eccentric members of this family tree, but this rough outline may provide some impression of family characteristics which theological uses of 'transcend' and its cognates may exhibit in various and perhaps subtle ways.

A thoroughly adequate picture of the theological uses of transcendence-language could be produced only by engaging in a systematic survey of such talk in theological contexts; a task from which I hope to have excused myself in stating the role of the word 'transcendent' in this thesis. But we are interested in gaining some overall impression of the sort of things transcendence-talk may

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* Ibid.

** Ibid.

be used to cover. I suggest there are inklings to be gained even from this cursory look at dictionary entries.

B. Transcendence and Limits

One thing that seems to stand out in the senses mentioned of 'transcend' and its derivatives is their common association with the idea of limits. It is clear that a great many things may be spoken of as having limits, and there are accordingly limits of an indefinitely large variety and number. Physical things have, among other kinds of limits, physical ones; i.e. spatial boundaries to their extension or outreach. There are limits to the range of radio signals as well as to the area of this table top and to the field of play in football; though these are established in various ways. Physical things are frequently, if not always, subject to temporal limits as well. They tend to exist, as a particular of this or that sort, for limited temporal period. But it is clear that physical things may have limits other than spatio-temporal ones. Lead has a limited value, and spiders have a limited appeal. These are limits, though not physical limits. Of course there are many more kinds of things with limits than physical things. Trade between countries is limited, and so is the scope of government action in dealing with a strike. There are limits to one's influence and on one's financial liability. As well as limits to one's patience and powers of persuasion, there are speed limits and limits on the amount of sterling one may legally take out of Great Britain. The variety of things that may be spoken of as having limits is obvious, and so is the multitude of conceptual frameworks according to which their limits may be described. It

is therefore with trepidation that anyone should try to identify a common theme running through all these uses of 'limit'. Nevertheless, it seems plausible to say at least this in general about the concept of a limit; that it depends on there being finite quantities or extents or amounts of that which is said to be limited.*

It may be felt, however, that there is a certain oddity in what has just been said about limits; and this oddity turns out to be relevant to our present concern. It seems almost a matter of logical necessity that things should have limits of at least some kinds, but we do not on that account find it necessary or appropriate to describe them as 'limited' or 'having limits'. Behind this observation lies an implicit recognition of what may be called a 'loaded' use of 'limit'. Sometimes when we speak of someone or something as having limits of one sort or another, we mean to suggest that the extent or amount of the limited aspect is less than usual in particulars of that kind, or is less than adequate for the achievement of some purpose. In this way we may speak of someone's having limited use of his limbs, or a limited acquaintance with some subject. The term 'limitation' suggests itself here. For it is at least one use of this word to indicate a relative privation in some respect. A limit may constitute a relative disability or inability; and when it does we are apt to call it a limitation. These are illustrations of the 'loaded' associations which may attach on occasion to talk of limits. They help explain why, although things necessarily have limits in a sense,

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* The notion of a 'limited person' may seem to be a counter-example. But this is plainly an elliptical expression having to do with limitation in some respect or other, e.g. imagination, or self-confidence, etc., which the context usually suggests.

in another sense it seems misleading to speak of them as 'having limits' or 'being limited'. It seems so because in drawing attention to their limits we may be taken to suggest that they have limitations (in the above sense) even when that is not our intention.

But there is a perfectly respectable, 'neutral' use of 'limit' and 'limited'. Sometimes we may find it worthwhile to remind ourselves or others of the truism that this or that thing is finite in its quantity or scope or capacities, though it is not necessarily inferior to others in these regards. 'There are limits to what he can do' is true, and moreover obviously true, no matter who 'he' is (except perhaps God). But it is nonetheless effective as, say, a rebuke to one who ascribes more power to another then that other person has. It should not be taken, apart from some context, to mean that 'he' is relatively powerless. The sentence 'There are limits to what he can do' can obviously be used in either a loaded or a neutral way, depending on its setting.

It is worth noticing the importance of limits to the general practice of using concepts. To employ a concept is necessarily to abide by certain restrictions; to limit one's use of the concept in certain ways. The concept of a certain sort of particular, for instance, must include means by which particulars which may count as applications of the concept are distinguished from those which may not The concept of a specific activity or attribute likewise presupposes that that activity or attribute is in some way distinct from others; that the concept has limited application. Moreover concepts exist in networks, which are in turn limited in their legitimate employments. To select a concept is also to select a scheme in which it is linked

with other concepts; and to apply the concept is to imply that its application is a member of that limited class of things to which the network is appropriate. The idea of boundaries is in this way bound up with the use of concepts. Their employment depends on establishing boundaries between individuals of the same kind, and between different kinds of individuals. And with the idea of boundaries comes that of limits.

These are general and very sketchy remarks. But in making them I hope to suggest something of the sense that lies behind talk of transcendence, as well as the breadth of the front along which it may be used. For it seems that as many things as can be spoken of as having or constituting limits of these various sorts can be said to be transcended. Someone or something who transcends something else fails to be bounded by the limits of that something else; whether the limits are seen in terms of physical boundaries, or of limited qualities and capacities, or of particular conceptual restrictions. Accordingly, one could apparently say at one time that so-and-so 'transcended' a river, or a mountain. And that sense of 'transcend' is not unconnected, I am suggesting, with the sense evident in Herbert Spencer's phrase: "unable as we are to transcend consciousness".* Nor with that employed by the reviewer in "The cast cannot transcend their assignments."** Construing the notion of 'limit' in the broad way I have indicated helps to narrow what may appear to be a yawning gap between cases like these and other uses of

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* Principles of Psychology, II, xvii, No. 81.

** Newsweek, 23 November, 1970, p. 47.

'transcend'. Take the philosopher's use for instance. It seems plausible to regard the Schoolmen's transcendentia as transcending, or failing to fit within the bounds of, the Aristotelian categories. Also in a philosophical context, though with a less technical use of 'transcend', are the words in a review of a book by Iris Murdoch: "'Good is transcendent' means that its claims are absolute."* Presumably the claims of other things than goodness are in some way limited.

But what about theological transcendence? I have already committed myself to the view that in theological discourse 'transcend' and its cognates are used in a great many ways, and I take it that the above dabble in semantics does nothing to prejudice that view. I allow it to stand as a forecast that this idea of something like limits (in both the loaded and neutral senses) plays a part throughout this variety. It is easy enough to see this in the case of dictionary entries on the theological employment of this family of terms. A New English Dictionary lists the following 'theological' uses under 'transcend' and 'transcendent' respectively: "To be above and independent of: esp. said of the Deity in relation to the universe",** and "Of the Deity: In His being, exalted above and distinct from the universe".† Now to say of something or someone that it is independent of something or someone else is, apart from a particular context, ambiguous. A girl may be independent of her

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* The Guardian. The title of the book reviewed is, interestingly enough, The Sovereignty of the Good.

** P. 252.

† Ibid., p. 253.

family in that she has formed her own opinions and not adopted those of her family uncritically, or in that she has her own source of income and does not depend on them for support. One could go on to spell out other sorts of independence. But running through these and the others one might think of there is clearly the idea that independence means freedom from various kinds of limitations or constraints in relation to the thing of which one is said to be independent. (Need one balk at saying 'She transcends her upbringing', for instance?) Perhaps it is not straining things to see God's transcendence of the universe, where it is taken to be his 'independence' of it in some sense like those given, as once again having to do with the surmounting of limits or constraints.

There is a sense of independence that looks to be quite different from the ones mentioned above. We might say 'The University is independent of the colleges', meaning that there is something to the university over and above the colleges that are a part of it. This sort of independence in fact seems to merge with the 'distinctness' mentioned in the second definition given above; a numerical distinction. Now this <u>is</u> quite different from some other kinds of independence, but once again a broad notion of 'limit' can make the difference appear less than total. The use even of a word like 'universe' depends on there being limits to the range of things it collects in any individuating reference. (For instance, 'the universe' in the sentence 'There are intelligent creatures beside ourselves in the universe' presumably does not include in its scope the creations of science-fiction writers.) To say of God that he transcends the universe, in this sense of being numerically distinct

from it, is to say among other things that the limits on the range designated by 'God' are not coincidental with those on the range designated by 'the universe'. (It is not altogether fanciful to imagine someone's saying that the University transcends the colleges, and meaning just this sort of thing by his utterance.)

As we shall see, these uses of the concept of transcendence are not the only ones in the theological repertoire. I shall not try to provide a detailed argument for the pervasiveness of this idea of 'limits' throughout the range of theological use, though where it seems to emerge naturally I will try to pay it due attention. There are, of course, other elements which one might want to trace across the spectrum of transcendence-talk. The analogy of height and the attitude that it may imply is but one candidate here. But once again I have not attempted a precise and detailed map of 'transcend' and its relatives in their secular and theological employments. All I have tried to do is provide a feeling for its use, as a guide to examining some beliefs that lie within its scope in the theological realm.

Transcendence is a transitive notion. It has to do with relations between things; which provides a convenient starting place for a look at some of the strands underlying talk of God's transcendence. We might begin by asking what it is that Christians are inclined to say God transcends. If we do, we shall probably get a number of answers, prominent among which should be 'the world'.

CHAPTER II

GOD TRANSCENDS THE WORLD

A cursory look at Christian talk of God's transcendence makes it clear that one concern underlying such talk is the attempt to portray a peculiar and complex relation between God and the world. The following sentence introduces a paper entitled 'Transcendence in Contemporary Piety':* "In traditional theology transcendence is an attribute of God which indicates that he is outside and independent of the world." That provides not a bad clue to the sense of many theological utterances involving the notion of transcendence. 'The world', of course, is not a very precise concept. Neither is 'the universe' or 'the cosmos' which could be substitutes for it in this context.** But we know how to use these notions well enough to get the enquiry underway. If some problem candidates for inclusion in the universe were to crop up we should have to settle on something like a definition, but in the absence of such a problem let us proceed without one.

The above statement about the traditional understanding of transcendence provides no more than a clue, for as we shall see there are various ways in which God may be said to be outside and independent of the world.

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* Bellah, p. 85.

** For discussions in which the difficulty is recognized of defining 'the world' or 'the universe' see Ninian Smart, Reasons and Faiths, pp. 35-41; and Swinburne, 'The Beginning of the Universe', pp. 125-7.

A. God is Numerically Other Than the World

One important strand in Christian talk of God's transcendence is plainly the conviction that God, whatever he is like, is numerically distinct from the world or anything in it. This element in talk of transcendence is most obvious in discussions of pantheism and other reductionist accounts of the nature of God. Accordingly, J. R. Illingworth said in 1907, "we may...think of God as dwelling in the universe, without in any way transcending it. This means pantheism of one kind or another."* Renford Bambrough brings out this same aspect of the concept:

> Homer's assertions, although they refer to something over and above their own evidence, do not at first refer to anything outside and beyond his own familiar world. His gods and their heaven are a part of the furniture of this world.... The move to the transcendent and the supernatural is made when it is suggested that facts about this world are evidence for the existence of beings in another world, when the gods are no longer spatially 'up there', but metaphysically 'out there'.**

There may be reasons for having reservations about the notion of God as a being, particularly if this is taken, as some theologians (e.g. Tillich) think it must be, to suggest that God is a being like others, 'a being among beings'.† But it is worth stressing that within the traditional Christian theological scheme God is assumed to be in some sense an individual in his own right, though not an individual just like other individuals in the cosmos. Antony Flew recognizes how this view is implicit in the Christian doctrine of

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* Doctrine of the Trinity, p. 196.

** Reason, Truth and God, p. 51.

† I shall pay some attention to these reservations later on, in Chapter XIV.

creation.

> ...the God of Christian theism is quite certainly supposed both to be an individual and not to be part of the universe. The two things are connected: for "the Maker, and Preserver of all things both visible and invisible" must be distinct from his creation; while, both as the living Creator and as bearer of such attributes as infinite power and personality, he must exist in his own right.*

In traditional theology there is some necessity about the view that God is numerically other than the world or anything in it.

A sketch of what might be called the Christian epistemology suggests this same point. It is typical of the experiences that are held to initiate and reinforce a Christian view of things that certain objects and events are regarded as inherently mysterious and awe-inspiring. The orthodox Christian proceeds to the contention that it is God himself who is <u>in some way</u> encountered, experienced, even 'seen' and 'heard' in those objects and events; and moreover that God is in some similar way related to the other entities and events which compose the world and its history. Implicit in all this is the insistence that our experience of God is in an important way indirect. God is not to be identified with the world or any part of it, including those things which are seen as 'holy' or 'revelatory'. He is something other than the world, 'behind' it and 'beyond' it in some non-spatial sense of those words. Ninian Smart links this epistemological point with the general requirements of worship.

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* <u>God and Philosophy</u>, p. 31.

> Our praise and wonder is more adequately expressed if we speak of the sublime and marvellous and awe-inspiring features of the world not as exhibiting their own divinity but as signs or traces of something divine which lies beyond. So the divine becomes transcendent and phenomena become themselves a veil screening our gaze from the object of worship.*

The idea that divine transcendence entails numerical distinction from the world was also emphasized by F. R. Tennant, when he wrote that this notion "implies that the world, as posited, created, or planted out, is other than God though God is ever its 'ground'...."**

So there are grounds for saying that the idea of God as numerically distinct from the world or any of its parts is essential to traditional Christian theology. The heavens are alleged to declare not their own glory, but the majesty of another. I have suggested that this point is at least sometimes a burden of talk about God's transcendence; occasionally perhaps the main burden.

But in saying that God is 'above' or 'other than' or 'different from' anything in the world, or the world as a whole, theists do not always mean to indicate just a <u>numerical</u> distinction. Quite frequently what they aim to identify is a difference in <u>kind</u>.

B. <u>God Transcends Space</u>

According to orthodox Christians, one fundamental respect in which God differs from the world and its contents is that he is not spatial. His transcendence of space does not involve the absurdity

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* <u>Reasons and Faiths</u>, p. 42.

** <u>Philosophical Theology</u>, Vol. II, p. 209.

that he is spatially 'outside' or 'beyond' space. Merely the view that he is not to be thought of as a spatial being or entity. Theophilus of Antioch may be taken as a spokesman on this point: "It belongs to God, the highest and almighty and the truly God, not only to be everywhere, but also to overlook all things and to hear all things, and yet, nevertheless, not to be contained in space."* A minimal interpretation of this view would be contained in the statement that spatial predicates (such as 'is located at the end of Banbury Road' or 'is circular and twelve feet in diameter') are not applicable to 'God' in any straightforward way. It could be pointed out that the effect of this prescription is two-fold. The examples just given of spatial predicates in fact illustrate two different sorts of spatial predication; one specifying location in space, and the other referring to extension. The first concerns spatial relations to other spatial particulars (e.g. 'at the end of' or '200 yards due north of') while the second has to do with 'spread-out-ness' or occupancy of space (e.g. 'is circular' or 'is twelve feet in diameter). It is hard to be clear about the logical relationship between these two elements in spatiality. On the one hand, it seems that location in space does not entail extension, at least in the sense that Euclidean points are said to have the former but not the latter. But on the other hand, while it seems generally true that anything possessing extension must also be spatially located, the universe as a whole presents a perplexing case. (The universe is certainly extended. But can one say it is spatially located?) Whatever the relation between location in and occupancy of space,

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* Ad. Autol., 2.3; quoted in Prestige, p. 3.

to say that God is non-spatial entails at least the denial that either sort of spatial predicate is literally applicable. One way in which he is radically distinct from the world and its constituents is that he is not in any similar way to be located in a particular place, nor is he an occupant of space.

I specified that spatial predicates are not applicable to God in any straightforward way, for it is only too obvious that in the Bible and elsewhere such predicates are applied to him somehow. He is said to have been present in such places as Mount Sinai, and is claimed to be present in some sense at least on those occasions designated by Christians as sacraments. There are at least three considerations that help to reconcile these commonplaces with the non-spatiality of God. The first is that the Bible itself is full of warnings that God is not to be tied down to particular locations, which suggests that spatial predication of God, wherever it does occur in the Bible, is not 'straightforward'. Alongside the graphic descriptions of God in the Pentateuch must be placed Paul's pronouncement, "No man has ever seen or ever can see him."* At least as long ago as Clement of Alexandria it was said, "you must not entertain the notion at all of figure and motion, a standing or sitting, or place, or right or left, as appertaining to the Father of the universe, although these terms are in Scripture".** A second point is the obvious implication of the Christian doctrine of creation, which is in some sense a Biblical doctrine. The creator and logical predecessor of the spatio-temporal order can hardly be confined to

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* I Timothy 6:16 (New English Bible)

** Strom. 71.4. Quoted in Prestige, p. 9.

some location in his creation. Again, this is an argument with patristic precedent. Justin Martyr maintained "that God is uncontained either in one place or in the whole universe, since He existed before the universe came into being."* This point suggests again that however Biblical utterances in which God is given spatiality are to be understood they are not to be taken as plainly literal. Finally, it is arguable that where God's presence is spoken of in Christian theological expression, it is mentioned in a context of the special activity or manifestation of the Deity. I shall say something more about this later on.** But for now it should be clear that according to Christians, spatial predicates cannot be applied to God in any literal sense. This is one important difference between him and the world or its parts.

But there is more to the claim that God is not a spatial entity than this logical point about the inapplicability of spatial predicates may suggest. That this claim is embedded in a setting of beliefs about God and attitudes toward him is witnessed to in speaking of his transcendence of space. Numbers and sensations do not take spatial predicates, but it is not usual to resort to talk of transcendence to make this point. So there is more to God's transcendence, and therefore something more to his transcendence of space, than his failure to qualify for spatial predicates. We shall get hints as to what this 'more' is as we proceed.

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* Prestige, p. 5

** Pp. 53-4.

C. God is Incorporeal

Another aspect of God's fundamental distinction from the world and its parts is indicated in the doctrine of his incorporeality. There is plainly a connection at least between the view that God is not a material entity and the doctrines of his numerical otherness from the world and its constituents, and his non-spatiality. The connection is a logical one if we think of the world as something like the sum of physical entities,* for on this supposition something numerically distinct from the world and its parts cannot be a material thing. Similarly, if, as it seems reasonable to suppose, all material things are spatial things,** then the doctrine that God is not spatial entails that he is not material either.

But the assertion that God is incorporeal is different in some important ways from the statement that he is immaterial. If we interpret 'material entities' liberally enough to include embodied persons, as it seems proper to do in this context, then God's incorporeality is as much an implication of either of the two

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* I assume a distinction made by R. G. Swinburne ('The Beginning of the Universe', p. 126, and Space and Time, pp. 17-20) between 'material' and 'physical' entities. Both sorts of things occupy space, and together with those things that are in some way dependent upon them they exhaust the sorts of things that do so. But material objects are "logically impenetrable" to one another. That is, "no two material objects can have the same primary place at the same temporal instant." (Space and Time, p. 17.) 'Physical' things, on the other hand, need not be impenetrable in this way. Radio waves and photons are examples of this sort. It follows that all material things are physical things, but not vice versa. Therefore if 'the world' is taken to designate the sum of physical things, something numerically distinct from the world or anything in it would necessarily be something other than a material entity.

** Quinton, 'Matter and Space', pp. 338-41, gives reasons for rejecting two possible objections to this supposition.

doctrines we have identified, as his immateriality. But the notion that God is incorporeal is worth some attention of its own, for it evinces more clearly than the doctrines we have looked at so far the impingement of other elements from within the Christian doctrinal scheme. I have admitted that to say, for instance, God is not a spatial entity, is by itself to do little more than class God with such things as numbers. The same is true of the assertion that God is immaterial. But the statement that God is "without body" brings with it the suggestion that he is in at least some respects the sort of entity whom one might have expected to be corporeal. It would seem strange indeed to say that numbers do not have bodies. That is because no one is expected to entertain the idea that they might have. That God should be described as incorporeal involves a recognition of the fact that many of the things said about him might lead one to conceive of him as an embodied being. Christians commonly speak of God as in some way perceiving things, as somehow active in the world, and in general as the sort of being to whom at least some personal predicates apply. But persons, in our experience (and some might argue, as a matter of logical necessity*) are embodied things. It is just because God is spoken of in these ways, and is indeed believed by Christians to be in some sense a personal being, that it is important to specify his incorporeality; and to express it as incorporeality rather than, say, immateriality.

In a way, then, the doctrine that God is incorporeal is a logical outcome of distinguishing him numerically from the world or

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* See chapters XIII and XIV.

its constituents, and of asserting his non-spatiality. But this statement of the outcome is significant in the way it exhibits the influence of a doctrinal scheme into which this particular notion fits. As we shall see, it is this doctrine in the setting which it thus evinces that is responsible for some of the most pressing difficulties in talk of a transcendent God.

D. God Transcends Time

Although I have listed independently the idea that God transcends time, it is often coupled with the assertion that he transcends space. Anselm thus addresses God in the Proslogium: "...thou, although nothing exists without thee, nevertheless dost not exist in space and time, but all things exist in thee."* But God's alleged transcendence of time raises considerations distinct enough to merit independent examination and appraisal.

The doctrine of God's a-temporality can be seen as an interpretation of the traditional view of God as "eternal". The most obvious way of understanding this adjective, almost certainly the way exhibited in the Bible, is simply as something like 'everlasting duration'. Now the view that God is in this sense eternal raises no problems that the notion of a similarly eternal universe would not raise. It is arguable that in neither case are the difficulties

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* Chapter 10. Quoted by Pike in God and Timelessness, p. 9. In the exposition of this section I owe a good deal to Pike's book.

insurmountable.* But it may seem that to describe God's eternity, in this sense, as his 'transcendence of time' is at least a bit extravagent, justifiable only as a case of theological hyperbole.

It is apparent that a good many Christians, including theologians, insofar as they have reflected on God's relation to time, have adopted this view of his eternity. But others have not. And it is important to notice that some important figures in the history of Christian theology have held a significantly different interpretation one that may seem more properly expressed in the dictum that God transcends time. On this view, God's eternity is to be understood as a temporal parallel to his transcendence of space.** Thus, just as God is held not to take spatial predicates, neither is he admitted to take temporal ones. This parallel with God's relation to space extends at least part way into a more detailed consideration of his relation to time. Temporality, like spatiality, may be thought of as involving

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* A well-known argument <u>against</u> the eternity of the world is that mentioned by Kant. Such a notion, he argues, entails that an infinite series of events will have elapsed prior to any moment in the world's history; which cannot be, since this would amount to the absurdity of a <u>completed</u> infinite series. But the impression that such an absurdity is entailed by the idea of an eternal universe stems from the false assumption that the serial order of the events must be from past to present. (Notice 'will have elapsed' in the argument.) In fact it cannot be from past to present, since this would mean there must be a first member back there in time, a situation which is ruled out by our hypothesis that the world is in fact eternal. To say that the world is eternal does imply that there is an infinite temporal series connected with any moment in time. But the series has as its (serially, not temporally) first member <u>that moment</u>, with the series extending infinitely backward (or perhaps forward) in time. Thus the infinite series is not completed, but <u>begun</u> with the selection of a particular time in an eternal world. Therefore it has not been shown that the idea of an eternal world entails an absurdity.

** Pike, pp. 6ff, begins his exposition of God's "timelessness" by developing this parallel as put forward by Frederich Schleiermacher.

the distinct notions of extension (duration) and location. Some temporal predicates, such as 'for ten minutes' or 'during a ten-year period', refer to duration in time. Others, such as 'at 4 p.m. on Tuesday', concern what we might loosely call temporal 'points' or 'moments'. Similarly, it is at least theoretically possible that something might be temporally located but lack a duration. (We could say when it happened, but not that it took such-and-such a length of time to happen.) On the other hand, anything occupying a stretch of time could scarcely fail to be temporally located (with the possible exception of the history of the universe). Both aspects of temporality are barred from applicability to God in an utterance like Anselm's, again in the Proslogium: "Thou wast not, then, yesterday, nor wilt thou be tomorrow; but yesterday and today and tomorrow thou art; or, rather, neither yesterday, nor today nor tomorrow thou art; but simply, thou art, outside all time."* Such notable members of the Christian theological tradition as St. Augustine, Boethius, St. Thomas Aquinas and (more recently) Frederich Schleiermacher appear to concur in this opinion that temporal predicates, like spatial predicates, are simply inapplicable to God.** He does not, like men, perceive things in a temporal order composed of past, present and future, but has all things before him, so to speak, in a single, timeless instant in which there is no temporal progression. Augustine puts this point in City of God.

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* Chapter XIX. Quoted in Pike, p. 9.

** See Chapter I of Pike's book for documentation of this.

> It is not as if the knowledge of God were of various kinds, knowing in different ways things which as yet are not, things which are, and things which have been. For not in our fashion does he look forward to what is future, nor at what is present, nor back upon what is past; but in a manner quite different and profoundly remote from our way of thinking. For he does not pass from this to that by way of thought, but beholds things with absolute unchangeableness, so that of those things which emerge in time, the future, indeed, are not yet, and the present are now, and the past no longer are; but all of these are by Him comprehended in His stable and eternal presence.*

It may appear that in the Bible and elsewhere God is spoken of in ways that have inescapable temporal implications. Among other things, he is alleged to follow and take part in the fortunes of Israel, to intervene dramatically through the person of Jesus of Nazareth, and frequently to act specially at specified points in the world's history. I shall reserve a detailed consideration of this sort of difficulty for Part II of the thesis, in which the intelligibility of divine timelessness is examined. For now, let us agree that if it is possible to escape these counters on the subject of spatiality (e.g. by assigning some intelligible but non-literal sense to them) a similar counter-move may be possible with respect to temporality.

In summary, at least some authoritative theologians subscribe to the doctrine that God is a-temporal as well as non-spatial.

E. God is 'Above' the World

It is common in speaking of God's transcendence to say that he is in some sense 'above' the world. Given the etymology of 'transcend',

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*Book XI, Chapter 21. Quoted in Pike, p. 74.

this may seem a natural enough coincidence. It may be that at some points in the history of Judaism and Christianity, believers were inclined to locate God literally (i.e. spatially) above the world. There are grounds for attributing a "three-decker" view of the universe to primitive Christians, though to interpret this as simply a naive spatial view is probably to see things through a set of distinctions which post-date New Testament times. But even where this "three-decker" view has been held, it would be a mistake to see talk of God's 'aboveness' as merely the reflection of a primitive cosmology. And it would be a still greater mistake to view this talk where it survives the death of such a cosmology as simply a kind of theological keepsake, retained with at best a host of mental reservations or at worst a subtle kind of double-think.

First of all, it ought to be obvious that words like 'above' and 'beyond' flourish outside spatial contexts. If someone were to dismiss a charge brought against his friend, with the words 'He is above that', none of us would be tempted to imagine a spatial relation between his friend and the alleged misdemeanour. Nor do we understand there to be anything spatial about the relation of something 'beyond our ken' to our ken. So it would be naive to suppose, on the basis of the spatial uses of these terms, that only a primitive and materialistic view of God and the cosmos could allow one to speak of him as 'above' or 'beyond' it. There are too many other and equally important uses of words like 'above' and 'beyond'.

I shall not try to give a list of these non-spatial uses, tracing out affinities between members of the list and occurrences of these terms in a theological connection. Instead, I shall simply draw

attention to one feature of theological talk of God's 'aboveness' - a feature, incidentally, for which there is ample non-theological precedent - and suggest that it throws light on the idea of God's transcendence. Briefly, my contention is that the expression 'God is above the world' is one which grows partly out of an attitude held by believers toward the Deity, an attitude which also underlies a good deal of talk about God's transcendence, and which supplies some clues as to the character of the object of that attitude.

The way in which saying 'God is above the world' is connected with the attitude of believers toward God can be brought out by considering a similar though not identical utterance: 'God is holy'. As Ninian Smart has pointed out, "to say that something is holy is not just to ascribe to it a property like redness or hardness".* There are criteria for the application of 'holy' (we shall attend to this in discussing holiness later on**), and the expression 'x is holy' therefore shares characteristics with terms like 'x is red'. But utterances containing the word 'holy' usually have a more complex role in human discourse due to their connection with attitudes. Specifically, to describe something as holy is partly to adopt a certain posture in relation to it. In the case of God, this posture may aptly be called 'worship' or 'self-abasement'. Accordingly, sentences containing 'holy', particularly where the subject is in the second person singular, can be used for <u>expressing</u> the response of worship. But more than this, to say of something that it is holy can also be a way of inviting someone else to attend to it in a

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* <u>Reasons and Faiths</u>, p. 22.

** Pp. 63-80.

particular way and to respond to it in the way a worshipper does. In these and no doubt other ways the expression 'x is holy' therefore has a particularly intimate connection with specific attitudes and feelings of the one who uses it. It is not simply an 'emotive' response. For as the existence of criteria for the application of words like 'holy' shows, there is an implicit claim involved to the effect that the target of one's response in fact merits it. Nevertheless, we should fail to understand the notion of holiness if we did not see that talk of holiness typically emerges in the company of attitudes and feelings toward that which is so described.

I am not saying that 'God is above the world' is just like 'God is holy'. I am suggesting that uses of the former, like uses of the latter, are commonly rooted in certain attitudes of the speaker. To say that God is above the world is partly to express and call forth a particular response to God. It is a way of giving voice to one's relative <u>evaluation</u> of God and the world, and inviting others to a similar appraisal. God's relation to the world, according to the Christian, is that of a worship-worthy creator to his creation. And it is this attitude toward God, as one who appropriately excites worship in a way which his creation does not, which in part underlies the assertion that he is above the world.

What has all this to do with transcendence? The etymology of 'transcend' is by itself enough to suggest a connection between talk of God's transcendence and that of his being 'above' the world. What this point about the roots of the latter sort of discourse in the believer's attitudes toward God may help us to see, is, first of all, that perhaps even talk of his transcendence is not <u>just</u>

descriptive; second, that even if it is not, it still has descriptive elements in that with varying degrees of explicitness it involves claims as to the character of God; and finally, that those things we may uncover as characteristics of God suggested by talk of his transcendence are to be seen at least in part as characteristics which have a part in justifying the adoption of a particular attitude toward him.

We are now in a position to recognize a dimension to the 'theological strands' in transcendence talk which we have so far only glimpsed. Let us turn to an examination of some threads woven through those doctrines we have already looked at, which evince more clearly a connection with the attitude toward God typically taken up and enjoined by Christians.

(1) Free from Limitations

In speaking of God's transcendence of space, corporeality and time, I used descriptions that do little if anything to reflect the Christian assumption that God is worthy of worship. After all, to say that 'God' takes neither spatial nor temporal predicates and is in no way a material entity is to say nothing that is not equally true, say, of numbers. These points seem merely to be directions as to the logical pigeon-hole into which a particular kind of discourse fits, or rather does not fit; as when one is told that the European Common Market is not to be found on any High Street. Our consideration of God's alleged incorporeality, however, brought us a glimpse of something apparently more profound behind these logical considerations. Seeing these now in the setting of a scheme which everywhere assumes the immense value and worship-worthiness of God enables us to discern

something other than a cool concern to avoid category mistakes. One way of viewing the above logical considerations which accords with this broader perspective is to see them as parts of a general attempt to exempt the object of worship from anything that could be called a limitation.* Consider the doctrine of God's non-spatiality. From the Christian's point of view, it is not just that God happens not to be the sort of entity that is located in space. It is also, and more importantly, that God is free from the limitations inherent in being a spatial being. To be a spatial entity is to possess at least one characteristic from a bundle (including corporeality and perhaps temporality) which are seen as limitations in any being proposed as a fit object of worship. Matter in particular is seen in the tradition as a principle of limitation. To be a material object, or in terms of personal entities, to be an embodied being, is to possess less than the total freedom from restriction which a being worthy of worship must enjoy.

At least two considerations may be summoned in support of this perspective. The first might be called 'theoretical', and the second 'practical'. The theoretical point could be expressed like this. It is a notable feature of physical entities that they lend themselves to rational and empirical investigation; investigation which renders more and more intelligible the nature and behaviour of such entities. It seems some kind of necessary truth that we shall never know all that there is to know about any physical particular, let alone physical particulars in general. Nevertheless, one need not be spellbound by advances in the physical sciences to believe that enormous gains can

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* In the sense suggested on p. 17.

be and have been made in our understanding of the physical universe. It may seem odd to say that this feature of intelligibility constitutes a limitation or restriction in physical entities. But the fact is, as we shall see more clearly in discussing God's alleged incomprehensibility, that in beings considered as candidates for divinity, intelligibility or comprehensibility is deemed to be a drawback. It counts against the holiness or worship-worthiness of a being that it is accessible to detailed intellectual examination. A crude way of expressing the limitation that such accessibility entails might be to say that it reduces the potential of such a being for shattering our expectations of it, for providing continual surprises of intellectual and other sorts. And it is this potential that a being who is holy and worthy of worship is expected to possess. God must not be one we can get under our thumbs, or into our minds.

The 'practical' reason for regarding material entities as limited is not unconnected with this theoretical reason. The experience of human, embodied persons is that their membership in the material world brings the intensely practical limitation that one is subjected to all sorts of constraints by one's physical nature. Not only are embodied beings limited in their physical capacity to do many kinds of things they would like to do, there is a feeling that the physical aspect of human nature is a factor in its tendency to moral shortcomings. Further still, it seems to be our embodied state that renders us heir to the change and decay which is part and parcel of the physical world. All these things, frustrating as they are to the human participant, are in a way acceptable as among the 'facts of life' for human persons. But these would be serious deficiencies in any

being proposed as the fit object of worship. It appears to be a defining characteristic of God (where 'God' is used as a noun and not just as a proper name) that he be free from the limitations imposed on any physical thing by its membership in the physical universe. So it is that the doctrines of God's non-spatiality, incorporeality and a-temporality can be seen as manifestations of the fundamental view that he cannot be a limited being.

This idea of the necessary freedom of God from limitations of various sorts is one that plays a considerable part in the Christian theological tradition. G. L. Prestige argues that the negative prefixes so characteristic of words used to describe the divine nature (e.g. '<u>in</u>corporeal') in fact serve to affirm God's freedom and independence. "When it is asserted that God is free from various limitations and controls, the effect is to assert his entire freedom to be Himself and to act according to His own nature and will."* In contemporary theology this is a note often sounded in the context of God's transcendence. Reinhold Niebuhr, in talking about the transcendence of God, draws upon an analogy with human "self-transcendence", in which the freedom that results from self-awareness is a key element.** Paul Tillich uses the expression "The Unconditioned" to represent God in his character as transcendent.†

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* Prestige, p. 4.

** See Farley, <u>The Transcendence of God</u>, p. 43ff.

† <u>Ibid</u>., p. 78f. An interesting, if curious, outcome of this strain in Tillich's thinking is his denial that God can be said to exist, since to ascribe existence to God is, in Tillich's estimation, to ascribe limitations of some sort to him. To be, he says, is to be structured within certain "basic polarities", and God cannot be subject to this sort of structuring. This seems to echo the 'theoretical' reason I gave for regarding physical entities as in some sense limited, though I have many reservations about Tillich's way of putting it.

In these and other theologians is evident the concern to do justice to God's holiness by emphasizing his freedom from the limiting structures which are held to be associated with all that we know of in the world.

(2) 'Ontological Independence'

Another way of expressing this conviction that God is without limitation or constraint is found in the doctrine that God is "self-existent" and "self-sufficient".* According to this doctrine, God, in contrast with anything else, is -- so to speak -- ontologically independent. He exists in his own right and is in no way dependent on anything else for his existence. The assumption evident in this contention is that a being which <u>is</u> in some way derivative, i.e. owes the fact that it exists to the existence or agency of some other being, is somehow 'limited' or less estimable than we expect a divine being to be. If we use the word 'contingent' to describe particulars which owe their existence to another and therefore might <u>not</u> have been,** then it can be said that contingent beings are disqualified <u>by</u> their contingency from the status which is part of being divine.

It may be that this point about the liability of contingency is simply to be seen as a brute fact about what users of theological language tend to regard as qualifications for deity. The point may, however, be connected with another tendency in the history of Christian theology; viz. the traditional association of the contingent or dependent order of which we are members with an inclination to

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* See Owen, 'God', p. 346.

** As we shall see shortly, this is not the only theological use for 'contingent'.

change and decay. Where this view is held, it is frequently seen to be a part of God's distinction from his creation that he is entirely free from this disposition. Such a line of reasoning is plain in patristic discussions of God as 'agennetos';* i.e. uncreated or underived. On this subject, Justin Martyr wrote, "for God alone is agennetos and incorruptible, and for that reason he is God; everything else after Him is gennetos and corruptible."** The equation of 'gennetos' with 'corruptible', and 'agennetos' with 'incorruptible', is an enduring conception in classical Christian theology, and may well enter into the traditional distinction of God from all that is 'contingent'.

Yet another expression of the view that God's existence is non-derivative in a way that the world's is not, is found in the classical notion of God's 'aseity', defined in one theological handbook as:

> A characteristic of being self-derived in contrast to being derived from or dependent on another, hence predicable only of God in classical theology. It is a technical term for the judgement that the existence of God is necessary in contrast to contingent.†

This doctrine amounts to a plain statement of the view under consideration in this subsection: namely that God, unlike the world, is 'ontologically independent'.

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* Or 'agenetos'. For a discussion of the etymological distinction but virtual synonymy between these two terms in patristic theology, see Prestige, pp. 37-54.

** Dial. 5. Quoted in Prestige, p. 39.

† Harvey, p. 207.

(3) Necessary Being

The conception of God as a 'necessary being' obviously comes up for discussion in this connection. It is often assumed that the accepted meaning of 'necessary being' in traditional theology is that of '<u>logically</u> necessary being'; i.e. one whose existence cannot be denied without self-contradiction. There are clearly difficulties in this latter notion, as shown by the chequered history of ontological arguments for God's existence. But it is by no means clear that this is the only, or even the chief, sense which has been given to 'necessary being', even in 'classical' theology. St. Thomas Aquinas, to take an important instance, contrary to what is often said in comment on his 'Third Way',* meant, or at least came to mean,** something quite different by the phrase. According to Aquinas, a being who exists necessarily, is one who is "imperishable...[and] has no liability to cease."† The point of this contention is perhaps made clearer by raising again the assumed contrast between 'necessary' and 'contingent' things. One way of using the word 'contingent' is that which I exhibited myself a page or so ago and which also figures in the quotation made above from a <u>Handbook of Theological Terms</u>. In cases like these the term is used to refer to things which owe their existence to some <u>other</u> thing, and therefore conceivably might <u>not</u> have been. However representative of some theologians this sort of use may be, it is arguably not the one employed by Aquinas himself.

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* For instance by J.J.C. Smart in 'The Existence of God'.

** See Kenny, <u>The Five Ways</u>, p. 42.

† Anscombe and Geach, <u>Three Philosophers</u>, p. 115.

In Aquinas, Patterson Brown argues convincingly, "The point is not that contingent things in principle can not-be; rather it is that they have a built-in process of corruption, an actual progress toward non-being."* A necessary being, on the other hand, is one which lacks this built-in tendency. It can undergo no substantial change, though it is mutable in those respects which do not bear on its nature. And it is neither generable nor corruptible, though it may be created ex nihilo and may be totally annihilated.** Our puzzlement at the non-exclusiveness of this description may be dispelled by the information that in Aquinas' view God is not the only necessary being. In his own words, "there are many necessary things in existence,"† including heavenly bodies, human souls, angels and matter itself.†† The distinction, in terms of necessity, between God and these other incorruptibles lies, according to Aquinas, in whether or not their imperishability is caused. While other necessary beings owe their existence and nature to God, have been created ex nihilo by him and could be annihilated by him, God is uncreated and could not pass out of existence. None of this implies logically that God does exist; merely that if he does, then he could not cease to exist. In Aquinas' terms, the doctrine of God's necessity merely expresses the view that he is imperishable. Something like the doctrine of his 'aseity' must be added to make it clear that he is also underivative.

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* Brown, "St. Thomas' Doctrine of Necessary Being", p. 86.

** Ibid., esp. p. 82f.

† Summa Theologica, I, q. 44, Art. 1, Obj. 2; quoted in Brown, p. 79.

†† Brown, p. 79.

In neither case is anything like a logical stricture applied to the denial of God's existence.

(4) One-Way Dependence

It has been impossible to explicate this theme of God's ontological independence without mentioning a particular point of contrast assumed in Christian thought between God and the world. The latter, it is assumed, is dependent. It is dependent, in fact, precisely upon God. And here we have another doctrine impinging upon the doctrines blanketted under 'transcendent', for it proves impossible to describe God's relation to the world in terms of transcendence without taking notice of the fact that in Christian theology God is regarded as creator of the world. This doctrine is perhaps not strictly a part of what goes into the concept of God's transcendence, but the latter cannot be properly understood without reference to the view that he is creator. This conception of God's creative role actually entails not simply the dependence of the world upon God, but the independence of God and his freedom in relation to the world. It is interesting in this connection to notice the traditional debate among Christians as to whether God is self-sufficient apart from the creation, and accordingly whether or not he could be said to be free either to create or not to create.* However such a debate is resolved, the point is that Christians are anxious to maintain a view of one-way dependence between God and the world, in the interests of protecting the notion of God's independence.

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* For a reflection of this debate in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries see, for instance, Temple's Nature, Man and God, esp. p. 301f; and Pringle-Pattison's 'Immanence and Transcendence', esp. p. 13.

Norman Malcolm, in 'Anselm's Ontological Arguments',* discusses the 'necessity', given the "common meaning of the word 'God'", of his being independent of anything else as regards his existence. Malcolm argues that there is in the logic of ordinary discourse a correlation between our description of something as 'dependent' or 'limited' and our failing to esteem that something as highly as another which is (perhaps comparatively) independent or unlimited. Whether or not Malcolm is right about this linkage in everyday concepts, it is clear that in theistic discourse the connection exists. There is, in the concept of 'God', a value placed on independence and freedom from limitation. And nowhere is this more evident than in the one-way dependence that is posited between God and the world in the Christian doctrine of creation. The relevance of these points to the notion of transcendence is made plain in the words of a Clementine Homily:

> This is peculiar to God, that He alone is, as the maker of all, so also the best of all. That which makes is indeed superior in power to that which is made; that which is boundless is superior in magnitude to that which is bounded; in respect of beauty, that which is comeliest; in respect of happiness, that which is most blessed; in respect of understanding, that which is most perfect. And in like manner in other respects he incomparably possesses transcendence. Since then, as I said, this quality, to be the best of all, is peculiar to God, and the all-containing world was made by Him, none of the things made by him can come into equal comparison with him.**

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* Pp. 46-8.

** hom. Clem. 10.19. Quoted in Prestige, p. 25f. The word which Prestige translates as "transcendent" is ὑπεροχή: "excess, hence pre-eminence, superiority". (Lampe (ed.), A Patristic Greek Lexicon, p. 1441.)

F. God is Everywhere

The notion of immanence is usually taken in the standard reference works on Christian theology to be at least in some tension with that of transcendence. For example:

> The terms transcendence and immanence may be taken as polar words, like "up" and "down", "high" and "low". While the former holds God to be above man and his world, the latter holds that God or the divine is within human experience or within the world.*

These terms apparently entered the theological vocabulary as representing a distinction between two ways of viewing God's relation to the world. It is therefore to be expected that there should be some tension between them. Nevertheless, it is arguable that a study of the notion of transcendence goes some way toward meeting any suggestion that the views they represent are irreconcilable. The idea of immanence is no doubt as complex in its way as that of transcendence. Clearly, however, an important part of immanence is the idea that God is in some sense everywhere, in intimate connection with all parts of the world. Now if we put together three of the notions that have been mentioned so far, namely (1) God's transcendence of space, (2) the epistemological point that God is 'behind' and yet associated with certain objects and events, and (3) God's role as creator of the world, then the idea that God is in a way present throughout the creation can be seen to flow from the combination.**

To make this clearer, let me expand these three notions. The

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* Hutchison, 'Transcendence', p. 363f.

** The idea that God's "secret omnipresence" is in fact suggested by his transcendence is put forward in Ninian Smart's 'Myth and Transcendence', p. 481.

point has already been made that God's transcendence of space is held to lie in the fact that although some things said about him might lead us to expect him to be a spatial particular, he does not in fact take spatial predicates. I have also pointed out that behind this contention lies the view that God is free from the limitations associated with spatial entities, one of which is that a spatial entity is one which is here or there, and not somewhere else.

The epistemological point (which I mentioned in connection with God's non-spatiality) could be put like this.* It seems typical of a number of religious epistemologies, of which Christianity's is one, that a beginning is made with certain entities and events in the world which are regarded as innately mysterious and awe-inspiring. They may be things like vistas of the starry heavens or of an impressive mountain range, the phenomena of emerging personality in children or of human interaction generally, or the intricacy of a leaf or a snowflake. Assuming that a case can be made for genuine mysteriousness, as distinct from a naive, pre-scientific bafflement, the move is then made to the view that what in fact might be regarded as a number of independent, awe-inspiring objects and events, in fact constitute a sort of unity. They are united in that 'behind' or 'beyond' them is held to lie a single, more profound and more fundamental mystery, of which the 'independent' mysteries are glimpses. It seems a part of this process that it brings about the discernment of more and more items and occurrences as manifestation of this underlying mystery. And the generalization comes to be made that

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* I am borrowing here from Ninian Smart's Reasons and Faiths, esp. pp. 32-44.

those parts of the world and its history which impress and move us in this way are only the most striking examples of a general truth about the world: namely that behind all of it, and not just those things which first evoke our awe, lies this single mystery. The world is thus related to this fundamental mystery in two ways. On the one hand, the world functions as a kind of 'screen' standing between us and the holy entity which is believed to underlie it at all points. (As we shall see when we consider the idea of holiness, there are reasons why this 'screen' is in a way necessary to a holy being.) But on the other hand, the world, especially in its sublime and awesome aspects, provides traces of the presence and character of this mystery. So the world not only stands between us and the awesome being behind it, it also gives a kind of testimony to the continual 'presence' of that being. (As Smart points out, this last point tends to attenuate, though it does not dissolve, the distinction between pantheism and monotheism.*)

It is not difficult to see how this sort of reasoning already suggests the idea that God is in some sense everywhere. He is not spatial, and therefore cannot be said in any straightforward way to be here rather than there. At the same time, the suggestion is made that to the question 'Where is God?', the best answer is not 'nowhere' but 'everywhere'. This suggestion stems partly from the view that glimpses of his 'presence' throughout the cosmos are afforded in particular objects and events which are seen as mysterious.

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* Ibid., p. 43f. This attenuation is also visible in discussions later in this thesis, pp. 294-8 and 364-75, of whether the world should be regarded as God's body.

This notion of God's "secret omnipresence"* is filled out by the third conception I have mentioned; the Christian doctrine of creation. It is held by most Christians that this doctrine has at least as much to do with the continual dependence of the world on God's 'ontological support', as it does with the origins of the universe. It is not just that the world is dependent upon God for whatever beginnings it had, it is continuously dependent on him. At least part of what it means to say that God is creator is conveyed in saying that he is sustainer of the world.

It is this idea of God's continual sustaining role in relation to the world that links up with the ideas (1) that he cannot be confined to any particular place in the world, and (2) that certain mysteries in the world evince his mystery at its foundation. The result is this conception of God as intimately connected in a complex and subtle way with the world in all its parts, and thus 'omnipresent'. This is another point which G. L. Prestige sees as among the contentions of patristic theology:

> ...in connection with God and nature, the idea of the penetrative quality of divine being, as not only externally framing and supporting, but also permeatively sustaining the created universe...provided, in modern language, a theory that God is immanent as well as transcendent, the immanence no less than the transcendence being based on the actual nature of the divine mode of existence, or 'spirit'.**

There is, as I have admitted, more to immanence than omnipresence. But the latter is clearly an ingredient in the former.

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* Ninian Smart's words in 'Myth and Transcendence', p. 481.

** Prestige, p. 34.

And it is important to recognize the way in which the concept of transcendence itself includes strands which eventuate in the view that God is, in a sense, everywhere.

It is worth pointing out in passing that one of the points raised above, the one dubbed 'epistemological', sheds some light on a difficulty recognized earlier. In considering the idea that God transcends space, we encountered the objection that in the Christian tradition God is frequently and paradoxically spoken of as being in some place or other. Perhaps the prime example of this difficulty in the Christian setting is the doctrine of the Incarnation, in which Jesus of Nazareth is thought of as the incarnate God. This difficulty represents a species of problem well enough known amongst theologians to have won a name: 'the scandal of particularity'. Now it is arguable that the epistemological point raised above can help to reconcile the notion that God is non-spatial with the view that he is somehow <u>specially</u> present on the holy mountain, or in Jesus of Nazareth, or in the Eucharist. I suggested in that sketch of a religious epistemology made above that the sense of God's presence throughout the world is gained from an initial impression of his presence in certain, perhaps rather special, parts of it. And it seems reasonable to maintain that unless God is first glimpsed in some particular part of the world, his presence throughout the cosmos cannot be discerned. So the idea that God is a non-spatial appears at this level to be at least compatible with, and perhaps even required by, the view that he is specially manifested in particular objects and events.

Of course it would be a mistake to see this argument as doing anything more than helping to reconcile God's non-spatiality with his special presence. For it seems crucial to at least some examples of God's alleged presence -- the Incarnation is again a prime instance -- that what is insisted upon is not just that in some entity or event(s) God is especially evident, but that he is actually present in a way that he is not elsewhere. So the epistemological consideration raised just now does not provide a complete resolution of the tension which we have noticed. It seems necessary to add an 'ontological' point which can allow the joint insistence that God is present and active in all the world and yet he is specially present and/or active in some particular parts of it. To do this one would presumably have to establish that there is something like a variety in degrees or kinds of 'ontological participation' open to the Creator, a consideration which incidentally would bear also upon the problem of evil.

However this difficulty is untangled by the philosophical theologian, the point remains that according to the Christian theist, part of God's transcendence of the world in fact lies precisely in his ability to be present throughout it.

So far, we have looked at themes connected with the Christian idea of God's transcendence as suggested by the heading 'God transcends the world.' But there are other elements in the Christian notion of transcendence, and to some of these I now turn.

CHAPTER III

UNLIMITED PERSONALITY

The relation which is held to obtain between God and the world informs a good deal of what is said in talking of God's transcendence. But not all talk of God's transcendence occurs in this perspective, broad as we have seen it to be. Let us begin a look at other frame-works for such talk by considering the relation which is alleged between the personality of God and that of humankind.

A point which emerged in our examination of what Christians theists see as God's transcendence of the world is that at the root of many doctrines which fit under this heading is a concern to exempt God from the limitations of the natural order. I believe this is a point worth taking with us in exploring other strands in transcendence talk, including those which might be placed in the category of God's transcendence of human personality. Early on in our discussion the fact that Christian talk of God's transcendence continually evinces the assumption that God is in some sense a <u>personal</u> individual, made itself felt. My argument in this section is that a number of elements in the concept of God's transcendence have to do precisely with the way in which the personality of God differs from the personality of human creatures. Once again, a key factor in these alleged differences is the way in which God is supposed to be free from certain limitations inherent in human personality.

A. <u>God is Omniscient</u>

One obvious though complex capacity which we associate with human persons is that called 'knowing'. Equally obvious is the fact that in human persons knowledge is without exception a limited capacity.

To put it simply, there are a great many things which, though true, are not known by any human person, and particular human persons all know a great deal less than all that there is to know. Now it is precisely this sort of limitation in knowledge that the theist means to deny of God when he claims that God is omniscient. God, it might be said, transcends the limitations so evident in human knowing. "There is nothing in creation that can hide from him; everything lies naked and exposed to the eyes of the One with whom we have to reckon."* Formally, God's omniscience may be expressed in the following way: "For every p, if p then God knows that p."** Informally, it might simply be said that God knows all the facts that there are to know.

There have been disputes among theologians and others as to what facts there <u>are</u> to know and therefore what an omniscient God must be held to know. This question has been thrown into relief by one venerable problem in philosophical theology; the question of how God's omniscience can be reconciled with human freedom.† One way of dealing with this has been to maintain that since only what is true can be known, and since the future free actions of men <u>are</u> in the future, statements about such actions are, in advance of their performance, neither true nor false and therefore cannot be known by anyone, even an omniscient being. That God cannot know the future free actions of men is thus argued to be no blemish on his omniscience, for the 'cannot' here merely represents a logical stricture against

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* Hebrews 4:13-4.

** Prior, 'The Formalities of Omniscience', p. 27. On the pages following Prior works out some formal expressions of ways in which this formula might be instantiated.

† This is the subject of Chapter XII.

forming statements of a particular kind.* So it can be said that

> as a matter of history there have been philosophers who have believed that God was omniscient without thereby believing that God knew the future free actions of men. Indeed...even a philosopher so orthodox as St. Thomas Aquinas denied, in one important sense, that God knows the future when the future is not already determined by causal necessity.**

Another way out of this difficulty (one also employed by Aquinas) has been sought in a link between God's omniscience and a particular view of his timelessness. If the latter is thought of not as eternal duration in time but as total abstraction from the temporal order, then God's knowing is placed 'outside of time' in some sense. And the way is opened to a claim that God does not see the future contingent fact as future, but as part of what is to him a 'continuous present'.

But these are side-issues in the setting of this part of the thesis. The point is that according to traditional Christian theism, God, like human persons, knows; but unlike human persons he knows all that there is to know, however that is to be understood.

B. God is Omnipotent

According to Genesis 17:1, one warrant for the view that God is "almighty" is to be found in God's own words. There can be no doubt, in any case, that the doctrine of God's unlimited power is a venerable one in Christianity and its antecedents. Such a belief flows naturally enough from the view that he creates and sustains all that there is; a connection that is evinced in the words παντοκράτωρ

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* Prior argues this way, p. 117f.

** Kenny, 'Divine Foreknowledge and Human Freedom', p. 255f.

and omnipotens which are the words in early Christian creeds usually translated 'almighty' in English. The fact that these terms have the sense of being ruler or sovereign of all has led Nelson Pike to argue that God's omnipotence is to be interpreted not so much as his ability to perform all kinds of actions (including such things as swimming the English Channel and making unassisted leaps of 100 feet into the air), as in being able to "create, bring about, affect [sic], produce, make-to-be, etc., anything possible absolutely."*

However one phrases the doctrine in order to discourage silly questions -- and Pike's proposal has that merit -- the idea is clearly that God is to be considered free from the limitations of human creatures in their power over the world.

Again, there have been differences among Christian thinkers as to which sorts of things can (in some appropriate sense) be 'brought about' and thus fall within the scope of an omnipotent being. Descartes was not alone in thinking it blasphemous to speak of God's power as confined to that which is describable without contradiction or nonsense. He wrote to Mesland, on May 2nd, 1644:

> As for the difficulty in conceiving how it was a matter of freedom and indifference to God to make it true that the three angles of a triangle should equal two right angles, or generally that contradictions should not be able to be together, one can easily remove it by considering that the power of God can have no limits.**

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* Pike, p. 98. Of course there is another way of dismissing such silly riddles as whether God can ride a bicycle, swim the channel, etc. As Pike mentions, it was argued by Lombard, among others, that an incorporeal being can hardly be held responsible for doing such things.

** Quoted in Frankfurt's 'The Logic of Omnipotence', p. 263n.

But it is more usual for Christian theologians to hold that in claiming the ability of God to bring anything about, one includes under 'anything' only those states of affairs whose descriptions are logically coherent. Aquinas is often quoted in this connection:

> Therefore, everything that does not imply a contradiction in terms is numbered among those possibles in respect of which God is called omnipotent; whereas whatever implies contradiction does not come within the scope of omnipotence, because it cannot have the aspect of possibility. Hence it is more appropriate to say that such things cannot be done, than that God cannot do them.*

Thus the fact that God cannot perform actions describable only in contradictory or other nonsensical terms is usually regarded as no defect in his omnipotence. For the 'cannot' here again represents merely a logical comment on the failure of certain combinations of words to constitute genuine statements.** Accordingly, it is not that God cannot perform this class of action, it is that contradictory expressions do not in fact specify any action to be performed, though their grammatical form may beguile us into thinking that they do.

So an element in God's transcendence is his alleged transcendence of the limitations in human capacities to do things or bring things about. In some sense of 'anything', God is believed able to do anything.

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* Summa Theologica, Part I, Q. 25, Art. 3.

** For an amusing and cogent rebuttal of the contention that God's inability, e.g., to make a stone heavier than he can lift disqualifies him as omnipotent, see Frankfurt.

C. God is Perfectly Good

Another human capacity, though of a quite different sort, is that for moral action. And in this area as in the others we have noticed, man notoriously displays his limitations. The most upright of men has his moral failings, and even a good man is never perfectly good. But God, according to the Christian, is. God alone is perfectly, or 'infinitely', good. It is clearly an essential part of the Christian doctrinal scheme, with its emphasis on God's selfless initiative taken in the interests of man's salvation, that God is at least an extraordinarily loving and benevolent being. But 'extraordinarily' is not enough for the orthodox Christian, and it would appear that something in the logic of worship and holiness demands that the believer posit an unqualified or perfect goodness in the object of his belief and worship.

Of course it is just this theme in Christian doctrine, when juxtaposed with such conceptions as the omnipotence of God, that yields the persistent Problem of Evil. The very persistence of this difficulty shows how deeply entrenched are the doctrines of God's omnipotence and perfect goodness. Relevant to our consideration of the latter claim is the fact that where, in an attempt to relieve God of responsibility for evil, Christians have felt driven to reduce their claims on his behalf, it is usually his omniscience and/or omnipotence that is reconsidered.*

I have argued that in at least a good many cases the attributes

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* J. S. Mill is the best-known example of one who advocates such a move. See also W. D. Hudson, 'An Attempt to Defend Theism', esp. pp. 23-5.

of God are arrived at by viewing him as free from certain limitations evident in the natural order, including those exhibited by human persons. This point in connection with the doctrine of God's goodness is borne out in a consideration of the traditional notion of God's 'impassibility'. In setting out the 'Elements of Theism', G. L. Prestige makes the following remark:

> Just as God is supreme in power and wisdom, so is He morally supreme, incapable of being diverted or overborne by forces and passions such as commonly hold sway in the creation and among mankind. The word chosen to express this moral transcendence is 'impassible' (ἀπαθής).*

A contrast is thus assumed between the moral choices of men, whose participation in the "perishable" order of nature renders them subject to all the limitations and instabilities of life in the flesh; and those of God, whose will is thought of as entirely self-determined and perfectly consistent. So the doctrine of divine impassibility is not meant to secure his isolation in some Epicurean impassivity. Still less is it meant to imply that God is inactive or uninterested with respect to the world. It is a way of highlighting what is thought to be his perfect moral freedom, a freedom from the sway of external and distorting conditions of the kind which play upon limited creatures.

But the idea of God's perfect goodness presumably entails not just that he possesses a greater moral freedom than do his creatures, but also that he invariably exercises that freedom in the right way. God is alleged not only to have more opportunity to do good, but consistently to take advantage of this superior capacity. Christianity

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* Prestige, p. 6.

has given the name 'good news' to its view of God's interest and action in the world, presumably on the ground that they deem him to be supremely good.

There is, I think, another ingredient in God's transcendence which fits under this heading of his supreme goodness. It begins to appear in the experience of Christians where they discover what they take to be moral demands made by God which turn out to be unexpected and, not infrequently, unwelcome. The unexpectedness if not the unwelcomeness of these apparent demands may stem partly from the fact that they frequently have to do with matters not hitherto regarded (by an individual, or conventionally) as having a moral dimension. So a man may begin as one who evaluates his business transactions solely in 'business' terms, but come to believe that he is required by God to view them morally in a way that he had not recognized before. Another source of surprise in 'God's demands' may be their conflict with what is taken on other grounds to <u>be</u> moral. So it may happen that a man moves from the belief that he is under a form of moral obligation to fight for this country on at least some occasions, to the conviction that 'in God's eyes' <u>any</u> war is wrong. In both these kinds of cases, what is understood to be a divine requirement of a moral kind appears to come as something of a surprise.

Yet — and this is important — the claim <u>is</u> held to be a moral one, for all its unexpectedness and perhaps even shock. Not on the grounds that God may ask what he likes of us, or arbitrarily legislate what is moral and what is morally right; but in the belief that somehow one's eyes have been opened to a claim which was, in a way, always there, but unrecognized. So there is an impression of

recognition along with the surprise; an impression that brings with it the suggestion that one has been roused from a certain moral insensitivity by that demand which first surprised or even shocked. God's moral transcendence may thus be seen as consisting partly in his supreme moral authority. And, once again, his authority does not issue from his being able to decide what is moral, but from his perfect moral insight.

The "'otherness' of God" is a phrase that frequently appears in discussions of God's transcendence. By itself, this is perhaps not a clear expression. But in a context like the goodness of God it begins to take on a significance, for it is just the potential 'other-ness' of God's moral requirements for which I have been claiming a place in the notion of God's moral transcendence. Such requirements are seen as 'other than' what might have been expected, given our own restricted sensitivity or the shackles of a merely conventional morality. It seems a fundamental tenet of Christian belief that God may thus break through one's limited expectations, and rise above our limited moral insight, in the demands he makes on men. It is fascinating to observe the criticisms brought by a non-Christian against some contemporary theological strategies, on the ground that they neglect this fundamental point.

> Death-of-God theologians, then, along with secular theologians like Harvey Cox, have agreed that the heavenly kingdom should be brought down to earth. And, having moved heaven, they now seek to move earth. This redirection should certainly be applauded, but the applause should not be allowed to obscure one fundamental hang-up. Just as mass-tailored religiosity in the absence of some metaphysical transcendence becomes swamped by the crassness of the secular world, a change-minded theology faces similar dangers in the absence of

> some secular standard by which this particular intellectually normative and ethically good world might be judged.*

So far, we have considered elements in the complex idea of God's transcendence which flow from the supposed contrast bwtween God and the world, and God and human persons. For another set of ideas, I turn now in a different direction; to the concept of what man may be said to understand.

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* Weissman, 'New Left Man Meets the Dead God', p. 25f.

CHAPTER IV

GOD TRANSCENDS HUMAN UNDERSTANDING

When it is said that God transcends human understanding, this is not usually meant to be the sort of remark that fits into a discussion of his omniscience. That is, it is not being said that God understands more than humans do, though of course it alleged that he does, but that he is more than humans can understand.

The idea that God is in some important sense incomprehensible is, of course, a long-standing one in Christian thinking, and its association with the notion of transcendence is not difficult to see. In this case as in others we have looked at, it is important to recognize the connection between what Christians claim to be attributes of God and their inclination to worship him. Such a connection is plainly exhibited in the words of Theophilus, in the second century:

> The form of God is ineffable...in glory He is uncontainable, in greatness incomprehensible, in height inconceivable, in might, in wisdom without peer, in goodness inimitable, in well-doing indescribable...*

There seems an obvious resonance in these words between the attribute of incomprehensibility, and the unlimited praise, which includes an element of humility, that is felt by the worshipper to be due to God.

The ties between this predicate and its setting in a context of worship no doubt lead to hyperbolic statements of God's incomprehensibility. And it is possible to construe such hyperboles, even (or especially!) when they are one's own, on too literal a model

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* ad. Aut. 1.3. Quoted in Prestige, p. 3.

God cannot be absolutely beyond our ken, or even the assertion that he is incomprehensible would be impossible. To say that it is God who is incomprehensible is to use a word which, however it looks and functions like a proper noun, also has some of the characteristics of a common noun. So even one who wishes to stress God's transcendence of our understanding usually means to identify the Creator of the world, the one who takes an initiative in bringing all men to him, and so on, with the word 'God'. But if God were totally incomprehensible not even these minimal references could pretend to succeed, and it would be a matter of indifference whether God is said to hate or to love us, or for that matter to be disembodied or deep mauve. A quotation from T. R. Miles serves to illustrate both the connection between transcendence and incomprehensibility and the temptation to overstate the latter, "To say that God is transcendent is to emphasize the non-applicability of any concept whatever."* Making God absolutely impervious to our understanding is a self-defeating operation, for it simply withdraws from the currency any expressions in which 'God' appears.

Short of this self-defeating rendering of God's incomprehensibility there is a more coherent view which appears to represent something like the majority Christian position. According to this view, God is so different in kind from anything else which we encounter, that our attempts to understand him and give conceptual expression to our understanding (which are probably not sharply separated activities) are attended by very considerable difficulties. At every point, it is insisted, we must remind ourselves of the

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* 'On Excluding the Supernatural', p. 150.

inadequacy of any attempt to grasp the fullness of God's character and purpose. All our statements of what we take to be insight on these matters are in the last resort ineptitudes, even if some ineptitudes may be preferred to others. The point is that God is of such a kind that none of the conceptual frameworks available to us can with perfect fitness be applied to him. God is so different from us or anything else we know of that we can only venture some superficial and potentially misleading statements of what he is like, the very best of which we can only describe as the best of a bad lot.

But if this point concerning the unfathomability of God is partly a logical point, the setting of this doctrine in a context of worship and associated activities shows that it is not <u>just</u> that. It is this setting which displays the 'devotional' force of such a doctrine. For it is clear that the idea of God's incomprehensibility is also meant as a hedge against a particular kind of blasphemy. In Chrysostom's words, "He <u>insults</u> God who seeks to apprehend His essential being."* The potential blasphemy evidently grows from a sense that a <u>holy</u> being, one whom it is appropriate to worship, must as a matter of some sort of necessity be impenetrable to our minds. To place a being within our intellectual grasp is to make it ordinary, approachable, and to disqualify it as genuinely holy. So Augustine can say with an air of almost logical certainty, "If you have understood what you are trying to say, it is not God. If you have been able to understand it, it is something other than God that you have understood."** This point will emerge again in our examination

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* Quoted in Otto, <u>The Idea of the Holy</u>, p. 80.

** Quoted by Martin in <u>Religious Belief</u>, p. 137.

of holiness. For now, it is important to discern the devotional purpose behind the conceptual point that God transcends human understanding.

CHAPTER V

GOD IS HOLY

"Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God of Hosts", begins an ancient Christian hymn. Holiness is so central a conception to theism that we find such claims as these being made by theologians: "Holiness is so inherently a quality of God as to belong to the very definition of deity",* and "holiness is not one of the attributes of God, but 'the background and the atmosphere of the conception of God' which colours every attribute."** So it is possible to say that 'God is holy' is somehow analytic or superfluous. To deny God's holiness would be to call in question a whole doctrinal scheme and not just some item within it.

I believe that we can learn a lot about Christian talk of God's transcendence by inspecting utterances concerning his holiness. But the lessons are not to be learned by viewing 'God is holy' as though it were a straightforward assertion that God has some particular quality. Instead we must take a more roundabout way, the need for which becomes apparent when we stop to consider the actual use of expressions of the form 'X is holy'. Sentences of this form, as Ninian Smart points out,† are not always, and perhaps not even typically, used in a straightforward way to offer a description of God. 'God is holy' is an expression which resembles others like

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* Shinn, 'The Holy', p. 167.

** Ibid. Internal quotation is from Gustaf Aulen.

† Reasons and Faiths, pp. 21-32. Smart's comments appear to rest on something like the analysis given by Nowell-Smith in Ethics of 'aptness words and sentences' and 'gerundive words and sentences'. See especially pp. 62-7 and 75-81.

'The view was sublime' in finding themselves at home in patterns of behaviour such as marvelling or worshipping. The function of such utterances in such a setting is partly to express a reaction;* and not primarily, if at all, to describe. That they seem descriptive in this setting is due (1) partly to their grammatical form (for in this respect they resemble paradigm cases of description such as 'John is six feet tall'); (2) partly also to the fact that they have what might be called 'second order' uses, which are descriptive (we might say 'This grotto is holy' meaning simply that it is regarded as holy by someone or other); but (3) partly, and most significantly for our discussion, to the existence of criteria for their use (and it is easy to suppose that the sentence is used to state that its subject possesses those characteristics which render the sentence appropriate).

The last point is particularly important, for it shows how a sentence like 'God is holy', even if it usually is used to express a reaction to something and not to describe it, nonetheless involves a kind of objective claim. For it is possible to argue about the appropriateness of reactions, and in adducing reasons for and against appropriateness we expose criteria for their application. All of which suggests that implicit in these expressions of reaction is the claim that something about is occasion actually merits such a response. Notice that such a claim is not very precise. It does not specify, except in quite a general way, what it is about the target of one's

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* I say 'partly', since such expressions seem available for a number of other jobs such as inviting a similar response from others, perhaps predicting that others will have a like response or that such a response will be general.

response that deserves just that response. All that is implied is that something about that which excites the reaction does so within canons of appropriateness. Which is not totally unhelpful, as the particular kind of reaction places limits on what can be cited to legitimate it. But one's reaction need not, and usually does not, implicitly specify which of the very large number of qualities that might be held to merit such a response, are in fact possessed by its object.

The sketch I have given, if it is at all faithful, has at least two other things to be said for it. The first is that it explains the extreme difficulty which awaits any attempt to pin down the specific attribute or complex of attributes which one might suppose is ascribed to God in saying that he is holy. The most that can be said here, I have argued, is that to say God is holy is to imply a somewhat indeterminate set of attributes from among which an unspecified selection is to be applied to God. The second advantage one might claim for this view of holiness-talk is that it explains why, in speaking of God's holiness, theists are inclined to begin with accounts of religious experience. The reason is that such utterances have their origin in experiences of certain kinds, which include the responses of marvelling, worship, and the like. And the implications of such talk as to the nature of God are best got at by examining those experiences and inferring back via canons of appropriateness to the range of qualities that would license such responses. In fact, this is precisely the roundabout way that I have in mind as the way to learn lessons about 'transcendence' by scrutinizing 'holiness'.

I suggest, therefore, that we pay some attention to the sorts of responses in which talk of God's holiness figures, as a way of throwing some indirect light on the God which such responses have as their target. We do not have to start from scratch on a project of this kind, as it seems that this is just the sort of approach exhibited in Rudolf Otto's classic, The Idea of the Holy. As an efficient way of pursuing this possibility let us therefore attend to some of the things said by Otto.

Otto founds his analysis on the view that religious thought and experience are, in an important sense, autonomous. Accordingly, he argues that "the Holy" is an a priori category, applied to unify the elements in a particular range of experience which he dubs experience of "the numinous". This non-rational apprehension in experience of "the Holy" is, he holds, the birthplace of religion. Conceptual thinking in religion, important as it is, always takes second place to this primary source of religious insight. Otto proceeds to attempt a rough characterization of numinous experience; one which is deliberately evocative in keeping with Otto's conviction that such experience is in itself sui generis and cannot be literally described in terms drawn from other spheres of experience. He therefore invites us to read what he says "bearing always in mind that these expressions do not hit with precision, but merely hint at what is really meant."*

I have argued that it is vital to see talk of holiness as rooted in experiences of a particular kind. Otto's statement of his

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* Otto, p. 50. In a footnote, Otto quotes the words of Hugo of St. Victor: "These words were chosen, that that which could not be comprehended might yet in some measure be understood."

own starting point is strikingly like the implications which I drew from the setting of holiness-talk.

> ...the nature of the numinous can only be suggested by means of the special way in which it is reflected in the mind in terms of feeling. 'Its nature is such, that it grips or stirs the human mind with this and that determinate affective state.'*

Otto undertakes to distinguish, in the rough and evocative way described, some of the elements in experience of the holy. He uses the Latin phrase <u>mysterium tremendum et fascinans</u> as a guide to his enquiry. Let us begin, as Otto does, with the adjective <u>tremendum</u>.

A. <u>God is 'Awe-Inspiring'</u>

A leading feature of numinous experience is, according to Otto, a spontaneous emotional response which might inadequately be described as a special sort of 'fear'. In his search through other languages for ways of representing the special quality of this reaction Otto includes the English words 'awe' and 'aweful', "which in their deeper and most special sense approximate closely to our meaning."** The first glimmerings of this emotion are seen by Otto in feelings of something uncanny, eerie or weird. In its primitive forms it appears as a sort of daemonic dread. In its more mature instances it includes elements of exaltedness and sublimity, without completely abandoning its primitive beginnings. In none of these, he argues, do we have simply an intense form of natural fear. The impression is as of something <u>super</u>-natural and awe-inspiring, an impression that brings with it a sense of one's own 'nothingness' in relation to the awesome

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* <u>Ibid</u>., p. 12.

** <u>Ibid</u>., p. 14.

sublimity of the numinous. (Otto reminds us of the words of Abraham: "Beyond now, I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord, which am but dust and ashes."*) Attention to this aspect of numinous experience can help, Otto maintains, to understand the difficult Biblical concept of God's wrath. What may appear to be the ascription of capricious and arbitrary passion, he urges, is in fact the outgrowth of a sense of God's awesomeness. Otto draws attention to the non-moral quality of God's wrath in its resemblance to "'...a hidden force of nature', like stored up electricity, discharging itself upon anyone who comes too near." He argues that this Biblical concept embodies an indispensable ingredient of holiness, expressed in a perhaps naive analogy with the anger of man. In Otto's view, any exclusive concentration on God's gentleness, love and intimacy with man, neglects this essential point.

Significantly for our purposes, Otto represents the implications of this point for the nature of the numinous, in an "ideogram";† "absolute unapproachability". It is, incidentally, easy to see how the idea of the world as a 'screen' between us and the mystery underlying it, which I mentioned earlier on, fits into this picture. It is almost a necessary feature of a holy being that he be kept at some 'personal distance' from his creatures. The 'logic' of holiness which is expressed in saying "It is a terrible thing to fall into the hands of the living God"†† grows from this element in numinous experience, and demands that the 'profane' be protected from the Holy.

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* Genesis 18:27. Quoted in Otto, p. 9.

** Ibid., p. 18.

† Ibid., p. 19. An ideogram is distinguished from "a concept proper".

†† Hebrews 10:31.

In summary, one ingredient of numinous experience is, in Otto's view, the reaction we may feebly describe as a special kind of uncanny awe. If we accept this, then it follows that where these experiences are seen as apprehensions of God, God is shown to be (in words of equal inadequacy) supremely awe-inspiring. This is one of the things contained in addressing or 'describing' him as holy.

B. God is a 'Supreme Mystery'

Turn now to '<u>mysterium</u>' in the formula used by Otto to direct his enquiry. Otto admits that there is something of a flow between the ideas canvassed under the heading '<u>tremendum</u>', at which we have just glanced, and those cast up by a consideration of '<u>mysterium</u>'. Mystery and awefulness are, to change the analogy, bound up together, and "it is true that the reactions in consciousness that correspond to the one readily and spontaneously overflow into those that correspond to the other."* Nevertheless, there is, he holds, something of a distinction between the two. This he begins to establish by discriminating amongst the reactions which figure in numinous experience. If we use the words 'fear' and 'awe' as inadequate symbols for the response which points to the 'awefulness' of God, then, Otto argues, the term 'stupor' may be used, with similar misgivings, to locate the experiential indicators of God's 'mystery'. An essential component of numinous experience, Otto contends, is the spontaneous response which we may lamely describe as "blank wonder, an astonishment that strikes us dumb, amazement absolute."** Again, the wonder, astonishment, dumbness and amazement that compose this reaction are sharply distinguished from the usual responses to which we apply these labels.

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* Otto, p. 25.

** <u>Ibid</u>., p. 26.

Just as there is a different quality to the 'stupor' with which we are struck by the numinous, so there is a corresponding difference in the quality of God's mystery which our response reflects. The "ideogram" coined by Otto to represent this special quality is 'wholly other';* an expression of well-known theological importance as well as obvious relevance to the subject of transcendence. It is an attempt to suggest the 'total difference' between God and everything else, attested to by the unique reaction in question. The '<u>mysterium</u>' implied by numinous experience is therefore quite unlike even the most stubborn and intractable mystery of ordinary proportions.

> The truly 'mysterious' object is beyond our apprehension and comprehension, not only because our knowledge has certain irremovable limits, but because in it we come upon something inherently 'wholly other', whose kind and character are incommensurable with our own, and before which we therefore recoil in a wonder that strikes us chill and numb.**

Once again Otto finds in the features of numinous experience -- features which themselves can only be indicated by what Otto sees as the most strained analogies -- a clue to the nature of that to which this experience is a stammering witness. In this case, the response is given the name 'stupor', and is seen as a meagre sign of the unfathomable 'otherness' of God.

Perhaps this is the point at which to insert a note on the idea of God's incomprehensibility, which has cropped up already in our discussion of transcendence. The idea seems to fit into the 'overflow' between these first two headings of Otto's; the

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* <u>Ibid</u>., p. 26.

** <u>Ibid</u>., p. 28.

awesomeness and the otherness of God. Though it may be difficult to assign a precise location for God's unfathomability in this nexus, it is clear that the insistence upon this point grows from a sense of the violation upon holiness which intellectual comprehension would wreak. (Otto, in fact, devotes an appendix to The Idea of the Holy to 'Chrysostom on the Inconceivable in God'.) This sense of potential violation seems directly connected with the unapproachability and the absolute otherness which are taken to be essential features of the numinous to which numinous experience testifies. All of which serves to underline the point that the doctrine of God's incomprehensibility is not simply a logical note about what may or may not be said about a transcendent being. It is that, but it stems from this more fundamental religious concern to protect the inviolable holiness of God. Intellectual trespass is seen as as much an assault on God's worship-worthiness as any other attempt to reduce the daunting mystery that he is.

C. Yet God is 'Fascinating'

A strange fact about experience of the holy, in Otto's view, is that it leads to a characterization of its object as a mysterium not only tremendum but also fascinans. At the level of experience, Otto's contention is that numinous experience includes not only those characteristics to which 'awe' and 'stupor' make a gesture, but also an element for which the word 'fascination' may be used to stand. Although the holy is found to be daunting and numbing, Otto argues, at the same time we find ourselves deeply drawn toward it. The same experience which strikes us with a numbing kind of awe paradoxically brings a sense associated with "religious bliss or felicity."* Without

* Ibid., p. 33

this note of 'fascination', Otto contends, one could not explain "how it is that 'the numinous' is the object of search and desire and yearning, and that too for its own sake and not only for the sake of the aid and backing that men expect from it in the natural sphere."* And yet, in spite of the fact that the holy is longed for in itself, Otto seems to suggest that a factor in its 'fascination' is the dimly-sensed promise that in some sort of communion with or sharing in the holiness of God there lies a fulfillment which the word 'salvation' palely suggests. So although man's experience of the holy brings with it a sense of the great gulf between it and himself, at the same time it attracts him across that gulf toward holiness, sharing in which is somehow apprehended as 'salvation'.

The characterization of God which this implies is vaguely figured, Otto suggests, in a word like 'gracious'; though again this word lacks the depths of wonderfulness which lead the mystic to forego the use of words altogether. Still less does 'God is fascinating' capture that aspect of God's character which is believed to compel this profound longing and sense of promise. But once again, in the aspect of numinous experience for which 'fascination' must do, Otto sees a non-rational pointer to the nature of God.

D. Holiness as Value

There is yet another feature of numinous experience identified by Otto and given a role as indicating in the same non-conceptual way something of the character of God. Mention has been made of the feeling built into experience of the holy, of one's own comparative

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* Ibid., p. 32.

worthlessness when faced with the numinous. Otto draws attention to a note running through those elements already mentioned ('awesomeness', 'mystery' and 'fascination') which is the obverse side of this sense of one's own profane-ness. According to Otto, this latter sense is but the reflexive side of an implicit judgement of the extreme value of the holy. "Thou only art holy" runs the line in the Gloria, signifying that God alone is, among other things, of such numinous value and worth. The response marked by this phrase implies not just the 'awe-someness' of God, but also his 'praise-worthiness'. For to say such things is precisely to render that kind of praise which only the numinous is deemed to deserve. Otto emphasizes that although this supremacy ascribed to God, and the relative baseness imputed to man, come to include moral elements, that is not their primary force. Moral delinquency only becomes sin, he insists, when an implied contrast with numinous value is added. (One thinks in this connection of the association in Paul's words between 'sin' and 'falling short of the glory of God'.*) Accordingly, it is not quite right to say that it is men's moral defects which are dealt with in redemption or salvation. These moral shortcomings are merely an element in a general alienation from the holy; the holy to which men are at the same time deeply drawn. The profound value of God which numinous experience is held to imply is therefore much more than simply moral value; and Otto tries to extend our conception of value possibilities by raising analogies of aesthetic and other sorts of value. Of course, Otto would concede, it is impossible to describe adequately the sort of value one is implicitly ascribing to God in the responses of worship

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* Romans 3:23.

and praise. It is part of his case that this is a unique sort of value, specific to the numinous. But the idea is that included in a full-blooded experience of the holy is an awareness of the intense value and praise-worthiness of God that entails an impression of one's own relative worthlessness.

E. Holiness and Transcendence

It is no doubt possible to bring criticisms against Otto's argument. For one thing, it is not clear how far he means to suggest that numinous experience is self-validating; i.e., that by its nature it somehow establishes the existence of an object of those experiences he calls numinous, to which the name 'God' may be given. Such a claim would, I think, be open to serious objections. Otto has also been criticized for failing to do justice to the experience of the contemplative mystic,* in which the sense of 'tremendum' seems at least greatly diminished. This is a serious enough fault in an attempt to canvass the riches of religious experience. But however proper such objections may be I do not think they invalidate the lessons I wish to draw from Otto's work. Subject to criticisms which are more damaging to Otto's importance for the subject of this enquiry, let me suggest that there are two connected morals for the study of transcendence to be drawn from his account.

The first concerns the place of transcendence-talk in religious life. 'Transcendent' is a technical word, in a way that 'holy' is not. So they are not just the same sort of concept, and can scarcely be expected to occupy just the same place in the life of Christian belief and experience. Nevertheless it is striking that in so many contexts

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* See, for instance, Ninian Smart's The Philosophy of Religion, p. 13f.

where the word 'transcendent' is available, it is used as something like a synonym for 'holy'. In the standard English translation of The Idea of the Holy the words 'transcendent' and 'transcendence'* frequently appear in close association with 'the holy'. In one place Otto suggests that the words "supernatural" and "transcendent", which (according to Otto) strictly speaking have merely a negative force in denying the possession by God of those attributes possessed by the world, are in fact best filled out in a positive way by the kind of non-conceptual "feeling content" he finds in experiences of the numinous.** In general it seems obvious that in the current debate about God, where the withdrawal of "transcendence" is either deplored or welcomed, it is something like the appropriateness of such responses as "awe", "stupor", "fascination" and praise, or the existence and character of something deserving these reactions, that composes the issue on which sides are being taken. It would be a mistake to see 'holy' and 'transcendent' as equivalent in their situation in religious life. But it would also be a mistake to see their roles too sharply distinguished. For it is hard not to discern behind the cognitive concerns of transcendence-talk a similar set of responses to those in which the concept of holiness is held by Otto to emerge. This is an aspect of 'transcendence' that has arisen often enough in this enquiry to need no further emphasis. It was particularly evident in our discussion of the idea that God is 'above' the world. The point of noticing this similarity in location is that (1) it helps protect us from the mistaken view that in religion (or anywhere else)

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* The German word given this translation is, I believe, Überweltlich.

** Otto, p. 30. See also p. 52.

we have understood everything of importance when we understand the 'meaning of the terms', and (2) it provides a way of getting at the cognitive content of these expressions, if that is what we are interested in.

Which brings me to the second moral. The connections between those strands in talk of God's transcendence which we have looked at and those evocative hints at the character of the numinous which Otto provides, appear too striking to be unimportant. I was led to trace through such cool statements as 'God is numerically other than the world' and 'God does not take spatial predicates' and even 'God knows all that there is to know' and 'God is perfectly good', a common concern to exempt God from anything that might be regarded as a limitation or imperfection. It is more than tempting to tie this up with the blend of 'awesomeness', 'mystery', paradoxical 'fascination' and 'value' which Otto ascribes to the numinous. The very concept of 'transcendence', emerging as it did in a contrast with immanence, carries echoes of the great 'personal distance' which Otto claims is brought home in numinous experience. Arguably, it is a sense of this distance that is reflected in the pains taken by theologians to distinguish God sharply, both numerically and qualitatively, from anything in the creation, to the point of embracing his incomprehensibility. I am suggesting, therefore, that it is appropriate to see at least a good many, and perhaps all, of the points I have located in transcendence-talk as the logical (Otto would say "rational") outcroppings of the kind of experience cited by Otto. More than this. It is appropriate to see those points as ways of

filling out those vague but evocative descriptions given by Otto of the nature of that to which this experience testifies. Whether this experience is *of* anything is another question. But the logic of the responses, including utterances, which flow from it is, I think, at least partly depicted in the doctrines we have inspected. Seeing them as logical creations prompted by those responses which believers are inclined to make to what they take to be God, may help to account for their bloodless appearance, but also allow us to feel their pulse.

I have tried in this part of the thesis to shed some light on the content of Christian discourse concerning God's transcendence, as well as on the origins in life of such discourse. Whatever success I have had at that, we have surely had provided a store of potential problems from which to choose in what follows.

PART II

DIVINE TIMELESSNESS

CHAPTER VI

TALK OF TIME AND TIMES

"Time like an ever-rolling stream, bears all its sons away." But God, according to Christian theists, is not one of time's sons, at least in the sense that he is not borne away. I want now to examine critically one way in which God has been held by Christians to avoid whatever drawbacks there are in temporal existence.

There are, as I mentioned in outlining God's transcendence of time, two quite different ways in which God is exempted by Christians from the role of those borne away on time's flood. According to one, the simplest and the most common, God is what might be termed 'eternal'. That is, his life has duration without beginning or end. If he exists at all, then he always has and always will. On this view God may in some sense be said to be 'in time', in that at the very least he exists throughout all of it. As far as time is concerned, his principal difference from other entities in temporal transit, apart from the sheer extent of his occupancy, is that time does not see fundamental change in him. Specifically, he is not involved in that steady progress toward decay and dissolution which marks the passage of time and invariably characterises the existence of all his creatures. This difference may lead one to say that God is not borne along by time at all. It certainly entitles one to say that he is not borne away.

That is one way of exempting God from the ravages of time's river, but there has been another. According to this second view, God cannot properly be said to be in time at all, not even in a way

that acquits him of fundamental change. Just as spatial predicates (used literally) are ruled out of association with 'God', so are temporal ones. Neither he nor anything about him (e.g. his knowledge, perceptions or actions) can be assigned a time or date, i.e. a location in time; nor can he or anything about him be allotted a temporal period, i.e. duration in time. Again, Anselm's words in the Proslogium represent this view: "Thou wast not, then, yesterday, nor wilt thou be tomorrow; but yesterday and today and tomorrow thou art; or, rather, neither yesterday, nor tomorrow thou art; but simply, thou art, outside all time."* Augustine draws out the implications of this same view for our understanding of God's thought and awareness:**

> ...not in our fashion does He look forward to what is future, nor at what is present, nor back upon what is past; but in a manner quite different and profoundly remote from our way of thinking. For He does not pass from this to that by transition of thought, but beholds things with absolute unchangeableness, so that of those things which emerge in time, the future, indeed, are not yet, and the present are now, and the past no longer are; but all of these are by Him comprehended in His stable and eternal presence.

In short, nothing is permitted to be a predicate of 'God' which implies that he or anything that he does or undergoes is either temporally extended or temporally located.

Let the first of these two views as to God's relation to time be called that of his 'eternity',† and the second, that of his

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* Chapter XIX. Quoted in Pike, p. 9.

** City of God, Chapter 21. Quoted in Pike, p. 74.

† This is a somewhat stipulative restriction on the application of 'eternity' and 'eternal'. It appears that these words have, in the history of theology, been used to represent both views. See, for instance, Pike, op. cit., p. ix.

'timelessness'. In part one of this thesis I argued that some such view of God's relation to time, either his eternity or his timelessness, is among the elements available to fill out the notion of God's transcendence. There can be no doubt as to which of these two accounts of God and time amounts to the more radical estimate of his transcendence. Indeed Nelson Pike believes that

> ...if one surveys the range of doctrines that have been advanced in traditional Christian theological texts concerning the nature of God, the claim that God is timeless must surely be listed as the most complete and emphatic assertion of divine transcendence.*

Partly because it is such an emphatic assertion of divine transcendence, and partly because it is intuitively so much more troublesome a view than that of God's eternity, I intend in this section to examine the doctrine of God's timelessness. I shall begin, in this chapter, with some general and by no means exhaustive remarks on the conceptual framework involved in talk of time. Second, in the next chapter, I shall consider the case of three important and representative verbs which in different ways rely on this same framework, and for this reason appear not to be predicable of a timeless God. Third, in Chapter VIII, I shall argue that to attempt to retain these verbs by calling for various kinds of conceptual reform is at least unpromising.

First of all, let us be sure that we are clear about what is involved in saying that God is timeless. As a way of achieving this, let me rehearse some very general points about time and temporal

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* Pike, p. xi.

predicates.*

Time, like, space, is constituted by the possibility of locating things and events relative to one another; though of course there is an important difference between locating things spatially and locating them temporally. (Obviously these remarks do not yield anything like a definition of 'time'. For to say that time consists in the possibility of locating things temporally relative to one another involves a patent circularity if it is meant to be a definition.** All that this comment provides is a reminder about what is done in speaking about the times of thing.) Time, unlike space, is one-dimensional. That is, to identify uniquely any point in time, all that is necessary is a single coordinate specifying some temporal interval between that point and some other (such as the conventional date of Christ's birth). Time, also unlike space, is (at least in our experience†) uni-directional. This is reflected in our usual addition to the specification of a temporal interval between

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* I have drawn especially upon Swinburne's Space and Time, chapter 10, for the following.

** I am inclined to agree with Gale (in The Languages of Time, p. 4) that any definition of time must be circular. This seems generally true of terms which mark the entry into a particular conceptual framework or 'language game'. One cannot define such expressions in terms of some other conceptual framework. One can only rehearse some of the rules which govern its use within the framework to which it belongs, thereby apprising or reminding someone of the structure of that framework and thereby providing an introduction to or reminder of the way it is applied. One can also attempt to point out features of the world which seem to legitimate the use of the framework, though even this seems difficult to do in a way which does not beg the question against anyone who is skeptical about its applicability.

† There is some disagreement as to whether time must always proceed in the direction it appears to do now. See, for instance, J.J.C. Smart's 'Time', especially pp. 130-2. Smart includes a topically-arranged bibliography, with one heading being 'The Direction of Time'.

events,* of the expressions 'earlier than' or 'later than' or some equivalent. 'Points' of time, which might be called 'instants', may be construed as analogous to spatial points. Like the points on an infinite line, instants are not strictly to be thought of as discrete or denumerable. This is just a way of saying that time is genuinely continuous. The implication that these instants therefore can have no breadth or duration, with its prospect of an infinite series of durationless instants, need not bother us as it did Zeno.** Discoveries in modern mathematics have apparently shown that "there is no inconsistency in supposing that an appropriate nondenumerable infinity of points makes up a set of greater dimensionality than any finite or denumerable set of points could."†

From this point about the continuity of time it follows that time possesses no intrinsic metric. If instants are durationless, then any interval of time contains as many instants as any other. So there is no smallest-sized unit of time, in fact no intrinsic unit at all. The units we employ to measure time must therefore be conventional and somewhat arbitrary as regards time itself.

So far, then, I have said that time has to do with the location of things relative to one another, that it is one-dimensional and uni-directional, and genuinely continuous.

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* For the moment I shall confine my attention to the temporal location of events; though as we shall see, things other than events are commonly spoken of as having this sort of location.

** See H.N. Lee's 'Are Zeno's Paradoxes Based on a Mistake?', for an explanation mainly in non-mathematical terms of how modern mathematics show the way to a resolution of Zeno's famous paradoxes.

† J.J.C. Smart, 'Time', p. 129.

Now if we consider temporal predicates, it appears that they are roughly of two kinds: one having to do with location in time (e.g. 'at four o'clock', or 'in 1971' or 'ten minutes before he died'), and the other with duration (e.g. 'for eight seconds' or 'from sun-up to sun-down' or 'during the reign of Henry VIII'). I have already mentioned the way in which we specify temporal location; i.e., by stating in some metric and usually in terms of 'earlier (or later) than' the temporal interval between the thing in question and some other. Duration, or extension in time, is parasitic on the idea of location. To specify the duration of something is to state the relative temporal locations of the beginning and the end of that thing. To say that something went on for eight seconds or throughout the reign of Henry VIII is to specify the temporal interval between the beginning of something and its end. There is also the implication, of course, that that thing continues through all the temporal instants between those which mark its beginning and its end. So if a total solar eclipse lasts for eight seconds, the sun is eclipsed at any time one might choose to specify between t (the time of the onset of the eclipse) and t + eight seconds. Similarly, if England was a maritime power during (in the sense of 'throughout' and not just 'at one or more points in') the reign of Henry VIII, then it was a maritime power at any time between the coronation and the death of that monarch.

It is tempting to see one sort of entailment between the notions of temporal location and duration. On the one hand, it appears that saying something or other has duration commits one to saying that it has location as well; specifically, all the locations

between and including the beginning and end of its temporal spread. On the other hand, specifying the temporal location of something seems by itself to entail nothing about its duration; not even that it has one. Something can happen at 4 p.m. on Tuesday, such as my noticing that it is 4 p.m. on Tuesday, without taking any time to happen. So we seem to have a one-way entailment between duration and location in time: duration entails location but not vice versa.* Let us call this the Entailment Theory, noticing that its one-way clause brings it about that there are two parts to the theory; one part in which it is stated that temporal duration necessarily entails temporal location, and a second in which it is stated that location does not necessarily entail duration. It is worth examining this theory more closely, for in doing so we shall uncover some points about time and temporal particulars that are easily missed.

An initial point worth noting is that accepting this theory uncritically might allow us to ignore the variety in sorts of particulars which may be said to have duration or temporal location or both. We may say that Methusaleh lived for 900 years, or that a house has been unoccupied for six months, or that a battle has been raging for eight hours. We may also say that Methusaleh lived 3,000 years before Christ, that this is the first time in its 200-year history that the house has been unoccupied, that the battle took place on the second of March, and that the general was killed at ten in the morning. It is easy to multiply examples of this sort, and the variety in kinds of subjects which may be referred to in terms of temporal

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* That there is a one-way entailment of this kind was a view advanced, for instance, by Frederich Schleiermacher (The Christian Faith, paragraphs 52 and 53), and apparently accepted by Pike (pp. 6-8).

spread or location may have a bearing on the truth of the Entailment Theory.

It is plain that the particulars which admit of temporal modification in this way may be classified in any number of ways, and that any particular way with a claim to rigour must be the product of a lengthy and painstaking enquiry. For purposes of this discussion, however, let me propose a rough-and-ready set of categories which will, I think, prove sufficient for our purposes.* Let us distinguish three sets of temporal particulars: (a) material bodies and persons, (b) states, processes and activities, and (c) what I shall call 'happenings'. In the latter category I mean to include only those events which may be assigned a location but not a duration in time (e.g. someone's arriving home, or seeing the answer to a puzzle, or a clapper's striking a bell).** Let (a) be interpreted broadly enough to include things like rivers, hills, and other distinguishable material masses which are not obviously 'material bodies' as well as persons other than human, if such there be. It follows from the

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* My list bears some resemblance to a set of distinctions employed by Strawson in Individuals, p. 46, though my set is longer and its members are grouped in a way that Strawson's are not.

** Whether or not an event is regarded as having duration is to some extent a contextual matter. For many purposes we may regard as virtually instantaneous an event which for some other purposes we recognize as having temporal spread. For most of us, the click of a camera is instantaneous; unless you happen to be a photographer, in which case the length of time that a lens is open can be of crucial importance. In other cases concerning events which manifestly do have duration, we often have occasion to speak of them in a way which has little or no regard for their temporal spread. (This is a point that will emerge later in our discussion of 'open-ended' temporal location.) But the class of 'happenings' is reserved for those events which cannot, under any circumstances, be thought of as taking some time to happen. By and large these will concern events which are themselves the boundaries of events which do have duration; that is, the beginnings and endings of things. (See G.E.M. Anscombe, 'Before and After', especially pp. 17-21.)

restrictions placed on membership in class (c) that those things we might often classify as happenings, but which may be clocked, however briefly, as well as dated (e.g. a flash of lightning, the mowing of a lawn, or the climbing of a mountain) will be placed under (b) as processes or activities. (Apologies may need to be made to ordinary usage in particular instances.) Otherwise, the membership of this class is just as one would expect from the terms used to describe it.

It is obvious that at least some members of classes (a) and (b) are on occasion properly spoken of as having temporal duration. Methusaleh, the state of being unoccupied, and the set of activities that compose a battle, appear in this capacity in examples I gave above. So at least some things which have temporal spread are either material bodies or persons, or states, processes or activities; which means that at least some particulars of these kinds are with logical propriety describable in terms of temporal duration. Let us leave aside for now the question of whether <u>all</u> members of classes (a) and (b) may be described in this way.

The first part of the Entailment Theory may be rendered something like this: for any x, it is necessarily the case that if x is extended in time then x is also located in time. Now let us consider the way in which members of (a) and (b) in the list given above might fare as applications of this purported entailment. What we want to know is whether, if a particular of either kind is said to have duration, it is entailed that it has temporal location as well. Before attempting this, however, we may reflect for a moment on what it means to speak of something which is extended in time as having temporal location also. Here we come across a difficulty, for it becomes

apparent that we speak of continuants as having temporal location in two quite different senses. First of all, our ways of speaking reflect the point already mentioned that anything enduring from time t to t + n, as a matter of logic endures through all the intervening instants. In some contexts what we appear to do is select one of the temporal points which lies within the duration of some continuant, and speak of the continuant as in a way located at that point, though not just at that point. What we do on these occasions is usually to state that some other particular which has temporal location is coincident with some point or points in the duration of this continuant. Thus we might say that Henry VIII was on the throne when Anne of Cleves first set foot in England. Of course in this example we do not mean to suggest, nor would we be taken to suggest, that Henry VIII was on the throne only at that instant when Anne of Cleves first touched English soil. If it is proper at all to call this way of referring to points in the life of a continuant, 'locating' the continuant, it might be dubbed 'open-ended' location, in recognition of this fact that location in this sense is compatible with the thing's being extended before and after the point in time specified.

This sort of location is not always a matter of picking out a point in the career of some enduring entity. Not only things like Anne of Cleve's first contact with England, but also such things as her stay in that country, may be pegged to Henry's reign. But again, in saying that Henry was on the throne while Anne of Cleves was in England it is not implied that the two states of affairs were coextensive. Of course it would not normally be our purpose in saying such a thing to assign a location to Henry's reign, but to Anne of

Cleve's stay. Nevertheless, Henry VIII's monarchy is implicitly assigned an open-ended location in such an utterance. In this sort of case it is not a happening but a continuant of some sort that is located relative to continuant number one (Henry VIII's reign in the example). Locating a second continuant thus serves also to locate that prime continuant. Temporal location of this sort is a reciprocal arrangement.

But there is another and more restrictive sense in which we locate continuants in time. To complicate things further, we may locate (in this sense) with the aid of either or both of two different coordinates. Consider some examples. We might say (1) 'Henry VIII lived before Elizabeth II', or (2) 'There are 400 years between Henry VIII and Elizabeth II', or (3) 'Henry VIII lived 400 years before Elizabeth II'. In all these cases it is surely proper to say that we are locating continuants in time, though in a sense quite distinct from the 'open-ended' sense just mentioned. Each of these cases entails at least a rough specification of what time is <u>not</u> occupied by the continuants located, which the open-ended kind of location does not. The evident differences in their specification reflect the difference between the <u>dimension</u> of time and its <u>direction</u>. In example (1) we indicate the relative position in time of two continuants merely with respect to which one is earlier than the other. All that is ruled out is the case where Henry either lived <u>after</u> Elizabeth or lived at the same time. Example (2), on the other hand, is more precise about the interval separating the two monarchs, and therefore excludes a great many additional possibilities as to their temporal relation; but it fails to specify, in a way that (1) does not, their

relative temporal priority. Example (3), of course combines the specifications of (1) and (2), and thus constitutes the most exclusive location of the two continuants mentioned. But all three involve a restriction on the possible temporal relations of Henry and Elizabeth, and for this reason might be called the 'restrictive' way of locating continuants in time.

Of course we may locate a continuant in this way without using as a reference point some other continuant. We locate Henry's life just as well and in much the same way when we say that he lived 400 years before the death of George VI. In this case, as with that involving the life of Elizabeth II, there is a more or less rough limit assigned to Henry's existence.

The limit is rough. This is because either in stating the relative priority of the things mentioned or in stating the size of the interval between them we appear to ignore, or at least pay scant regard to, the duration of the continuant(s). What we do is locate, either in terms of priority or in terms of temporal separation or both, the duration of some continuant relative to some other continuant or some happening. In those cases, like examples (2) and (3), where the temporal separation between things is quantified, it is obviously a contextual matter how precisely we specify the span between them, or for purposes of specifying it, what we regard as its beginning and end. In general however, it would obviously be practical to undertake this sort of location, i.e. where temporal separation is quantified, only where the duration of the continuant(s) involved is small in comparison with that of the interval between the two particulars being spoken of.

Now we are in a better position to assess the truth of part one of the Entailment Theory. Is it true that, for any x, it is necessarily the case that if x is extended in time then x is also located in time? As we have seen, there are two senses of 'located in time' to be canvassed, and our assessment of the alleged entailment may be affected by which interpretation is placed on that phrase.

Let us consider first whether extension of any particular in time entails that that particular also possesses <u>open-ended</u> location in time. The answer to this question has already been provided. It was assumed in discussing the notions of duration and location in time, and again in discussing the idea of locating continuants in time, that if something is said to be extended in time then it has in effect been said that that thing is located at all points between and including those which mark its beginning and end. In this sense of 'location in time' it seems plain that duration entails location in time.

But what about the second sense in which continuants may be assigned temporal location? Does being extended in time entail the possibility of 'restricted' location?* There is, it appears, one conceivable case of extended existence which does not entail restricted temporal location; namely the case of something which has infinite or 'eternal' existence. If there is a God, or indeed if there is anything else, which possesses duration without beginning or end, then obviously

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* We need not consider independently the two sub-kinds of restricted location that may be effected, for it is clear that if any particular has one sub-kind of restricted location it must also have the other. That is, if one particular is temporally prior to another then it must in principle be possible to specify the interval, if any, between them; and if two particulars are consecutive or separated by a temporal interval then one must be prior to the other.

the temporal span of such a thing could not be assigned a restricted location relative to the spans of other things. Since he or it occupies all of time, no portion of time could be set aside as the only part occupied by him or it, and setting aside such a bit of time is a necessary condition of restricted location as I have described it. So it seems that the ambiguity of 'temporal location' in the case of continuants does make a difference, and that our assessment of part one of the Entailment Theory is contingent upon clarifying the sense to be attached that phrase.

It may be objected, however, that the exception just noted is a singular and unusual sort of case, and that since the entailment still seems to hold in every other conceivable instance, it is still a relatively important thesis. In the face of this, I can see no reason to press the importance of this exception; provided that the Entailment Theory is not employed in a way that infringes the exceptional nature of this sort of case, and provided also that acknowledging the general truth of this statement of entailment does not obscure the distinction in kinds of location in time which may be assigned to continuants.

So much for part one of the theory. We have seen reason to grant its truth with one, perhaps relatively unimportant, class of possible exceptions. From our consideration of it we have also learned some things about the language of time. Let us proceed now to a scrutiny of part two of the Theory of Entailment; the 'not vice versa' clause. This part of the theory could be put as follows: 'for any x, it is not necessarily the case that if x is located in time then x is also extended in time'. Of course all we need to

establish the truth of this proposition is one case of a substitution for x in the conditional part of that formula which produces a false statement. And we do not have to look far for such a case. Class (c) in the list of temporal particulars which I distinguished earlier is composed, by definition, of things which have location but not duration. Substitution of an expression referring to one of these things, say Anne of Cleves' first stepping on English soil, in the formula 'if x is located in time then x is also extended in time', produces a patent falsehood. It can clearly be said <u>when</u> Anne of Cleves' first contact with England took place, but equally clearly it cannot be said to have taken any length of time to happen. It is therefore true that one cannot validly infer from the fact that a temporal particular has location in time, the supposition that it has duration. Part two of the Entailment Theory is therefore true.

But we must not allow the speedy victory of the theory to obscure some important further connections between location and extension in time. It may be thought, for instance, that the battle for part two of the theory could equally well have been won using particulars of classes (a) and (b) as examples. That is, it may be supposed that from the fact that some material object or person, or some state, process or activity, has temporal location it cannot validly (on grounds of logic) be inferred that it has any duration. But this seems questionable. P. T. Geach argues against the notion of instantaneous existence of such things in the following words:*

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* <u>God and the Soul</u>, p. 73.

> A kind of stuff, like sugar, is characterized by the specific things it does and has done to it; could there be sugar for a shorter time than it takes for these specific activities to occur? This question is closer to natural science than many philosophical questions; for it suggests that care may be needed in asserting the existence of an unstable chemical compound or sub-atomic particle for a very short time; if the time is too short, the assertion may become incoherent, because the thing might be supposed to exist for a time that would not allow its characteristic behaviour. As Aquinas said, that is a given thing which performs the operations of the thing; the thing does not, then, exist if the relevant operations cannot exist.

I am not sure that this is a clinching argument against the possibility of there being particulars of types (a) and (b) which lack duration. Whether or not it is, however, it does reflect what seems to be some sort of necessary truth; namely that any particular which is properly accorded any of those titles must in fact have some temporal spread, however short. With regard to material bodies and persons, it seems very difficult -- and for reasons of logic, not just contingent fact -- to suppose that anything which may be referred to as a body or a person might conceivably exist for no length of time. States, processes, and activities in the same way seem of necessity to be things that go on over some period of time, however brief. The notions of durationless bodies, persons, states, processes and activities seem equally unintelligible, and not just because we do not seem to have encountered any in nature so far.

If this is so, then it follows that there are some temporal particulars (specifically, members of (a) and (b)) which, if they exist at all, exist for some period of time. This conjecture, especially with its support left largely at the intuitive level, cannot

be used to beg the question about God's timelessness. The most it can be used to do at this stage is to record what seems a deep-seated conceptual resistance to talk of timeless (i.e. durationless) persons, etc. Whether this conceptual resistance reflects a defect in such a concept as a timeless God, or is simply one of those intellectual inclinations to be got over by theists, remains to be seen.

To round things off, let us return briefly to members of class (c), those I have called 'happenings'. By definition, they do provide an instance where the duration of something may not be inferred from that same thing's location in time. What may be less obvious is that their occurrence often entails that <u>something else</u> has duration. This can briefly be shown, I think, in the following way. A very large number of those things which qualify as happenings turn out to be, as a matter of conceptual requirement, the doing or undergoing of something <u>by something else</u>. If Anne of Cleves' first step on the soil of England counts as a happening, it could not have occurred without there being an Anne of Cleves and the soil of England. Similarly, there could not, as a matter of logic, be such a happening as a stone's striking a window, without there being a stone and a window. Many happenings are by definition happenings in the life of some object or person. In some cases the 'something else' which is logically necessary is not one or more material bodies or persons, but a member of class (b) above. Some happenings are happenings to states, processes and activities. That the battle begins to grow fiercer requires that there be a battle, but a battle is not a material object or a person. Nevertheless, even in these cases the statement that there has been a happening frequently brings us back to

objects and persons. For instance, though a battle is not one of these things, it in turn is logically dependent on some such things. Battles are collections of activities, and activities are the activities of some persons. Thus it is that talk about happenings, and also talk about states, processes and activities, in a great many cases depends on there being material objects or persons. If I am right to suppose that members of class (a), and for that matter members of class (b), must logically be continuants, then it is true that in such cases there is an entailment between location in time and duration; though the entailment is between the temporal location of one sort of thing and the duration of another sort of thing.

Not all happenings depend in this way on the existence of some continuant(s). There is, as P.F. Strawson has pointed out,* a distinction to be observed between those events which as conceived by us must necessarily be of, or performed or undergone by, other things; and other events which need not. "Thus a death is necessarily the death of some creature. But that a flash or a bang occurred does not entail that anything flashed or banged. 'Let there be light' does not mean 'let something shine'."** Moreover, the fact that there is in some cases an entailment of some sort between temporal location and duration in no way threatens part two of the Entailment Theory. It merely shows that talk about the times of things is shot through with more and subtler connections than we may at first have realized.

These general comments are intended as a rough sketch of the conceptual network which advocates of God's timelessness wish to

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* Individuals, p. 46.

** Ibid.

renounce as having any application to God. But it often escapes our notice the degree to which particular expressions are embedded in this network of temporal concepts. Let us turn our attention now to a number of verbs whose use may, without our quite being aware of it, ensnare us, theists and all, in the web of temporal talk.

CHAPTER VII

TIME, PLANNING, INTENDING AND ACTING

A. 'Plan'

It appears that we use the verb 'plan' in two fairly distinct ways. According to one pattern of use it conforms quite well to the pattern of what linguists call 'verbs of state'; i.e. verbs which refer not to something which is actually going on, like a process or activity, but to a condition or state. If we say 'They plan to marry in the spring' we use 'plan' in this way, and in such a setting 'plan' seems to carry much the same meaning and work in much the same way as 'intend'. Those who are said in this sense to be planning to do something need not actually be doing or undergoing anything that counts as their planning. This use of 'plan' is usually marked by its association with the prepositional phrase frame 'to...'. In contrast with this is the use of 'plan' to refer to something which clearly is an activity. In such a sense it frequently occurs with other prepositions such as 'for...', or with grammatical objects lacking a prepositional introduction altogether. So we might say 'She is planning for their retirement' or 'He is planning his escape'. (Notice the difference between that latter sentence and 'He plans to escape'.*) That the two uses are quite distinct is witnessed to, for instance, by the different sorts of modifiers they admit. 'He carefully plans to

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* It is tempting to make a general remark about verbs of state to the effect that they do not have a progressive form. (See Vendler, p. 99f for example.) This is true of verbs like 'know' and 'believe', but not of 'plan'. You could say 'They are planning to get married in the spring' for 'They plan to get married in the spring' , perhaps because it also has an 'activity' sense. It follows that the occurrence of a progressive verb form cannot be used to distinguish the two senses of 'plan'.

escape' is puzzling unless we take it as a dramatic use of the historic present. But 'He is carefully planning his escape' is quite plain in its meaning and would do quite nicely as the report of a certain activity. These differences merely illustrate the differences between 'state' and 'activity' verbs. The complication in the case if 'plan' is that it leads a double life, having one pattern of use that qualifies it as a 'state' verb, and another which places it under the heading of 'activity' verbs.* Just now I wish to discuss 'plan' in its role as an 'activity' verb. (What is said later about 'intend' may well bear upon 'plan' in its 'state' sense.) I shall argue that 'plan', in this sense, implicitly assigns to its subject an open-ended temporal location.

To be engaged in planning is, roughly to be engaged in a process in which one considers and decides what must be done in order to bring it about either that some particular event takes place or that some particular state of affairs obtains. (There is, I think, a rough distinction between bringing it about that a particular thing happens and bringing it about that a particular state of affairs obtains. But this is not a distinction I shall attempt to refine or exploit, as I believe it is not directly relevant to the subject of planning and temporal location.) The prisoner planning his escape considers and decides what must be done in order to bring it about that his escape takes place; or alternatively, that a state-of-affairs including his freedom obtains. A couple planning their wedding consider and decide what things must be done in order to bring it about that they have a wedding, and that it is the sort of occasion they and/or their parents want it to be. Planning something is next door to making the

arrangements for something. It is considering and deciding what arrangements to make.

If we consider every-day examples of this sort of activity it is immediately obvious that to speak of something as the object of planning establishes it as a <u>future</u> event or state-of-affairs relative to the occasion of that activity. Imagine word being circulated in the prison that so-and-so is planning his escape. On hearing the rumour, one convict exclaims 'But he escaped three days ago!' Now this reaction presumably expresses not just a conviction that the report is false, but also the feeling that something in this attempted act of communication has gone wrong. The facts as they are, or at least are believed to be, pull the logical rug from under the statement which is going round. Surely this is the sort of puzzlement it would be normal to experience on being told that so-and-so is planning such-and-such, where the latter is something believed to have a date and time in the past. Just as a prisoner cannot plan an escape which has already taken place, or failed to take place, neither can a couple plan their wedding after it has occurred. A pensioner may postpone planning his retirement until after it has begun; but he cannot plan that part of it which has elapsed when he begins to plan. The 'cannot' in these cases is a logical one. The attempt to state that one is planning retroactively brings about a paralysis of communication. What must be given in one part of the utterance with the word 'plan' is somehow taken back elsewhere where the object of planning turns out to be one that is recognizably in the past. And the result is a situation in which the hearer is inclined to think that he must have mis-heard, or that the speaker does not understand the use of 'plan'

in English. The logical breakdown can be made screamingly obvious simply by spelling out the reverse temporal order. 'He is planning his household renovations of last month' is either a joke or the plainest sort of howler. If it is a joke, its being a plain howler is one of the things that may make it so.

These examples all have to do with retroactive planning, but the plight of contemporaneous planning is just as grave. A guest who whispers that the couple at the altar are still planning their wedding would have to mean something special (perhaps that their planning has been 'last-minute') or invite blank incomprehension. The planners of a festival could still be planning the final night when the first day of the festival is underway. But it makes no sense to speak of their planning the first day on the first day. Any critic who said that they had, would be taken to mean that they had not planned at all.

It is difficult to avoid a feeling of pedantry when one dwells in this way on the temporal implications of 'plan'. What could be more obvious than that a fundamental logical requirement of anything that someone is said to be planning, is that it be something later in time than the activity taking that name? Any attempt to frame a statement in contravention of this rule produces a patent absurdity. It needs hardly be said that planning, if it <u>is</u> a process and therefore a member of class (b) in the list I gave of temporal particulars,* is one of those particulars that brings us back to a member of class (a). For there to be planning, in other words, there must be a planner. And if planning is necessarily located in time (that is, in the past relative to its object) then something which the planner does is thus located.

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* See p. 92.

On this reasoning, therefore, no planner can coherently be said to lack temporality, for at least one thing that he does has open-ended temporal location. It follows that God, if he is timeless, cannot be said to plan.

The advocate of timelessness, however, may wish to object at this point, on the ground that these examples and the moral drawn from them misplace the necessity of the temporal connections. He may say that he does not wish to debate the temporal implications of 'plan' in the contexts which surround the above illustrations. Indeed, he may admit, these contexts are the normal ones, and the temporality of planning in such connections is beyond dispute. But, he may continue, this is merely a result of the contingent fact that the planners we refer to in this sort of case are acknowledged to be temporal creatures. It is inappropriate to draw from this a moral about what may be said of a timeless being. The temporality of ordinary planning is a contingent feature of the concept, made to appear essential only by the fact that most planners we have occasion to speak of happen to be in time. It has not been shown that in the case of a timeless individual we are unable to suspend this requirement.

But this counter misplaces the reason for the temporal requirement in ordinary talk of planning. To gain a better idea of the source of this requirement let us return for a moment to the sketch I gave of what is involved in planning. A brief look at that sketch will reveal, I think, that the temporal requirement in this concept is far less contingent than is supposed in the above objection.

To be engaged in planning, I alleged, is to be engaged in a

process in which one considers and decides what must be done in order to bring it about either that some particular event takes place or that some particular state-of-affairs obtains. It is worth making explicit three not very surprising presuppositions built into this notion. In considering and deciding what to do in order to bring something about, one clearly assumes that it is worth considering and deciding. That is, it is pre-supposed (a) that as things are, the event or state-of-affairs might or might not come to pass, (b) that free human action has a part to play in determining whether or not it comes to pass, and (c) that the free actions of the planner himself have such a part to play. Now it is apparent that one very fundamental condition of an event or state-of-affairs' qualifying under these related headings is that it must not lie in the past. It is plain that our concepts of intending, acting, deciding, and so on, regard the past as determinate and beyond the reach of any action undertaken either now or in the future. 'What is done, is done' and 'There is no use crying over spilt milk' are but two folk records of this logical point.*

If this is true, then the temporal implications of planning

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* I have assumed here and throughout the following chapters that the notion of bringing about the past is incoherent. This is a controversial point. It has been contested, e.g., by Michael Dummett in 'Bringing About the Past', I do not have the space here to argue for my assumption. I can only refer to detailed arguments in Gale, Chapter VII, and Swinburne, Chapter 8, which are (in my opinion) sufficient to show that the extent of the conceptual upheaval involved in accepting backward causation is so great that we could no longer mean the same thing by 'cause'. Any counter-stipulative-example which might be suggested as inviting this reform is therefore more likely to be accounted for within the common-sense assumption, even if this involves oddities; for such oddities as would be required will be less destructive of a wide range of fundamental concepts than would the supposition that one may bring about the past

are far more deeply rooted than is recognized in the objection under consideration. According to this objection it is the temporality of ordinary planners that brings temporality to the planning exercise. But as we have just seen, it is the temporality of what is planned that brings about the involvement in time of anyone who plans. If it makes sense to speak of planning only that which it is within one's power to affect, and it is within one's power to affect only those things that lie in the future, then anyone who is legitimately said to be planning is placed squarely in time. Specifically, he is given an open-ended location at some point earlier than that which he plans. If one wishes to speak of a timeless being, therefore, it appears that one must forego any talk of his planning. And that is my conclusion: that it does not make sense to speak of a timeless God as one who plans.

I have been discussing 'plan' according to one pattern of its use; namely that in which it refers to an activity. But as we noted at the outset of this discussion, there is another sense in which this word is used. In this second sense it appears to have at least close affinities with the word 'intend'. To say 'John plans to wed in the spring' does not imply that John is engaging in some activity or other, and moreover it seems quite interchangeable with 'John intends to wed in the spring'. Let us turn now to a consideration of 'intend', bearing in mind that at least some of the lessons learned there may also apply to this second sense of 'plan'.

B. 'Intend'

'Intention' serves as the subject of many lively debates in modern philosophy. There are arguments over whether intentions are anything like private mental acts, whether they function in a way that

it is proper to characterize as 'causal', and so on. I shall not attempt here to make any contribution to the discussion of this sort of issue. What I shall attempt instead is to show some of the ways in which the logic of 'intending', whatever it is, presupposes the logic of temporal relations.

It is customary in discussing intention to consider its role under four headings: (1) expressions of intention, e.g. 'I shall go for a walk'; (2) ascriptions of intention, e.g. 'He intends to wed in the spring'; (3) ascriptions of the intention with which something was done, e.g. 'She crossed the road intending to look in a shop window'; and (4) the description of actions as intentional, e.g. 'He embarrassed her intentionally'. Though there is much to be learned about intention from an examination of expressions of intention, I shall ignore this heading, just because it is not an important theological issue whether God may be said to express (verbally) his intentions. I shall argue that considerations issuing from headings (2), (3) and (4) show a variety of ways in which saying of someone that he intends involves the assumption that temporal concepts apply to that individual.

Let us begin with (2), ascription of intention. 'He intends to wed in the spring', is the example I gave. 'They intend to buy a car' and 'She intends to snub him' would be others. It seems true almost by definition that one can speak of another's intending (in this sense) only with regard to something else which lies in the future relative to the time at which it is appropriate to say 'he intends...'. 'He intends to bring about the fall of the Roman Empire', when uttered in 1971, qualifies as an absurdity, just as does 'On Thursday

he intended to do the washing on the previous day'. It seems a necessary truth that one can say so-and-so intends to do or bring about something only during a stretch of time which precedes the time at which what he is said to intend takes place. This does not mean that in saying that he intends there is a specific time assigned to the object of his intention. It merely means that a logical condition of saying 'he intends...' is that what he is alleged to intend lies somewhere in the future relative to our utterance.

One suspects that this condition rests on a point we noted in connection with 'plan'; namely that it is incoherent to speak of someone's planning (or intending) where the object of the exercise is beyond one's power to effect or affect. And this in turn, I have claimed, is bound up with the logical supposition that what is past is beyond anyone's power to influence. If this is so then the ascription of intending, like the ascription of planning, is conceptually dependent on temporal notions. To speak of intention (in this sense) is to usher in certain minimum temporal requirements.

But intending differs in some important ways from planning (in the sense we considered), and it would be wrong to suppose that one can construct a case for the temporal implications of 'intend' parallel to the one I put forward for the case of 'plan'. Planning, as we have seen, is something that one must do before that which one is planning actually comes to pass or fails to come to pass. But it is at least very misleading to say the same thing of intending. The reason is that intending, unlike planning (in the sense we considered), is not something one must <u>do</u> at all. Intending is not an activity. To intend to do or bring about something is not necessarily to do or

undergo anything at all. It certainly does not entail engaging in some activity that may be identified as one's intending. There still appears to be something tantalizingly temporal about the idea of intending. But whatever it is, it cannot be used for locating a person in time by locating something that he does in time.

The temporal note in intending may be brought out in another way. Although there are objections to saying that intending is something one is logically obliged to do before that which one intends either takes place or fails to take place, it is true that we may speak of someone's intending only with respect to things that are in the future relative to the time at which we say he intends. This point is illustrated in the absurdity of my saying of anyone that he now intends to assassinate Hitler. Hitler's death lies in the past, and no one can be said to intend things that are not future things. But there is another kind of absurdity in which talk of intending might play a part, and it points up a still more fundamental point in the logic of intending. It would presumably be all right for me to say of someone that he intended to kill Hitler. There is, however, one further condition which would render this assertion absurd as well, though for a different reason. My statement that so-and-so intended to assassinate Hitler would be nonsensical if it happens that so-and-so is someone who was not alive during Hitler's lifetime. This second kind of absurdity illustrates the logical truism that for a sentence to be useful for making a statement, its subject must succeed in referring to something or someone which or who actually exists. Arguably, 'the present King of France is bald' fails as a statement not because it is false but because there is no present King of France.

In the same way, if 'A intends to do or bring about y' is to be a statement, 'A' must refer to some person living at the time.* This is a logical point underlying the making of statements, and applies equally where 'God' is the subject. Add this to the fact that one can be said to intend something only during certain specifiable periods prior to the performance, etc., intended, and it is clear that God is implicitly assigned an open-ended location in time by any statement to the effect that he intends to do something or bring it about. In making such an assertion we locate God in the temporal period prior to that performance, event or state of affairs which we say he intends. Intending thus involves location in time, not because intending is doing something at a particular point in time, but because it is predicable of a subject only during certain periods of time, and the logic of predication requires that the referent of the subject-expression be in existence during that period of time to satisfy the need of a subject for a reference. I conclude, therefore, that a timeless God cannot be said to intend to do or bring about any action, event or state of affairs. And this is a restriction that seems inconsistent with the statements of traditional Christian theism.

So far we have looked at only one setting for talk of intending: that in which an intention to do something is ascribed to some person. Let us consider now the sort of case in which we ascribe to someone an intention in doing something else. 'He polished the silver with the intention of impressing their guests' is an example of this sort. In many instances of this kind we specify a person's intention in doing

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* Gale, p. 73ff, argues that a logical subject-predicate statement presupposes an existential statement having the same tense.

such-and-such by mentioning some event or state of affairs which is in the future relative to the action performed. In 'She crossed the road intending to look in a shop window', we explain someone's crossing the road by specifying the later event of looking in a shop window. Sometimes there is a causal connection assumed between the event done with some intention, and the later event or state of affairs which we mention in specifying the intention. A medicine man who danced with the intention of bringing an end to a drought might well do so in the light of a causal assumption about dancing and rainstorms. But as G.E.M. Anscombe has pointed out,* doing something with the intention of doing something else is not always based on assumption about straight causal connections between the two. If one crosses the street with the intention of looking in a shop window, one hardly assumes a causal relation between crossing the street and looking in a shop window. What Anscombe suggests as a general way of characterizing the relationship is that the later event or state of affairs must be viewed as a later stage in proceedings of which the earlier is an earlier stage. On this model, crossing the street, for instance, is to be seen as an earlier stage in proceedings of which looking in the shop window is a later stage, where one crosses the street intending to look in a shop window.

We are scrutinizing one sort of intention <u>with which</u> something is done; the sort that is identified by mention of some later event or state of affairs. In cases like this the temporal backdrop behind what we say seems obvious enough. In fact it is tempting to assimilate the temporal connections of this sort of intending to the first kind we

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* <u>Intention</u>, p. 35f.

looked at: straightforward intentions to do something or bring something about. The assimilation could be worked by noting that part of what we say in specifying the intention with which some action is performed concerns some later action, event or state of affairs. In saying that she crossed the road intending to look in a shop window, we say that she intended to look in a shop window. This is an example of the ascription of intention which we began by examining. In identifying the temporal presuppositions underlying that form of talk about intentions it would appear we have by implication identified an element in this second form; where what is intended is tied to some earlier performance. Saying that so-and-so's intention in doing this is to do or bring about that, involves saying that he intends to do that. Saying that he intends to do that, we have seen, involves the subject in time by virtue of the logical requirement that 'he' have a reference if what we say is to constitute a genuine statement. So it appears that specifying the intention <u>with which</u> someone did or does x locates that someone in time in the same way that simply specifying his intention to do y does. It follows that if we are unable (logically) to say that a timeless God intends to do or bring something about, we are also barred from saying that his intention in doing this was to do or bring about something else.

Although I think it is true that there is this link in temporal underpinnings between ascription of intention and ascription of intention <u>with which</u> something is done, there is, it seems to me, an additional temporal grounding in the latter kind of case. This can perhaps best be brought out by emphasizing that ascription of intention <u>with which</u> is at least more obviously located than straight ascription

of intention, in the language-game of explaining actions. When we say 'he did x intending to do y' we offer an explanation of his doing x. Frequently we say such things in response to a question such as 'Why did he do x?' (We may answer simply 'He intended to y', where y is clearly believed by the agent to be an effect of or later stage of a process involving x. But that statement could also be used in situations less clearly involving the explanation of actions. 'He intends to do y' could equally well be an answer to the question 'What is he doing tonight?') Ascriptions of intention with which, I am arguing, are logically linked with the concept of action. They are a species of explanation, and rest on the occurrence of actions to be explained. Now if it turns out that the notion of acting contains temporal elements, ascriptions of intention with which will bring with them additional temporal implications. Let us reserve judgement on the temporal connections implicit in this sort of discourse concerning intending, therefore, until we have examined the notion of action.

This point allows us to recognize a form of intention with which that has not been mentioned so far. I have talked about intentions with which only in those cases where mention of some later action, event or state of affairs counts as identifying the intention. But there are other kinds of things that count as identifying the intention with which something is done. If it is said that a soldier fired a shot intending to warn his comrades, warning his comrades is not necessarily represented as a distinct and future action relative to firing a shot. Firing a shot is not even, or at least not necessarily, an earlier stage in a procedure of which warning one's comrades is a later part. Frequently the intention with which someone does something

is identified not by referring to some later action or event, but by specifying an alternative description of what he does which is presumed to be rendered appropriate by the circumstances of his action. When we mention an intention of this sort we offer what at least the agent expects his action to amount to in the circumstances in which it is performed. So in 'He belched with the intention of complimenting the hostess on her cookery' we are not mentioning two actions, one belching and the other complimenting. What is being said is that the subject expects his belching, in the particular circumstances (which he takes to include conventions about belching and expressions of appreciation) to be interpreted as his rendering a compliment. If he succeeds in his intention, the action which is his belching might equally well be described as his complimenting.

Looking to the notion of action for at least some of the temporal implications in ascriptions of intention with which has an obvious advantage in this sort of case. Here we do not necessarily have a future action or event prior to which we can say he intends to do it or bring it about. All that we have is an action done with a certain intention, and that intention concerns what that action amounts to in its circumstances and not necessarily something temporally subsequent to its performance. It follows that we cannot get at the temporal connections of this sort of ascription of intention with which, in just the way that we did where intention involves some future action, event or state of affairs. It may still be true that there is in cases of this kind a period of time set aside as the period during which we can say 'he intends to such-and-such'. Since 'such-and-such' here holds the place for an alternative account of his action rather than

some further action or event, the period of time is co-extensive with, and not prior to, some particular performance. While this may be enough to establish the logical temporality of this kind of ascription of intention, the conceptual tie-up with action suggests a further way of tracing out the temporal threads woven into talk of intending.

We have looked at two sorts of ways in which intentions are ascribed to persons; one in which there is ascribed the relatively straightforward intention to do something or bring it about, the other in which we refer to the intention <u>with which</u> something or other is done. I have argued that the first way of talking implies temporality in the person to whom intention is ascribed in virtue of (a) the fact that it can be ascribed only for a time prior to the performance, event or state of affairs which is its object, and (b) the logical rules governing reference in statements. The second way of talking, ascription of intention <u>with which</u>, breaks down into two sub-kinds: the first involving mention of something future, and therefore overlapping with straight ascription of an intention to do something; and the second by contrast identifying the intention by reference to an alternative description of it. The first of these sub-kinds, I have suggested, involves its subject in time in much the same way as straight ascriptions of intention to do or bring about something. The second sub-kind implies temporality in its subject only in a similar way: the rules governing reference are plainly applicable in the same way, but the period of time during which the intention may be ascribed is different. I have suggested, however, that this second form of ascription, with its two sub-kinds, is more obviously dependent

then the first on the concept of action.* We shall turn to the subject of action in a moment. For now, let us agree that whatever temporal associations there are on the surface of discourse concerning intention with which, these may well be amplified by presuppositions built into the concept of actior with which this sort of intention is linked.

We have not dealt with another context in which the concept of intention appears; namely that in which we speak of actions as 'intentional' or 'unintentional'. What is the relation between this use of the notion of intention and those that we have identified above? It does not seem necessary to suppose that if A does x 'intentionally' that there must have been a time prior to his doing of x during which he intends to do it.** I may intentionally activate the brakes of my car without having intended to do so for even a brief period before activating them. Similarly, it does not seem essential to my doing x intentionally that I have a further intention in doing it; i.e. that I do it with some other intention as well. A man may do x intentionally without having any further intention beyond that of doing x. Nevertheless, as Anscombe† and others have shown, that we may do x without intending thereby to do or bring about some y (some future event or state) seems logically dependent on the normal case being one in

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* This should not be taken as a suggestion that ascription of intention to do or bring about something is not dependent on action. One cannot have intentions of this sort with respect to something that is not either an action or causally linked with an action. All that I mean to suggest is that intentions with which are more plainly involved with action, since they are normally mentioned as explanations of actions.

** See Fleming 'On Intention', p. 310.

† Intention; see, e.g. pp. 30-33.

which we do have a further intention. If we are asked why we do something that is obviously intentional, it is permissible to say on occasion 'I just did' or 'I just wanted to'. But, as Miss Anscombe puts it,*

> ...if the only occurrence of intention were as the intention of doing whatever one is doing, the notion of intentional action itself would be a very thin one; and it is not clear why it should be marked off as a special class among all of man's actions and movements which are known to him without observation, any more than we mark off movements that are expressions of emotion as a distinct and important class of happenings.

It is clear even from this comment on the relation of 'intention' as it figures in 'intentional action' to 'intention' in the two other sorts of contexts we have glanced at, that there are some considerations regarding the first of these employments that are peculiar to it. I shall not attempt to articulate these in the hope of finding temporal implications in them. Nor shall I attempt to establish the temporality of intentional action by tracing out its logical relations with the two other uses of 'intention' that have been mentioned above. Instead I shall look for the temporal connections of this sort of intention in its obvious connection with the notion of action. Intention with which, as we have seen, is logically linked with the concept of action. But in an even more straightforward way, intentional action is rooted in that concept. Whatever intentional action is, it is action. If action necessarily involves an agent in time, then it follows that intentional action will as well.

We have seen that intention in some of the contexts in which it appears carries temporal implications. Enough has been said already,

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* Ibid., p. 31.

for instance, to show that one cannot be said to intend to do or bring something about without being located in time prior to the action, event or state of affairs which is intended. A timeless God is on this ground excluded as the subject of such ascriptions. But we have also seen that intention in its various uses is in various ways linked with the notion of action, and that further temporal implications may lie in those connections. Let us therefore turn to an examination of action with a view to uncovering any temporal presuppositions built into that notion; keeping in mind that any conclusions we draw there will have a further application in the notion of intending.

C. 'Act'

A large number of things count as actions, all the way from raising one's arm to issuing a Unilateral Declaration of Independence. One suitably vague way of identifying actions is that reports of them may occur in answers to a question of the form 'What did A do?' or 'What is A doing?'.* When we say what a person did or is doing, we ascribe an action to him. Now plainly a large number of things that are traditionally said by Christians of God qualify under this broad definition of 'action', including things like 'God loved Abraham' and 'God brought Israel up out of Egypt'. The definition as it is is too broad, for it seems odd to think of God's loving Abraham as itself an action of God, however much his affection issued in loving actions. So let us concentrate on a particular class of things that may be said in answer to 'What did God do?' or 'What is God doing?'. Let us confine

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* There are important distinctions to be made within the class of actions. See, for instance, Kenny's Action, Emotion and Will, Chapter VIII. I shall, in effect, be singling out for attention a group from within that class of actions which Kenny calls 'performances'.

our attention to those cases where (a) mention is made of some event, process or state which has temporal location, and (b) it is said that God brought it about that the event took place, that the process was underway, or that the state obtained. We are testing the idea that a timeless God may be said to act in this sense. What we want to know, then, is whether bringing it about either that some event takes place, some temporally-located process is going on, or some similarly temporal state obtains, necessarily involves an agent in time.

In a way it seems obvious that the answer to this must be yes. Not that every case of bringing something about locates something about an agent at precisely the same point in time as that occupied by that which he is said to bring about. We often speak of what is in one way only the consequence of a person's action as in another way his action. A man may dislodge a stone at the top of an incline and by starting a rockslide bring about the destruction of a building at the foot of the slope. He could, under certain circumstances, speak of the destruction of the building as an action of his, even though he is not doing anything contemporaneous with its destruction. But part of the reason we can describe the event in this way is that it is traceable back to an event which <u>is</u> contemporaneous with and effected by his doing something; in this case the movement of that first stone. This point is connected with another of some importance. Though a person may be said to 'bring about' some events, processes, etc., in this sense of 'causing them' and not necessarily <u>doing</u> something which is numerically identical or even contemporaneous with them; this is so only on the understanding that there is <u>something</u> which he does which he does not <u>cause</u> to happen, but just does. Arthur Danto has made this point in

arguing for the necessity of what he calls 'basic actions'. He shows that not every action can be a case of an agent's causing something to happen, in the following way:*

> ... suppose every action were a case of the agent's causing something to happen. This means, each time he does a, he must independently do b, which causes a to happen. But then, in order to do b, he must first independently do c, which causes b to happen .... This quickly entails that the agent could perform no action at all. If accordingly, there are any actions at all of the sort described by "causing something to happen", there must be actions which are not caused to happen by the man who performs them. And these are basic actions.

So even if, in our example, the movement of the stone is something 'caused by' the agent, we must come to a stop somewhere; say, with the movement of the man's limbs that caused the stone to move. Although this limb movement is not something the agent causes to happen, it is something he does. That is one thing to notice. A second is that in order for us to say that the outcome event (e.g. the destruction of the house) is an action of someone, the basic action which he performs which brings about this event must stand within a specific range of time relative to that event. Specifically, his basic action must be either contemporaneous with or prior to the event which may alternatively be described as his action.

The point of all this is to show that in order to say of some temporally located event, process or state that it is an example of God's action, we must say that he acts at a certain point in time. This is so, we have seen even where the event is held to be something other than a 'basic action' of God. For only if it is somehow

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* Danto, 'Basic Actions', p. 145. Later on, in chapter XII we shall see reasons for adjusting Danto's account of basic actions slightly.

connected* with an event which *is* a basic action of God can we, according to the logic of agency, say that the outcome event is an action of, or is brought about by, God. If an event, process, or temporal state is held to be an action of God either it is a 'basic action' of his or it is in some way the outcome of a basic action of his. On the first alternative God is therefore said to be acting at *just that time*; i.e. at or during the time that event, process or state takes place, etc. On the second, God is allowed to act other than at just *that* time, but only because he acts at some other. In either case, an event takes place in the life of God; namely his action.** This seems to constitute a conclusive reason for saying that a timeless God could not be said to act, in the sense specified.

But is there another way in which God's action could be construed such that God's agency is maintained without necessitating a temporally located exercise of his power to act? Suppose, for instance, that we were to think of God's action as being something like a timeless decree or timeless willing that such-and-such take place at a certain point in the temporal order. Could we not make sense of this in a way that preserves God's agency without involving him in time?

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* We shall see in chapter XII that Danto's description of the relation as causal requires some modification.

** It seems that a pre-requisite of acting with the intention of bringing something about is knowledge of what is going on now. That is, in order to inject a cause into the stream of things that are happening, designed to produce some effect, one must know what is going on 'now' in order to know what to do and when. But it may be argued that a timeless God could not possess such knowledge, and therefore could not act in this way. The question of whether an a-temporal being could have this sort of knowledge is one of the things to be considered in the next chapter.

One thing that an idea like this does do is show how God's 'willing' or 'thinking of' a succession of temporal events need not itself involve a succession of 'willings' or things 'thought of'. Plainly one can think of, say, the succession of events that makes up Israel's deliverance from bondage in Egypt without thinking of them individually and successively. One could, so to speak, think of them all at once. Thinking of or willing a temporal series need not be something that is itself composed of temporally successive episodes.

The trouble comes when we try to conceive of this timeless willing or decreeing as that which <u>brings about</u> the event or series of events in question. 'Decree' itself is a word that can be used to refer either to what is decreed or to the act of issuing the decree. Insofar as we think of decrees as effective in bringing about some state of affairs it is surely only in that latter sense of 'decree'; an <u>action</u> of issuing a command, or whatever. If it is insisted that the decree is timeless, it seems hard to say why such a thing should become <u>effective</u> at this temporal point and not some other. In short, it is difficult to see what would allow us to assign some causal efficacy to a decree, unless it is construed as an <u>action</u> at some point in time. But then in <u>that</u> sense the decree can no longer be said to be timeless. Something similar is true of 'willing'. Perhaps it is true that we can conceive of timeless willing in the sense that one can want something to happen without performing some temporally-located action that constitutes one's wanting. But if we wish to regard someone's willing as causally effective, than surely it is only by changing our notion of willing to something like the action that participants in experiments in psychical research are called upon to

perform. If 'willing' is not a temporally-located action of this sort, then what grounds could be given for seeing it as effectively bringing about some event or state of affairs which is temporal?

A reply to these arguments may be made with the use of an analogy. Consider the case of an object moving down a channel, occupying successive positions which the shape of the channel determines. The shape of the channel, it might be said, exercises a kind of causal power that has successively different effects, though the channel itself does not change. Might it not be that God's effective decrees are like this, producing changes in time without themselves changing? They are, so to speak, the channels along which flow the course of events in the temporal order.*

There are two difficulties in this analogy. The first is knowing what to treat as an analogue of the contours in the channel, which have the causal influence, in the case of decreeing or willing. The change in an object's course down the channel, which is in time, is presumably to be seen as a result of a change which is not in time but in space, in the channel's shape. We can see how this is the case in the instance of a permanently laid-down channel, but how might this work in the instance of a permanently laid-down decree? What would be the equivalent in the case of a decree of the non-temporal change of shape in a channel? Presumably the answer here might be that the content of the decree is the analogue to the shape of the channel. To make the parallel still more explicit, we could imagine the decree to include such things as 'let a happen, and then b'; this corresponding

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* This analogy is developed from a suggestion made by Mr Martin Hughes in an unpublished paper 'The Powers of a Timeless God'.

to the change in shape of the channel. But this brings us to the second problem in this analogy. It would be a necessary condition of our calling the change in course which is effected by the change of shape in the channel an action of someone, that that person fashioned the channel. His forming the channel must be an action of his, connected somehow with a basic action of his. And these actions would, necessarily, on the reasoning employed a moment ago, occur at some point in time relative to the temporally located change in course which we wish to speak of as an action of his. There is an analogue to this in the case of decree. As we have seen decrees become effective by being issued in some way. In the same way, it might be said, channels become effective in being fashioned by someone. A channel that I have only planned to make will not bring about any changes in the course of actual objects moving through space. Now even if the changes brought about by the decree are at some temporal remove from its promulgation, we connect them to the decree by tracing them back to that event. If we want to describe the changes effected by a decree as the actions of the individual who issued the decree, then it must be that we can trace those changes back to the action of that person in issuing the decree. Thus it seems that even if that decree includes 'changes in shape' ('let a happen, and then b') it is the action in time of someone's promulgating the decree that entitles us to say he did the things that resulted from the decree. So this analogy does not offer a way of interpreting God's action-by-decree that is compatible with his timelessness. Our earlier conclusion, that a timeless God could not be said to act, remains intact.

This conclusion, as I mentioned earlier, has repercussions for

our understanding of a timeless God's intentions. We saw reasons, in considering intention, to disqualify a timeless being as the subject of intention in at least some contexts. But we saw as well that the notion of intention is logically tied, in various ways, to the concept of action. We can use this connection to make at least one obvious statement about intending based on our scrutiny of timeless action: if a timeless being is barred by his timelessness from acting, then he is, on the same grounds, barred from acting intentionally.

CHAPTER VIII

TIMELESSNESS AND CONCEPTUAL CHANGE

It has been shown that, certainly in their ordinary uses, a large family of words such as 'plan', 'intend', and 'act' are firmly embedded in assumptions about the temporality of any subject of which they may be predicated. It follows at least that our suspicions may be aroused about the applicability of any concepts of this sort to a timeless God, and these can hardly be suspicions that the orthodox Christian theist will be happy to entertain.

The most obvious line of counter-attack which is open to the advocate of God's timelessness would appear to be something like this. It may well be and probably is the case that many of these concepts in their ordinary applications carry temporal overtones. But it is not clear that there is any necessity in this. Human beings and the world which they inhabit are, or at least appear to be, in time. It is not surprising that a language evolved by such beings for their use in such a setting should be rich with temporally-loaded concepts. But it seems at best unimaginative to suppose that this language cannot be altered, in ways that are perhaps subtle and complex, to cope with unforeseen sorts of cases. Human enquiry is continuously turning up discoveries that not only require additions to our vocabularies but frequently bring about conceptual reformation or revolution in particular areas of discourse. There seems no a priori reason why the discoveries of theology should be exempted from this process. Indeed it is a long-standing view in Christian thought that ordinary concepts must in some respects be stretched and altered in order to be applied

even tentatively to a transcendent God. What a doctrine of God's timelessness calls for is the application of that same principle to a large range of concepts with respect to their temporal implications. In principle, the changes that are called for seem no more impossible than those which modern physics appears to demand in a vast realm of notions involving time and space. What reason can be given for dismissing the theologian's case for talk of God's timelessness before it is even heard?

A short answer to this rebuttal may be given as follows. The case <u>cannot</u> be dismissed before it is heard. But a case must be presented, and we cannot easily assume the right of the theologian to proceed in talk of God's timelessness before something of that case is before us. It is not enough simply to say that something may be made of these key concepts even after their temporal connections have been severed. If it can be shown, as I think the arguments so far have at least suggested, that concepts like 'plan', 'intend', 'act', and so on, are woven right into a fabric of temporal assumptions, then anyone wishing to use these notions apart from that fabric must do something to show how they can be extracted and still bear some minimum resemblance to their former appearance. Without some such resemblance, of course, the <u>words</u> 'plan', 'intend', etc., may continue to be used, but we will not be saying what we might think we are saying in using them.

This is an adequate answer only to one who has simply assumed that concepts like those I have mentioned may flourish apart from the temporal grounding which appears to nourish them. Something more can be said, I think, to point up some difficulties in specific attempts

that have been made to transplant these key notions, as well as to indicate more precisely the difficulty of the conceptual task which confronts any advocate of God's timelessness. Let us consider two possible views of God's timelessness: (1) that temporal becoming is an objective feature of the world, but not of God, and (2) that temporal becoming is not an objective feature of the world, nor of God; and since God 'sees' the world as it really is he sees it without the feature of temporal becoming which we humans impose upon it. I shall call the first view 'the objectivity of time' and the latter view 'the non-objectivity of time'.

6. Timelessness and the Objectivity of Time

First of all let us consider God's timelessness in the context of a belief that time is objective. In saying that temporal becoming is an objective feature of the world, what I mean to say is that there is a genuine past, present and future; or, putting it another way, there is an objective 'now' or 'present'. 'Now' according to this view, marks our location in the temporal order of becoming. I will not try to define or analyze 'now' or 'the present', but simply point out that on the objective view of time it serves as a hinge for what are seen as certain ontological features of things and events in the world; such as that we are not at liberty to choose the reference of 'now' as we are to choose the reference of 'this' or 'here', and the future is open in a way that the past is not.

The proposal before us is that a timeless God alongside a world involved in becoming could nonetheless have predicated of him that variety of personal and other predicates which orthodox Christians have employed in speaking of him.

It is clearly this notion of God's timelessness, i.e. as existing in contrast with the world's temporality, that lay behind my arguments concerning 'plan', 'intend', and 'act'. I assumed that behind the assumptions we observed to be built into these notions, of a world in which some possibilities are open and others are not because some things are in the future and others are in the past, lies a truth about the world. I assumed further that one who wants to say that a timeless God plans, intends, acts, and so on, does so in a way which does not implicate him in the temporal order as I have just described it. It was the suggestion of our enquiry that notions like these are held together in the conceptual web which they help to compose by assumptions about the temporal relations between any subject they might take and some other things and events. Instead of rehearsing again those findings, let us consider another problem which brings out more pointedly the difficulties of a timeless God in the face of an objective 'now'. What I have in mind is the question of what God may be said to know. Let us consider an argument aimed at showing that the knowledge possessed by a timeless God is necessarily limited in an important way. The argument is intended to demonstrate the incompatability of God's timelessness with his alleged omniscience. Although we are not here considering that latter doctrine, the argument is still relevant to our present topic, for if it is valid it entails restrictions on God's knowing that the orthodox Christian theist would be unlikely to welcome. A.N. Prior* and others have advanced an argument of this sort. The following is from a version put forward

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* In 'The Formalities of Omniscience', especially p. 29.

by Norman Kretzmann.*

> According to (one) familiar account of omniscience, the knowledge an omniscient being has of the entire scheme of contingent events is in many relevant respects exactly like the knowledge you might have of a movie you had written, directed, produced, starred in and seen a thousand times. You would know its every scene in flawless detail, and you would have the length of each scene and the sequence of scenes perfectly in mind. You would know, too, that a clock pictured in the first scene shows the time to be 3:45 and that a clock pictured in the fourth scene shows 4:30, and so on. Suppose, however, that your movie is being shown in a distant theatre today. You know the movie immeasurably better than do the people in the theatre who are now seeing it for the first time, but they know one thing about it you don't know, namely, what is now going on on the screen. Thus the similar account of omniscience regarding contingent events is drastically incomplete. An omniscient being must know not only the entire scheme of contingent events from beginning to end at once, but also <u>at which stage of realization that scheme is now</u>.

In brief, Kretzmann's argument is that it is one thing to know what the entire course of contingent events is, and another to know where we presently are in that course of events. Since a timeless being has no open-ended temporal location, he cannot know where we presently are in time. If he did, it could only be because he had temporal relations with events located in time, which amounts to a denial of his timelessness. So a timeless God cannot know what is going on <u>now</u>.

Nelson Pike, in <u>God and Timelessness</u>, has produced a counter-argument to this. To formulate his argument, he employs the notion of a 'fact'. By this term he apparently wishes to identify something like 'what is actually represented as the case' by the use of a

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* 'Omniscience and Immutability', p. 414. Quoted in Pike, p. 91.

particular sentence on a particular occasion in particular circumstances. Now sentences like 'x is now going on' feature among their characteristics the use of temporal indexicals (e.g. 'now', 'today', 'past', etc.). It appears to be the case that the use of sentences containing such expressions entails that the user is located somewhere in time. Accordingly, it would appear that a timeless being could not use sentences containing temporal indexicals. What Pike wants to say, however, is that a timeless being could use such sentences, but that what he says would necessarily be false in virtue of its implication that the user is temporally located. (This seems a quibble on Pike's part, but I do not think it is important to refute this contention.) Whatever reason one gives, Pike therefore agrees that a timeless God could not express what he knows in sentences containing temporal indexicals. But, he wants to ask, is there some 'fact' represented in the use of such sentences which cannot be represented in sentences which lack these indexicals? It is Pike's opinion that there is not, and he puts his argument for this view in the following way.*

> A timeless individual might know that at a certain point in time, the first scene was on the screen. He might identify this temporal point in a variety of ways. He might say, for example, that it was 3.47 p.m. on the sixth of September. In order to pin it down in a different way, he might add that it was the moment at which Pike said: 'The first scene is now on the screen.' Let's suppose the timeless individual makes use of both these identifications. He says: 'At 3.47 p.m. on the sixth of September -- the moment at which Pike said "the first scene is now on the screen" -- the first scene was on the screen.' Would the timeless individual have reported the same fact as I reported when I said: 'The first scene is now on the

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* Pike, p. 92f.

> screen'? Let's agree that the sentence uttered by the timeless individual would not have the same meaning as the one I used in my report. I'm not really sure that this is true -- since the correct analysis of 'the first scene is now on the screen' might have to make mention of the fact that it was uttered at a certain time (however that time is to be identified) -- but let's grant this assumption for the sake of argument. Still, I can find no reason for thinking that I and the timeless individual have not reported the same fact. If called upon later to justify my original comment, I would point to the fact that at 3.47 p.m. on the sixth of September -- the moment at which I said: 'The first scene is now on the screen' -- the first scene was on the screen.

So Pike's conclusion is that although a timeless God could not use certain sentences to express what he knows, he is just as able as any temporal being to report all the facts. This is so, he argues, because whatever facts may be reported with the aid of temporal indexicals may just as well be reported in sentences which lack such expressions.

In order to evaluate Pike's claim let us for the moment leave out of our considerations the timeless reporter and concentrate on Pike's report of the appearance of this film's first scene. Imagine that instead of saying 'the first scene is now on the screen' he says 'At 3.47 p.m. on the sixth of September -- the moment at which I say "the first scene is now on the screen" -- the first scene is on the screen.' (To keep things clear I have put the verbs in Pike's utterance in a form which may be read as tenseless. If we are to avoid smuggling in temporal location then they must be read in this way.) Now the question is, does Pike represent the same state of affairs as obtaining when he uses this latter utterance as he would in using the former?

The first thing that must be recognized is that these two sentences do differ in meaning. (Pike ought not to have the doubts on this score that he has.) One obvious difference is that while 'The first scene is now on the screen' does not semantically entail that some utterance is made or some specific reading registered on clocks at the same time as the first scene's appearance, the latter sentence does. We can <u>infer</u> these truths from the <u>use</u> of the first sentence. But that is a result of a 'pragmatic' and not a 'semantic' feature of that sentence in the case of the simultaneity of an utterance;' and a result of a piece of knowledge we must have independently in the case of the clock-reading. The first sentence in no way concerns utterance or clock-readings, though information on these points may be inferred from a particular use of the sentences on other grounds. The second sentence does concern them directly.

But, as Pike points out, this is no proof that the two sentences, when used, do not yield the same statement (in Pike's terms 'report the same fact'). The two sentences 'I am overweight' and 'The dark-haired man saying "I am overweight" is overweight' differ in meaning in the same way as the two temporal sentences we are considering. But it seems undeniable that they can on occasion convey the same item of information. There are many items of information that people may have about each other, and yet be unable to express through the use of identical sentences due to the rules governing the use of personal pronouns. This does not prevent their knowing these things, and expressing what they know either by using different pronouns or by using (often somewhat unnaturally perhaps) sentences

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* This is a useful distinction made in Gale p. 63 for instance.

which employ grammatical devices other than pronouns to make identifying references.

The question is, however, whether temporal facts reported by using temporal indexicals may be equally well represented in other terms. Now there is one obvious way in which they can, apart from the sort of translation proposed by Pike. 'The first scene is now on the screen', considered as a statement, plainly does not report anything different from 'The first scene is on the screen' considered in the same way. The 'now' in the first sentence merely emphasizes what is already contained in the (present) tense of the verb 'is' in the second; i.e. the 'presentness' of the first scene's being on the screen. But it is unlikely that this is the sort of thing that will satisfy Pike, for the present tense of this verb has precisely the effect of locating in time anyone who uses such a sentence that the use of 'now' does. That is why Pike's alternative must be rendered free of tenses, in the way I suggested above. This also shows that the issue confronting us concerns more than just the use of temporal indexicals. It has to do with the use of any sentences which effectively locate their user in time, of which sentences containing temporal indexicals and tenses are but two examples.*

What we want to know, then, is whether a sentence free of indexicals and tenses, etc., can be used to represent the same facts that sentences containing such devices do. The answer, I think, is that they cannot. This can be shown in the following way.

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* See Gale, p. 39, for further examples.

Notice that between the two sentences 'I am overweight' and 'The dark-haired man saying "I am overweight" is overweight' there is no difference represented as regards the actuality of the allegedly over-weight man. This is part of what it means to say that the two sentences can be used to report the same fact; they represent the same fact as actual. But there is no parallel to this in the case of the sentences 'The first scene is (now) on the screen' and 'At 3.47 p.m. on the sixth of September -- the moment at which I say "the first scene is now on the screen" the first scene is on the screen'. There is a difference between these two as to what is actually the case. The first sentence, when used, tells us that the first scene's appearance on the screen is actual. Use of the second sentence, on the other hand, tells us that the coincidence of certain clock-readings and a specific act is (tenselessly) actual. What it does not tell us is whether the clock-readings and the speech act themselves, and therefore the first scene's appearance on the screen, is actual. The difference in facts represented shows why the second is 'timelessly true', and therefore available to a timeless being, while the first is not. One fact, that represented in the second sentence, concerns a state of affairs that is presumed always to obtain. The first sentence, on the other hand, concerns a state of affairs that obtains only at a particular time. The difference between these two sentences is an important difference, and one that surely counts as a difference in reported fact. Anyone who knows the fact represented in the latter sentence therefore does not necessarily know the fact reported in the former, for they represent different facts. Pike is right to maintain that two sentences with different meanings may

be used to represent the same facts. But he is misled in thinking that 'The first scene is now on the screen', and 'At 3.47 p.m. ...' are instances of this. The reason is that he overlooks a difference in logical form between these two sentences; a difference which underlies a difference in the facts represented.

This can be brought out by seeing that in the case of the overweight man, the proper parallel to Pike's translation is not 'The dark-haired man saying "I am overweight" is overweight', but 'If there is a dark-haired man saying "I am overweight" then he is overweight'. The reason why this latter sentence is a parallel is that it, like Pike's translation of 'the first scene is now on the screen', withdraws a condition that is laid down in the original statement: viz. the actuality of that which is referred to in the subject expression. 'The dark-haired man...' translation preserves this condition, and therefore qualifies as making the same statement. 'If a dark-haired man...', on the other hand, leaves open the question of whether there is a dark-haired man saying.... So this sentence differs from 'I am overweight' in what it represents as actual. But now, of course, there is no temptation to regard it as a translation of 'I am overweight'. The two sentences are plainly not at all equivalent. One could know the fact represented in the conditional without knowing the one represented in 'I am overweight'.

What this suggests, of course, is that presentness is rather like existence. Saying that some event is taking place now, is a bit like saying that some particular thing exists. One need not suppose that existence is a predicate to maintain that the existence (or non-existence) of

some thing is among the facts there are to be known. Similarly, it need not (in fact should not*) be held that presentness is a predicate in order to say that the presentness (or non-presentness) of some event is among the facts there are to be known. It is true that nothing appears to be added to our conception of a particular event when we assert that it is present; any more than, as Kant observed, something is added to our conception of some object by the assertion that it exists. This is one of the things that lends plausibility to the idea that we can effect the sort of translation suggested by Pike. But it is a mistake to assume that factual differences can always be '<u>pictured</u>' like this. It is plain that in the ordinary course of things we regard being told of the existence of something as being informed of a fact, whether it is picturable or not. In the same way, it seems clear, being told of an event's taking place amounts to being informed of a fact; albeit a fact that does not make any difference to our picturing of the event. Just as a man might know all about a film without knowing whether it is now being shown, so might a man know all about a book without knowing whether it is a novel or a piece of history. In both cases something is added by the statement that the first scene is now on the screen, or that the leading character is an historical figure.

If temporal becoming is objective, then our position in its course is objective. It is one consequence of regarding this matter as objective that it is among the facts that there are to be represented. I have been arguing that Pike fails to show that these facts can be represented in a way that frees the one who represents them from temporal location. This is so whether it is Pike or some

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* See Gale, Chapter V.

timeless being who is alleged to make the report using a sentence free of indexicals, or some other temporal locator. If 'The first scene is now on the screen' is something no timeless being can say coherently (or, as Pike would have it, truthfully), and some fact is represented is saying that that could not be said in a timeless way, then there is at least one fact which a timeless being could not know.

My conclusion is that if, as our ordinary ways of speaking seem to assume, location in the temporal flow of events is an objective matter, then it is not something that can be represented in a way which entails no (open-ended) temporal location on the part of him who attempts to represent the truth on this score. I have not established that temporality <u>is</u> objective in the sense specified. But I think we have seen reasons for supposing that information about this allegedly objective feature of reality is additional to that conveyed in setting out the temporal relations of events one to another.

But the argument has left unaccounted for one telling point in Pike's case for the reduction of 'The first scene is now on the screen' to its alleged equivalent. "If called upon later to justify my original comment", he pointed out, "I would point to the fact that at 3.47 p.m. on the sixth of September — the moment at which I said: 'The first scene is now on the screen' — the first scene was on the screen."* If saying that 'The first scene is now on the screen is, as I have maintained, not the same thing as saying 'At 3.47 p.m. on the sixth of September....', then why should we be able to check the truth of the two statements in the same way, as Pike points out we do?

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* Pike, p. 93

One thing to notice is that it is not as easy to free this checking procedure of its temporal connections as Pike appears to suppose. Presumably the timeless reporter cannot be challenged '<u>later</u>' on the truth of his report. That would involve locating him in time just as surely as his truthfully using a temporal indexical. So let us just say we (timelessly) ask him whether it is true or not that Pike's statement 'The first scene is not on the screen' occurs during the appearance of the first scene on the screen. Now the trouble is that there seems no way of specifying what it is he recommends we look for as supporting the truth of this report that is independent of locating the event of that scene's appearance somewhere with respect to 'now'. If an event is alleged to <u>have happened</u>, i.e. be in the objective past, then we check for memories or traces; i.e. enduring states of things that witness to the event's occurrence. If it is purported to be happening <u>now</u>, then we can at least in principle just look and see; we need not rely on traces. If it is a <u>future</u> event, then we wait and see; i.e. we wait until the time of its alleged happening and check directly. So it is impossible to spell out the verification procedure without assuming a temporal relation to the moment of the alleged happening. Justifying one's statement by indicating the simultaneous occurrence of the first scene and Pike's utterance is not the a-temporal procedure that Pike's argument suggests. It makes an enormous difference whether the event is objectively past, present or future. Apart from the supposition that it is one of those, we would be at a loss to specify the verification technique.

Pike's comment on justification in fact slips in a temporal

locator. He imagines being challenged "later" to justify his original statement. Even recognizing that this assumption queers the pitch, why is it that justification of a past statement of the sort in question can be checked in the way Pike indicates. That is, it may seem odd that we check by looking for the simultaneity of his statement with the first scene's appearance, if his statement 'The first scene is now on the screen' did not concern such a simultaneity.

The oddness disappears, however, when we realize that we are checking the truth of a statement by checking on the truth of something that is entailed by the statement in its context. As I mentioned, 'The first scene is now on the screen' pragmatically entails the simultaneity of the first scene with the utterance made, though it does not entail it semantically. The statement that x is present does not have as one of its truth conditions that a speech act take place concurrent with x. X could be present without anyone's saying so. But in order to make a true statement, one must of course say (or write, etc.) something. If the statement concerns some event or state of affairs alleged to be then present, then it is obvious, though it is not stated, that that event or state of affairs must be simultaneous with the speech act. But that is a pragmatic fact having to do with making statements. All it does is allow us to infer the simultaneity of utterances about what is true at the time of the utterance and the events or state of affairs which they report.

Now it can be seen why checking on the simultaneity of the report with the occurrence of that which it reports is a way of justifying a past statement of what was then the case. We check in this way not because that simultaneity is among the things reported,

but because it was pragmatically entailed. If it is false that the two events took place at the same time, then the statement is false. But that does not mean the statement was one about those two events and that it alleged their simultaneity.

It is worth stressing again that this procedure is one we would employ only in the case of past events. The suggestion is that since they are past, reports concerning them can only be indirectly verified; e.g. by checking on their entailments <u>via</u> traces. But the report of a present event would be verified quite differently. If you tell me there is a fly on my ear, I shall look for a fly on my ear. I shall not look for a relation of simultaneity between your saying 'There is a fly on your ear' and there being a fly on my ear.

The upshot of all this, I suggest, is that a timeless God is logically barred from knowing those facts which have to do with the objective past, present and future. The fact that his knowledge cannot be expressed in sentences containing temporal indexicals is but the thin end of a logical wedge separating him from knowledge concerning these matters. If such indexicals are ruled out on the ground that they entail a position in time on the part of anyone using them, then a number of other linguistic devices are also disqualified; among them tenses, modifiers having to do with the onset or completion of events (e.g. 'it is <u>all over</u>'), and so on. The doctrine that becoming is an objective feature of things entails that the pastness, presentness and futurity of some things is an objective fact; a fact which changes. The location of things with regard to this progressive change is therefore, on this doctrine, to be numbered among the facts there are to be known. But they appear to be logically inaccessible

to any timeless knower. And this appears to constitute not just an impeachment of a timeless God's omniscience, but a wide-ranging challenge to the traditional Christian view of God if he is to be thought of as a-temporal. It would appear that there are many things that a timeless God cannot know. And suspicion is cast on a large number of other predicates traditionally applied to God, which appear to rest in similar ways on the involvement of their subject in time.

The above arguments give additional weight to the view that if time is real, then a timeless God must be quite unlike the God of whom Christians are inclined to speak. Let us turn now to an alternative way of interpreting God's timelessness; that in which he is held to be timeless because everything else is actually timeless.

B. Timelessness and the Subjectivity of Time

In discussing God's timelessness so far I have offered a number of arguments to show how deeply rooted are many of our concepts in the assumption that there is an objective and changing past, present and future. It is time to consider whether this assumption may be challenged. If it can be, then of course the conceptual difficulties in speaking of a timeless God will be at least different from those facing us on the assumption that most things are in time. It would still be true that our ordinary concepts must be involved in a radical shakeup. But if <u>everything</u> is really timeless then the shakeup is required for more reasons than that we wish to speak of a timeless God. 'Planning', 'intending', 'acting', 'knowing', and so on, must be given a new set of connections in order to talk about human as well as divine individuals in such a case. If it were shown that

the objectivity of time is a questionable assumption, then the difficulties in speaking of a timeless God, though they would not be diminished, would at least cease to be made so conspicuous by their apparent uniqueness.

First of all, let us be clear about what is contained in this alternative view of the world's involvement in time. On the first view we considered, becoming is an objective feature of things; i.e. the pastness, presentness and futurity of things is an objective feature of them, and a feature with respect to which many things are continually changing. On this second view, becoming is <u>not</u> an objective feature of the world. That is, it is denied that events, states and other things are intrinsically past, present and future. Things take these designations only in relation to one another, or to some subject <u>qua</u> perceiver or user of language. On this view, the objective temporal relations of things are properly defined not in terms of pastness, presentness or futurity, i.e. in relation to an objective 'now', but in terms of 'earlier' and 'later than' in relation to one another. It may even be objected from this point of view that I have prejudiced the discussion by describing this second proposal as one concerning the 'timelessness' of the world. Advocates of this view may protest that they assume the objectivity of time; what they differ over is the <u>nature</u> of time. A quarrel may also be had with my assertion that it is part of this view to deny the objectivity of past, present and future. The protest in this case will be that what is proposed is an alternative understanding of these relational terms, and not their abandonment.

The reason I have described this as a view of the world as timeless is that it fails to include in its notion of time the objectivity of becoming; a fundamental assumption which we have seen clearly to be incorporated in our ordinary talk of time. It is open to someone to recommend a revision in our temporal concepts, but it would be misleading to describe a view which differs on so fundamental a point as simply another view of time. The word 'time' may continue to be used, but it would represent a markedly different concept. So adopting as standard the conceptual network of time built into ordinary discourse let us agree to say that on this alternative view the world is timeless, given the ordinary notion of 'time'. Similarly with respect to the objectivity of past, present and future. I have argued that it is part of our ordinary concepts covered by these terms that they represent more than the relations of 'earlier' and 'later than'. They assume an objective and changing 'now' as their generating point, and in this vital respect differ from the proposal we are about to entertain. That this latter view may, for the reasons just given, be described as alleging the timelessness of the world and the non-objectivity of past, present and future, should not be taken as a reason for rejecting it out of hand. That description merely marks it as the call for conceptual revolution that it is. Conceptual revolutions have occurred often enough and with sufficient reason to make it unnecessary to justify giving any such proposal a fair hearing.

What we want to consider, then, is the proposal that the objective temporal relations of events can be described exhaustively in terms of the relation 'earlier (or later) than'. It might be said that ordinary talk of past, present and future can be adequately

expressed in these terms. We have seen reasons for doubting this. On the other hand, it may be allowed that when we ordinarily talk of pastness, presentness and futurity, what we say may not be translated without remainder into statements in which only the relation of 'earlier (or later) than' is mentioned. But, it might be added, what is left over is subjective in character. Just as the logic of our ordinary discourse on perception must not be allowed to mislead us into thinking that objects are objectively coloured, i.e. would be coloured even if no one were perceiving them; so, it might be argued, our talk of time must not be taken as a guarantee that there is in nature an objective and changing 'now', and that it would be as it appears to us to be, whether or not we or some other sentient creatures are on hand to observe it.

The upshot of our investigations so far has been a suggestion that our ordinary discourse about things like planning, intending, and so on, as well as directly about time commits us to a realistic view of becoming.* We are now faced with the suggestion that this is a commitment worth reconsidering. This call for a conceptual change has been based on considerations from various quarters. I shall take account of only one evident source of disquiet about our ordinary concepts of time; that which is connected with certain facts in modern physical science.**

Let us consider two arguments drawn from the state of contemporary physics in favour of the sort of conceptual shift we are

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* This is more thoroughly argued with regard to temporal discourse as well as to talk of causes, intentions, etc., in Gale, Chapters V and VIII.

** For much of this I am indebted to Gale, Chapter XI.

considering. The first is based on the empirical fact that signals (e.g. light and sound waves) have a finite velocity. The second concerns the use made in physics of temporal notions.

As an example of argument number one, consider the following:

> A star, two million light years distant from the earth, which exploded two million years ago, is experienced as exploding 'now' by an observor on the earth. Similarly, an electric shock, delivered to our great toe and experienced by us 'now', was actually given at least 25 milli-seconds previously. From these two examples of the use of the word 'now', we see that it refers to the first moment of awareness of an event or an entity by a particular observor who is located in a unique position in the universe. 'Now' is a term which refers, therefore, to an aspect of the <u>experience</u> of existence."

The argument appears to be that since we might speak naively of both the star's exploding and the shock in my toe as occurring 'now', whereas in fact they both occur in the past, and at widely separated points in the past at that, 'now' is primarily a psychological term referring to the time of my consciousness of events and not to the times of events themselves. If 'now' in fact has this sort of reference, then clearly 'now' is a mind-dependent feature of things and not an objective one.

The trouble with this argument is that it proves too much. Suppose that instead of talking about whether a subject experiences both of these events as 'now', we speak of his experiencing them 'at the same time' or 'simultaneously'. To do this is to substitute 'earlier (later) than' talk for 'past, present or future', in the way that this programme recommends. Unfortunately, however, the above argument cuts equally well against this revised way of speaking. We

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* Quoted in Gale, <u>op. cit.</u>, p. 219n.

would be saying of two events widely separated in time that they occurred at the same time. If the argument establishes the mind-dependency of 'now', it also establishes the mind-dependency of 'at the same time'.

The fact that signals are propagated with a finite velocity clearly does have implications for our ordinary temporal discourse. It appears that discoveries of this sort, particularly when placed in the context of Relativity Theory, may well necessitate conceptual reforms in this area.* But the point to observe is that the reforms will involve 'earlier (later) than' no less than 'now'. It has been argued that modern physics and cosmology in fact allow for the identification of different places at the same instant;** that is, there is one true standard of simultaneity, and therefore there is Absolute Time. Be that as it may, there appears to be nothing in the fact that there is a time lapse between our perception of an event and its occurrence which singles out the notion of an objective present for disqualification. If a conceptual revolution is demanded by facts of this sort, then there is nothing to show that a revised but still recognizable concept of becoming will not occupy the pivotal position in a revolutionised brand of temporal talk that it does in our present form.

e turn now to a second and more general argument drawn from modern physics to show the subjectivity of temporal change.

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* For instance, we ordinarily talk of 'earlier (later) than' and 'simultaneous with' as dyadic relations, without mentioning a third position relative to which the relation obtains. In certain circumstances we may have to add such a frame of reference to resolve ambiguities in an ordinary dyadic statement.

** See Swinburne, Space and Time, Chapter 11.

Adolf Grünbaum expresses this argument succinctly in the following comment.

> It seems to me of decisive significance that no cognizance is taken of nowness (in the sense associated with becoming) in any of the extant theories of physics. If nowness were a fundamental property of physical events themselves, then it would be very strange indeed that it could go unrecognized in all extant physical theories without detriment to their explanatory success.*

Grünbaum's argument may be schematized thus:**

(1) Nowness is not taken cognizance of by physics

(2) Any non-mind-dependent property is taken cognizance of by physics

(3) Nowness is not a non-mind-dependent property

As Richard Gale points out, the syllogism is clearly valid, but there is room for doubt as to the truth of its premisses. Consider first of all premise (1). It would appear that this premise admits of at least two renderings: (a) physicists make no use of the concept of nowness in their scientific activities, or (b) physical laws and theories contain no implicit or explicit reference to the concept of nowness. The first alternative is plainly false. Experimental work in the laboratory could not go on without experimenters knowing that 'now' is the time to do something or other. Knowledge of the course of events to be expected is useless as a basis of experimental or any other sort of action unless the judgement can be made that one is now at some particular point in the course. But the quotation from

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* 'The Temporal Status of Becoming', p. 336.

** The schematization is in Gale, p. 224. He puts his arguments in terms of McTaggart's distinction between A-series (past, present and future) and B-series (earlier, later than). I have substituted 'nowness' for his 'A-determinations' in the scheme.

Grünbaum suggests that he does not have this part of scientific practice in mind. What he specifically refers to are "the extant theories of physics", which brings us to alternative (b) as an interpretation of premise (1) in the argument. Let us suppose that on this interpretation, the first premise is true.* How about premise (2)? Clearly, in the phrase 'is taken cognizance of by physics', this premise admits the same ambiguity as premise (1). Accordingly, we get an (a) and (b) interpretation of premise (2), referring respectively to the absence of the concept of 'nowness' in scientific practice and the same lack in physical laws and theories. To interpret the syllogism consistently we must pair the interpretations given to each premise. That is, if we render premise (1) in its (a) version, we must do the same for (2); and similarly for the (b) interpretations. We have seen reason to believe that on the (a) rendering of (1), the premise is false. We have also seen reason to suppose that this is not the interpretation which Grünbaum himself invites. So let us concentrate on the (b) reading of premise (2); having allowed the equivalent version of premise (1) to stand as true. Is it true that any non-mind-dependent property of things is taken account of in physical

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* Gale, chapter VI, argues convincingly the B-relations (earlier, later than) can be defined in terms of A-relations (past, present and future). The specific equivalent he suggests is: P is earlier than Q = (P is past and Q is present) or (P is past and Q is future) or (P is present and Q is future) of (P is more past than Q) or (Q is more future than P). If this is true, then even on the (b) interpretation of premise (1) of Grünbaum's argument the premise is false, for extant physical theories do contain references to earlier (later) than. But let me assume, as Gale does (p. 225f), that the scientist may be using 'earlier (later) than' in a way that differs enough from ordinary usage that we may not assume this equivalence. For the sake of argument, then, let premise (1) be considered true.

laws and theories? Prima facie it is far more difficult to allow the truth of this statement to stand uncontested than premise (1). If it is true that every non-mind-dependent property of things is taken account of in physical laws and theories, it is not obviously true. In fact this premise seems wide open to the challenge that there is at least one non-mind-dependent property not taken account of in the laws and theories of physics; namely that of 'nowness'. Of course it is the truth of this contention that is disputed by the argument under consideration. But to rule it out a priori plainly constitutes a petitio principii. So the second premise of this argument is either false (on the same grounds that reading (a) of premise (1) is false) or it begs the question. It therefore appears that the argument from the role of 'nowness' in physics fails to establish the mind-dependence of that notion.

As Gale points out,* however, a reason can be given for the appearance of a petitio in premise (2). Once this reason is recognized, the real weakness of the argument is also apparent. It appears from Grünbaum's brief statement of the argument that it is a contingent matter that physics does not recognize an objective past, present and future. In other words, it is suggested that physics might have been expected to make reference to nowness if in fact it discovered the need. This is what makes its apparent failure to make use of this concept of some importance. But, asks Gale, is it a contingent matter that physics operates without such a notion? And his answer is that it is not.

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* Ibid., p. 224.

Gale argues that implicit in the physicists's claim that 'nowness' is not needed in physics, is the recognition that it is impossible to devise a physical criterion whereby one can uniquely distinguish the present.* Any criterion that seems a possibility, for instance "the moment at which what was undetermined becomes determined",** turns out to identify only a present, and to establish only the direction of time relative to some event(s). But, Gale goes on to explain, the fact that this is so should not surprise us once we realize that it is the aim of physics to produce general laws and theories; i.e. laws and theories that hold without reference to particular times. The apparently contingent fact that physical laws and theories take no account of 'nowness' thus turns out not to be contingent at all. It is built into the aims and objectives of physics. But in this case it is of no importance to the objectivity of 'now' that physics operates in this way; for physics is barred by its own logic from dealing with such a question. The argument from the absence of 'nowness' in physics therefore must beg the question if it is to characterize physics correctly. So the argument is unsound.

All that has been shown, of course, is that two specific arguments do nothing to suggest that we revise the assumption built into ordinary language that temporal becoming is an objective feature of things. It would be rash to assume that there are no more powerful arguments for this revision of our temporal concepts, and still more

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* Gale considers Reichenbach's attempt, p. 223f, and shows why it fails.

** Ibid., p. 223.

rash to suppose it impossible that other such arguments could be produced. Rather than attempting to refute in anticipation any arguments of this sort, let me try to show instead that any proposed conceptual revolution of the kind imagined would have to cope with certain *prima facie* difficulties. The difficulties we can anticipate in any such attempt suggest further severe theological drawbacks accruing to the notion of a transcendent God.

In order to bring this out, let us consider as far as we are able what such a change would mean for our view of human beings. Whatever the revised conceptual framework is like it will presumably involve a view of nature in which physical events and states are not in themselves past, present and future and changing in respect of these designations. They are, objectively, only earlier or later than or simultaneous with certain other events and states. Now the problem is how we are to fit into this picture the fact that to human creatures, these events and states certainly *seem* to become present and past. It is an uncontestable fact of which even a revised network of concepts must take account that these things appear to at least human subjects to undergo becoming. Our discussion thus far provides at least a partial answer to this problem in the proposal that temporal becoming is a subjective, or mind-dependent, feature of our impressions. This view is succinctly if metaphorically expressed in another quotation of Adolf Grünbaum made by Richard Gale.*

> Instead of allowing for the transient division of time into the past and future by the shifting Now of experienced time, the theory of relativity conceives of events as simply being and sustaining relations

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* *Ibid.*, p. 218

> of earlier and later, but not as 'coming into being'; we conscious organisms then 'come across' them by 'entering' into their absolute future, as it were. And upon experiencing their immediate effects, we regard them as 'taking place' or 'coming into being'.

Now the first difficulty that presents itself in this account is that it seems to lead to a form of dualism so radical as to make Descartes' version appear half-hearted by comparison.* The reason is this. I have mentioned the fact that whatever implications are to be drawn about the rest of nature, our mental states plainly appear to undergo becoming. This is so even if becoming is subjective to the extent that it is not an intrinsic property of physical events and states. Now the question is how can this apparently rock-bottom fact be protected in any other way than by regarding at least mental events and states as intrinsically past, present and future? As Peter Geach expresses it,**

> ...even if my distinction between past, present and future aspects of physical things is a fragmentary misperception of changeless realities, it remains true that I have various and uncombinable illusions as to which realities are present. I must therefore have these illusions not simultaneously but one after another; and then there is after all real time and real change.

So it seems that we are stuck with objective temporality at least in the case of mental states and events. Even if physical occurrences are not to be seen as intrinsically past, present and future, it remains true that mental occurrences must be regarded in this way.

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* In this argument I am drawing upon the resources of Gale, Chapter XI; but this dualistic implication is a point noted also by Geach in 'Some Problems About Time', pp. 180ff.

** Ibid., p. 179.

A second difficulty to which I would like to draw attention is but one of the complications that flow from this extreme dualism. It is a standard objection to dualistic schemes, having to do with causal relations between mental and physical events. It is a commonplace of science as well as of common sense, at least that states of perceptual awareness, as well as other mental states, are brought about by certain physical events, including occurrences in the brain. Now these latter events, on the view we are considering, are not objectively past, present or future. They are only earlier, later than, or simultaneous with certain other events. But among these latter events, if science and common sense are right, are certain mental events. And these, we have seen, must be accorded the status of objectively caught up in becoming. So we have the odd circumstance that some events which are not objectively past, present or future are temporally related with some other events which are. It would seem the only way of avoiding this paradox is to give up our notions of causal connection between physical and mental events; and this seems an absurd price to pay for a doctrine meant to clarify our view of the way things are.

But whether or not this view of physical events and states as tenselessly related allows for an intelligible account of the place of human persons in the world, what allowances does it make for relation between the physical world and God? Presumably God, even in this revised scheme is to be regarded as a non-physical entity. It may be naive to claim that in Christianity God is thought of as just like a disembodied mind. But it is at least true that he is spoken of in ways that suggest his life is appropriately characterized as

including something like a mental life. Now from this starting place, there appear to be two directions in which conceptions of his relation to a tenseless world could run. One possibility would be to maintain that God, unlike human subjects, perceives things in the world as they really are; i.e. he sees them as tenselessly laid out in an order exhaustively defined in terms of 'earlier (later) than' and 'simultaneous with'. God does not undergo becoming in his mental states in the way that we do, and therefore suffers no temptation to give this sense of becoming an origin in the objective world. A second possible view of God's relation to a tenseless world would involve a more anthropomorphic view of his mental life. On this view it might be allowed that his impressions and states of mind do undergo becoming in the same way that those of his sentient creatures do. The crucial difference in God's case is, it might be argued, that he realizes the subjectivity of becoming. That is, he knows that the sense of an objective past, present and future is objectively grounded only in characteristics of his mental life and not in any feature of the natural world. Let us briefly scrutinize these two possibilities.

(1) A Timeless God With a Timeless World

The first view, according to which God's mental life differs from ours is not being subject to becoming, fits in well with the blanket notion of his transcendence. If the world is really composed of things and events temporally related without reference to an objective 'now', and it is the change in our mental states which inclines us to impose such a notion on the world, then God presumably is freed from the limitations of our restricted view. He could, for instance, see beyond the ontological asymmetries which we read into

the difference between 'past' and 'future'. The trouble is, however, that this account raises enormous difficulties for those who, like orthodox Christians, wish to use ways of speaking appropriate to human experience to speak of God. The survey we have undertaken of a few sample words, 'plan', 'intend', 'act' and 'know', reveal something of the extent to which these concepts are dependent on seeing temporal becoming as objective. It hardly requires further proof to show that concepts like these are rooted in the assumption that at least the mental states of anyone to whom they are applicable undergo becoming. Given this fact it is difficult indeed to imagine that many of the words drawn from applications in the human context can be applied with any appropriateness to a being whose life is alleged to be so fundamentally different. It is clear that before concepts like 'plan', 'intend', and so on, could be used of such a God something must be done to indicate that there are still coherent rules of use for these words, and that these rules bear enough resemblance to our ordinary language rules to warrant our using those particular words. Our researches so far into concepts of this sort justify, I think, a sceptical forecast of attempts to work out an a-temporal logic of such terms as 'planning', 'intending', and 'acting'. A particular example of the difficulties in such a project is to be found in the words of St. Augustine quoted at the beginning of this section:*

> ...not in our fashion does He [God] look forward to what is future, nor at what is present, nor back upon what is past; but in a manner quite different and profoundly remote from our way of thinking. For He does not pass from this to that by transition of thought, but beholds things with absolute unchangeableness, so that

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* City of God, Chapter 21. Quoted in Pike, p. 74.

> of those things which emerge in time, the future, indeed, are not yet, and the present are now, and the past no longer are; but all of these are by Him comprehended in His stable and eternal presence.

Augustine's words here do not accord perfectly with the alternative we are considering, for he seems to leave open the possibility that temporal becoming is a genuine feature of the world. At the same time, however, he wants to speak of God's comprehension of all that is, in a way that imputes no such feature to God's awareness. And it is soon apparent that this attempt leads to absurdity. If two or more things are both 'present', then they are simultaneous with each other. ('Present' presumably means something slightly different in the context of a timeless God. But if this minimum entailment no longer holds, there seems no reason to continue using this word.) If all things are present to God then all things are simultaneous to him: the crossing of the Red Sea, the sack of Rome, the discovery of North America and my writing these words. And that is absurd.* If one insists on saying that to God these things are simultaneous, then the only reply that can be given is to ask what the word 'simultaneous' is now being used to represent, and why this word should continue to be used when the rules governing its use in this new context appear to run so counter to those governing its ordinary employment. The root of the difficulty here lies in Augustine's implicit recognition that awareness that an event is taking place entails that it is present. If one tries to preserve both this logical point regarding

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* It is no help to point out that in relativity theory one might argue that simultaneity is relative to an observer. The reason that it might be relative in this way is that there is supposed to be a velocity of the observer relative to events in question. But it seems distinctly heterodox to imagine that God is travelling at all.

the use of 'awareness' and the doctrine that God's mental life knows no changing 'present', one gets just this sort of absurdity. The only way of avoiding it is to alter the meanings of these key terms. But to be effective they must be altered out of all recognition, and one is liable to be misled into thinking that something has been said by the fact that some familiar language tokens have been uttered.

The picture drawn by Augustine is very like another which a view of the world as timeless may tempt us to draw. If we think of events, past, present and future, as being equally real and determinate, it is easy to imagine that future events are in a sense 'already there', awaiting merely the contact with our consciousness to make them 'present'. Such a suggestion is readily taken from Grünbaum's words, quoted above,* according to which events are to be conceived of as "simply being and sustaining relations of earlier and later, but not as 'coming into being'; we conscious organisms... 'come across' them by 'entering' into their absolute future, as it were." If future events are, in this sense, 'already there', it is easy to imagine that they may somehow be 'entered into' by a consciousness not restricted in ways that ours are. As Peter Geach says: "We find it easy to imagine the future as a country into which we are travelling and which is there before we travel into it; a country of which we might get a Pisgah sight through a break in the clouds before we actually get there."** Perhaps we might not, but God can. He can see the whole territory at once (say, from above) without having to travel laboriously through it.

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* P. 155f.

** 'Some Problems About Time', p. 181.

But we have already seen enough to see that this picture contains an absurdity. It suggests that all events are, at least potentially, simultaneous; a suggestion that betrays the incoherence of supposing a timeless observer of timeless reality. The point has already been made* that to say an event is present resembles saying that something exists. A real difference is thus supposed between events that are present and those that are not, in that the former are actually happening ('exist'). It is this fact that allows us to see events as simultaneous with only some events, and forbids our viewing the future as already laid out and waiting for us to set foot in it. Geach reflects our ordinary concepts of the reality of the future, when he continues:

> ...it is not the travelling that raises the real difficulty, but the destination. What is (say) the England of 1984? Is there really such an object *in rerum natura*, distinct from the England of 1965?**

According to our ordinary conception of time, the answer is no. When 'England in 1984' *is* actual, when it is observable, it will be 1984. This is a point against the idea of a timeless world. But even if it were not, it counts against the idea of a timeless observer of a timeless world.

There is another difficulty in this idea of the timeless God alongside a timeless world. As I have mentioned, even if we reconstruct our view of the world so as to make it describable solely in terms of tenseless temporal succession (no 'now' involved), there seems no way of escaping the fact that at least our mental states undergo change in respect to becoming. Now even if these result in illusion, it

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* Pp. 139-41.

** 'Some Problems About Time', p. 182.

remains true that our illusions have an objective past, present and future. How could a timeless God, in whose mental life there is no becoming, be said to know which illusions we are presently having? (Or if this illusion is not intersubjective, which illusions I am now having?) We have a parallel case here to the one against God's knowing that it is now. It is not enough that he knows the order in which our illusions present themselves to us. For there is plainly another fact about these illusions to be known: i.e. which ones we are presently having. So even if the world is allowed to be timeless, the problem of a timeless God's knowledge of the objective present remains. The only change is that it exists in relation to temporal changes in the mental states of human creatures.

It seems, then, that the first alternative in the face of an assumption about the world's timelessness has a serious theological drawback. It appears to render senseless, or at least diminish the import of, many of the things theists have traditionally wished to say of God through the use of concepts relating to human mentality. What about the second alternative: that we regard God's mental life as like ours in undergoing becoming? The difference between his life and ours, on this view, is that he is aware of the subjectivity of pastness, presentness and futurity.

(2) Divine Timelessness as Recognition of the Subjectivity of Becoming

There is a preliminary difficulty in this proposal. It is that our scrutiny of concepts such as 'plan', 'intend', 'act', and the like, suggests that these notions are woven together not just by the assumption that becoming might well be seen as objective, but by

the much stronger presupposition that it is objective. 'Plan', for instance, was seen to depend on the objectivity of becoming in that it depends first on there being contingencies open to influence by our activity. It would seem that a being whose mental states underwent temporal change, but who knew these reflected no objective fact about the physical world, would have to exercise a particularly rigorous form of 'double-think' to carry on planning, intending, and so on. Temporal becoming, it was suggested, serves as the foundation for these activities by serving as the hinge for certain ontological differences between past and future; e.g. that the past is over and done with while the future is to some extent contingent. If there is no objective 'now', except in the mental life of subjects, then these asymmetries do not exist, and there seems to remain no foothold for concepts like 'plan', 'intend' and 'act'. Let us suppose however, that there is some way of surmounting this objection. The most serious problem in this view of God's mental states changing while the world does not, lies elsewhere.

It was mentioned as a *prima facie* objection to the doctrine that physical events are tenselessly related that an extreme form of dualism results. Among the difficulties attaching to this dualism, one was singled out for mention: the problem of causal relations between mental and physical events. Now if we suppose that God is to be conceived of as roughly like a disembodied mind, then the doctrine of a tenseless world of physical events poses some particularly awkward problems for the theologian. We are just now considering the possibility that God's mental states may be allowed to undergo temporal change; while events in the world do not change in respect to becoming

but simply exist in tenseless relation to one another. On such a view it seems extremely difficult to conceive how God could be held to have causal relations with the physical world. To say that God brought about this or that physical event would amount to saying that his deciding, intending, and so on, either exist in no temporal relation to the event he is alleged to bring about or exist in some relation such as temporal priority. On the first of these alternatives we have the odd suggestion that God's deciding, intending, and so on, have no temporal relation to what it is that he decides or intends, etc., to do. On the second we have the equally odd proposal that God's deciding, intending, etc., are related (presumably are prior) to the objects of his deciding and intending; but while the former are objectively past, present or future, the latter are not. In either case the normal logic of causality seems to have broken down, and the cash value of saying that God brought the event about becomes decidedly unclear.

This is but one of the theological parallels to the difficulties of dualism. No doubt there are others to be drawn out. However let me draw attention instead to a peculiarly theological difficulty which follows from any sharp distinction in terms of temporal becoming between divine and human mentality on the one hand and the physical world on the other.

The general topic which led to this discussion of God's timelessness is that of his transcendence. Now it seems to me that this notion of a God whose mental life undergoes becoming, alongside a world which does not, may have a particular disadvantage when viewed under this heading. In Part One of this thesis, God's transcendence of time

was mentioned as one element in his transcendence of the world. That is, his relation to time was listed as one respect in which he lacked certain limitations inherent in the natural order. Now on the view we are presently examining this would not be quite correct. If God's mental life undergoes becoming, while the world does not, it is not easy to see how this would constitute a lack in the world which is not shared by God. It would seem more reasonable on this view to locate God's relation to time under the heading of his transcendence of limitations in certain human capacities and powers. But even here there are difficulties. For according to this view God's mental life is likened to human mental life, and not distinguished from it in any way that suggests a relation of transcendence. Perhaps the distinction could be made, however, by adding that while they share the feature of objective temporal change, God realizes that this feature is a subjective one. That is, God knows that becoming characterizes his thoughts, decisions, intentions, etc., but not the physical world. Human subjects, on the other hand, habitually project this characteristic onto events in the physical world. The trouble with this is that it is not difficult to imagine at least some human beings coming to believe the same thing with regard to the relation between their mental life and events in the physical world, that God is alleged to know. Indeed it would appear that those (such as Adolf Grünbaum, J.J.C. Smart and others*) who argue for the subjectivity of becoming already hold such a belief. The margin of God's transcendence thus seems dangerously thin, and in some cases perhaps almost totally eroded.

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* See J.J.C. Smart, 'Time'.

This is no clinching argument against viewing God as one whose mental life undergoes change in relation to a world of tenselessly successive events. The kinds of differences between man and God that contribute to our describing the latter as transcendent are not easy to characterize in any general way. It is hard to set out minimum criteria for transcendence in any particular respect, and certainly the brief argument I have just put forward does not show conclusively that this view fails to do justice to God's transcendence. However, it does seem that a view like this one has at least a *prima facie* disadvantage when it is seen as an interpretation of a doctrine intended, among other things, to establish a freedom in God from limitations found in the world or in human creatures.

We have been examining a view of God's timelessness in which it is assumed that the physical world does not in fact have an objective past, present and future. Two sub-alternatives under this heading have been explored: one in which God is seen as somehow beholding this world as it really is; i.e. timelessly; the other according to which God's life is characterized by becoming but he does not project this feature onto the world. A number of difficulties have been exposed in either version of this general approach; some stemming from the problem of reinterpreting concepts whose native use implies an objective view of temporal change in the world, and others from an extreme dualism which sub-alternative two implies between God and the world. It seems fair on the basis of these difficulties and others which they suggest to conclude that placing the doctrine of God's timelessness in the context of a timeless view of the world does nothing to render that doctrine more plausible. If anything, it

appears to add problems to an already problemmatic view.

I believe that the arguments of this section support a negative verdict on the doctrine of God's timelessness. The suggestion which has emerged is that advocates of the doctrine must underestimate the degree to which many of the notions that Christians wish to apply somehow to God are woven together on a background of assumptions about temporality. The question remains of the importance to divine transcendence of the idea of God's timelessness. Does the infirmity of the latter doctrine necessarily infect the idea of a transcendent God? It is worth mentioning again that there is not the same unanimity in the Christian tradition concerning God's timelessness that there is, say, for his incorporeality. It is significant also that at least one philosopher of religion who has considered the doctrine of divine timelessness concludes that it is by no means essential to orthodox Christian theism.* I agree with this view, but shall not argue for it here. Suffice it to say that if the complex notion of divine transcendence is to remain standing, it seems it must do so independently of the idea of God's timelessness.

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* See Pike, Chapters 8 and 9, and 'Concluding Comment'.

PART III

ON OMNISCIENCE

CHAPTER IX

OMNISCIENCE, KNOWLEDGE AND PERCEPTUAL EXPERIENCE

I argued in Part One of this thesis that among the elements in God's transcendence is the idea that his knowledge is in no way subject to the shortcomings that characterize human knowledge. God is believed by orthodox Christians to transcend these limitations. His transcendent knowledge is represented in the term 'omniscience'; knowledge of everything that there is to be known. A formula which has been suggested as the logical expression of this doctrine is 'For every p, if p then God knows that p'.*

Not surprisingly, this claim has been felt by many, Christians among them, to generate difficulties. Some of these emerge most clearly when we take seriously the organic nature of religious doctrinal schemes: i.e. the fact that doctrines exist in complex structures, elements of which impinge upon and affect one another. Also among those beliefs which go to make up the concept of divine transcendence is the belief that God is incorporeal. Now a particular problem begins to take shape if we place this alongside the claim that he knows all that there is to know. Included in the class of things that there are to know is a very large sub-class of things that appear knowable only by experience. I know that this desktop is dark brown because I can see that it is, or have heard someone say that it is. I know that it is a warm day because I can feel that it is or hear the radio announcer say so. Were it not for the reports of my senses,

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* From Prior, 'The Formalities of Omniscience', p. 27. We shall find reasons in the next chapter for modifying this formula.

how else could I know these things? There is an enormous number of facts which these seem to represent in being known, and in fact knowable, only by sensation. The problem is obvious. How can an incorporeal being come to know those things, if there are any such things, that are knowable only by sensory experience? If we accept the view that the having of sensation is dependent on having the proper organs and therefore a body, it appears that a bodiless person cannot have such experiences. If there are in fact areas of knowledge which are accessible only to such experience, then a being of that sort appears barred from those areas of knowledge. It would follow, of course, that such a person could hardly be said to be omniscient.

Two ways appear open to the advocate of divine omniscience. On the one hand he may try to show that being incorporeal is no bar to having sensory experiences. On the other he may argue that there are no genuine examples of knowledge which may be had only by sensory experience. Let us leave aside for the moment the idea of God's having sensory experience. Is there any case to be made against the view that there is knowledge which is accessible only <u>via</u> the senses?

It certainly <u>seems</u> to be the case that there are many truths discoverable only by the use of our senses. The normal way of coming to know that a traffic light is red is simply to see its redness. Admittedly, this is not the only way one can come to know such a thing. Even a blind man could know that the light is red by the use of some other sense. Not that one could hear the light's redness. But one could hear that it is red (i.e. be told by someone that it is). So it is not necessary to argue that particular examples of empirical knowledge are tied to one particular sense. In most cases there

appears to be a 'primary' sense involved; primary in the sense that the use of that sense yields what may be called 'knowledge by acquaintance'. But usually, if not always, I may discover the same things *via* some other sense. From the fact we are in a bakery and I can see the steaming loaves I may infer the presence of a particular aroma even if a head-cold forbids my smelling it. Or someone may tell me of the smell, or write me a note about it (perhaps in braille if I am blind). But it seems difficult to imagine that I should learn about the redness of the traffic light or the fresh-bread smell in the bakery without resort to *some* sense. It is not like learning the sum of 17 and 35, which I can close my eyes and figure out. No, it seems necessary to have one's eyes open, or at least to be receptive in some of one's senses, in order to acquire a great many pieces of information. In fact it is experience alone that helps us generally to sort out from the infinite number of theories we could spin about the structure of the world, descriptions of how things actually are. It seems a consequence of asserting God's incorporeality, if that rules out sense-experience, that this entire realm of empirical knowledge must be denied to him. Such a lack amounts to more than a minor flaw in his alleged omniscience. A God who is unable to know anything about the empirical world is not only disqualified as omniscient. The entire ground for his purported interest and action in this world would be removed by the discovery that this sphere of knowledge is closed to him.

A. 'Practical Knowledge' as Knowledge Without Observation

It seems incredible that there should be knowledge of the empirical without observation. But it has been one of G.E.M. Anscombe's

most useful reminders that such a thing is common in human affairs. Miss Anscombe's remarks to this effect occur in the context of her well-known discussion of 'intention'. She argues there that it is one mark of an intentional action that one knows what one is doing without observation.* This point is brought into sharp focus in her explication of the Aristotelian notion of 'practical knowledge'.**

> Imagine someone directing a project, like the erection of a building which he cannot see and does not get reports on, purely by giving orders. His imagination (evidently a superhuman one) takes the place of the perception that would ordinarily be employed by the director of such a project. He is not like a man merely considering speculatively how a thing might be done, such a man can leave many points unsettled, but this man must settle everything in a right order. His knowledge of what is done is practical knowledge.†

The point is that when we are engaged in an intentional activity our capacity to say what we are doing does not derive from observation. Our sensory experiences may aid us in the performance (e.g. it is difficult to write or do many other things with one's eyes closed), but the correct description of their office is as an aid. They are

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* Intention, pp. 49ff.

** The relevance of Miss Anscombe's discussion to the subject of God's knowledge of the empirical was pointed out by Anthony Kenny in the third of his Wilde Lectures for 1970 in Oxford University. Kenny relates Anscombe's reminder to Aquinas' treatment of God's knowledge in the Summa Theologiae, Ia, 14, especially article 9. Aquinas there distinguishes between God's 'knowledge of understanding' (scientia intelligentiae) and his 'knowledge of vision' (scientia visionis). Under the former heading would be placed his knowledge of what things might be, i.e. of all possible hypotheses. Under the latter would be placed his knowledge of what things are, i.e. which hypotheses are true. He knows the latter by knowing what he has willed to enact; which is where the notion of 'practical knowledge' enters in.

† Intention, p. 82.

in an important way accidental to what is being done. It is not on the basis of them that the agent is able to say what it is that he is doing. What is the basis is his intention; knowledge of his own effective will.

But there is an obvious objection to this. It is plausible to say that I know without observation what I am trying to do, but plainly mistakes are often made in these sorts of performances. Intentions are frequently frustrated. How, then, can we say that in these instances we know without observation what we do? Surely the most we are entitled to claim is knowledge of what we intend to do. Miss Anscombe anticipates this criticism. In the case of the architect she imagines "it may be objected that he can only say 'This is what the house is like, if my orders have been obeyed.'"* It therefore seems rash to say that he knows without observation what the house is like. Orders, she admits, can be disobeyed, and intentions fail to get executed. But the architect's 'knowledge' would be just the same; that is, it would be unaffected by what actually happens. Nevertheless, Miss Anscombe insists, what he has is still knowledge. "Someone might say", she admits, "that it was a funny sort of knowledge that was still knowledge even though what it was knowledge of was not the case."** Her answer is that if there is a mistake in the building, the mistake lies in the execution and not the mind of the designer.

Miss Anscombe has in mind here a contrast developed in the

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* Ibid.

** Ibid.

course of her discussion of practical reasoning. The contrast is between two directions of fit between knowledge and its objects, one of which may spell-bind us into thinking it is the only one. She brings the contrast out by having us consider the case of a man with a shopping list.* The list may be called one of his intentions (if it is his own list) or of his orders (if, for instance, his wife made it up). In either case, if what the man buys does not square with his list, and this constitutes a mistake, then the mistake lies in his buying and not in the list-making. The matter could not be put right when he got home simply by altering the list. The contrast is furnished by imagining the man to have been followed by a detective who tries to record all that the man buys. If the detective's list does not agree with the man's actual purchases, then it is his list that is mistaken and not the buyer's performance. The mistake in his case could be corrected by amending his list. The contrast in directions of fit may be put this way: when one intends to do something but inadvertently does another, his mistake is in his doing; but when one who is merely an observer says that something is done which in fact is not, his mistake is in what he says. So it makes a difference to our appraisal of a lack of fit between pronouncement on an action and the action itself according to whether the pronouncement is made on the one hand by one who intends (or commands), or on the other by one who merely observes. In the former case we accept the pronouncement and regard the performance as a mistake; in the latter we accept the performance and see the pronouncement as in error. The following is one way in which Miss Anscombe's acute observation might

* Ibid., p. 56.

be thought to support her conclusion. In the case of a mere onlooker, lack of fit between his description and the performance clearly disqualifies any claim he might make to know what is going on. This is so because the mistake in these cases lies in the description, and a mistaken description plainly cannot (on logical grounds) represent knowledge of what is described. But things are different where the disagreement is between the pronouncement and performance of one who intends or is ordered. Here we judge the performance to be at fault. The pronouncement is not mistaken, but in some sense correct. And if the pronouncement is correct, then it represents some sort of knowledge. Hence, he who intends to do something can claim to know without observation what is done.

However, if this or something like it is Anscombe's implicit argument, it needs only to be spelled out this fully to be seen as misapplied. That there must be something wrong with it is apparent immediately we realize that it entails the possibility of 'knowing' what is in fact not the case. This is a funny kind of knowledge. In fact it is no kind of knowledge at all. Knowledge, even 'practical knowledge', cannot be of what is not the case. There can be no doubt that Miss Anscombe has identified something important in these two different directions of fit. It seems to me, too, that she is right to suggest (if indeed she does want to suggest) that in the case of an intentional action, where it is the intender's word rather than his performance which sets the standard, the correctness of his word may be regarded as a mark of his knowing something. What seems mistaken is the suggestion that he inevitably knows what is done. If

to take another of Anscombe's examples,* a man says 'Now I press Button A' but mistakenly presses Button B, it seems wildly implausible to say that he knows that he is pressing Button A. He just is not pressing Button A, and therefore cannot (logically) know that he is. But Miss Anscombe is right to point out, "we do not say: What you said was a mistake, because it was supposed to describe what you did and did not describe it, but: What you did was a mistake, because it was not in accordance with what you said."** What this suggests, however, is not that he knew what he was doing, but what he meant to do. The reason we ascribe the error to his performance and not his utterance is simply because we take his word for what he intended to do and notice that it fails to accord with what he does. This allows us to locate the mistake in his action and not his pronouncement, without saying that the latter expresses his knowledge of what he is actually doing.

Does this mean that in fact we do not have knowledge without observation of what we are doing, but only of what we are trying to do? I do not think so. The case we have just been considering is drawn from the by no means small constituency of cases where what is intended or commanded does not come off. But, of course, there are many cases, perhaps the majority, where it does. And in these, I think, it is proper to say that we know what we are doing without observation. I agree in general, therefore, with Anthony Kenny when he says†

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* Ibid., p. 57.

** Ibid.

† Also in the third of the Wilde Lectures for 1970.

> The truth in Miss Anscombe's point, it seems to me, is that if someone does know what he is doing, if he means to press button A and is pressing button A, then he knows that he is pressing button A without observation, he needs no further grounds, reason, observation etc. to make his meaning to press button A into knowledge that he is pressing button A.

What this means, of course, is that in many cases the only difference between believing wrongly that one is doing x and knowing that one is doing x is that in the latter case, one is in fact doing x. There is no difference, in other words, between the two states in terms of evidential support for the belief. If this strikes us as odd, it is probably due to the fact that normally we require three things of knowledge that p: (1) belief that p, (2) the truth of p, and (3) evidence of the truth of p.* In what has just been said about 'practical knowledge', however, the third condition is set aside. Kenny's point is that Anscombe's observation suggests that in the case of practical knowledge it is correct to do this. In this case we do in fact have knowledge without observation, or, for that matter, without any other evidential support. Though, of course, we can have knowledge without observation only where, to begin with, we have knowledge; i.e. where what we know is true.

If Miss Anscombe is right, therefore, knowledge of the empirical without observation is not an uncommon thing. We can see, in this notion of practical knowledge, a way of ascribing to God knowledge of things as they are in the physical world; a way which does not involve ascribing to him sensory experiences as the source of his knowledge. God, we may say, is able to know empirical facts by knowing his own will and intentions. In fact, in the theological

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* More about this in the next chapter.

case, the problem we have just been considering of intention unfulfilled through inadvertency or whatever appears not to arise. I have argued that if one means to do something and in fact does it, then in normal circumstances he knows (has practical knowledge) without observation that he does it. The most obvious sort of breakdown in practical knowledge occurs when an agent is not in fact doing what he means to do. But in the instance of God, among whose transcendent attributes is included omnipotence, we may exclude this possibility. What God means to do, he does. The orthodox Christian view of God leaves no room in his case for slips between intention and execution.

> In the case of God, there cannot be the possibility of mistake or of failure of subordinate demiurges to carry out orders; there cannot be inadvertence as when I press button A meaning to press button B: there cannot be recalcitrant material preventing the design from being realized as might happen to a sculptor or an architect.*

It seems, therefore, that God's knowledge of everything in the empirical world might be accounted for by taking seriously the Christian doctrine of creation. God knows all the empirical facts there are because he makes them facts.

However, although this may be part of the answer, it cannot be the whole answer. The reason is this. According to orthodox Christianity, God could bring it about that only those things which he intends to happen do happen, but he does not. It is an axiom of common sense and some traditions in Christian theology that men enjoy at least a certain degree of freedom, and included in their freedom

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* Kenny, No. 3 in the Wilde Lectures for 1970.

is the liberty to do otherwise than God would have them do. God, it could be said,* restrains his omnipotence in granting at least to men genuine liberty. And in so doing, he allows the possibility that things will happen in the world which are not the outcome of his active intention or will. It may be that even these things are woven into some overall plan which is God's plan for his creation. But there are still a great many contingencies which he must presumably deal with as they emerge, to bring this about. These, it would appear, are not things that can be accounted for as objects of his practical knowledge, since they are not the direct products of his intention. How then, can God know the facts concerning such things if we deny to him anything like sensation?

This point can be put by returning to Miss Anscombe's example of the architect who never observes his building. It may be said that if we use this as an analogy to illuminate God's activity in creation, he may unquestionably be said to know what his creation is like, since, unlike the case of a human designer, the questions of the builder's obedience or the limitations of the materials used do not arise to insert a wedge between the designer's knowledge of his intentions and his knowledge of what is actually built. But with the assertion of human freedom, the question of the builders' obedience does arise. We may want to say that even if the builders cut corners here and there, even if they substitute cheaper and less satisfactory materials and modify the design in the interests of easy construction, the architect (God) is able to take this into account as he sees this

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* See Lucas, The Freedom of the Will, p. 75f.

happening and by his further orders see to it that his overall intentions are realized. But how are we to understand his 'seeing this happen'? It cannot be accounted for in terms of his practical knowledge, as we have seen. Apart from some capacity analogous to observation, how can we say that God knows the facts about what is going on on his building site?

I have said that this problem shows the inadequacy of practical knowledge as a complete answer. In fact the situation is more serious. There is another problem which suggests that by itself this cannot even account for some knowledge on the part of God. The problem is this. Leaving aside the contingencies inserted by the free will of men, if God does not have anything like perceptual experience, how can he know that he is omnipotent? Imagine a world in which all of God's intentions were in fact executed to the letter. How could God know, without observation, that they are always executed? It may appear that in asking this question I have missed a point made just a moment ago. In the case of practical knowledge, it was suggested, one needs only the intention to do a plus one's doing of a to constitute knowledge that one is doing a. Unlike other sorts of knowledge, the question of evidence does not arise. My question as to how God could know of his own omnipotence appears to betray a failure to grasp this point.

In order to see why it must still be asked we must probe more deeply into this matter of practical knowlege. I mentioned above that the most obvious sort of breakdown in knowledge of this kind occurs when an agent is not in fact doing what he means to do. This is perhaps the most obvious sort of breakdown, but it is not the only

sort. One need not rack the imagination for cases in which, although one is actually doing what one means to do, one is by no means entitled to say that one knows that one is doing it. The most patent cases of this kind concern operations which demand skills which are either so inherently complex or so unfamiliar to us that even if we happen to bring off what we had hoped to accomplish, it could hardly be said of us as we were doing it that we knew we were doing it. It must be emphasized that even if one means to do something and in fact does it, only in certain circumstances are we justified in saying that he knew without observation what was happening. What this points up is that our acceptance of knowledge without observation of what we are doing is based on the 'developed' case of persons who are in a position to know about their own capabilities. The reason why we are often able to say what we are doing solely on the basis of what we intend to do is that on such occasions our intentions concern something which we know we have the capacity to do. But this merely relocates the matter of observation farther back in the concept of practical knowledge. For how can I learn that I am able to do something, except by on at least a number of occasions, observing or being told, etc., of my success? I may be justified in saying that I know that I am writing my name on a piece of paper (imagine I am blindfolded). But surely that is true only because I have learned, in a way that involved the use of my senses, that I am able to write. My daughter, who is just learning to print, could not make such a claim. She would have to remove the blindfold and look to see, or in some other way be informed, whether she had succeeded. By manipulating a piece of apparatus unfamiliar to me I may intend to bring about sub-atomic

reaction. But even if I happen to succeed, it cannot properly be said that I know without observation that I am succeeding. Activities of this sort involve skills. In such cases, only when one has learned the skill, and knows that one has learned it, can one normally claim to know what one does solely on the basis of what one intends to do. The situation is different, but only slightly, when it comes to activities that do not so evidently involve skills. I may claim to know without observation that I am raising my arm, but surely only because I have learned that this is something it normally is within my capacity to do at will. The problem is that perception seems to play an indispensable role in learning that one has a particular capacity, whether this involves a skill or not.

So it is that the matter of justification re-enters the concept of practical knowledge. It may be by and large true that one does not need evidence to support the belief that one is doing such-and-such in order to convert our belief about what we are doing into knowledge. At least it is true that evidence does not enter in here in the same way as it might with regard to a belief about, say, the behaviour of iron at very low temperatures. But there is a way in which evidence <u>is</u> required. It is required not in direct support of one's belief that he is doing so-and-so; but in support of his belief that he has the ability to do so-and-so. One can fail to know what one is doing not only in the case where one's intention fails to be executed, but also in the case where faith in one's abilities is unjustified.

My query may now be put more plainly: how can God know without observation that his intentions are always executed if he cannot have anything like sensory experience to tell him that his intentions are at

least sometimes executed? I hope it is clear that this question threatens to expose more than a mere chink in God's alleged omniscience; as if the answer that he cannot, would allow that he might still know everything except that he is omnipotent. The point that allows us to ask the question about God's knowledge of his omnipotence, if it is admitted, goes on to undermine the whole idea of his having any sort of knowledge by intention. It is the absence of testimony from anything like perceptual experience that prompts the question about God's knowledge of his own omnipotence. But that same point, if I am right about the foundations of practical knowledge, calls into question the possibility of God's having practical knowledge at all.

It seems, therefore, that reminders about knowledge by intention, or practical knowledge, are at best limited in the aid they offer to our understanding of how a God who lacks anything like perceptual experience can know empirical facts. The fact, if it is a fact, of human freedom, suggests that practical knowledge cannot be the whole answer. And the fact that practical knowledge itself must be grounded in experience, suggests that by itself it cannot supply even part of the answer. We are left with the question of how, if we are reluctant to ascribe to him anything resembling perceptual experience, God can know what happens in his creation.

B. Could God 'Just Know'?

It is time to consider a proposal that some may feel should have been considered at the beginning of this discussion. The problem of God's empirical knowledge is generated by the assumption that there are some things which cannot be known without observation to be true. Facts about practical knowledge may be used, as we have seen, to challenge

this assumption. They challenge it by citing a specific and familiar way in which we may know empirical facts without basing our knowledge directly on experience. But we have also seen reason to doubt whether this specific mode of knowledge, granted its application to certain limited areas, could completely account for an individual's empirical knowledge, even if that individual is an omnipotent God. Perhaps where this programme goes wrong, however, is in supposing that we must supply a reminder about a familiar mode of knowledge which allows for knowledge without perception. Could it not have been said at the beginning that whereas we know empirical facts in ways which perception supports in a variety of ways, God simply knows them all without observation; we cannot and need not say how? The fact that practical knowledge cannot be the model for all of God's empirical knowledge need not bother us, for we need not tie ourselves to any of the particular ways in which humans know such things or even to the requirement that there be a way. God 'just knows' the way things are in his creation. We need not speculate on how he knows this, or indeed on whether he must have some means of knowing. He just knows.

We could have begun with this proposal, or inserted at the point in our discussion which has just been reached. The answer 'He just knows' might be given either to the question 'How does God know about his own capacities?' Since he presumably would know of his own abilities partly by knowing about particular changes in the empirical facts which are systematically related to his trying to do such-and-such, the answer is relevant to either question.

What is meant by this answer is, roughly, that God knows that p, where p is any true proposition or, connectedly, any proposition

concerning his capacities, without knowing it on the basis of something else. But there are two sorts of 'something else' possible here, only one of which we mean to exclude. A person may know something on the basis of something <u>else</u> that he knows, in which case his knowledge might be termed 'inferential'. It is not disputed that God may know things in this way, but it is plain that he cannot know <u>all</u> empirical facts in this fashion. The other sort of basis on which we may come to know p is not something else which we know, but <u>have</u>, such as a perceptual experience. In this sort of case our knowledge can (arguably) no longer be called 'inferential'. What we are asking is whether God could have non-inferential knowledge without perceptual experience.

Wallace Matson considers this possibility in 'An Introduction to Omniscience',* but gives it short shrift.

> Now it might be suggested that the o.b. [omniscient being] <u>just knows</u>. We can imagine without contradiction an Internal Revenue computer that just ticks off the amount every time I make a bank deposit. Telepathy and clairvoyance with no intermediaries are logically possible.
>
> Such extraordinary phenomena are not, however, models of knowledge. The revenue agents have to come up with the incriminating check before they can prosecute me, the telepath has to find out whether he was right by interviewing eye-witnesses. If he is perpetually imprisoned he cannot -- logically -- know that his hunches are right. For whatever the analysis of knowing may be, it must include the having of good reason for believing.

Matson's case is perhaps obscured by his comment on what we require of prosecuting revenue agents and putative telepaths. It is at least arguable that incriminating cheques are demanded of prosecuting revenue agents, and eye-witness testimony in the case of

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* p. 11.

alleged telepathy, mainly if not entirely to protect against error and deception which in these cases are notoriously both possible and damaging. It is not clear that we require of the revenue agent that he come to know of our malpractice on the basis of the same sort of evidence that he must produce in a court of law. We certainly do not demand that the alleged telepath form his belief about what happened on the basis of interviews with eye-witnesses. The particular sorts of evidence that are required for tax evasion or telepathy may have as much to do with the requirements of law-courts and psychical research as they do with the logic of knowledge.

It is also possible to misunderstand Matson's claim that the isolated individual is logically barred from knowing that his hunches are correct. It is not just the fact that this individual could never be warranted himself in claiming to know, i.e. that this person could never know that he knows, that by itself counts against our saying that he knows. This would be the case only if knowing that p entails knowing that one knows that p, and there is enough controversy on this point to show that it is by no means plainly true. *

In any case, Matson's argument is stronger than the one I have just discounted. His point is that the isolated telepath cannot know, let alone know that he knows. (Although the grounds for one's knowing might be distinct from those for one's knowing that one knows, they are

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* For what it is worth, it does seem that unless grounds sufficient to justify knowledge that p are never so distinct from grounds sufficient to justify knowledge that one knows that p, so that a person could recognize one without the other, knowing that p does not entail knowing that one knows. (See Lemmon, 'If I Know, Do I Know That I Know?', esp. p. 80.) It seems quite conceivable that someone, for instance, might believe that p, p be true, and that person possess grounds adequate to justify our saying that he knows it, but that he might at the same time not recognize the adequancy of his grounds.

at least related in that one could not possess the second without the first.) The reason that he cannot is that his isolation deprives him of the possibility of having grounds for his beliefs. It is this fact that bars not just the telepath but anyone from saying that the telepath knows. Even if his hunches are sometimes, perhaps even often, right, he can never have grounds for believing them right. In this context, that is just another way of saying he can never have grounds for believing them at all. And it is the having of grounds, in fact good grounds, that distinguishes knowers from mere believers and guessers.

Of course we must be careful here not to suggest that every example of putative knowledge must be backed by good reasons. Good reasons must come to an end somewhere.* I may claim to know that there is a pig in the field and give as my grounds the fact that I see a pig in the field. If I am asked for reasons to support my belief that I see a pig, then in ordinary circumstances, I shall not know what to say. Somehow it is just incorrect to say that I believe I see a pig, though not just in the sense that one should say instead that I know I see it. I just see it. If I take the question to be how I know it is a pig that I see, I may answer with protests that there seems no reason in such a case to distrust my senses or my grasp of the language. But these would not be reasons in the sense we began by asking for. Reasons must end somewhere.

Moreover where reasons sometimes end is in a claim not directly concerned with perception. We have seen an instance of this in facts

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* See pp. 283-8.

about practical knowledge. In certain circumstances, to support a contention that I know such-and-such has happened it is enough to say that I intended it to happen.

Nevertheless, though reasons must end somewhere, it is very often proper to go on asking for them. Also, it seems unlikely that good reasons could <u>always</u> end without reference to perception. As we have seen in the case of practical knowledge, claims to empirical knowledge without observation seem eventually to depend on claims that require experiential backing.

The general point could be put thus. Particular examples of knowledge do not always by themselves require grounds, let alone grounds that include evidence provided by the senses. But if we are concerned with <u>empirical</u> knowledge, and consider knowledge to be a complex structure composed of interdependent elements, then it appears that perceptual experience provides an indispensable part of the structure. If we remove this part of the structure it is not that the structure collapses but that it becomes indistinguishable from another; namely that which is composed of our opinions, hunches and guesses. Normally these two frameworks are 'internally'* distinct in two closely connected respects: (1) What is known, unlike what is believed, etc., is <u>likely</u> to be true. That is, while both <u>may</u> be true, it is no mere accident that what one knows is true, while beliefs, etc., may just happen (fortuitously) to be true. (2) We have a right in connection with knowledge which we do not (at least to the same extent) in regard to our beliefs; namely to <u>claim</u> that

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* They are 'externally' distinct, of course, in that what is known is necessarily true whereas what is believed, guessed, etc. need not be.

they are true.* We may see now how removing the requirement of good grounds, among which (in the case of empirical knowledge) must be included elements from perceptual experience, abolishes the ('internal') distinction between knowing and believing. It is the function of grounds to establish the likelihood that one's beliefs are true and consequently the right to claim that they are. Without them there is no distinction between beliefs that (in some sense) must be true and others that just happen to be.

It appears, then, that if the lack of perceptual experience in God's case prevents our distinguishing in principle between his knowing and believing, the most we could claim is that he believes all and only those things that are true. Even this, however, would constitute a somewhat flattering estimate of his epistemological position, for in the case of true beliefs we normally discriminate between those for which the believer has at least some grounds and those for which he apparently has none.** The latter are called something like good guesses. Consistent good-guessing thus appears to be the cash value of divine omniscience if in the case of God's beliefs we remove the possibility of grounds provided partly in experience. 'Just knowing' appears indistinguishable from 'just guessing'.

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* Obviously I have made the 'internal' distinction between knowing and believing appear sharper than it really is. The likelihood of particular beliefs being true ranges all the way from certainty through just likelihood to none. The same range is apparent in our right to claim that this or that is true. In fact the structures of our knowledge and beliefs constitute a single continuous structure with a marked difference between the two ends. My complaint about removing grounds (including perception) is that it removes the idea of a difference between the ends.

** The artifically sharp distinction I have made between believing and knowing shows up here again.

However, perhaps we have not looked closely enough at the case of the isolated telepath. It seems to me possible that a closer inspection of his situation might allow us to give some sense to a claim that someone 'just knows', accepting the point that to do so we must offer some grip to a distinction between knowing and right guessing.

Imagine that we are party to a particular psychological experiment. A certain individual, whom I shall call Ψ, exists in a state of complete sensory deprivation.* We may leave aside the question of how long he has been in this condition. Perhaps if he has always been in it there are special difficulties, but we need not consider that possibility now. Let us further suppose that in some way we are able to receive communications from this individual. Perhaps he can speak to us by means of some electronic arrangement. But we cannot communicate with him in any of the usual ways. He cannot hear us, or see messages that we write, or use any of the normal human senses so as to receive communication of any sort from ourselves or anyone else. To our astonishment, it appears from the content of Ψ's communication with us that he is aware of happenings in the world outside himself. He comments on states of affairs and occurrences on the international level with which we are all familiar but which we cannot imagine he is in a position to know of, and also on more or less trivial matters concerning those who live and work in the areas around the room in which he is isolated. Moreover, he

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* In practice, of course, it appears impossible to achieve complete sensory deprivation (see Norton, The New Dimensions of Medicine, pp. 188-94) But since this is an imaginary experiment we can imagine away some of these practical difficulties.

further makes assertions about developments with which we are not acquainted in these and other areas, and to our growing astonishment we find upon checking that he is quite right about the latest border-clash or aircraft hi-jacking, and also about the new secretary in the Senior Tutor's office and the rainstorm raging outside his building. Naturally, we find ourselves wondering about this strange state of affairs. Again to the increase of our astonishment, Ψ remarks on the wonderment we feel but have not voiced, though not in a way that suggests he merely expects that we must be wondering. In fact when we begin to discuss these bizarre happenings among ourselves, Ψ comments on our discussions in a way that betrays an apparent awareness of the very words we are saying. We rigorously check on the security of Ψ's isolation, without discovering any defects. We mount a twenty-four-hours-a-day watch on him through one-way windows, but witness no physical changes in his environment or such things as the orientation of parts of his body. The atmosphere in his room is monitored for sound waves of both usual and unusual frequencies and for electrical changes of any sort. It may even be that we are able to observe the electro-chemical activity in various parts of his body and in his brain. But all to no avail. There is no sign of any series of physical events in his body. Perhaps we are unable even to find evidence of the usual electro-chemical processes that normally are correlated with reports of perception. Yet all the time his commentary goes on, including with apparent indifference the reports of events close at hand and others at enormous distances from him. And the reports turn out invariably to be true.

It is quite natural to imagine that we begin to wonder how Ψ

can make these reports. It may be that some of us simply wonder about this, 'in our heads' so to speak; or perhaps we begin to ask each other the question. Not surprisingly by now, Y proceeds to give an account of what is going on in our minds or our conversations. Moreover he attempts to give an answer. But all that he is able to say is that he finds himself believing these things. That is, he finds himself inclined to make certain statements, wanting to act in various ways (if only he could), and so on. Often, he says, his beliefs just 'happen to him', especially when they concern people, things and events that are important or of interest to him. But sometimes he wonders what is happening to this person or in that place and immediately finds himself with an 'answer'. In either case he may form a mental picture, perhaps even filled out with the sorts of sounds, smells, etc., that would normally be associated with the state of affairs he believes to obtain. But, Y insists, it is not <u>on the basis of</u> these pictures, and so on, that he believes what he does. He simply finds himself believing those things.

It is quite clear that so far as we know, the picture I have just sketched is empirically impossible. It is a quite fantastic story. But let us suppose it is at least <u>conceptually</u> coherent; that is, that we need not accept a conceptual muddle to get the story going as we must, say, in the case of H.G. Wells' time-traveller. The question is, is there any place in the story for the concept of knowledge? If there is, what sort of place is it?

Plainly, Matson's remarks of a few pages ago would have the effect of denying that there is any place in the picture for this concept. There is no place for knowledge, he would say, because there

is no place for grounds. It is an essential part of our concept of knowledge that we distinguish between knowledge and such things as right guesses, and it is only by having a concept of grounds that we can do this. That is why the lack of any possible grounds, which is ensured by the condition of complete sensory deprivation, closes the door on the notion of knowledge. Right hunches and good guesses are, logically, the best our solitary telepath can do.

This is presumably the case against thinking that we may speak of the telepath's knowing what he believes and is true. If we look more closely at the notion of grounds, however, I think we may see that this case is far from conclusive.

In explicating Matson's point I suggested one way of bringing out the importance of grounds. Grounds provide the basis of a distinction between knowing and guessing, and they do so by allowing us to think of some beliefs as other than accidentally true. What this means, roughly, is that we regard some judgements as being connected via grounds with the object of the judgement, in such a way that had things been otherwise with that object it is at least likely that the grounds and therefore the judgement would also have been different. It is not perfectly clear how we ought to characterize this relation between the state of affairs on the one hand and grounds for believing on the other, but it seems at least to have a causal element involved. The way, therefore, in which the idea of grounds permits our thinking of some beliefs as other than accidentally true is by taking into account the (in part) causal connection between a particular state of affairs' obtaining and certain other things (such as a perceptual experiences) which may form the basis of a belief. Of course it is

just this sort of causal link that appears absent in the case of our telepath. It seems there is nothing Ψ can mention which is (a) systematically related to changes in empirical facts, and (b) available to him as grounds for believing that this or that is among the facts.

But while part (b) in this contention appears true, it is not clear that part (a) is. It is true that there is nothing in Ψ's experience which can function as grounds for his believing this or that, but there appears to be something which <u>is</u> systematically related to changes in empirical facts: namely his beliefs themselves. What is there to prevent our seeing his case as one in which grounds in the usual sense are no longer required, since the causal warrant which they usually supply is to be found in a direct link between the facts and his beliefs? The causal connection which allows at least some beliefs the status of other than accidentally true is preserved. But the connection in Ψ's case is not between certain facts and other facts which constitute grounds; a connection which may indirectly link facts and beliefs. Instead it is directly between certain facts and certain beliefs.

The most likely objection to this proposal concerns the notion of causality. From the set-up of the story it appears that Ψ is located at some spatial remove from most of the things he reports. In some instances the distance is far greater than in others, but in all of those which concern us there is some physical gap. Moreover, it also appears that in Ψ's situation there is no way of filling the gap. Pains were taken to exclude the possibility of physical states and events linking those things on which Ψ reports and physical states and events in his body. But where it is alleged that a causal connection

obtains between phenomena which are not contiguous, it is normally incumbent on anyone making such an allegation that he specify intermediate events which together constitute a causal chain uniting them, or at least that he admit that there is such a chain which is in principle discoverable. This possibility is precluded in the story of Ψ, and the idea that there should be a causal connection between his beliefs and the states of affairs which they appear to concern is thereby ruled out.

We have here an appeal to what may be dubbed the 'Principle of Causal Chains'. There can be no doubt that this is a widely respected principle.* It is at least arguable that progess in the natural sciences rests on the adoption of such a principle. Nevertheless, it is far from obvious that to deny the necessity and/or universality of this principle is to reject something essential to the normal concept of causation. In fact evidence for its non-necessity appears available from scientific theory itself. Newton's theory of gravitation, for one, appears to countenance the possibility of causal influence without intermediaries. A still more compelling case against the causal chain principle might be made from the common-sense view of perception. However applicable the principle of causal chains may be to the physical events which play a part in perception, there appears to be a crucial gap between this class of events and the mental events which are at least an element in perceiving. Here it is

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* In Bertrand Russell's discussion of 'The Postulates of Scientific Inference', in Human Knowledge, he gives as his third postulate "... when there is a causal connection between two events which are not continguous, there must be intermediate links in the causal chain such that each is continguous to the next, or (alternatively) such that there is a process which is continuous in the mathematical sense."

not so much a case of action at a distance as of action between two sorts of events only one of which seems to admit of spatial predicates.

In any case it seems quite possible that in a set of circumstances like those we have imagined involving Ψ, we should find ourselves inclined to say that his beliefs are <u>caused by</u> the states and events which his beliefs concern. A persistent researcher may refuse to accept this notion and doggedly pursue an explanation of Ψ's beliefs which conforms to the principle of causal chains. But my point is that a stage may be reached where it is rational to suppose that there is <u>no</u> causal intermediary. The facts might be such that on the one hand we are inclined to see a causal connection between states of affairs and someone's beliefs, but on the other hand we cannot see that they are linked by a causal <u>chain</u>.

Now it seems to me that in such a situation it might be allowed that Ψ 'just knows'. The usual objection to this is that since the idea of grounds is left out there can be no distinction between knowing and right-guessing and therefore no use for the concept of knowledge at all. I have suggested a reply to this: that the notion of grounds which permits this distinction is based on common assumptions about relations between (a) the way things are in the empirical world, and (b) certain other things which play a part in the formation of beliefs, such that changes in (a) are at least likely to be reflected in (b). But in a case like Ψ's the relation might be held to exist between (a) the way things are in the empirical world, and (b') the beliefs themselves; in which case we have a logical foothold for a distinction between knowing and right-guessing without needing grounds to provide it.

It might be asked, of course, whether there really is any such foothold provided. Is it intelligible, for instance, to suggest that of 100 true reports made by Ψ, 99 were examples of his knowing and one was an instance of his guessing correctly? It is difficult to see how we should make sense of this claim if we posit an unexplained and inexplicable causal link between (at least most of) Ψ's beliefs and the way things are.

At least three ways may be suggested of coping with this difficulty. The first is based on the fact that we might find certain kind of states and events (for instance those involving objects smaller than a certain size, or mental phenomena characterized as 'unconscious') concerning which Ψ either does not find himself having beliefs or has beliefs which turn out as often as not to be false. If this were the case, then when Ψ made pronouncements on such subjects we may want to say that we suspect or know he is guessing, even if his pronouncements turned out sometimes to be correct. The basis of a second kind of response may be found if there are systematic differences between kinds of beliefs which Ψ has 'spontaneously' and others which he must make some sort of effort (say by concentrating on 'asking himself the question...') to acquire. If, concerning a belief which falls into the latter class, Ψ were to hazard a comment without making the requisite effort, what he says may be reckoned a guess, even if it is a correct guess. On this account 'careless' utterances would be guesses; though of course to be careless they must be utterances that could have been made with care. A third sort of reply may be built on the fact that we may rule out some states-of-affairs as causally connectable with Ψ's beliefs on grounds other than spatial separation.

An example of this would be future contingent states of affairs. Even if Ψ's remarks on future contingencies* always turned out to be true we would not say that his remarks express what he knows, since there could not be a causal relation backward in time bringing about his belief. Such remarks could express only guesses; perhaps invariably good guesses. Why not allow the possibility of accepting backward causation as we have the possibility of accepting causation without intermediaries? The reason is that to accept backward causation is to launch a wholesale conceptual revolution in the way that allowing 'action at a distance' does not. It is far more difficult to imagine a state of affairs which would invite such a revolution than it is to conceive of one which suggests the abandonment of the principle of causal chains.**

In these ways and perhaps others the distinction between knowing and right-guessing may be shown to have a basis in the kind of situation we have imagined. It appears, then, that certain conceivable states of affairs might lead us to accept that a given individual 'just knows', in the sense that his knowledge does not have grounds in the usual sense but is nonetheless causally related to the objects of his knowledge.

I take it that the above defends the notion of 'just knowing' against the usual charges of incoherence. If this is so, and if there

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* By 'contingencies' I mean events or states of affairs that are not causally determined, such as the free actions of agents or perhaps quantum movements. I specify these since in the case of non-contingents it is possible that Ψ might be able to infer from his 'caused' knowledge of the present state of things, their future states. I am plainly assuming that genuine freedom is incompatible with complete causal determinacy.

** See Gale, Chapter VII; and Swinburne, Space and Time, Chapter 8.

are no more damaging objections to be made against the idea, then it seems conceivable that God may be allowed to know without having the usual sort of grounds. Of course I am not contending that God's case is just like that of our imagined telepath and clairvoyant.* All I am arguing is that the absence of grounds which is entailed in the absence of perceptual experience need not constitute a logical bar against God's knowing. God's case would then be quite special, but we have seen reasons to believe it need not be logically inconceivable.

C. Must God Lack Perceptual Experience?

So far in this chapter we have been examining the possibility that God might know empirical facts without having perceptual experience. But the assumption that he cannot have such experience may bear some scrutiny.

No doubt the chief reason for thinking that God must lack sensory experience is that he is believed to be incorporeal. An incorporeal being obviously cannot have anything like sense organs, and it is natural enough to suppose that a being without sense organs cannot have sensations. It is possible, however, to challenge this supposition, as we may see by returning to the fantasy of our perfect telepath and clairvoyant, Ψ.

At one point in our story it was imagined that Ψ attempted to give an account of how he came by his beliefs. All he could say, we supposed, is that he found he had them; though some came 'unbidden' while others came as answers to internal questions. Now let us imagine

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* A crucial difference is that God is regarded as being incorporeal. The relevance of this difference will occupy our attention in chapters XIII and XIV.

that Ψ gives a different sort of account. Suppose that instead of saying that he simply comes to have these beliefs, with or without any effort, he tells of having certain experiences like those we normally call perceptual experiences. He 'sees' things, and perhaps 'hears', 'smells', 'touches' and even 'tastes' things. Of course all these verbs must be placed in quotes, since he and we are aware that his body is not in the appropriate place to have the sensations he seems to have. In fact, so far as we can tell, his bodily organs of sensation are not stimulated even in some extraordinary way such that we would expect him to have the sense experience he reports having. Ψ may even remark that he has no 'perceptions' of his own body or parts thereof, except when his 'sensations' are of the inside of his room; and then they are unusual in that he sees it from a variety of perspectives* in succession, unlike the single point of view each of us has with respect to his own body. There is a still further possibility. It is that Ψ may report having either instead of or in addition to the sort of experiences we normally have, a whole new range which he can no more describe to us than a sighted man could describe seeing to a man blind from birth. It is on the basis of these experiences, says Ψ, that he forms his beliefs and makes his reports.

Now this is clearly quite a different sort of reply from the one we earlier imagined coming from Ψ. In this case there appear to be grounds, or at least 'grounds', for his beliefs. His beliefs, and

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* I assume that with regard to those senses involving perspective, Ψ will have his experiences as of from a particular point of view. I cannot make sense of the notion of, for instance, seeing from no particular perspective. It may be, however, that Ψ appears able simply to choose his point of view in a way that we cannot. (See Penelhum, Survival and Disembodied Existence, chapter 2, especially pp. 24-32.)

his reports, are related to his experiences in the same ways that ours are. It is on the basis of what he 'sees', 'hears', etc., that he is inclined to say or do this or that. His sense experience serves at least part of the function that our sense experience does in supplying grounds for belief. It guides us in our choice of things to say and do in our dealings with the empirical world.

This point is clearly relevant to answering the question of how we might distinguish in Ψ's case between his knowing and merely guessing correctly. It has been admitted that without such a distinction there can be no grip for an application of anything like the usual concept of knowledge. Can we make it in the case of Ψ? The obvious answer is that we may make it in much the same way as we do in our own situation. What Ψ knows, as distinct from what he might guess (perhaps correctly), is marked off by being grounded in certain complex ways in his 'experiences'. Only those beliefs of his which are related in this way to what he 'sees', 'hears', etc. can stand as candidates for knowledge.

But there is an objection to this. While it is true that a function of grounds in the ordinary concept of knowledge is to allow us to distinguish between knowing and right-guessing, it is not the case that we should agree to count as grounds just anything that allows us to establish a distinction which we may decide to recognize with the use of these two terms. Not just any old distinction between knowing and good-guessing will do if we wish our concept of the clairvoyant's knowledge to bear a recognizable resemblance to our conception of anyone else's knowledge. The reason one might say that in Ψ's case we have an arbitrary distinction, critically unlike the ordinary

distinction, lies in a point that has already been raised. The point about grounds in our usual way of speaking about knowledge is that they permit us to recognize some beliefs as being other than accidentally true. This, it might be said, is the way that the notion of grounds provides a basis for distinguishing knowledge from correct guesses. It does so by recognizing that the making of some judgements is related in such a way with the object of the judgement that we may expect differences in the latter to be reflected in differences in the former. Grounds are adduced on the assumption that there is a connection, at least partly causal, between the way things are in the empirical world and the sort of grounds which we find ourselves presented with. But it is precisely this connection which is absent in Ψ's case. There is no recognized way of relating the 'perceptual experiences' that he has to the empirical facts that obtain, such that we should expect differences in the other. Thus what Ψ adduces as grounds, though they may allow us to make some distinction between knowing and right guessing, they cannot do the job that grounds are normally called upon to do. That is, they cannot establish that if Ψ's belief is true it is no mere accident that it is true.

Now it is important to see that this objection, like its near-relative raised in connection with Ψ's 'just knowing', rests on the Principle of Causal Chains. And there seems no reason to acknowledge the necessity of this principle in the present context any more than there was in our discussion of 'just knowing'. It seems right to say that the usefulness of grounds depends on positing a connection, in part causal, between empirical states of affairs and our perceptual experience. The objection to allowing Ψ's case as an instance of this

apparently rests on the fact that there seem to be no intermediate states and events to connect the states and events he reports, with happenings in his sense organs or brain. But, for the same reasons mentioned above, there seems no good reason for saying that there must be such intermediaries, and it seems perfectly possible that a situation like Y's might lead us to grant that in at least one case there are not. Even a high degree of correlation between his unmediated experiences and things being as he 'saw', 'heard', etc., them to be, would be enough to suggest that there is a causal connection of sorts. And in such a case it seems quite likely that we should agree that Y perceives, though perhaps not with his bodily sense organs.

What is the relevance of this to God's case? It is relevant, I believe, in showing that there is no logical necessity in sense experience's depending on the having of sense organs. Again, I am not suggesting that God's situation is very like the one we have imagined. What Y's case shows is not how God might know, but that the logic of knowledge is such that we might allow its application to God's beliefs. It does seem conceivable that God might have something like perceptual experience upon which his knowledge may rest, even though he ex hypothesi lacks any organs of perception. It need not concern us, perhaps, whether his experience is like ours in consisting of sight, hearing, and so on; or different in including others besides or instead of these. (There may be a problem if his experiences include the element of perspective, as at least sight seems necessarily to do, for this appears to locate the perceiver in space,

But this problem may not be insurmountable.* Even if it is, there is perhaps an analogy available in our kinaesthetic sensation, which do not appear to involve perspective.**) All I am arguing is that there seems no logical bar to supposing that God may have grounds for his beliefs which on the one hand are distinct from his beliefs themselves and on the other are causally related to the states of and events in the empirical world. If this is so then God's case is again quite special in that he has perceptual experience without organs of perception. But that is different from saying that his case cannot be described without logical absurdity.

We began this chapter by noting the apparent difficulty in saying that an incorporeal God, i.e. one who lacks sense organs, knows all that is happening in the physical world. An attempt to relieve this difficulty was examined in the reminder that human agents are often allowed to know without observation what is happening when it concerns the outcome of their intentions. But this reply was found wanting in that (a) it seems hard to see how such a model could allow God's knowledge of what creatures do with their freedom, and (b) more fundamentally, our knowing without observation what we are doing seems to depend at some stage on our having learned, via perception, what our capacities are. It was then suggested that some sense could be given to the idea that God 'just knows' in a way that excuses his lack of grounds in experience but preserves the distinction between knowing and right-guessing. Finally, I examined the assumption that God's

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* See Penelhum, Survival and Disembodied Existence, pp. 28 and 32.

** This may lead to the suggestion that the world is God's body; a suggestion which will crop up again in our discussion of God's acting in the world.

lack of sense organs must deprive him of perceptual experience, and suggested that there seems no logical necessity in this. My conclusion is that we have seen no reason to believe that God's incorporeality, insofar as it entails the lack of sense organs,* must also entail that he cannot know empirical facts. That God has no body and therefore no organs of perception seems no logical threat to his omniscience.

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* There is another way in which God's incorporeality might be held to disqualify him as knowing empirical facts, that is by disqualifying him as a continuing person. In other words, it may be argued that the notion of an incorporeal person, let alone perceiver or knower, is radically incoherent. This is the point to which chapters XIII and XIV are devoted.

CHAPTER X

OMNISCIENCE, FOREKNOWLEDGE AND FREEWILL

> For if God beholdeth all things and cannot be deceived, that must of necessity follow which His providence foreseeth to be to come. Wherefore, if from eternity he doth not only foreknow the deeds of men, but also then counsels and wills, there can be no free-will; for there is not any other deed or will, but those which the divine providence, which cannot be deceived, hath foreseen. For if things can be drawn aside to any other end than was foreknown, there will not be any firm knowledge of that which is to come, but rather an uncertain opinion, which in my opinion were impious to believe of God.*

In these words Boethius recorded a disquiet, which he was neither the first nor the last to feel, concerning the compatibility of belief in God's omniscience with belief in human free will. A formula expressing divine omniscience has been suggested: for every p, if p, then God knows that p. Now let us assume that my having my hair cut today entails that the statement 'On 13 July, 1971 MM has his hair cut' is true, and has always been true. It is easy to see how the problem arises. Whatever I do on any date is describable in propositions that are true at any time before that date. If God knows all true propositions, then he knows today what I will do tomorrow. How can it be, then, that what I do tomorrow I do freely, since if God knows in advance that I will do it, it seems in some sense impossible that I should fail to do it? On the face of it, at least, there appears to be some sort of conflict between the belief that God knows everything and the supposition that some of my actions are truly voluntary.

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* Boethius, Consolation of Philosophy, Part V, section III.

In what follows I shall not try to establish whether or not some human actions are free. What I shall examine is the suggestion that the belief that some are, is incompatible with belief in God's omniscience.

The case for incompatibility may be countered with arguments from any one of at least three different approaches. One approach would be to try and show simply that omniscience, including complete foreknowledge, <u>is</u> reconcilable with human freedom, and that the impression that it is not is generated by some mistake in the case for their incompatibility. Nelson Pike, among others, appears to advance an argument of this sort, maintaining that God's foreknowledge of our actions is no more of a threat to their freedom than is the foreknowledge that might be had by an especially intimate friend.* The idea that God's foreknowledge <u>is</u> a threat to their freedom may be produced, in Pike's opinion, by the assumption that God is not just omniscient, but necessarily (in a logical sense) so. And this assumption he regards as open to question.** A second way of contrasting the incompatibility argument may be adopted by the advocate of God's timelessness. From this point of view, while God's knowledge of all true propositions includes those describing actions which are (from our standpoint) in the future, because of his timelessness this sort of knowledge does not constitute <u>fore</u>knowledge. Actions which are, to us, in the future, are beheld by God in a sort of eternal present. That we can know what someone is doing <u>as</u> he does

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* Pike, Chapter 4; especially pp. 76-83.

** See also Kenny's 'Divine Foreknowledge and Human Freedom'.

it poses no threat to freedom. So by claiming that God's knowledge of what we do is never foreknowledge, but rather timeless knowledge of our action beheld in an eternal present, the believer in God's timelessness seeks to remove the difficulty. In Part II, however, we encountered reasons for doubting the coherence of a doctrine of divine timelessness. It does not seem to make sense to say that action is future only 'to us'. It is either future or it is not.*

A third approach to answering the case for incompatibility is the one I wish to take in this chapter. It lies in arguing that it is not necessarily a part of omniscience that an omniscient person should have foreknowledge of the kind that precipitates the difficulty. That is, it is claimed that God's not knowing the future free actions of men (or, for that matter, any other genuine future contingencies, such as quantum movements) need not count as an impeachment of his omniscience.

In order to frame this argument more precisely let us put the case for incompatibility in a more perspicuous form. In the first premise, let it be made plain that God's omniscience may include at least some foreknowledge. Omniscience has been expressed in Prior's formula: for every p, if p then God knows that p.** That foreknowledge might be included in omniscience, Prior makes explicit in the following expression,† which serves as the first premise of the case for incompatability:

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* See Prior, p. 43.

** Prior adds (p. 29) that if one takes the 'is' in 'God is omniscient' to be the ordinary present tense, and one wishes to say that God's omniscience is a permanent attribute, the formula must be expanded to something like: It is, always has been, and always will be the case that for every p, if p, then God knows that p. For the sake of simplicity I shall not adopt this expansion, but take the permanence of the attribute defined in the simpler formula for granted.

† Ibid., p. 30. I have changed the tenses to avoid what seems to me an unnecessary complication.

(1) If, at any time, it is the case at that time that it will be the case that p, then God knows at that time that it will be the case that p.

What this formula makes clear is that among the substitutions for p in the basic formula for omniscience it is possible that at least some expressions referring to future states of affairs should be included. If there are any true statements about the future -- and this premise leaves open the question of whether there are -- then God must know the truths expressed in them. Thus his omniscience could include foreknowledge, whatever truths about the future there are to be known.

In a second premise, let us record the assumption that there are true statements about the future, and that among them are statements about what free agents will do. It is based on the general supposition that if p at any time t, it was true at any time before t that p would be at time t. Prior's way of expressing this is:*

(2) For every p, if p, then it has always been the case that it would be the case that p.

From these two premises it follows that:

(3) For every p, if p, then God has always known that it would be the case that p.**

The next steps on the road to a fatalistic conclusion are subject to some variety, depending on whether the fact that it has always been (true) that p would be the case, or that it has always

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* Ibid.

** Ibid.

been known that p would be the case, or that it has always been known by God (a necessarily omniscient being) that p would be the case, is seized upon as suggesting that no actions can be truly voluntary. Criticisms are frequently levelled at the premise(s) supplied at this stage in the argument. They vary, of course, with the sort of premise that is provided. Since it is not my intention to examine this fourth step in the case for incompatibility, I shall not attempt to specify the premise(s) bridging the gap between the three I have noted and the conclusion for fatalism. I shall simply mention that some sort of bridge is needed at that point. Summing up, we have:

(1) If at any time, it is the case at that time that it will be the case that p, then God knows at that time that it will be the case that p.

(2) For every p, if p, then it has always been the case that it would be the case that p.

(3) For every p, if p, then God has always known that it would be the case that p.

(4) (bridge premise(s))

(5) There can be *no* truly voluntary actions.

It is the argument up to step (3) that I wish to contest. Accepting that premise (3) follows from (1) and (2), this means that either or both of those first two steps must be shown to be unsound for the first stage of the case for incompatibility to be called in question. Let us begin with premise (2).

A. The Truth-Value of Statements Concerning the Future

'For every p, if p then it has always been the case that it would be the case that p'. I said that this premise concerned the possibility in principle of true descriptions of the complete future.

But as it stands, this premise, like the others in the argument, concerns states of affairs. That is, for 'p' in this formula one substitutes expressions representing states of affairs. The whole argument, including this second premise, could just as easily be put into a version in which what is talked about are propositions; the assumption being that if p, then it is true that p; (p = (T) p). The premise we are considering would, on this rendering, be: For every p, if it is true that p, then it has always been true that it would be true that p.* Now it is worth putting our premise in this form in order to entertain one criticism of it that has been made. In 'The Formalities of Omniscience', A. N. Prior argues thus:**

> What I want to say...is that nothing can be said to be truly 'going-to-happen' (futurum) until it is so 'present in its causes' as to be beyond stopping; until that happens, neither 'It will be the case that p' nor 'It will be the case that not p' is strictly speaking true.

If Prior is right about this, then of course one leg is kicked out from under the case for incompatibility. If in connection with some things that happen it is neither true nor false before they happen to say that they will, then no one, not even an omniscient being, could know that such things are going to happen. The apparent incompatibility

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* This inelegant way of putting things is required in order to deal with the tensed propositions. 'If p, then it has always been true that p' would be adequate in the case of propositions that are cast in the 'timeless present', e.g. 'two plus two equal four', or 'The battle begins on May 2nd, 1940.' But for ordinary propositions things are different. Even if 'It is raining' is true, it is plainly not necessarily the case that 'It is raining' has always been true. For cases like this, employing the usual tenses, the 'once true, always true doctrine must be applied in a more complex way, through the use of temporal entailment rules. See Gale, pp. 140-1.

** P. 38.

of omniscience with freedom would be eradicated by the claim that even omniscience need not include complete foreknowledge. But is Prior right in the argument he provides for this point? Is it correct to say that some statements regarding future states of affairs, i.e. those concerning as yet undetermined events or states of affairs, do not have a truth-value?

Imagine a man with a claim to clairvoyance regarding the future. He repeatedly deposits sealed predictions concerning anything you like from elections through horse races to whether the Vice-Chancellor will choose to go punting on any given Saturday. Now presumably it is the mark of a genuine clairvoyant that at least a certain percentage of his predictions turn out to be true. It follows that the way to discredit a clairvoyant is to show that at least a good number of his predictions are not true. The ordinary way of settling the issue, obviously, is to wait for the time of the event or state of affairs predicted by the putative clairvoyant and see whether his forecast accords with the facts. But if Prior's argument is correct, there is another procedure open to us. Prior's argument, remember, is that a statement about the future is strictly speaking not true (neither is it false) unless the event or state of affairs it predicts is already so "present in its causes" as to be unstoppable. Surely, then, what we might do in the case of the clairvoyant is, instead of waiting for the occurrence or non-occurrence of that which he predicts, consider whether the event or state of affairs which he foresees is, in the sense just given, inevitable. If it is not, then we will on Prior's reasoning have shown his prediction not to be true (though we will not have shown it false) and be entitled to charge the clairvoyant

to renounce his claim to at least clairvoyance about the future.

But we may anticipate a complaint from the candidate. Surely, he might protest, the only proper way of evaluating his prediction is the normal 'wait and see' method. To judge the issue in the manner just described is to confuse the matter of his prediction's truth-value with the matter of whether or not that which he predicts is already determined, and/or with the question of whether he has grounds for saying and therefore can be said to <u>know</u> what will happen. It is easy to imagine our clairvoyant's wanting to distinguish his claim that such-and-such will be the case from the claim that it is the inevitable outcome of present conditions. If he is a modest clairvoyant, he may even be willing to say that he has nothing like the usual grounds for his predictions (perhaps he gets them from something like automatic writing) and therefore cannot claim to <u>know</u> what is going to happen; but that his forecast is nonetheless true. And in this counter-claim, surely the candidate is right. In maintaining that nothing can be said truly to be 'going-to-happen' until that thing is unstoppably "present in its causes", Prior does seem to confound the truth-conditions of statements concerning the future with the causal necessity of future events and states.

It may be objected from Prior's position that, as I put it myself a moment ago, the predictions of a genuine clairvoyant <u>turn out</u> to be true; the implication being that there is a distinction between a prediction's <u>turning out</u> to be true, and being true when it is made. It is questionable, however, whether this figure of speech in fact protects one side of such a distinction. It seems indifferent whether we say that good predictions turn out to be true, or that they

turn out to <u>have been</u> true, or that simply that they are true. If someone turns out to be a traitor, the suggestion is clearly that he has been one for some time, not that he has just become one. Similarly, that a true seer's predictions turn out to be true does not mean that sometime after his making them they changed from being neither true nor false to being true.

A second objection from Prior's point of view might be that I have assumed it is a refutation of the claim to clairvoyance of the future to show that certain predictions are not true. This sounds plausible, the Priorite may claim, because we normally equate 'not true' with 'false'. But is the aim of Prior's argument to show that 'not true' may simply stand for 'as yet neither true nor false'. Claims to precognition <u>are</u> falsified by the making of <u>false</u> predictions it may be admitted. But in showing that a prediction is as yet neither true nor false, i.e. as yet neither it nor its contradictory is causally determined, one does not show that it is false. So the new accrediting procedure I took to be entailed by Prior's argument does not in fact follow.

The trouble with this is that it still allows us to talk of a prediction (a clairvoyant's or anybody else's) which in the end turns out to be correct, but which, at the time it is made, is neither true nor false. And this runs directly counter to our ordinary ways of talking about predictions. If we are present at the making of a forecast, it is easy to imagine our turning to one another and asking 'Do you think he is right?' or 'Do you think that is true?' What would be odd is our asking 'Do you think he will be right.' or 'Do

you think that will become true?'* In the event that what is predicted in fact comes to pass, what we would normally say is 'He was right' or 'What he said was true'. And surely we would say the same things at any point of time before the predicted event or state at which that event or state could be seen to be causally or in some other way 'on the cards'. The suggestion is plainly that truth and falsity attach to predictions from the moment of their making and not from the time at which what they forecast turns out to happen or not to happen, nor from the moment at which it becomes inevitably 'present in its causes'.

I have used the somewhat fanciful case of verifying claims to precognition to make my objection to Prior's contention. The facts about ordinary predictions would do almost as well. The point is that some version** of the 'once true, always true' thesis seems built into the way we handle statements concerning the future, as well as those about the past and present. And this counts against Prior's claim that some statements about the future are at the time of their making neither true nor false.

I have suggested (in the counter-plea of the putative

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* In case such questions are imaginable, Gale has provided an account of such locutions which is compatible with the 'once true, always true' thesis. (See The Language of Time, Chapter VIII.) He argues that by recognizing (a) a metalinguistic use of 'is now (was, will be) true', with which we endorse statements which because of their tense or some other feature refer to a particular time relative to now, and (b) a metametalinguistic use which is used to take into account the state of evidence for the truth of a particular statement (the state of evidence not being a part of what is semantically affirmed in saying that the statement is true, but a pragmatic requirement of our saying that it is), we may see how these ways of speaking do not undercut the timeless view of truth.

** See p. 213a.

clairvoyant) that where Prior goes wrong is in confounding the claim that a statement regarding the future is true, with the claim that what it states is "so 'present in its causes' as to be beyond stopping". It seems clear that one may make the former without even implicitly making the latter. What is it, then, that is tempting about Prior's argument?

I think that at least part of the appeal may be explained thus.* Often, perhaps normally, when we say that such-and-such will be the case, or that it is true that such-and-such will be the case, what we say is 'loaded'; "loaded that is, with some kind of implication about the present".** The implication may well be something like what Prior identifies as part of the truth-condition of statements about the future: namely that what we say will be is already causally determined. Or it may be that the event or state is the object of someone's intention, one that is unlikely to be thwarted. Or it may be a plain fatalistic implication. People often say 'whatever will be, will be' while throwing up their hands in a way that suggests there is no point in trying to affect the future. In these and other ways our forecasts are often infected with an unspoken comment on how things are now; how they are, that is, with regard to causes, or intentions, or blind fate.

There is not much mystery about why our comments are so often loaded in these ways. It is a normal pragmatic requirement underlying the making of statements that if the statement alleges something for

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* What follows is suggested in part by Strang in 'Aristotle and the Sea Battle', p. 463, and in part by Gale, pp. 142-8.

** Strang, p. 463.

which grounds may be adduced, the person making the statement has at least some such grounds. There are ways of reducing this requirement to some extent. If we say 'I _believe_ that such-and-such will be the case, particularly if we emphasize 'believe', then we will not be expected to have such good grounds. But we must still have _some_. The requirement, however, is not reduced but heightened when we say '_It is true that_ such-and-such will be the case'. Someone who said this but could produce no grounds for saying it, would be judged guilty of rash speech, and must not mind if his prediction is not taken seriously. Of course what he said might nevertheless be true, even if we cannot say that he knows it is true.

Now the strongest sort of grounds one could have for saying that something or other will happen would be the knowledge that that thing is already resident in its causes. Strictly speaking, of course, the cases may be rare in which we know that the thing is causally inevitable. But some idea of present conditions and their probable outcome is quite a respectable ground for making some kinds of forecasts, even if it is not the only one.

This helps to explain why one might be tempted to say, as Prior does, that statements concerning the future are not true (nor are they false) until their truth (or falsity) is guaranteed by causal necessity. But it also shows why this is a mistake. Making predictions conventionally requires having grounds for one's prediction, where those are relevant. Knowledge of causal necessities is among the best grounds one could have. But a groundless prediction could nevertheless be true, even though it is rashly made. Prior's point would be closer to the truth if he had said 'nothing can _warrantedly_ be said to be

'going to happen' until it is so "present in its causes" as to be beyond stopping'. But then his point would not serve so obviously as a counter against the case for incompatibility.

I have argued that there seems no reason to abandon the common-sense assumption that if p is the case (or is true) at t, then it was always the case (or was always true) that it would be the case (would be true) that p at t. Premise two of the case for incompatibility seems sound enough. The impression that it is not sound, I have suggested, may be fostered by the observation that in at least some cases there may not always have been grounds for saying that p would be the case (be true) at t. But this is no reason for denying that 'p at t' was always true. What it is reason for denying is that 'p at t' was always warrantedly assertible.

B. Is the Truth Always Knowable?

If, as I have suggested, the case for incompatibility goes wrong in its earliest stages, it appears now that the mistake must be in premise (1): 'If at any time, it is the case at that time that it will be the case that p, then God knows at that time that it will be the case that p.' It may seem difficult to imagine that anything could be wrong with this premise. If statements about the future, including those concerning the actions of men, are now and always have been true or false, must it not be that an omniscient being knows which are which? To deny this appears to amount to a denial of the basic formula we have used to explicate God's omniscience: 'For every p, if p then God knows that p.'

In fact it seems to me correct to deny this formula and the re-statement of it which composes premise (1). Let me show how this

is possible. It is essential to my case to suppose, with a qualification that will emerge shortly, that 'A knows that p' is not true unless at least: (1) p is true, (2) A believes that p, and (3) A has adequate evidence for p.* I propose to accept these three conditions, with one important qualification, as severally necessary for knowledge.** The crucial condition in the context of our present discussion is number (3). At least three arguments have been put forward to show that it does not belong in any list of necessary conditions of knowledge. In meeting these we shall come across the qualification that I mentioned above. The objections we shall consider are that the condition (i) implies a circular definition, (ii) introduces an infinite regress, and/or (iii) is unclear in its specification of what constitutes adequate evidence.

(1) Adequate Evidence and Circularity

The requirement that before a person may be said to know he must believe on adequate evidence is obviously an attempt to explicate the intuitive difference between genuine knowledge and such things as

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* Hitherto (e.g. pp. 190ff) I have tended to speak of 'grounds' as necessary to knowledge. 'Grounds', I think, is a broader concept than 'evidence'. Though I shall not try to define the distinction here, it seems to me that often one's grounds for believing that p do not consist in evidence for p (e.g. when one directly observes that p). As this comment suggests, I believe there are exceptions to the requirement for evidence. Even in those cases, I think that grounds are required, but that is not a position I shall argue for here. Suffice it to say that until now I have been concerned with the broad requirement of grounds. In what follows, I shall be concentrating on the narrower need for evidence.

** In what has been called the "Standard Analysis" of knowledge (see Danto, Analytical Philosophy of Knowledge, p. 73) these three are commonly advanced as jointly sufficient conditions of knowledge. Gettier, in 'Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?', has called this claim into question with a pair of ingenious counter-examples. I shall confine myself to claiming that the conditions are at least severally necessary.

lucky guesses. The appearance of circularity comes about in this way. Let us suppose that this condition is part of an attempted definition of 'knowledge'. The difficulty becomes clear when we press for a clarification of 'adequate evidence'.

> One obvious answer is that my belief in q is justified if there is some other belief p which entails or supports it. It is clearly not enough that this further belief p should merely exist. It must also be a belief of mine; I must know it to be true, and I must know that it justifies q. But if this is a definition of justification, the original definition of knowledge is rendered circular....*

It is rendered circular, obviously, in that it turns out we define knowledge partly in terms of having justification or adequate evidence, and having adequate evidence in terms of knowing something else. The circle appears quite vicious.

However, the appearance of circularity is something that emerges only if this condition is taken to be part of a definition of 'knowledge'. If it is insisted that a list of necessary conditions must amount to a definition, then the answer is to regard the list given above as including at least some of the defining characteristics not of 'knowledge' but of 'knowledge <u>that p</u>'. In outlining the circumstances in which we may say that someone knows, it would obviously be of no help to say that we may say this only when, among other things, he knows. But in doing the same for 'knows that p' it is not obviously the same sort of mistake to allege that knowing that q, where q constitutes adequate evidence for p, is one of the conditions. Circularity is avoided, therefore, by making it clear that what we are after in listing the necessary conditions of knowledge

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* Quinton, 'Knowledge and Belief', p. 346.

that p, is not a definition of 'knowledge'; but, if it is a definition of anything, of 'knowledge that p'. So the charge that this condition introduces a circular definition is seen to be based on a misunderstanding.

(2) Adequate Evidence and Infinite Regress

The claim that this condition introduces an infinite regress begins in much the same way. It may be pointed out that one can hardly be said to know that p unless one is quite certain about the evidence for p. For this reason it may be said that in fact the evidence must be known to be true. If a man claimed to know that p, and gave as his grounds his suspicion or tentative belief that q, we would be justified in challenging his claim to know that p. We can now see that this requirement does not complete a circle, but what it does appear to do is open the way to a potentially infinite regress. If, in order to know that p, A must know some q that constitutes adequate evidence for p, what about the requirement of adequate evidence for q. Presumably one must know some r which constitutes the same sort of evidence for q, but then some s which is adequate evidence for r, and so on past the end of the alphabet. If it is a general requirement of knowledge that p that there be knowledge that q, and of knowledge that q that there be knowledge that r, etc., how does one stop the regress on its flight to infinity?

It is the answer to this difficulty that brings a qualification to the condition under discussion. We may begin to see what the answer is by attending to another objection to citing this condition as a necessary condition. The objection, briefly, is that we commonly speak of knowledge in cases where the knower has no evidence whatever.

Anthony Kenny puts this point with an example.

> ...even in non-theological contexts there seem to be cases where true belief, without grounds, constitutes knowledge. One such case is our knowledge of our own actions. Commonly, we know what we are doing with our hands, and we do not know this on the basis of any evidence or grounds.*

Kenny's counter-example is the familiar one of so-called practical knowledge. His point is that in this case and others like it we know that p, if we do know that p, without having evidence for p. In our ordinary dealings with one another there seem to be many instances in which we would regard it as ludicrous to ask one who knows for his evidence. There is a well-known example given by J.L. Austin.

> The situation in which I would properly be said to have <u>evidence</u> for the statement that some animal is a pig is that, for example, in which the beast itself is not actually on view, but I can see plenty of pig-like marks on the ground outside its retreat. If I find a few buckets of pig-food, that's a bit more evidence, and the noises and the smell may provide better evidence still. But if the animal then emerges and stands there plainly in view, there is no longer any question of collecting evidence; its coming into view doesn't provide me with more <u>evidence</u> that it's a pig, I can now just see that it is, the question is settled.**

Now if this is true, that is, if in fact there are some items of knowledge which do not require 'adequate evidence', then we have a way of stopping our regress short of infinity. But then, of course, we also have reason to doubt the necessity of this condition concerning adequate evidence.

It seems clear that there is knowledge of this sort. We might

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* 'Divine Foreknowledge and Human Freedom', p. 268. In such a case I should be inclined to say we know what we are doing on the basis of <u>grounds</u>, but not on the basis of evidence.

** Austin, <u>Sense and Sensibilia</u>, p. 115.

call it 'basic' or 'direct' knowledge. Knowledge of our own actions, or attempted actions, is one example. First-person reports of sensations, beliefs, emotions, etc., represent another. Yet another, more controversial instance of such knowledge is that yielded by our senses, or 'direct observation'. It is a traditional philosophical objection to citing the latter as a case of basic knowledge (i.e. knowledge in support of which we may not or need not ask for evidence) that in such cases we may on occasion be mistaken. The reports of our senses, it may be urged, are inconclusive evidence for the truth of propositions concerning the world. It requires further evidence to show that these reports are true. (Whether or not one thinks there is further evidence divides the philosophical sceptics from the non-sceptics.) Thus the possibility of illusion, madness or simpler mistakes may be held to entail the purely evidential status of sense-reports, and the need for evidence supporting their reliability. But illusion, madness and mistakes must, in the logic of our discourse concerning that which we observe directly, be the exception. What this means is that in this sort of case we need evidence not for the veracity of our senses, but their unreliability. If I base my claim to know that there is a pig in the yard on the fact that I see a pig in the yard, then only in very special circumstances does it make sense to ask for evidence of genuine seeing (as distinct from, say, mistake or hallucination). Evidence must be adduced not for the truth of what my senses report but its falsity. In the absence of such evidence (e.g. the light is bad, or I have been taking drugs, or I cannot tell a pig from a sheepdog) to demand (further) evidence in support of my belief in the pig's presence is to betray a misunderstanding of the concept of evidence.

So there is an end to the quest for evidence. This is not just a matter of practical agreement, enabling us to get on with the business of making knowledge claims. It stems from the fact that there comes a point (the precise location of which may be in some cases contextual) where to ask for (further) evidence is conceptually inappropriate. I shall not try to list all the sorts of things that may count as basic knowledge. Nor shall I attempt a general characterization of the concept, beyond saying that knowledge for which evidence need not or cannot be produced, is 'basic knowledge'. My purpose here is simply to indicate a sort of knowledge that prevents the regress of adequate support from becoming infinite.

But then what of the claim that adequate evidential support is a necessary condition of knowledge? To accommodate the fact of basic knowledge we must add a qualification to the condition. The obvious way of doing this is to add a clause to the condition, so that we get:

(3a) 'A has adequate evidence for p, where p is an item of non-basic knowledge.'

So far, we have seen that the requirement of adequate evidential support for knowledge that p need not involve circularity or an infinite regress; though in meeting the latter objection we were forced to qualify the requirement. What about the charge that, as stated, this condition is unclear in that there is no obvious criterion of adequacy which evidence must meet?

(3) Canons of Adequacy

It is obviously possible for something cited as grounds or evidence* supporting a belief, to be known, i.e. to be true and justifiably believed so, without being <u>good</u> grounds or evidence. I may claim to know that the library is presently unoccupied and give as my evidence the fact that I saw no one in it five minutes ago.** But my claim is vulnerable to the observation that someone could easily have entered since I last looked. In discussing the charge of infinite regress, we considered one way of explicating the condition that evidence be adequate: viz. in terms of the truth of, and where appropriate, evidence in support of, those propositions cited as grounds. But the example just given fails the test of adequate evidence on a different account. For grounds or evidence to be adequate, they must not only be true; they must also be linked with what is 'known' in such a way as to provide some sort of support for it. And this is where the objection we are now considering lodges its barb. There is clearly a variety in the kinds and degrees of support that sets of propositions offer for other propositions. Precisely how much, or what sort, of support must evidence or grounds offer for what is said to be known before they may be styled 'adequate'?

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* I have mentioned a distinction between 'evidence' and 'grounds' (p.221). It is the necessity of <u>evidence</u> that is under consideration in section B of this chapter, and that is most relevant to my conclusions on foreknowledge of free actions. In most contexts in this chapter, therefore, I confine my attention to the requirement of evidence. In considering canons of adequacy, however, to observe the distinction rigorously, introduces an unnecessary complication. In this sub-section, therefore, I shall be talking about the adequacy of 'grounds <u>or</u> evidence'. Where I speak only of grounds, it is meant to include evidence.

** In this case direct observation provides evidence, since it is not 'p' ('there is nobody in the library now') that I observe, but something from which I infer that p.

In attempting to answer this question we may find ourselves torn between two sorts of response: one quite loose and liberal, the other much stricter. On the one hand we may be inclined to start with the way we use 'know' in ordinary, day-to-day discourse. Here the canons of adequacy do not seem very stringent. To use an example employed by Norman Malcolm,* I should normally be acknowledged to know that a particular gorge is not dry, assuming that the gorge is <u>not</u> dry, even if the only evidence that I could advance for my belief is that it rained only three days ago and water usually flows in the gorge for at least that long after a rain. But, it may be objected, ordinary language is simply slack in this sort of case. On the evidence given it is easy to imagine that I am mistaken. Some other condition which I have ignored or am unaware of, say the fact that there was a month-long drought prior to the rain, could easily lead to the falsification of my belief. Whatever ordinary language may allow us to say, it seems philosophically ill-disciplined to adopt these cases as paradigms of knowledge. It is hard to counter this objection. But it invites us to set foot on a road to rigour on which it appears hard to find a stopping-place. My belief, for instance, that there is a planet called Pluto in our solar system seems much better supported than my belief in the stream in the gorge. But there is still just the chance that what I give as my evidence (e.g. notes in an encyclopedia, or astronomy books for the layman) should be true and there <u>not</u> be such a planet. After all, the evidence on which <u>I</u> believe in the existence of Pluto is largely hearsay. It would be very surprising to me if scientific authorities were to reverse themselves on this point. But if they did, and some plausible explanation at least of

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* 'Knowledge and Belief', p. 59.

how the mistake came to be made were offered, I should clearly go along with them. So even in this case, where my claim to knowledge seems, at least as far as ordinary usage is concerned, to be quite secure, the claim seems compatible with the possibility that I might be wrong.

At this point we may feel driven to take up a much more scrupulous position than is built into most ordinary talk of knowledge. It is tempting to bring this narrowing of the scope of knowledge to a halt by allowing that there is knowledge only where the grounds or evidence one has are <u>conclusive</u>. On this proposal we would be allowed to say that we <u>know</u> that the gorge is dry or that there is a planet Pluto in our solar system only if we possess <u>conclusive</u> grounds or evidence for the truth of these propositions. Short of meeting this requirement, we may in the ordinary way of speaking be said to know such things, but not on the strict standard according to which the possibility of doubt must be ruled out. But, notoriously, it is debatable whether a move such as this does in fact bring us to a bedrock kind of knowledge. It is only too easy to replace the question about adequacy with a similar one about conclusiveness. What sorts of grounds constitute <u>conclusive</u> grounds? There is a standard of conclusiveness with which Descartes was neither the first nor the last to be enchanted, which allows precious few, if any, examples of genuine knowledge. It is easy to get the impression that if we press the requirement for conclusiveness at all, it turns out that only analytic truths and perhaps first-person reports of something like sense-data qualify. It seems a high price to pay for rigour that we end up with a notion of knowledge which is practically unusable.

It seems to me that in a distinction made by Norman Malcolm there lies the possibility of allowing for differing standards of adequacy in grounds, while at the same time halting the incipient slide into scepticism. Malcolm's distinction* is between a 'weak' and a 'strong' sense of 'know'. In the weak sense, the one which Malcolm sees as frequently appearing in day-to-day discourse, he argues that it makes sense to say that although one knows, one could be mistaken. To relieve the sense of paradox here, it is important to be clear about the function of 'could' in that statement. In saying that one knows but could be mistaken, Malcolm must not be taken as denying the logical truth that if one knows that p then it is true that p. The force of 'could' here may be brought out by adding the phrase 'given the grounds of his belief'. Although one is said to know that p, that is to believe that p and have evidence for p (where appropriate), the 'could have been mistaken' phrase makes it explicit that the evidence which he has is not such as to place the truth of p beyond all reasonable doubt. So Malcolm's point is that in countless examples in everyday speech, while 'adequate evidence' is required before one's belief can be said to be knowledge, that evidence need not be <u>conclusive</u>. The wet gorge example is meant to illustrate this. If I assert confidently that the gorge is running with water, and give as my evidence the fact that it rained only three days ago and water flows in the gorge for at least that long after a rain, then in a sense of 'know' familiar to us all I would be said to know that it is running with water; provided, of course, that it <u>is</u>.

One reason why this appears contradictory (that we should be

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* In 'Knowledge and Belief'.

said to know with the possibility of being mistaken), Malcolm claims, is that we may have in mind the strong sense of know, according to which this could not be said. In this sense, if I could be wrong, then I do not know. It is in this stronger sense we may be said to know, for instance, the conclusion of a geometric proof that is universally accepted and which we have worked through ourselves. One way of contrasting these two senses is to note that in the water-in-the-gorge case it is easy to imagine our withdrawing the attribution of knowledge; most obviously in the event that the gorge turns out to be dry when we look and see. We should then say, of course, that I did not know that the gorge contained water, I only believed that it did, though in both cases my evidence is the same. As Malcolm puts it: "As philosophers we may be surprised to observe that it can be that the knowledge that p is true should differ from the belief that p is true only in the respect that in one case p is true and in the other false. But that is the fact."* Things are different, however, when it is the strong sense of 'know' that is in the play. Where knowledge that p in the weak sense is claimed or attributed, the claim or attribution may be overthrown without undue logical upheaval. This is so because the grounds for such 'knowledge' are acknowledged to be less than conclusive. But where knowledge that p in the strong sense is claimed or attributed, overthrow is judged to be logically unthinkable. (It will be seen shortly why I do not say 'logically impossible'.) It is taken to be unthinkable because the grounds are regarded as conclusive. Suppose that someone produces an apparently impeccable argument against the proposition that the sum of the angles

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* Ibid., p. 60.

in a triangle are equal to two right angles. If this is a proposition that we have not only seen in geometry text-books but worked out ourselves from other propositions that seem indubitable or conclusively proven, then our most likely response would be to say that although we cannot detect the flaw in this 'impeccable' counter-argument, there must be one. What we would be saying is, in effect, that the grounds for our belief about the sum of the angles in a triangle are such that "nothing that the future might bring could ever count as evidence against the proposition."* Unlike the case where knowledge in the weak sense is being spoken of, it is not easy to imagine withdrawing the claim or attribution. We are inclined to discount in advance the possibility that anything should come along to discredit our claim.

Malcolm insists that this strong sense of 'know' is not confined to the company of what may be called logical truths. In fact, he argues, the distinction between these two senses of 'know' runs right across the distinction between logical and empirical propositions. We may know (weak sense) that 92 x 16 = 1472, because we take it on faith or have worked it out quickly. Or we may know (strong sense) the same thing, having worked it out carefully and checked our calculation. Similarly, I may know (weak sense) that there is no money in the desk drawer, in that it is my drawer and I have not put any money in it. Or I may know (strong sense) the same thing, since I have opened the drawer and found it confronting me with its emptiness. In either case, the weak sense of 'know' is compatible with the possibility that, given my grounds, I may be mistaken. Where the strong sense is

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* Ibid., p. 62.

used, however, the possibility is not countenanced, that, given my grounds, I should be in error.* The possibility is not envisaged that anything else should emerge which could genuinely count against my belief.

But what is the criterion by which we can mark off some things as beyond the reach of any further evidence or grounds? If we can answer this it would appear we can halt the slide into scepticism that the search for conclusiveness seems to bring. The answer suggested by Malcolm is this. We regard grounds as conclusive when it no longer makes sense to entertain the possibility of <u>further</u> grounds. But what determines whether it makes sense to entertain such a possibility? Malcolm suggests that we think such a thing is not sensible when we take the request for further grounds to amount to the question of whether any grounds could be conclusive.

> Someone asks you for a dollar. You say "There is one in this drawer." You open the drawer and look, but it is perfectly empty. Your statement turned out to be false. This can be said because you <u>discovered</u> an empty drawer. It could not be said if it were only probable that the drawer is empty or were still open to question. Would it make sense to say "I had better make sure that it is empty; perhaps there is a dollar in it after all?" Sometimes; but not always. Not if the drawer lies open before your eyes. That remark is the prelude to a search. What search can there be when the emptiness of the drawer confronts you? In certain circumstances there is nothing that you would call "making sure" that the drawer is empty; and likewise nothing that you would call "its turning out to be false" that the drawer is empty. You <u>made</u>

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* According to Malcolm, it is not the case that we can know <u>any</u> proposition in either of these two sense. What would it be like, for instance, to know (weak sense) that 2 x 2 = 4? There seems to be nothing in this case that could count as bridging the gap between weak and strong senses of 'knowledge'. In the empirical class, he places propositions like 'Here is an ink-bottle' in the same logical position. (<u>Ibid</u>., p. 69)

> sure that the drawer is empty.... a conjecture implies an understanding of what certainty would be."

The point is that checking must come to an end. The end is determined not by the logical impossibility of further aberrant observations, but by the fact that at some point appealing merely to this logical possibility raises the question of whether <u>anything</u> counts as conclusive. Now it can be seen why in the case of knowledge (strong sense) the possibility of overthrow is regarded as logically 'unthinkable', though not 'impossible'. The unthinkability arises from the fact that it would involve the overthrow of a whole conception of good grounds in some field, which in some wider setting need not be <u>logically</u> impossible.

I have followed Norman Malcolm in arguing that there is a weak and a strong sense of 'know';** the former being consistent with less than conclusive grounds, the latter requiring conclusiveness. Conclusiveness obtains, it has been suggested, where to entertain the idea of there being further grounds amounts to the sceptical question of whether <u>any</u> grounds in that area could be conclusive. Asked in some contexts, such a question can have the point of questioning the

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* Malcolm, 'Knowledge and Belief', p. 69.

** I have posed the distinction more starkly than one should do if this were a detailed study of knowledge. The fact that 'conclusive' evidence does not countenance further testing means that there are in a way degrees of conclusiveness. This is so because the closure against further grounds depends on the conceptual scheme involved, and some conceptual schemes are more fundamental than others. I can be shown that what I thought was conclusive in some area is not, and my conceptual framework for that area thrown into confusion, but only by appealing to some more fundamental scheme which is kept intact. The most conclusive grounds, therefore, would be had in areas that are most fundamental to rational discourse. I do not think that this relativity damages the use I wish to make of the distinction.

conventional conceptual framework applied to some area. But asked without restriction this question becomes self-defeating, for it can eventually obliterate the distinction between certainty and uncertainty upon which any such question ultimately rests.

Of course claiming that someone knows that p, even in the strong sense, cannot by itself establish that p is true. It commits us to saying that p is true (whether 'know' is used weakly or strongly), and where the strong sense is used it involves staking our view of some area of things on the truth of p; for if p is false, then our conceptual inability to allow that it should be so will bring about some sort of logical crisis. But that crisis is not the same as when our belief rests on grounds which we either realize or may be brought to realize are less than complete. Conceptual systems have been challenged successfully in the past, and no doubt will continue to be. Sometimes our sense that further questions are sceptical in import is mistaken, for behind them may lie a conceptual reform that nevertheless allows for a new method of arriving at certainties. All that the above argument against scepticism establishes is that not all 'further questions' can have this function. "In order for it to be possible that any statements about physical things should turn out to be false it is necessary that some statements about physical things cannot be false."* In addition, there is the fact that some points (e.g. the evidence of our senses under normal conditions) are so fundamental that they must be numbered amongst those statements that cannot be false. Our whole way of talking and thinking, even of raising doubts, depends on them.

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* Ibid.

All this means is that even using the strong sense of 'know' does not guarantee the truth of what is alleged to be known. Where it is guaranteed, that is by its fundamental location in the logic of making statements and raising questions. Sometimes we may think that grounds are conclusive (in the sense just given) when they are not. So from the fact that we enter a strong claim to know, or attribute knowledge in its strong sense, it cannot always be inferred that we <u>do</u> know, or that the subject of our attribution in fact knows. All that this distinction does is help to clarify the sense of 'adequate evidence' which I have claimed is required by knowledge that p, save where p is 'basic'. This fact that we cannot always know that we know or that someone else knows does not hamper our discussion of omniscience, for we are considering only whether <u>if</u> God knows everything, he knows what our future actions will be. That is, we are assuming that he does know everything, and the question of whether we can know that he knows does not arise.

I have pursued this distinction as a way of dealing with the objection that the requirement of 'adequate evidence' in support of knowledge is hopelessly vague. Now it can be seen why it is vague. That is because it must cope with both weak and strong senses of 'know', in which the canons of adequacy differ. Having arrived at a somewhat more precise understanding of the grounds required by knowledge in its strong sense, we are now in a position to articulate an alternative version of condition (3) (regarding adequate grounds) that will apply only to this sense of 'knowledge'. I shall say that A knows (strong sense) that p only if:

(3b) A has <u>conclusive</u> evidence for p, where p is an item of non-basic knowledge.

Conclusive evidence will be taken, as our discussion has suggested, to be evidence such that it cannot be true and the conclusion false without calling into question whether anything would count in that area as conclusive evidence, thus undermining the conceptual scheme in which p is normally placed. That the conceptual scheme in which p is normally placed may properly be questioned need not bother us here. Not all such frameworks may be questioned at once, and some are so basic as to be fundamental to any questioning of others. The fact that we cannot always know (strong sense) that we know (strong sense) or that someone else knows (strong sense), is no barrier to saying that on some occasions we do. In the case of omniscience, the worry is still less relevant, for we may assume that God's conceptual grasp cannot be improved. What God knows, at least he knows that he knows.

I shall assume that in speaking of God's knowledge we use 'knowledge' in its strong sense. If we say that God has always known that I would choose to have a hair-cut today, the problem of my being free emerges most clearly if we think of this as infallible knowledge. That is, his knowledge appears most strongly to conflict with my freedom if, given his grounds for believing that I would have a hair-cut, I could not but do so. It is possible, no doubt, to include in God's omniscience examples of knowledge in its weaker sense. If this is done, and knowledge of our future actions constitute examples of this sort, then the problem appears less acute. Those who argue, as Nelson Pike appears to,* that God's knowledge of how we will choose is no more incompatible with our freedom than the foreknowledge that a

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* Pike, Chapter 4; esp. pp. 76-83.

close friend might possess, are clearly exploiting a sense of 'know' that is common enough in ordinary discourse. But if we wish to include in God's omniscience only those things he knows <u>infallibly</u> (i.e. in the strong sense of 'know'), then this will not do. If God knows what we will do in the sense that, given his grounds, he cannot be mistaken, then the problem is more acute.

This discussion of knowledge requiring evidence has occurred as a lengthy digression in our consideration of premise (1) in the argument for fatalism:

> If at any time, it is the case at that time that it will be the case that p, then God knows at that time that it will be the case that p.

I have argued that if we are to interpret 'know' in this premise in its strong sense, then the following condition must be fulfilled:

> God has conclusive evidence for p, where p is an item of non-basic knowledge.

Putting these together, we get the following as the expanded premise:

> If at any time, it is the case at that time that it will be the case that p, then God knows, i.e. has conclusive evidence at that time, that it will be the case that p.

I think that this premise is false, and that our discussion of the necessity of conclusive evidence for infallible knowledge shows why it is false. It is false because, although at any time it may be the case that it will be the case that p, it is not necessarily true that at that time there is conclusive evidence to support a belief that it will be the case that p. Genuinely free human action, if there is any such thing, is one example of this. Perhaps there are others, such as quantum movements. But the point is that the 'once true, always true'

doctrine, which I affirmed in our discussion of premise (2) in the case for incompatibility, does not entail that if p is always true, there have always been conclusive evidence for <u>believing</u> it true. Only with the addition of the latter conditional can the case proceed. But there simply seems no good reason to accept that conditional, apart, say, from an independent and sound argument to the effect that all actions are causally determined. In the absence of such an argument, we are free to reject the doctrine that 'always true, always evident'.

I have just suggested that God cannot be expected to know in advance the free actions of men, since in advance of their performance there can be no conclusive evidence of what they will be. But it was admitted earlier on that some knowledge does not require evidence. This is what has been called 'basic' or 'direct' knowledge. Is it not possible that the future free actions of men should be the object of God's direct knowledge, in which case the absence of conclusive evidence would be of no account? Direct knowledge is of various kinds, but it is hard to think of any kind that would support this proposal. One sort of direct knowledge, for instance, seems to be that resulting from direct perception. But to think of future contingencies as subject in advance to anything analogous to direct perception seems to require that we see the future as in some way 'already there', available at least to the inspection of an unlimited consciousness like God's. This proposal, we have seen,* entails the absurdity that future events are simultaneous with present ones, for events that are directly observed or observable together are, by

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* P. 161ff.

conceptual necessity, simultaneous events. Appealing to this sort of direct knowledge would therefore invite the difficulties we have seen to be associated with the idea of divine timelessness. There is another possibility. Knowledge of future events that are the objects of one's intentions is arguably direct; at least in the case of God, who could know that he will not change his mind or have his intentions frustrated. But to view men's actions as, in the sense required, the object of God's intentions would seem necessarily to disqualify them as the free actions of men. If God intends my actions, in the sense that he knows in advance what they are because he intends to do them, then they are hardly my actions, let alone my <u>free</u> actions. There are perhaps other sorts of direct knowledge. But it is hard to think of any that would cover God's beliefs about the future actions of men. In general, I cannot see how infallible knowledge of the future voluntary actions of men can be exempted from the requirement of conclusive grounds.

It may be urged that I have concentrated too strictly on the concept of '<u>knowledge</u>'. Even if the general necessity of evidence is admitted in the case of knowledge, surely we could imagine that God has, if not knowledge, then at least complete clairvoyance of the future. Indeed it may be thought that I opened the way for such a suggestion in my remarks of the last chapter. I argued there for the possibility that God might know all empirical facts without his knowledge being grounded in the usual ways. This would be the case, I suggested, if it happens that God's beliefs have a direct causal relation with the states and events they concern, there being no intermediate grounds or evidence supplied to God by anything like

perception. Could we not conceive of a similar direct relation between future events and God's beliefs? This might not allow foreknowledge in any strict sense, but would permit complete clairvoyance of the future. I believe that the notion of such clairvoyance is incoherent, involving intolerable upheavals in such concepts as time and causation. But I shall not try to show this here.* For now, it is enough to say that God's grasp of the future is usually represented as knowledge (omniscience), and it is this representation that generates at least one important set of problems about free will. My task just now is confined to that set of problems.

In maintaining that there cannot be conclusive evidence of what the free actions of men will be, I have assumed that an action's being free is incompatible with there being a complete causal account of it. I shall not try to argue for that assumption.** It seems to me that if complete causal accounts can be given of all our actions, then much of our ordinary talk about responsibility, praise and punishment, etc., is pointless. Arguments attempting to have it both ways seem inevitably to involve strained interpretations of our ordinary talk about these and other associated matters. But it is precisely because free actions are not causally determined that there do not exist in advance of their performance conclusive evidence of what they will be. That is why free actions seem to me a paradigm case concerning which statements whose truth or falsity is eternal may nonetheless be unknowable, even by an omniscient being.

I make explicit my assumption that freedom is incompatible

** See Lucas, The Freedom of the Will; especially chapters 5 and 10.

* See Gale, Chapter VII, esp. p. 131, for arguments to this effect.

with complete causal accountability because of another assumption: that knowledge of the causal inevitability of p would constitute 'conclusive evidence' for p, and therefore would satisfy that condition of infallible knowledge that p. If our 'free' actions were per impossible causally inevitable, evidence sufficient to support infallible knowledge of what we shall do would have been available as far back as the necessities reach. Omniscience could thus include knowledge (strong sense) of what we shall do without apparently threatening our freedom. The threat would be removed by showing that causal determinacy is compatible with freedom. In rejecting this compatibility I reject this way out of the problem. But the knowledge that p is causally inevitable can and does constitute conclusive evidence for p. This is why we can speak of knowledge in its strong sense with regard to the future. It may be objected that our knowledge even of relatively simple and mechanical things in the future can never be that infallible, since there are few things that with our present scientific knowledge can be seen to be causally inevitable. Even if we knew all the covering laws and conditions, which we do not, there is always a principle like the Constancy of Nature to be uncertain about. But even if our standards of conclusiveness are so rigorous as to rule out infallible knowledge of the future in the case of humans, it is presumably true that God does know all that he needs to know to see whatever causal inevitabilities there are. Given complete knowledge of all the covering laws of nature and the conditions at any time, God could know for certain that the things which are causally determined by this conjunction will come to pass. Whatever the status of our belief in the Constancy of Nature, God could know that nature

is constant, especially if this constancy is the product of his will. That God cannot, as I have suggested, know (strong sense) the future free actions of men, is therefore not just an instance of a general impossibility; that of infallibly knowing <u>anything</u> about the future. If there are causal inevitabilities, God presumably knows what they are. Nothing that I have said counts against infallible foreknowledge, at least on God's part. But it is part of denying that free actions are causally determined to deny that they can be among the objects of this infallible foreknowledge.

It is to be stressed that the limitation we have discovered is in what is knowable, and not in what God happens to know. For this reason it seems fair to say that God's failure to know for certain what use men will make of their freedom is no impeachment of his omniscience. To make this claim of course, I must reject the formula we have been using to define omniscience: for every p, if p then God knows that p. The implication of this formula is that God knows all true statements. I have argued that statements about the future, including those concerning the free actions of men, have truth values. If this formula is accepted, then the fact that God does not know (strong sense) some true statements, specifically those having to do with our future free actions, would count as a falsification of the formula and therefore of the view that he is omniscient. What our discussion has suggested, however, is that there is a mistake in the formula. It makes the assumption, which we have seen reason to reject, that whatever is true can be infallibly known to be true. If, as I have argued, the logic of 'know' (strong sense) actually rules out genuinely free actions as the objects of infallible knowledge, then this assumption must be abandoned.

There must be a distinction observed between the true and the knowable. Accordingly, I would suggest the following amended formula as the formula expression:

> For every p, if p, and p is knowable, then God knows that p.

Given this formula, plus the requirement of infallible knowledge that the knower have conclusive evidence, it can be seen that God's omniscience, knowledge of everything that is knowable, is perfectly compatible with genuine human freedom. This is so because genuinely free actions cannot be infallibly known in advance.

By way of conclusion, let me briefly compare this result with the views of two other writers on the subject: A.N. Prior and J.R. Lucas. It will be remembered that Prior sought to establish the compatibility of omniscience with freedom by denying that statements concerning free actions have truth values in advance of their performance. At one point in his article, 'The Formalities of Omniscience', Prior recognizes the possibility of arguing for compatibility in the way that I have.

> ...while contingent futures, and contingent future-infected pasts, can ... be correctly or incorrectly guessed, I cannot see in what way they can be 'known'; or to put it another way, I cannot see in what way the alleged knowledge, even if it were God's, could be more than correct guessing. For there would be ex hypothesi nothing can could make it knowledge, no present ground for the guess's correctness which a specially penetrating person might perceive.*

The reason given by Prior for rejecting this solution is that it does not yield omniscience.

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* P. 35f; Prior's emphasis.

> ...I don't think we get ... God's omniscience, except in the weak sense that He knows whatever is knowable, this being no longer co-extensive with what is true.*

I have tried to show why it is a mistake to suppose that omniscience must include knowledge of everything that is true. What Prior calls the 'weak sense' of omniscience is the only one consistent with a strong of 'know'.

In his book The Freedom of the Will, J.R. Lucas puts his answer to the omniscience vs. freedom dilemma in a way that differs from both Prior's and mine.

> The real solution to the problem of God's omniscience is to be found by drawing a parallel with His omnipotence. Although God is able to do all things, we do not think He does do all things. Not only do we often ascribe events to human agencies or natural causes rather than divine action, but we allow that some things happen against God's will. Although He could intervene to prevent the plans of the wicked from coming to fruition, often He does not. And the reason commonly given by theologians is that God often refrains from intervening in the world in order to preserve man's freedom of choice.... But if God is prepared to compromise His omnipotence for the sake of human freedom, surely then he would be prepared to compromise His omniscience also. If He suffers His will to be confined, in order that His creatures may have room to make their own decisions, He must allow His understanding to be abridged, in order to allow men privacy to form their own plans for themselves.**

I should like to emphasize that God's omniscience is abridged only in the sense that he might render more things knowable than in fact he has. Not that he could choose to know the future free actions of men; but he could, by making men unfree, have made their actions knowable

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* P. 36; Prior's emphasis.

** P. 75

in advance. This seems quite compatible with the view I have maintained above. The only point I should like to add, and this may amount to little more than a semantic quibble, is that even in its abridged form, God's omniscience would be complete. God knows all things that can be known, even if he does not do all things that can be done.

Lucas is careful to point out that the limitation he acknowledges applies only to infallible knowledge; i.e. knowledge in the strong sense.

> Such a self-limitation would not be open to Leibniz's objection that it would make God "like the God of the Socinians, who lives only from day to day." For it limits only His infallible knowledge. God could still know us and predict our actions in the way our friends do, without its constituting any threat to freedom. The Christian religion, with its emphasis on the humanity of God, must ascribe to Him all human modes of knowledge, as well as the more absolute ones of theism generally. Fallible foreknowledge is enough to enable God not to live only from day to day, but to foresee the likely course of events and to take such actions, consistent with human freedom, as will work out for the best in the context of those decisions men are likely to take.*

God therefore may have not only whatever infallible foreknowledge is afforded to him by his knowledge of the laws and conditions of nature, he also possesses fallible knowledge of the future in the same way that we do, though presumably to a far greater extent.

In this chapter I have been considering the apparent incompatibility of omniscience with freedom; which, if we assume the fact of some human freedom, may be thought to constitute a reductio ad absurdum of divine omniscience. I have argued that infallible

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* Ibid., p. 75f.

knowledge that p, or 'knowledge that p' in a strong sense, has as one of its necessary conditions the possession by one who knows, of conclusive evidence for p; and that this condition cannot be fulfilled in the case of future free actions. I conclude, therefore, that these cannot be infallibly known in advance. Since this follows from the logic of 'know' (strong sense), I have maintained that this entails no infringement of God's omniscience. Omniscience must be linked with what is knowable and not with what is true. Divine omniscience and human freedom therefore seem to me quite compatible, on the ground that infallible foreknowledge not only does not, but logically cannot, extend to the future free actions of men.

So far, we have considered two challenges to the view that God can know everything. Let us turn now to a more radical objection aimed at showing the incoherence of supposing that God can know anything.

CHAPTER XI

KNOWING AND ACTING

We have considered two objections to the thesis that God knows everything; one based on the claim that he cannot know empirical facts, and the other on the contention that he cannot know the future free actions of men. Both of these amounted to a claim that God cannot know <u>every</u>thing. We must now consider a more fundamental attack than either of these; one aimed at showing that God cannot know <u>any</u>thing. The attack is based on a particular view of what it is to know something, and may be framed roughly as follows.

It is quite plain that when we say A knows that p we are not necessarily mentioning an act or occurrence, not even an extended or drawn out act or occurrence that might more properly be called an activity or process. When we refer to an act, occurrence or process, we refer to a change or changes in some continuant(s). When a person acts or is involved in an event, he does or undergoes something. But it is clear that when we speak of A's knowing that p, we are not necessarily referring to something that A does or undergoes. We may say that A knows that Oxford is on the Thames even when A is not doing or undergoing <u>anything</u> (e.g. is asleep or unconscious), let alone entertaining a proposition to this effect or rowing on the Thames or directing tourists to the Isis. To say that a person knows such-and-such is certainly not <u>always</u> to refer to an act or event, for we commonly and rightly say this of people when no sort of act or event is occurring which could possibly count as their knowing. In fact, it is apparent that we <u>never</u> single out some act, event or

process with the use of 'know'. Knowing may thus be contrasted with things like smoking. Although we may say that A smokes even if he is not then doing or undergoing anything that counts as his smoking, if A lights up his pipe we may say 'he is smoking now'. But there is no corresponding use for 'knowing'. There is a distinction, for instance, between 'he smokes' and 'he is smoking'. But, significantly, 'he is knowing that Oxford is on the Thames' is not grammatical English. We may say 'suddenly he knew', but we are not thereby picking out an event as his knowing. We are picking out an event as his <u>beginning</u> to know. There is evidently no event, act, activity or process which we regard as someone's knowing something.

What, then, <u>are</u> we saying about someone when we say he knows that p? The most plausible answer is that we are, at least in part, ascribing to him a certain sort of <u>disposition</u>.* There are debates amongst philosophers as to the best way of characterizing dispositions. For purposes of this discussion I propose to adopt a definition proposed by Ryle in <u>The Concept of Mind</u>: "To possess a dispositional

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* It has been suggested by Rees in 'Continuous States' that knowledge is not a disposition but a 'state'. A mental state, he contends, is to be analyzed in terms of certain initial and terminal events, and not in terms of dispositions which characterize persons in that state. A <u>prima facie</u> difficulty with this view is that it is not clear we regard knowledge as something which must be initiated in some particular way. If we did, the problem of whether there can be innate knowledge should be more easily solved than it appears to be. (See 'The Possibility of Innate Knowledge' by Mackie.) In Rees' view, the dispositions commonly attached to belief are based upon "generalizations about persons who know things, not what we <u>mean</u> by saying that they know them". (p. 237) He admits that these "generalizations" may come to form a definition of 'knowledge', though he insists that what is thus defined is a different but closely related concept from the normal one. If I am right in the sketch that follows, a more plausible view is that to be in a state of knowledge is precisely to possess a certain complex disposition. At least some mental states may just be at least partly dispositions.

property ... is to be bound or liable to be in a particular state, or to undergo a particular change, when a particular condition is realized".* Accordingly, if we take 'being a smoker' to be at least partly a dispositional concept, to describe someone as a smoker amounts at least partly to subscribing to a certain set of conditional statements about him. An example from the set would be 'If he is offered a cigarette then he accepts it and smokes it'. Of course giving this example in isolation can easily suggest too simple a picture of the conditionals which are entailed in a disposition. He may have his own cigarettes, or it may be a cigar or pipe that he has or is offered, and of course he will probably <u>not</u> smoke if there is a 'No Smoking' sign or he thinks it will offend his company. The circumstances under which he may be expected to smoke, and the sort of things that count as smoking are to varying extents various. So in fact the set of conditionals entailed in saying A smokes is a more or less complex and disjunctive list. Reference to quite a number of possible circumstances is permitted in the position of antecedent. A variety of activities qualifies for mention in the consequent. And the two disjunctive lists may be combined in a variety of ways. Nevertheless, though the possibilities may be indefinite in number, the specification is not indeterminate. There are many activities which do not count as smoking under any circumstances, and even circumstances in which smoking does not make a man a smoker (say, he is taking part in an experiment). In general, to say that a man smokes is in part** to say that under certain circumstances he is more

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* Ryle, <u>The Concept of Mind</u>, p. 116.

** Many dispositions, like 'smokes', are attributed on the assumption not only of what a person or thing <u>would</u> do but as to what he or it <u>has</u> done at least once.

likely than not to engage in activities of a certain kind. It seems quite natural to give the meaning of dispositional terms at least partly by providing examples of what could, or probably will, or invariably will, happen in particular conditions.

Now if we take the concept of knowing to fall into this rough category, the question remains of what specific sorts of conditional statements are entailed in the statement that someone knows something.

First of all, one general remark about the antecedent part of those hypotheticals which are entailed in saying A knows that p. In specifying the conditions under which certain things may be expected regarding one who knows, there must always be included the mention of his apprehension or recognition of the state of affairs. It is tempting, for instance, to say that 'A knows that p' entails that certain things may be expected when A is asked whether p. 'If A is asked whether p then...' appears to be one candidate for the list of hypotheticals entailed in saying A knows that p. But, of course, we would normally expect one who knows that p to respond in one of a number of determinate ways to such a question only if he <u>understands</u> that he is being asked. If, for instance, he is asked in a language he does not understand, or he regards the question as in some way rhetorical, his failure to respond appropriately will not count against our saying that he knows. Similarly, A may mistakenly regard his circumstance as one in which he has been asked whether p, and his response will accordingly be based on his misunderstanding and not on whether he has really been asked. In general, then, in setting out the conditions in which we expect certain things of one who knows, we must mention his <u>understanding</u> of his circumstances.

A second and quite obvious point concerning the antecedents of these conditionals has already been mentioned. The list of circumstances in which we expect one who knows to do or undergo something is composed of a large number and variety of different situations. Some dispositions (such as being a conductor or being soluble) entail the forecast of certain states or happenings only in connection with a small number of curcumstances. But a person who knows something is expected to respond appropriately in a large number of different settings. There is a certain vagueness in the extent of these circumstances, brought about partly by variations in the ability of knowers to recognize the relevance of what they know to the situation in which they find themselves. But in the case of someone who responded appropriately only in a small number of relevant circumstances (say, he can correctly answer some questions about the matter, but only if they are put in a certain way) we might be reluctant to credit him with more than a poor sort of knowledge.

A third point concerns the antecedents of these hypotheticals, in which mention is made of the responses we expect of one who knows and sees himself as in a certain relevant setting. It is clear that in a very large range of such circumstances, among the things we expect are certain sorts of verbal behaviour. Looming large in this category of appropriate response is the making of statements. One who knows that p is normally expected in certain relevant circumstances to <u>say</u> that p. That there is something special about this requirement is reflected in the fact that we describe knowledge as we do: knowledge <u>that p</u>. Nevertheless, though there is something special about this requirement, its importance can be over-stressed. It is certainly

the case that we normally expect other sorts of behaviour than making certain statements on the part of people who know. A man who can tell us that gas explodes in the presence of a flame, but wittingly strikes a match in the vicinity of what he recognizes as a gas leak, must have his behaviour accounted for. Only if we can see that he wanted to commit suicide, or had something else special in mind, can we square his behaviour with what he appears on other counts to know. Even getting an explanation like his suicidal intentions depends on our linking up his knowing with his doing, for only if he knows about the explosive properties of gas is an account of his intentions relevant to explaining his behaviour. In general, then, when we list the consequents of those conditionals entailed in knowing that p, we may expect the mention of behaviour, including verbal behaviour and especially the making of statements, to be prominent in our list. To know that p is, at least among other things, to be inclined to behave in certain ways in certain situations.

I have included linguistic behaviour along with other sorts of behaviour for purposes of making this point. No doubt there are objections to regarding the use of language as simply a species of behaviour. But in connection with the present issue there is one important advantage to this procedure. It was noted above that the making of statements occupies a special place in the list of things we expect of one who knows. But the place must not be made <u>too</u> special, as certain facts about our ascriptions of knowledge attest. We do normally expect that someone who knows that p will, under certain circumstances, state that p. But this is not an unbreakable rule. It is not uncommon to judge that someone who does <u>not</u> make the required

statements nevertheless does know. The judgement would normally be made on the basis either of what we regard a person as in a position to know, or of how the person behaves. And where behaviour is concerned as the giveaway to what a person knows, behaviour may sometimes be the means by which the knower himself learns of his knowledge. 'I suppose I have known all along' is quite a proper thing to say on occasion, even when one has failed to answer correctly (perhaps even to oneself) the relevant questions, etc. Actions frequently do speak more loudly than words, and their message may even come as a surprise to their agent.

It is important to recognize that among the consequences of knowledge not only action but <u>in</u>action must be included.* If it is true that in certain circumstances we expect certain actions on the part of one who knows that p, it is also true that in certain settings we expect that one who knows that p will <u>not</u> do certain things. In the presence of a gas leak we normally expect a person who recognizes the leak and knows that gas is explosive to warn anyone in the vicinity who is unaware of the danger. But we also expect him to <u>refrain</u> from lighting matches. Knowing that p not only entails the likelihood of certain actions in certain settings, it also renders likely certain restraints.

I have been drawing attention to the behavioural implications of knowledge that p. There is a complication about this that has already cropped up in the example of gas leak. Even if we specify the circumstances in which we expect certain things of one who knows that p, it is seldom if ever the case that there is just one sort of action or

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* Price makes this point in connection with belief, in <u>Belief</u>, p. 267.

inaction that is consistent with his knowing that p. We normally expect people who know that gas explodes in the presence of a flame to refrain from lighting matches in such a setting. But, as we have just seen, it is quite conceivable that a man should do so without suggesting that he does not know that gas explodes in these circumstances. In fact we might explain his striking the match partly in terms of his knowing this. The point is that we link the antecedent conditions with the consequent behaviour with the aid of other things we know or assume about the agent. In any relevant setting there is a range of things which one who knows might be expected to do or refrain from doing. But some selection from the range is accomplished by such things as what the agent intends to do (e.g. escape unharmed or commit suicide). It may now be seen that to describe knowledge as a disposition to assert certain things and/or to act in certain ways is at best superficial. It suggests a tighter connection in the conditionals entailed by knowledge between particular antecedents and particular consequents than in fact exists. A truer picture of the conditionals entailed might be given thus:

$$\text{if . . . then . . .} \quad \left\{\begin{array}{l} \text{if . . . then . . .} \\ \text{if . . . then . . .} \\ \text{if . . . then . . .} \\ \text{if . . . then . . .} \\ \text{if . . . then . . .} \\ \text{if . . . then . . .} \end{array}\right.$$

The point is that as well as the circumstances determining which responses are appropriate on the part of one who knows that p, there are also other things about the agent; e.g. other things that he knows

or believes, his intentions, abilities, desires, stability of character, and so on.

There is another way in which the notion of knowledge as a disposition to behave in certain ways in certain situations goes astray. Although it is true that by and large we expect someone who knows something to exhibit his knowledge in relevant circumstances, it is also true that we expect things other than behaviour and that there are considerations which would allow us to suspend the requirement of appropriate behaviour. Take the last point first. It is obvious that people may know things but for one reason or another want not to betray the fact that they know them. A prisoner of war may know where his side's bombers are going to strike the enemy installations, but refuse to tell his captors. His refusal to answer questions or his giving the wrong answers does not of course mean that he does not know. What, then, does his knowing consist in? Simply, and perhaps unhelpfully, it consists at least partly in the fact that he could give the right answers, and in other circumstances might be expected to do so.

But there is more to be said than this, and the more brings us onto the first point just mentioned: there are things other than behaviour which we expect of one who knows. A point well-known to interrogators is that even if one who knows may refuse to exhibit the appropriate behaviour, he must at least expend some effort to do so. His speech and perhaps other aspects of his behaviour must be guarded. If he lies then he must labour to do so convincingly and to make his lies consistent. This alone points to something else we expect of one who knows; we expect him to add what he knows to his "stock of

premises",* to use it in his reasoning. If he wants to avoid exhibiting his knowledge he must be careful not to use it in a way that shows. And this requires effort. One thing, therefore, we might expect of a person who knows something is, if he does not want to betray his knowledge, the need to expend some effort in not showing it, say in his reasoning on connected matters. Of course this is only one example of things other than simple behaviour that we expect to find in one who knows. The prisoner of war may successfully hide his knowledge from his captors. But if, say, he knows that the bombs are scheduled to fall on the area in which he is being held, we should normally expect him to be afraid. If the bombers are heard to pass over and no bombs fall, we might expect him to be surprised. He need not <u>act</u> frightened or surprised in these circumstances, but if he knows that the bombs are scheduled for his area then in those circumstances he should at least <u>feel</u> frightened (unless he is very brave or foolish) or surprised (unless he can see why the plan was changed). Not only do we expect the knower to feel certain things in certain circumstances, we also, for instance expect him to notice certain things (he may hear the bombers sooner than the others when he is fearful of their coming).

So not all of the happenings or states which might be mentioned in the sub-hypotheticals which make up the consequent in these conditionals need to be items of behaviour. We expect that if A knows that p, in certain situations he will (probably or certainly) do such-and-such, but also that in certain settings he will feel certain ways and perhaps perceive things differently.

Recognizing this sort of ingredient in the conditionals

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* A phrase borrowed by H. H. Price from F. P. Ramsey in regard to belief. See <u>ibid.</u>, pp. 254ff.

entailed by knowledge may allow us to see the short-comings of a definition of knowledge according to which it is simply a disposition to assert certain things and/or behave in certain ways. But we must not be misled into thinking that these other elements have no logical ties with behaviour. If a perceptive interrogator were to notice our prisoner of war's glancing anxiously at the sky, he may well be able to see that he is afraid, and from this infer what the P.O.W. knows about the bombing targets for that night. Of course we might be tempted to think of this process of inference as being based on well-founded generalizations about what people who are afraid do. But that would be a mistake. It is true that a frightened person need not, for instance, glance anxiously; and not everyone who glances anxiously is afraid. But once again, to be afraid is at least <u>partly</u> to be inclined to do something like this in certain circumstances and given a certain object of fear. One may suppress one's anxious glances, but one must, in certain circumstances, suppress them. It is hard to see what fear could be if it is not to be understood at least partly in terms of what one would do <u>if</u> ... (one could, or one was not afraid of giving something away or being taken for a coward, etc.). It is not just that our experience of frightened people, including ourselves, would lead us to be surprised if a frightened person failed to manifest any of the usual symptoms. It is that our notion of what fear <u>is</u> includes certain elements which can be expressed only with the aid of concepts having to do with behaviour. A frightened man may not <u>act</u> frightened, but we cannot understand his fear apart from what he would like to do if he were not wary, or mentally deficient, or very brave, and so on. We may be afraid, even feel afraid, without acting

frightened. Where this fact may mislead us is in tempting us to think that we may be afraid without wanting to run, or shout a warning or throw ourselves under a table, etc. We may resist these inclinations, but our being afraid cannot be understood apart from them, and they cannot be spelled out without mention of the behaviour they incline us to.

What is true of fear is also true of surprise, noticing things, and in fact all the elements entailed by knowledge which are not on the surface behavioural. However true it is to insist that all these things have an 'internal' side to them, that internal side cannot be disengaged from how we would behave if .... The behavioural manifestations may frequently be dispensed with, but only if we keep them as representing what one feels inclined to do, or must make some effort not to do, etc. We can often disregard what he does, but not the concept of what he would like to do or is able to do, etc. We do not always need a performance in order to say he is afraid, surprised, alert, and so on, but we do need a concept of what he is inclined or enabled to do.

So we may recognize among the sub-hypotheticals which are attached to certain circumstances by the concept of knowledge, some which do not straightforwardly mention behaviour in their consequents. But the notion of relevant behaviour is present even in them. Even those implications of knowledge which are not explicitly behavioural depend on behavioural concepts for their significance. We cannot understand what it would be like to fulfil these consequents without seeing their fulfillment in terms of what someone is likely to do, or must resist doing, or is enabled to do, and so on, even if we may grant on many occasions that he does not do it.

It follows from all this that the relation between knowledge and behaviour is not contingent. Not that one who knows must (logically) behave in this or that way in circumstances of this or that sort. But it seems impossible to explicate the significance of 'knowing' without using concepts embedded in the conceptual framework of voluntary action. Normally we expect at least certain behaviour in certain circumstances to follow from one's knowledge. Even in the abnormal case, where we at least allow for some explanation as to why the putative knower did not act in the appropriate way, we assume that he would have acted in that way if only..., and acted in the way he did because.... Though we may understand his failure to act 'appropriately', we do so only by acknowledging some other element in his situation or make-up that has relevant behavioural implications. We can no more separate our thinking of one who knows from our thinking of him as one who is enabled to act in certain ways in certain settings, than we can disengage our imagining a person to be afraid from our imagining what he would do or like to do in particular circumstances. Talk of knowers takes place in the same conceptual arena as talk of agents.

Now if this is correct, it is clear that we cannot think of one who is alleged to know without also thinking of him as one who is at least logically capable of action. It is this point that is the basis of the more fundamental assault on divine omniscience which I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. The question is, if God is incorporeal, as orthodox Christians believe him to be, how can he (logically*) be though of as an agent. If he cannot be so regarded,

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* It is arguable that one who is contingently disqualified as an agent, say, one who is dumb and disabled, might still be allowed to know. This is so because we can still speak of how he would act if...(among other things, he were not dumb and disabled). But things appear different

(continued

it appears that he cannot (logically) be one who knows. Knowledge, we have agreed, does not strictly entail certain behaviour in certain situations. But what it does entail cannot be expressed without resort to the language of agency. In a more complex way, knowing entails the **capacity** for action. Though action may be inhibited, we look for explanations as to why it is on any particular occasion. Other beliefs, character traits, and so on, play a part in such explanations, but only because they too have behavioural implications. It follows that one who is logically incapable of acting, as an incorporeal God appears to be, is also logically incapable of knowing. The protest made on this grounds is therefore not against God's knowing everything, but his knowing anything.

The view of knowledge which I have sketched above is not uncontroversial. It may be objected that the size and complexity of any set of conditionals (especially when it is recognized that they in turn must contain conditionals in their antecedents) which is necessary to do justice to the way we speak of knowledge is so great as to obscure and not illuminate that concept. Or the notorious problems of explicating the truth-conditions of counterfactual conditionals may be taken to indicate that no philosophical advance is to be expected from analysis in terms of dispositions.* No doubt an attempt to meet these

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where there is a logical bar to action. A disabled person is still placed logically, though perhaps not empirically, in the category of agents. But one who is logically disqualified as an agent does not even begin to qualify. It is no help to say we might speak of how he would act if he were logically capable of acting, for on those grounds we would also have to allow that oranges and tables might know.

* Geach offers this counter in Mental Acts, p. 6f. See also Goodman's Fact, Fiction and Forecast, especially pp. 34-58.

and other criticisms of the dispositional view of knowledge which I have advocated would be illuminating and lead at least to a clearer representation of the view than the one I have given. Nevertheless, I shall not attempt to provide that here. I shall instead assume this view to be substantially correct and the problem it suggests for God's knowledge to be a genuine problem. If I am wrong to assume that the question of how an incorporeal God could act is relevant to the question of how he could know, then that is a relatively unimportant mistake. I believe that the problem of an incorporeal God's knowing does collapse into the problem of an incorporeal God's acting. But even if it does not, the matter of incorporeal agency is an imposing problem on its own.

PART IV

GOD AS TRANSCENDENT AGENT

CHAPTER XII

ON INCORPOREAL ACTIVITY

Anyone who announces with an air of discovery that the notion of God's activity is crucial to the scheme of Christian theism could justly be accused of having a death-grip on the obvious. The theological ideas of 'salvation-history' and Divine Providence are based on the supposition that God is active in and through the events of history to bring about what are thought of as his gracious purposes. Petitionary prayers are addressed to him, presumably in the confidence or at least hope that he will do something in response to them at least some of the time. The importance to orthodox Christianity of the notion of God's <u>acting</u> is obvious enough from these examples. But as we have seen in the preceding chapter, the concept of divine action is even more deeply and thoroughly incorporated in the Christian view of things than these straightforward points may suggest. The idea of God's <u>knowing</u>, it has been suggested, cannot be understood apart from viewing God as a potential agent. In this respect, knowing is merely one representative of a large number of predicates having to do with mentality and character. Predicates such as loving, caring, hearing, being faithful, and so on, are alike in that their sense depends in various complex ways on establishing logical connections with behaviour. These are, in various ways and to differing extents, dispositional concepts. And it is obvious how central these are to the traditional Christian view of God.

Not surprisingly, this conviction about the importance of God's activity to orthodox Christianity has been sensed by some to be on a collision course with another fundamental contention of Christian

orthodoxy; namely that God is incorporeal. It was argued in Part I of this thesis that incorporeality is one of the doctrines that fits into the schematic doctrine of divine transcendence. We have here another case where it appears that insistence upon God's transcendence threatens to evacuate any meaning from certain alleged statements concerning him. Paul Edwards, in an article entitled 'Some Notes on Anthropomorphic Theology' picks up just this point. He does so in connection with certain dispositional qualities, but he could have done it equally well with the more straightforward claims about divine activity which are made by Christians.

> I have no doubt that when most people think about God and his alleged activities here or in the here-after, they vaguely think of him as possessing some kind of rather large body. Now, if we are told that there is a God who is, say, just and good and kind and loving and powerful and wise and if, (a) it is made clear that these words are used in one of their ordinary senses, and (b) God is not asserted to be a disembodied mind, then it seems to me that <u>to that extent</u> a series of meaningful assertions has been made. And this is so whether we are told that God's justice, mercy, etc. are "limitless" or merely that God is superior to all human beings in these respects. However, it seems to me that all these words lose their meaning if we are told that God does <u>not</u> possess a body. Anyone who thinks otherwise without realizing this, I think, is supplying a body in the background of his images. For what would it be like to be, say, just, without a body? To be just, a person has to <u>act</u> justly -- he has to behave in certain ways. This is not reductive materialism. It is a simple empirical truth about what we mean by "just". But how is it possible to perform these acts, to behave in the required ways without a body? Similar remarks apply to the other divine attributes.'*

A. <u>The 'Analogical Predication' Defense</u>

Christian theists readily admit that in speaking of God as active they do not mean to say just the same thing about God as they

* Edwards, 'Some Notes on Anthropomorphic Theology', p. 242f.

would be saying about some human person if they were to speak of him as active. God, we are told, is very different from anything else that we know of, including human persons; a point which is stressed in describing him as 'transcendent'. It appears that we have God's own warrant for saying that his ways are not our ways.* Nevertheless, Christians do display preferences for saying some things rather than others about him, such as that he acts; and frequently enough argue with those who deny what they are inclined to affirm. A time-honoured way of holding together this point about God's uniqueness with our choosiness in regard to statements about him is through some doctrine of 'analogy' or 'symbol'. This move is presumably based on the view that while God is not just like anything else, he is more like some things than others. Which entitles us to prefer some ineptitudes to others in speaking of him, but not to infer that he is just like, or even very much like, the sort of thing <u>normally</u> spoken of in the modes of discourse appropriated for talk of God.**

It is tempting to base a counter-argument to Edwards on just this point about the necessary looseness of talk about God. In employing the language of human agency to speak of God's activity, it might be said, theists are not committed to all the details implicit in the ordinary uses of agency-language, of which having a body is one. The argument against the intelligibility of talk about God's activity may thus be met with the charge that it construes the notion of activity too strictly on a model of <u>human</u> activity; a model which theists

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* Isaiah 55:8

** I have argued for the possibilities of this sort of predication in 'On Believing That which is Beyond Understanding'.

propose to use only as a rough guide. But this simple counter-attack will not do to deflect Edwards' case. For it is part of his argument that having a body is not merely a detail concerning agents in our ordinary talk about them. Corporeality, Edwards plainly suggests, is not an incidental factor in discourse concerning action. Stripping off this notion does not, in Edwards' view, leave us with a coherent remainder that can find an application in connection with an incorporeal being like God. It drains all of the sense from talk of activity, a fact which one may hide from oneself only by, perhaps unconsciously, "supplying a body in the background of his images." It is beside the point, therefore, simply to remind Edwards of the possibilities of analogical predication. For his case rests not on a blanket rejection of these possibilities but on the contention that to speak of an incorporeal agent is to step beyond the reach of any possible analogy. It is a kind of empty talk to which we may give the illusion of content by engaging in the most misleading sort of 'picture-thinking'.

B. Corporeality as Inessential in Talk of Agency

It appears that this is the ground on which the argument which Edwards' represents must be met. That is, in order to defend his speaking about the activity of God, the theist who holds to divine incorporeality must show that the notion of corporeality is not so essential to the idea of agency that talk of agency is cognitively empty without it.

Ian Crombie provides, I think, an introduction to such a defense in his contribution to Faith and Logic.

> Our willingness to entertain the notion of a being outside space and time...is perhaps most fundamentally based on our inability to accept with complete contentment the idea that we are ourselves normal spactio-temporal objects. No doubt the point has often been put in extremely misleading ways, and many quite untenable claims have been made; but it remains true that you cannot adequately describe a human person with the range of concepts which is adequate for the description of a chair, a cabbage or even an electronic calculating machine. And the additional concepts which are needed for the adequate description of human experience -- loving, feeling, hoping, even seeing are obvious examples -- all have a relative independence of space, not in the sense that we can think of a loving being that is not somewhere, but in the sense that if you try to anatomize his loving you cannot think of it as rest or motion of parts, while you can think of his walking or digesting in such terms.*

Now at best this is an introduction to the case for the defense. (Of course it was not written with an argument like Edwards' in mind.) It is too easy to imagine Edwards' reply: that it is one thing to point to differences between on the one hand our discourse concerning emotion, perception, willing, hoping and the like, and on the other hand talk which straightforwardly concerns the movements in and of material objects; but it is another to establish a complete break between the two. It is one of the lessons of contemporary philosophy of mind -- a lesson manifested in the preceding chapter and the introduction to this one -- that however distinct 'mental' concepts may be from 'bodily' ones, at least some of the former are logically bound up with some of the latter. Putting in another way the response from Edwards' position to Crombie's suggestion: It is one thing to show that talk of persons is logically distinct from talk of bodily movements, but another to demonstrate that it is logically independent of discourse about bodily movements.

* 'The Possibility of Theological Statements', p. 57.

Nevertheless, it does seem to me that we have here an idea of the direction in which a more adequate reply to an argument like Edwards' may be found. Let me try to show how this might be developed.

First of all, let us pay attention to the distinction hinted at by Crombie between discourse about persons and discourse about material objects. Since we are considering agency, let us look at this in terms of a distinction between talk of action and talk of bodily movement. It is first of all worth emphasizing the way in which the language of action is logically distinct from that of bodily movement.* There is a very important difference between a simple description of some event in terms of bodily movement (e.g. 'George's foot moved') and a description of the same event couched in terms of action (e.g. 'George moved his foot'). To say 'George's foot moved' does not involve saying that an action was performed, by George or anyone else. Whereas to say 'George moved his foot' plainly does. The move from talk of bodily movement to that of personal agency marks not the discernment of additional physical features of the movement, but a shift in conceptual realms. To say that so-and-so did such-and-such is to place an event in the arena where the language of persons is in play, a conceptual framework which simply does not apply to bodily movements per se. It is in connection with actions, but not bodily movements, that we speak of decisions, motives, beliefs, purposes and so on. So it is that a detailed account of the movements of that body which is George's does not fit or mesh into the question of what, if anything, George is doing. The question 'What is George doing?' assumes a different way of regarding that which might otherwise be

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* In my comments on the concept of action I am borrowing freely from A.I. Melden's Free Action, especially Chapter 14.

seen as mere bodily movements. The way it assumes is one in which questions about purpose and intention also have a point. Their having a point is one way of marking the difference between talk of action and talk of bodily movements.

Of course it is true that even if the language of agency is logically distinct from that of moving bodies, the two are not unconnected. We might expect this to be the case, for even if movement-language is different from action-language, the two describe the same phenomena. It is plain, for instance, that certain limitations would be established by the account in terms of bodily movement on possible answers to the question of what he is doing. It would be more than odd to say of George's foot's moving swiftly until it contacts Adam's ankle that it is George's pouring a drink for Adam. But the physical description by itself leaves open the question of whether the query about George's activity is appropriate. (George may must have been tapped on the knee by a medical practitioner.) Similarly, though questions of purpose are relevant in connection with an event viewed as an action, and not in connection with the same event seen simply as a physical happening, the physical-happening description limits the things that can reasonably be said about purpose, in looking upon the happening as an action. 'Why did George kick Adam in the ankle?' is open to a wide range of possible answers, many of them opened up by areas of human convention such as warning, joking, signaling and so on. But the answer 'In order to make his (Adam's) ankle feel better' hardly fits. Again, details about the physical happening establish <u>some</u> limits on what may be said in terms of physical action. And again, before we can talk sensibly about the

purpose of the contact, before we can even call it a kick, we must shift our conceptual standpoint. George's foot's making contact with Adam's ankle is not something we can see as potentially purposeful until we see it as an action and George or someone else as an agent. Though there are connections, there is also a logical disparity between bodily movement talk and action talk.

An analogy might help to press this point home. In a similar way to that sketched above, the description of a series of marks on a stone is logically distinct from a description of those same marks as an epitaph. From the one point of view we employ a set of physical concepts such as the dimensions of the marks, depth of their incision, spatial relations among them, and so on. From the other, an entirely different set of concepts, including such things as 'symbols' and 'meaning', is given an application. These two different points of view are patently not <u>spatial</u> points. That is, in employing the notions of meaning and so on, we do not simply take into account a different set of physical characteristics of the marks, not even a ghostly set called 'meanings'. In this case as in the case of bodily movements and actions, we have, it might be said, an important kind of 'seeing as'. Not quite the sort of 'seeing as' that goes on in seeing a figure as now a duck and then a rabbit. But the kind that goes on in seeing something now as within one conceptual frame (a stone with marks, or a physical movement) and then within another (a stone with writing, or an action). Just as in the case of bodily movements and actions, the view through either set of spectacles places limits on what may be seen through the other. (There is a finite set of physical configurations which qualify as the conventional symbols

of some language. And it is the particular configuration that obtains in any given case which allows the inscription to be read in the way it is.) But the description of those marks in physical terms alone leaves open the question of whether they constitute a message.

I have been emphasizing the logical disparity between discourse concerning bodily movements and the same concerning actions. But even if what has been said is substantially correct, of what use is it in dealing with the question of incorporeal agency? It would appear that we are still vulnerable to the counter that we imagined from Edwards: "It is one thing to show that talk of persons is logically <u>distinct from</u> talk of bodily movements, but another to show that it is logically <u>independent of</u> talk of bodily movements." In order to answer Edwards' case, the point about logical disparity must be augmented by a point concerning one side of the disparity. Having recognized the difference between the logical order of bodily movement language and that of action language, let us concentrate for a moment on the matter of bodily movement. What I should like to draw attention to is how easily, in the case of those physical events which may also be spoken of as actions, the distinction between bodily movements and material movements of other sorts becomes eroded. Let me show how this is so, and why it is important to our discussion.

First of all, the eroded distinction between bodily movement and material movement. Erosion has already begun with the logical disparity pointed out between talk of the movements of bodies and talk of action. The way I described this disparity was as a disparity of conceptual schemes in which the two sorts of discourse are embedded. But now it is worth noticing that the conceptual scheme in which talk

of bodily movements takes place is one which that sort of talk shares with discourse concerning any sort of material movement. _qua_ physical objects, we observe no difference between those objects which we take to be the bodies of persons, and other material entities. We weigh them in the same ways, measure them in the same ways, and in general regard them as equally covered by the findings of natural scientists. And, what is most important for our discussion, we regard the _movements_ of these two sorts of things as indistinguishable in kind. We measure their magnitude, direction, and other features in exactly the same ways. In fact they _are_ two different sorts of things only because we take one of them and not the other to be peculiarly tied up with the perceptions, actions and existence of human persons. Our attitude to one who saw no reason to use these 'personal' concepts in connection with certain physical entities (if we can imagine such a person apart from the spell of a research policy in the social sciences) would surely be not that the physical descriptions he is wont to end with are mistaken, but that they are incomplete.

But notice (and here the erosion continues) that although movements in and of persons' bodies are among those things that we apply this additional framework of '_action_' to, they do not exhaust the class of such applications. The distinction between persons' bodies and other material objects, though it may depend on facts about perception, consciousness, life and death, does _not_ reflect any fact about the scope of application for the concept of action. We do not confine ourselves, in using the personal categories appropriate to action, to the movements of people's bodies. The melting of some ice or an explosion of some volatile substance may be just as much the

actions of someone as waving goodbye or turning a door knob. In fact the whole conceptual web in which action is located finds application far beyond the movements of persons' bodies. It is not just about the movement of people's limbs that we ask 'What possessed him?' or 'What did he have in mind?', but also about the smashing of a window or the building of a building. A number of things seem to count as the action of so-and-so besides so-and-so's raising his arm or his voice. The point is that while we find the 'language game' of material movement applicable for some purposes to persons' bodies, we also find the language game of action extending to include the movement of things other than person's bodies. In both of these facts we see the distinction between the bodies of persons on the one hand and other sorts of physical objects on the other, being worn down.

The significance of this eroded distinction is, I hope, obvious. It is tempting to think, as Edwards appears to, that bodies are logically required for action. Without them, how could we have the sort of physical event which might count as an action? Part of the answer is that we commonly regard quite a number of physical events besides those which are the movements of someone's body as actions. What the logical disparity between talk of bodily movement and talk of action shows is that the important thing in connection with action is not some physical characteristic of an event, but the applicability of such concepts as intention, purpose, care, attention, and so on. What the eroded distinction shows is there is nothing so special about bodies that it is only events directly concerning them that begin to qualify for the application of those concepts.

It is worth pointing out that not only are physical events

other than bodily movements regarded as the actions of someone, so also are events which are not even physical events. It is surely appropriate to call such things as concentrating, making up one's mind, and doing a calculation, mental acts. We invite, implore or command people to do such things, and very often they comply. And yet their doing these things does not entail (logically) the occurrence of some physical event.* The suggestion is that it is not necessarily a physical event, let alone a bodily event, that we need to support the language of action. Support for this suggestion is provided by experiments we might make in imagination. We might easily suppose that a certain wise judge was able to bring it about that without any apparent intermediaries certain just judgements occur to men judging a case many miles away.** In such a circumstance it would surely be appropriate to speak of the action of the judge in causing these judgements to occur to persons some distance away. But what we are calling his action is not some physical event, whatever logical connection it may have with the occurrence of certain physical events.

I have just been arguing that bodily movements are not the only things we call actions. But it is important to notice that even where actions are identified with the movements of some body, they need not be the action solely of the person whose body that is. One person's actions may at the same time be someone else's,† as the word 'agent' in ordinary speech shows. It is common in human affairs to see the

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* It may be that some neural event must take place which is in some way systematically related to concentrating, deciding, calculating, etc. But this, if it is required, is a contingent and not a logical requirement.

** I owe this example to J.R. Lucas.

† I owe this reminder to Lucas, 'The Logic of Action'.

actions of one man or a group of men as also the action of some other. If a man, acting as my agent, buys a house for me, then with his action I have bought a house. Or if I hire a firm of builders to construct a dwelling, then the builders' building it can at the same time be called my building it. The suggested parallel for divine action is obvious.

> We are quite happy to say that Christopher Wren built St. Paul's, though he did so only with the aid, and through the agency, of many masons and builders who actually carved the stones and placed them in position; and by the same tokens we can see the building of the Temple in Jerusalem as one of God's activities, in spite of its having been carried out through the agency of Solomon and Solomon's servants, and in spite of its being also quite properly described as Solomon's building of the Temple.*

This reminder about the common facts of agency, 'action on behalf of', provides another clue to the way in which God might be held to act without employing a body, or at least one which is his own. If the Christian is right, there are countless examples in human history of actions which are actions of men and at the same time divine actions. There is nothing odd about this joint ascription, as the facts about ordinary agency show. In a way, it plays a part in eroding the distinction between bodily and material movement, in that it is a case in which some physical movement is a person's action even though it is not a movement of his body. And it offers one more possibility as to the way in which a disembodied person may yet act.

We are now in a position to counter an objection which it is natural to pose to all this. Granted that we do consider as some person's action, bodily or material movements which are not the movements of that person's body, is it not still true that we trace

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* Ibid., p. 10.

back (not just causally) such movements to their source in the movements of his body? Though we may describe the window's smashing or the building's being built as the action of someone, do we not do so only on the understanding either that the event mentioned is caused by some bodily movements of the alleged agent (propelling a stone, or signing a contract), or that it is an event which may alternatively be described at least partly in terms of his bodily movements (we may speak of his building a house, or alternatively of the various movements he performs in the course of building it)? The distinction between bodily and other material movements is not really eroded, it might be argued. It is just that causal and other sorts of relations between them bring the two sorts of event close together. Bodily movements, however, remain distinct and essential in providing the origin-point by which we determine (a) whether an action was performed, and (b) if so, by whom.

Let us consider these two contentions separately; (a) that bodies allow us in this complex way to say whether or not an action was performed, and (b) if an action was performed, they provide a way of determining who the agent was.

First of all, is it the case that finding the movement of some person's body to be the initiating event in some causal chain is necessary for our calling the events in that chain, under some descriptions at least, actions? To begin with, it seems clear that in practice this is very often an important consideration in our deciding whether or not to call some event an action. Did he fall down the stairs, or was he pushed? Obviously, if we are able to discover whether someone's hands and arms came forcefully into contact with the victim's back we shall have gone some distance toward reaching a

verdict. But, notice, only some distance. Finding out that the movements of A's body were causally related to B's falling is not the same as finding out that causing B to fall was an action of A. It is quite possible, for instance, that A was in his turn pushed by someone else, or was a blind man walking along with arms outstretched. In neither of these circumstances, nor in others that might easily be imagined, would we say that A's causing B to fall was an action of A, even though some movements of A's body are productive of the event in question. Of course all this shows is that tracing an event's causes or descriptions back to the movements of some person's body is not a sufficient condition of calling that event an action. The thesis that we are now considering is a more modest one, claiming only that such a relation is a necessary condition of describing the event as an action. A number of points raised in the last few pages, however, show that this cannot be so. For one thing, as has been pointed out, not all actions are physical events of the sort that lend themselves to this tracing back to bodily movements. Concentrating on a word-puzzle, or solving it, are not physical happenings at all.* We do not need to relate them causally or in some other way to the movements of someone's body in order to decide that they are actions. It is also quite conceivable that even in the case of events which are changes in material entities, we should decide to describe these as the actions of someone despite our inability to discover a causal chain linking them with movements of someone's body. Such would be the case if we encountered a convincing instance of telekinesis. It might well be

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* Of course they may be logically related to physical happenings, in that (as suggested in a parallel case in the previous chapter) they depend for their sense on the conceivability of certain physical events. But that is different from saying that the actions themselves are physical events.

that circumstances should force us to acknowledge that some object's moving was not causally connected with or alternatively describable as, movements of A's body. In such a case our not being able to establish these kinds of connections may not be a bar to our considering some physical event to be the doing of A. If it is argued, therefore, that connectibility with bodily movement is a necessary condition of being counted an action, and consequently that having a body is a necessary condition of being considered an agent, we have seen that this is not so. It is not so because connectibility with bodily movement is not a necessary condition of being counted as an action.

What sort of things <u>are</u> necessary to support talk of agency? It is hard to speak of necessary conditions here. It is not difficult, however, at least to point to a number of considerations that normally play a part in our deciding to call something an action.* One thing that does play such a part is this matter of bodily movement. I have just argued that bodily movement is not a necessary condition of agency, but there can be no doubt that it is often an important consideration. Its central role is easily understood in the light of some facts concerning human agency which I shall mention in a moment.** Another important point, one which might start us off on a search for a putative agent, is what might loosely be called the inherent unlikelihood of an event apart from the act of an agent. I do not know of any rigorous way by which this character of events may be represented. It seems to me that the question of whether some event is so unlikely

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* On this topic I have been helped by reading Peter Donovan's 'A Philosophical Analysis of the Doctrine of Providence', especially pp. 190-215.

** See pp. 284-5.

in this respect as to generate talk of agency is precisely one concerning which there might be, in any given case, considerable debate; and, where the debate is resolved, it is not resolved by any very rigorous decision procedures. But part of what is meant by one who regards an event as in this way remarkable is not that there could be no ordinary and complete causal explanation of the event, but that as a matter of fact it appears that there happens not to be one apart from some talk of agency. A happening which is in this rough sense unlikely is one which invites the search for an agent. A further consideration, equally hard to delimit with precision, concerns purposefulness. The point has already been made that to speak of something as an action is to introduce a conceptual framework in which talk of purposes, aims, intentions, and so on, are essential parts of the structure. An occurrence which is not only unlikely but also appears to be contributory to some identifiable goal also attracts to itself talk of agency. Of course almost any event has consequences, and we must be chary of assuming too easily that the event was brought about by someone with those consequences in mind. Even if the consequences in a particular case are of great interest to us, we must allow for happy (or unhappy) accidents and coincidences. Nevertheless, "to be a coincidence, something must be striking, but not <u>too</u> striking."* Again, the matter of whether any particular occurrence is 'purposeful' is one that notoriously admits of both debate and self-deception. But it is plainly one of those things which may incline us to regard some event as at least possibly of some agent's doing. There is a final consideration which dovetails with the others I have mentioned. If

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* Donovan, p. 198.

an occurrence fits in some recognizable way with what some person said he would do, or is known to intend or desire, or with certain features of his character and habits, then we have an added reason for thinking of it as possibly an action; specifically his action. It is easy to imagine circumstances where this might be crucial. Cases are on record where persons interested in psychical research have pledged themselves to effecting certain specified things, if they are able, after they have passed from this life. Assuming the coherence of disembodied existence,* the occurrence of those things which the person promised to try and bring about would contribute to our thinking of them as his actions. And they would do so because of their (in this case) straightforward accord with his declared intentions. It is easy to see how this point about what is known or believed concerning some person's intentions, declarations or character, meshes with the foregoing points on the apparent unlikelihood and/or purposefulness of some happening. I shall not try to spell out in detail the relation of these points, but end at suggesting their importance to the question of whether some event is properly seen as an action.

The idea has been rejected that bodies are logically necessary to agents because movements in and of them are logically necessary to the identification of actions. What about the notion that they are logically required as a means of determining which agent is responsible for any given action, on the ground that it is only by this (causal or descriptive) 'tracing back' technique that we can identify agents? The same arguments that show bodies are not needed (logically) for

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* I assume it for the sake of this illustration. I am inclined to think the idea is incoherent, at least where a plurality of individuals is concerned. See Penelhum, Survival and Disembodied Existence, especially chapters 5 and 6.

identification of actions suffice also to show that they are not needed (logically) to identify agents. They show this by establishing that the 'trade back' technique is neither necessary nor always employed, on the grounds that (a) not all actions are physical events, and therefore not all actions allow us to start the tracing procedure; and (b) it is conceivable even in the case of physical events that we may decide some are properly regarded as actions even where they are not (causally or descriptively) connected with the movements of some putative agent's body. Again, without attempting to fix necessary conditions for their identification, something rudimentary may be said about how we do in fact determine who in the case of any action is the agent. And again, it is undeniable that in practice bodies normally play a large part in this procedure. Establishing a connection (causal or via an alternative description) between some event and the movements of some person's body is often a crucial move not only in deciding to call something an action but also in deciding who the agent is. (As the reminder made above concerning action on behalf of another shows, it does not tell us that some person is the only agent.) But a consideration which is of at least equal and in some instances greater importance is this matter of what is known or believed about the declarations, desires and character of certain potential agents. Even as a matter of practice, we regard particular events as actions and moreover the actions of some specified agent, strictly on the basis of what we think that person wants or said he would do or is like as a matter of general character. We certainly make these judgements very frequently without any of the 'tracing back' to bodily movements that is suggested above, and in certain circumstances (e.g. mental acts or

such things as telekinesis) would presumably be prepared to continue the practice even if it became apparent that there was no such causal chain or descriptive connection to be found. Of at least equal importance, therefore, in identifying agents is the matter of whose avowed intentions, purposes or general character the event in question displays some sort of accord with. Recognizing the importance of this kind of consideration both to the question of whether something is an action and also to the question of who performed it, can play a part in allowing us to see why it is that these two questions frequently collapse into one. It is often the case that we come to regard something as an action and some person as the agent, in a single move. This is so partly because connections with bodily behaviour are relevant to both elements, but partly also because conformity with someone's intentions, desires and character are relevant to both.

I have been arguing against the view that it is only by establishing causal connections between particular events and bodily movements or by showing that those events may be described as the movements of someone's body, that we may identify events as actions and persons as agents. In rejecting this view, I am rejecting also the contention it may be used to support: that in order to qualify as an agent a person must (logically) be a corporeal being. It would be a mistake, however, to underestimate the importance of bodily movements to our ordinary talk of actions and agents. I have stressed that in practice, connections with bodily behaviour are of enormous importance to our deciding that something is an action and some particular person its author. What I should like to do now is to offer a brief account of this practical importance which both allows it due weight and yet also displays it as logically dispensable.

Part of my attack on the necessity of bodies consisted in showing that the distinction between bodily and other material movements may be worn down. It may be worn down, I suggested, in that (a) bodies and other material objects are weighed, measured and in all other respects treated alike _qua_ physical entities; and (b) movements in and of bodies and other material objects may be equally describable as the actions of someone. In view, however, of the practical importance of establishing either causal or descriptive connections with physical occurrences and bodily movements, it appears that there is _something_ left of the distinction. Although we regard bodies _qua_ physical objects as on a level with other material things, and we do not restrict our talk of actions to the movements in and of person's bodies, the latter remain important in that they figure largely in so many of our actual decisions about what is an action and who is an agent. What I want to suggest is that the reason this is so but only contingently so, is that we are dealing with _human_ agents, and certain contingent facts about human agents lend a usefulness to observing a practical distinction between bodily and material movements. Distinctions, it seems clear, are made (a) for some purpose or other, and (b) in relation to the way things are. In ordinary discourse about agency, our purposes include the need to distinguish human agents from one another and from things that are not agents, as well as to apportion responsibility, and so on. As to the way things are, we find that human persons seem always to possess a certain _limited_ repertoire of what philosophers of action call 'basic actions', i.e. things which they can do without having to do something else in order

to do them;* and these seem, as far as physical actions are concerned, to be movements of the limbs or other parts of one's body. It is facts like these concerning human agents that provide a foothold for the distinction in practice between bodily movements and material motion. The (contingent) fact that we each have a limited set of basic actions, differing to some extent from person to person but in the case of physical actions limited (so far as we can tell) to movements in and of our bodies, means that finding such movements either at the beginning of a causal chain including a certain event or hidden in the particular description of that event is often a sound practical guide to whether the event was an action; and if so, whose. I have pointed out that we do not always use this criterion, that seldom if ever do we use it alone, and that if the facts were different about our basic powers (e.g. if telekinesis were possible) it would lose some of that practical usefulness which it has. Similarly, given the plurality of potential agents, and their limitation in basic action, finding the movements of a particular body at the root of some event is of obvious relevance to determining which of several possible agents is the actual one. Again, there are other ways of deciding the matter which may supplement or even supplant this one; and it is conceivable that in different circumstances this criterion would be less useful than it is. But given our purposes, and the way things are, the connection with bodily movement is of great practical importance.

I believe we can see now, however, why this practical importance

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* The idea of 'basic actions' is developed by Danto in 'Basic Actions'. Difficulties have been found in Danto's formulation of the idea, and the particular explication I have used is borrowed from Penelhum, Survival and Disembodied Existence, p. 41.

need not be imported into any talk of agency. The particular purposes and facts to which talk of human agency are related are not the only ones conceivable. In the case of God, for instance, the question of distinguishing him from other agents of the same order does not arise (unless we are polytheists or take a naive view of the devil).* It is conceivable and indeed likely that in his case the facts about what are basic action are markedly different from what they are in ours; e.g. the doctrine of omnipotence may be taken to mean that his basic actions are not restricted in the way that ours are to a particular and very small region of the cosmos. Given such shifts in the purposes and facts surrounding talk of agency, it is easy to see how the practical usefulness of appeals to bodily movement may be removed entirely. What would happen, of course, is that the dominant purpose of discourse concerning divine agency would be to distinguish (divine) action from non-action. In such a context it is easy to see how considerations concerning God's intentions, desires, and character would take the place of considerations about bodily movements in the determination both of what events are actions and (what in this case is an inseparable point) who the agent is.

The sketch which emerges of the logic of discerning divine action is therefore something like this. Events come to be regarded as divine actions insofar as they display some combination of the following characteristics: (1) they are in some way 'unlikely apart from agency', (2) they appear to fulfil some purpose, and (3) they are in themselves or in their relation to some purpose at least concordant with what is believed about God's intentions, desires and/or general nature. This

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* This turns out to be a point of fundamental importance beyond the concept of agency. See Chapter XIV.

is far from being a tidy formula by which events may easily be sorted into divine actions and non-actions. Precisely what constitutes unlikelihood, the fulfilling of some purpose, and consonance with God's intentions and character is not perfectly clear; nor is the way in which these considerations may combine and play upon one another or cancel each other out. To some extent the same is true of the factors that contribute to our calling something a human action. The point is that the Christian theist would presumably be prepared at least to indicate paradigm cases of events which qualify under these headings. Examples could be given from the key incidents of Christianity and Judaism, such as the exit from Egypt or the career of Jesus of Nazareth; or from occurrences in the lives of individual believers, such as deliverance from some danger, or an apparently miraculous cure. It seems that considerations including those just mentioned do allow theists to discriminate events which are regarded as divine actions from those which are not. They do this, it is clear, without connecting the events concerned with the movements of something seen as God's body. And the way in which they do it appears to display certain important affinities with the way in which we ordinarily identify actions and agents.

I began by considering an argument posed by Paul Edwards against the coherence of talk about incorporeal action. He does not explicate fully his reasons for holding that corporeality is essential to agents, but I have tried to cast doubt on this view by (a) showing that it is hard to maintain a sharp distinction <u>in logic</u> between person's bodies and other material entities, though there are practical supports for some such distinction in the case of human agents, and

(b) demonstrating that one reason for supposing bodies to be essential, namely that only by tracing back to their movements may we identify actions and agents, is false. If we are going to speak of God's actions, then it is plain that there must be some event to 'see as' his action. I believe it is this point that Edwards is rightly exercised to protect. Where he goes wrong is in supposing that it must be a bodily event that provides this necessary condition. I have argued that it is not even true that events must always be material movements to qualify as actions, and that even where it is some physical occurrence that is so-called it is not logically required that someone's body be involved in some way. It was suggested that in the case of human agents, there is a certain practical sense in looking for the movement of person's bodies in connection with certain kinds of events. But this sense follows, I have argued, from certain contingent facts about human agents and not from the logic of action.

In his introduction to The Philosophy of Action, Alan White comments that "an action is the bringing about of something. An agent or author is that which brings something about."* And later, "A particular happening is an action if it is the exercise of a power to make that happen."** No doubt there are objections to be brought against almost any pocket definition of this sort. But it is interesting to notice that certainly on the surface, and so far as I can see even in the implications of these dicta, there is nothing to suggest that agents must be corporeal to bring something about or make things happen. I have tried to suggest that bodies figure prominently

* White (ed.), The Philosophy of Action, p. 2.

** Ibid., p. 8.

in our discourse concerning human agency not because it concerns agency but because it concerns humans.

No doubt there are difficulties to be cited in the case I have made for the conceivability of incorporeal agency, especially in the brief and somewhat sketchy arguments with which I have made it. I shall anticipate three of these. Two of them are directed against the rough picture I have given of how divine actions might be identified in the absence of a divine body. The third and more radical criticism, treated in the next chapter, consists in a reformulation of the case against incorporeal agency. It takes us onto a new level in our consideration of the idea of a transcendent God.

C. Discerning the Character of God

In arguing that bodies are not essential to the identification of actions or agents, I pointed out a number of other considerations which enter into our calling some event an action and some person the agent. Among these were factors having to do with the character of putative agents; their intentions, desires, and so on. It was alleged that on the basis of what is known or believed about persons in these respects we may come to regard an event as an action and some particular person as its author. It may be replied that there is a difficulty in arguing this way concerning the alleged doings of an incorporeal being like God. The difficulty is this. Appraising on this basis something as an action and someone as the relevant agent obviously assumes a prior knowledge or set of beliefs as to the intentions, wants and general nature of the putative agent. In other words, this procedure depends on our having learned or come to believe at some time that it is that this person intends, desires and so on.

And presumably we must do this on the basis of (somebody's) acquaintance with events which can be seen to be the actions of that person without a prior estimate of his character. We can legitimately use our appraisal of his nature as a means of identifying (his) actions only if we have independently appraised his nature by observing things which we can recognize without knowing his character as his actions. Now, it might be asked, can we do this without that person's having a body in order to provide an independent criterion of which events are his actions? It seems that only by establishing causal connections between that person's body and the events in question, or showing that the events themselves are describable as the movements of his body, can it first be learned what happenings are his actions and on the basis of observing a number of such actions in different circumstances form an estimate of that person's character.

In answer to this it must first of all be said once again that clearly we do normally reason in this way with regard to human agents. However true it is that we may come to identify actions and agents on the basis of our estimates of people's character, we must at some point learn about their character from seeing things that are independently proclaimed to be their actions by a connection with their bodily movements. It is arguable that it is logically necessary that there should be some such criterion, for without it there can be no way of assigning particular actions and natures to particular agents. But once again it may be added that this logical requirement vanishes when the need to distinguish among a number of possible agents disappears, as it does if the orthodox Christian is right in affirming that there

is and can only be one God.*

But does it vanish? Perhaps we do not need a body in such a case to distinguish agents from one another, but surely we still need a body to distinguish actions from ordinary events. Presumably the Christian does not want to say that every event is in the same sense a divine action. Without finding the causal origins of only some events in the movements of something identified as his body, or seeing only some events as themselves the movements of his body, how can we discriminate between the actions of God and those things which happen but not by his doing? The reply that we may discriminate in terms of conformity with his wants and intentions, etc., will obviously not do, for the problem is precisely to know how we may learn what these are by identifying his actions independently of knowing these things about him.

There is a class of events which might be regarded as God's actions that, superficially at least, stand out from the rest. These are events which in one way or another bear an explicit claim to be divine actions; especially acts of communication. Prophetic utterances, for instance, are frequently introduced with the words 'Thus saith the Lord...'. The voice which Paul heard on the road to Damascus is reported to have said "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting."** That an event in some such way declares itself to be a divine action does not, however, solve the problem we are considering. That someone prefaces his remarks with the phrase 'Thus saith the Lord...' is no proof that his words are in fact God's words. Believers themselves are

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* Again, the importance of this point will become apparent in Chapter XIV.

** Acts 9:5

wont to distinguish true claims to prophecy from false, and genuine visions from delusions. An occurrence's being in some way labelled as an act of God may be one reason for considering the possibility that it really is a divine action. But the fact that some events bear an explicit claim to be divine actions does not provide us with an independent and sufficient criterion of divine action. Neither, therefore, can it supply a straightforward means of determining God's character, even though some of these occurrences include what purport to be explicit expressions of divine intentions, etc. Events which explicitly proclaim themselves to be divine actions, including declarations of God's plans and intentions, are in as much need as other events, of credentials in support of any claim to divine origin. Conformity with what is believed about the intentions and plans of God is among the credentials that might be produced. But an estimate of these intentions and plans is something we must, to some extent at least, bring to our view of these events, and not something that can simply be read off from them. How, then, can such an estimate be arrived at?

The answer is provided, I suggest, when we recall that there are other things than bodies or knowledge of character that even in the ordinary human case serve to distinguish actions from non-actions. Two of these things have already been mentioned: (1) unlikelihood, and (2) apparent purposefulness. Now in the ordinary human case these are not usually* enough to tell us which person is the agent, but the theological case is importantly different. Here, if the monotheist is

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* Sometimes, of course, coming to see something as an action is of a piece with identifying its author. Perhaps only one person has the capacity or opportunity for doing that particular thing.

right, if we establish something as an action we have at the same time identified the agent. What this suggests is that impressions of what it is that God intends, desires, and is generally like are formed on the basis of what is intimated by those occurrences singled out as his action by such considerations as unlikelihood and apparent purposefulness. Of course whether there can be workable criteria for unlikelihood and purposefulness, and if so whether there happen to be any events which qualify, forms the substance of a long-standing debate between believers and non-believers. I shall not try to demonstrate here either that such criteria can be supplied or that events can be mentioned which patently exhibit these features. It is plain as well that the picture which might emerge from events considered in this way could be hard to interpret and contain features which are difficult to harmonize with one another. (In fact the problem of evil appears to divide into two parts here. On the one hand we may have events which fail to satisfy the criteria of unlikelihood and purposefulness, but which are nonetheless evil in their consequences. Why does God permit these? On the other hand, there may well be events that, on the criteria given, attract interpretation as actions, but appear to have a malignant purpose. What do these signify about the character of God?*) I shall not try to provide an account of what emerges from such a consideration, nor to suggest ways of harmonizing elements in the picture. My point is simply that it is quite conceivable that events should be picked out by criteria such as these and accorded the description 'God's actions', and that on the basis of these actions an impression formed of the

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* See Basil Mitchell's contribution to 'The University Debate'.

plans, purposes and nature of God. I have not shown that the Christian procedure which follows these lines is a coherent and successful one. But I hope to have shown that it is a mistake to dismiss it out of hand on the basis of beliefs about the necessity of corporeality to agency.

D. The World as God's Body

There is another and quite different criticism of the defense of incorporeal agency offered above. It may be objected that in arguing for the discernment of some material events as the direct actions of God I have come perilously close to implying a rather bizarre heresy; namely that God is not incorporeal but embodied, and the world is his body. If one says, as I have, that some happenings in the world may coherently be described as God's actions, and moreover that any of these happenings could be a 'basic action' for him, i.e. an action which he need do no other action in order to perform, is this not tantamount to saying that the world is God's body?* Surely the fact that those physical events which we might speak of as 'basic actions' normally occur in the body of him whose basic action it is, is not a contingent matter. It may be true that not everything that counts as a part of some person's body can be an instrument of that person's direct action (e.g. not everyone can wiggle his ears, and so far as I know no one can secrete adrenalin at will). But it seems plain that everything that can be such an instrument is a part of that person's body. Thus it may appear that I have not really defined the notion of incorporeal agency, but defended the notion of God's agency by making him corporeal.

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* In fact the analogy was accepted by the 11th century Indian philosopher, Rāmānuja. See Ninian Smart's Doctrine and Argument in Indian Philosophy, chapter VIII.

I think that the proper answer to this charge does not begin with a brisk denial of the world's being God's body. The truth is that the relation supposed by orthodox Christians to exist between the world and God is almost by definition unique and not one for which our ordinary concepts, including those of person and action, provide an exact analogue. While some features of the supposed relationship between God and the world may tend to support an analogy with the relation of persons to their bodies, there are others which clearly undermine it. I shall mention two.

First, I take it to be an axiom of common sense that at least some men enjoy at least a certain measure of autonomy or freedom. We are more subject to the pushes and pulls of heredity and environment than we care to be, but the man who argues for complete determinism must counter not only some powerful arguments but a deeply-ingrained conviction in most if not all of us. Traditions within Christian thought have often played down the autonomy and freedom of men, but the view that man is a special, in some ways god-like creature* is never far from the surface in Christian theology. It is this special, autonomous status accorded to some creatures that provides one sharp disparity between the relation of God to the world and the relation of persons to their bodies. Even if God is able to bring about any logically conceivable state of affairs in the world, and is able to do so as a basic action, clearly he does not do so. In fact it appears that along with the partial freedom given to some of his creatures is given the option of frustrating the intentions and plans of God. This fact, if it is a fact, poses a manifest contrast between the relation

* Genesis 1:26-31.

of God to his creation and that of men to their bodies. It is as though I might intend to open a car door or signal a waiter but had to wait and see whether my limbs would decide to behave in the requisite way. In the relative independence of men lies, therefore, a crucial difference between the relation of God to the world and the relation of persons to their bodies. However much the scope of what may be direct action suggests a point of contact between the two kinds of relation, this fact about the autonomy of men indicates a distinct contrast.

That is one feature of God's relation to the cosmos which works against an analogy with the relation of persons to their bodies. Roughly speaking, it concerns the relative independence exhibited by parts of the cosmos, notably men, in relation to God. A second objection to the analogy may be raised by citing the alleged independence of God in relation to the world. We need not be so dualistic as to think of the body as the fleshly prison of the soul in order to recognize the limitations of our corporeal state. My physical constitution and general function is something over which I have next to no control. The principles that govern its development, health and decay may be learned and used by me to affect these things within narrow limits, but they are not of my choosing. Moreover I am profoundly affected as a person by the condition of my body and the happenings which occur in and to it. When my body has a cold or is struck by a car, I have a cold or am struck by a car and there are changes in me, whether temporary or permanent, as a result. Certain conditions in my body can bring about my death. Even if, as traditional Christians believe, that is not the end of me, it certainly

marks a radical change in me as a person; a change regarding which I am more or less at the mercy of what happens in and to my body. There are many other ways in which we embodied creatures are almost entirely dependent upon our bodies. I shall not try to continue the list, but instead point out the sharp contrast this picture affords with what is believed about God's alliance with the world. God is believed by Christians to have chosen to create the world and to have done so out of nothing, to have chosen the very principles by which it operates, to be independent as a personal being of whatever happens to it (however he may care what happens and play a part in its career), and so on. The independence of God in relation to the world was mentioned in part one of this thesis as prominent among those points protected in the doctrine of divine transcendence. It is a point fundamental to orthodox Christianity, and it provides a clear point of disparity with the picture of men's relation to their bodies.* Again, the matter of the possibility of basic action may provide one consideration in favour of seeing God's relation to the world as like the relation of persons to their bodies; but there are other features of the two relationships which appear to stand in sharp opposition. If it is insisted that ascribing to God the power of direct action throughout the cosmos amounts to making the cosmos his body, then it is a body with such a difference that this counter loses its sting. The worry about saying that the world is God's body is in large part that it appears to

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* We have not seen the last of this objection concerning the world as God's body. I have just pointed out that according to the Christian view of things God is independent of the world in a way that provides a contrast with our relation to our bodies. But it may be countered that there are logical reasons for discounting the Christian view of God's independence. This is an objection we shall encounter in Chapter XIV (pp. 365-75).

entail a crude pantheism. The two points I have just adduced are but a sample of those in which the fundamental dualism between God and cosmos is expressed in traditional Christianity, whatever is said as well about the immanence of God in general and the scope of his basic action in particular. The Christian may be wrong about the facts concerning the relation of God to his creation, but it is clear that he is not committed by what he believes to the view that God is corporeal. The range of our basic action is but one thread in the network of considerations which single out a particular physical entity as my body or yours. The rest of the network, I have suggested, shows some striking differences from the complexities of God's alleged relation to the world.

I have been considering two possible objections to my defense of the notion of incorporeal agency. It is time now to face a criticism more radical than either of these. It lies in arguing that the difficulty lies not so much in the idea of incorporeal <u>activity</u>, as in the idea assumed by that notion of an incorporeal <u>person</u>.

CHAPTER XIII

IDENTIFICATION, BODIES AND PERSONS

In the previous chapter we entertained one sort of objection to considering God as an agent. The objection we considered is based on the fact that in the scheme of traditional Christian doctrine, God is regarded as incorporeal. There is a *prima facie* plausibility in supposing that it is necessary to be embodied to perform actions. More precisely, it appears that if we say of any event *e* that it is the action of A, then there must be some bodily movement of A's which is either numerically identical with, or causally productive of, *e*. This is so, it might be thought, partly in virtue of a conceptual requirement built into the notion of agency; namely that there must be criteria for determining which events are actions, and which individuals are the agents, in any given case. We in fact use bodies and, it may be argued, by conceptual necessity *must* use them, in order to determine these two sorts of things. Only by identifying events with the movements of someone's body, or establishing a particular sort of causal connection between the two, may we distinguish actions from other events and agents from non-agents. In reply to this objection it was argued that in fact we normally employ other considerations in addition to identity or causal connection with bodily movements in order to identify some events as actions and some individuals as the relevant agents. The degree to which we also as a matter of fact use bodily criteria in this matter, and that this appears to be a conceptual requirement, may be explained by certain contingent facts concerning *human* agency; e.g. that human creatures happen to have a limited range of basic actions and that we have a plurality of such creatures among

whom we must discriminate in selecting agents. If we suppose these facts not to apply to God's case, it appears that other factors commonly involved in discerning actions and agents -- things like the inherent unlikelihood of an event, its apparent purposefulness, its consonance with what we know of someone's intentions, etc. -- are sufficient to satisfy the logical requirement that we have a means of identifying actions and their authors.

In this chapter we shall encounter a related and yet more fundamental challenge to the notion of divine agency. The objection I am about to set out also proceeds from matters of conceptual requirement having to do with the need to identify particulars. But it goes deeper in basing itself on the requirements of concepts more general than those of 'action' and 'agent'. In brief, the objection is that in regarding God as incorporeal, orthodox Christians violate a very general principle having to do with the identification of any particular whatever, viz. that there be some way of establishing just which individual it is that is being referred to by the use of an individual term. According to this objection, the effect of denying corporeality to God is to undermine the possibility of determining which individual, if any, is referred to by the term 'God'; a possibility which is essential to the inclusion of such an individual in the class of possible existents.

A number of philosophers commenting on religious language have drawn attention to the possibility of such a problem. Ronald Hepburn provides an example.

> If God is to retain the status of an individual which some parts of Christian discourse undoubtedly accord him, we need not only a role-in-the-language

> for "God", like a set of rules for the King in chess, but also an intelligible procedure for referring to God, a set of criteria for identifying him. And this is a demand of logic: one has either to accept it or eliminate that strand in Christian discourse that makes it a demand.*

Antony Flew, in God and Philosophy, puts the point more forcibly.

> ...incorporeal thing is not, despite appearances, an expression for a known and certainly identifiable sort of being: incorporeal by itself is a purely negative term; and where a special sense has been given by philosophers to the expression as a whole it is as equivalent to incorporeal substance. Unfortunately substance is here synonymous with our individual. So we are still left asking how there could be such substances; how, that is, they could be identified. Nor is the situation much improved if we substitute spiritual for incorporeal. For, in so far as this adds some positive meaning, its positive function is presumably to indicate that something possesses some distinctively personal characteristics: whereas our problem is to determine to what the characteristics specified in the definition -- including that of being personal and, in particular, wise and good -- are supposed to belong.**

The grounding of this objection in conceptual requirements of a very general kind deserves detailed exposition and argument. I shall develop the point on the basis of what is arguably the most meticulous explication to date of this idea of this conceptual requirement of identification, found in P.F. Strawson's Individuals. Strawson's aim is the exposition, for its own sake, of some of the most general features of our conceptual scheme. The discussion is accordingly

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* 'From World to God', p. 42.

** Flew, God and Philosophy, p. 32f. Other observations of this point are included in Coburn's 'The Hiddenness of God and Some Parmecidal God Surrogates', and Hampshire's 'Identification and Existence'.

carried on at a highly abstract level, at the same time consisting in a large number of arguments which are both subtle and ingenious. Any abridgement of such a discussion must involve some misrepresentation. Even in setting out those parts of it that bear directly on the topic of God's identifiability I must leave out steps in the argument that are important to an assessment of its soundness. Nevertheless, even an imperfect summary of Strawson's argument will help us to see the basis of this objection to God's conceivability.

A. The Requirement of Identifiability

Plainly a key feature of the thesis on which this objection is based is the contention that a minimum logical requirement of terms meant for reference to particulars is that there exist ways of identifying particulars of that sort. Strawson does not attempt any rigorous characterization of the term 'particular', contenting himself with an explication by illustration. As he uses the expression, "historical occurrences, material objects, people and their shadows are all particulars; whereas qualities and properties, numbers and species are not".* In Strawson's view, this sort of use conforms to an accepted philosophical tradition. Concerning the phrase 'identification of particulars' Strawson is more explicit. For present purposes, the expression derives its significance from the sort of situation normally obtaining between speaker and hearer. Correspondingly, we have what might be called a speaker's and a hearer's sense of 'identification'. The speaker 'identifies a particular' when he refers to some particular in such a way that the hearer is enabled to determine which particular is being referred to. In determining

* Strawson, p. 15.

which particular is being referred to by the speaker, the hearer identifies that particular. Notice that the success of the speaker in identifying a particular is dependent upon his success in enabling his hearer to identify it. Short of this, the speaker may in Strawson's terms make an 'identifying reference' to a particular without succeeding in actually identifying it.

It is in this two-sided sense of 'identify' that it is held one must (logically) be able to identify particulars of any kind before we can consider them to be possible objects of reference. In Strawson's words, "That it should be possible to identify particulars of a given type seems a necessary condition of the inclusion of that type in our ontology."* The requirement is, therefore, that there must exist some means whereby a speaker can acquaint a hearer with the particular to which he is making reference. Any alleged particular which is of a kind that rules out such a procedure also rules itself out as a referent. In Strawson's terms again, it bars itself from our ontology. Possible referents, possible members of our ontology, must in their nature provide a way by which speakers may make reference to them so that a hearer may understand which individual is being mentioned.

Why is this so? Well, asks Strawson, what could we mean by saying that some class of things exists and/or that other things are true of it, or some members of it, but that it is in principle impossible for us to enable each other to tell just which things these claims are being made about? "The qualification would seem to stultify the claim."** If we assert that some specific term has an application,

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* Ibid., p. 16.

** Ibid.

i.e. that such-and-such a thing exists, and/or that this or that is the case regarding some specific thing or set of things, but admit that it is impossible in principle for us to put others in the position of determining which things are declared to exist or be in some state or other, then what have we said? If we attribute existence or some quality to a particular thing, or mention it in any other way, but deny the logical possibility of identifying that thing, then it appears we might as well have used a nonsense syllable in place of the expression with which we meant to refer to it. Saying something about an in-principle-unspecifiable seems indistinguishable from saying nothing at all. Someone who is told that such a thing exists has not had his list of existing things added to. In fact someone told anything about such a thing has not had his list of facts added to. It is essential to the act of referring that it pick out from all the things that could be referred to, some selection which on that occasion actually is referred to. Admitting that it is in principle impossible to specify which things have on some occasion been picked out in this way amounts to an admission that no genuine, or at least successful, reference has been made.

Recognizing on grounds like these the logical necessity of identifiability, what sorts of things in fact allow for the possibility of identification? What is it in the nature of a thing that provides the means whereby this logical requirement may be met?

Before attempting to answer this, we must recognize the possibility suggested by Strawson of a general and fundamental dependence of some sorts of particulars upon others for purposes of identification. It is plain that in ordinary discourse the identification of some sorts

of particular is as a matter of fact made dependent upon the identification of a particular of some other kind, as in the 'house that Jack built' or 'the assassin of Abraham Lincoln'. What this raises is the possibility that some kinds of particulars may in some general way depend on the identification of other kinds. Accordingly, particulars of this dependent sort, if there are any, need not in themselves supply the means of identification directly, though they must at least provide a means of relating them uniquely to particulars of the kind on which they depend.

Now we may return to the question of what in general a class of particulars must be like in order to provide for the possibility of identification. One step in answering this question would be to look for a more precise understanding of the conditions of identification. Strawson's explication of this point is as follows.* A speaker satisfies the conditions of making an identifying reference when he makes a genuine reference to a particular about which or whom he knows some individuating fact. A genuine reference has been made when there is in fact a particular answering to the description used by the speaker to refer; or if he uses a name, then to some description he is prepared to substitute for the name. The speaker knows an individuating fact about such a particular when he knows something true of that particular and no other. These are the circumstances in which a speaker makes an identifying reference. If, of course, his making this reference enables a hearer to identify that same particular, then the speaker has not only made an identifying reference; he has identified that particular. It follows

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* Ibid., pp. 23 and 181-3.

from this description of a speaker's performance of identifying reference that hearer-identification will have occurred when the hearer knows that the particular mentioned is numerically identical with one about which he knows some individuating fact, other than that it is the one being referred to.*

From this statement of the conditions of identification we may extract a contribution toward answering our question about the way in which particulars might meet the requirements of identification. Particulars meet these requirements, it would appear, when they are such as to allow for the formation of individuating facts about them. The question now is, what is it about a type of particular that might allow for the recognition of this sort of fact?

B. The System We Use for Identification

A further contribution to answering this question may be had by paying attention to the way(s) in which we do, as a matter of fact, identify particulars; granting that we seldom have occasion to make our identifications so complete and explicit as to exhibit precisely that form just suggested for identification.

The most obvious and clear-cut way in which we identify particulars for each other is by indicating in some way a particular available to sense-perception in the immediate vicinity of the hearer.

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* In order to rule out what he calls 'story-relative' identification, i.e. identification strictly within the framework of a range of particulars identifiable only as those being spoken of by someone, Strawson adds a further condition: "...the known individuating fact must not be such that its statement essentially involves identifying the particular in question by reference to someone's discourse about it, or about any other particular by reference to which it is identified." (p. 23)

General descriptions accompanied by demonstratives (e.g. 'That blue car over there') are a common way of doing this. So also is pointing, with or without the aid of a description. Identifications of this kind, which we may call 'demonstrative identifications', enable the hearer to locate directly the particular referred to. Enabling him to do this is, of course, a sufficient condition of particular-identification. It is not a necessary condition, clearly, since very often we have occasion to identify something not in the immediate vicinity of our audience. How do we do this? It might be thought that here we must be thrown back on the resources of completely general descriptions; i.e. descriptions free of demonstratives and the like, which have the effect of locating the particular with respect to oneself. Now in practice we often do secure non-demonstrative identifications in this way, but to rest with that observation ignores two things. One is that we may do this only because we can take for granted a great deal about the people with whom we communicate; that they share with us assumptions about the contents of given sectors of the universe, and so on. Second, it is always possible and frequently necessary to identify particulars which are not sensibly present, in a way that guarantees the uniqueness of our descriptio 's application;* that involves, in a way that it seems purely general descriptions do not, the mention of an identifying fact. The way in which we achieve this, says Strawson, is by linking up non-demonstrative identification with demonstrative. If we relate particulars which are not present to us, to those that are, we are enabled to give a unique characterization of each of them in virtue of

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* Given any general description, it always seems at least theoretically possible that there should be more than one particular answering to it, though we may knowingly share the assumption that there is only one. (p. 20)

the spatio-temporal relation they have with those things we can sensibly identify. In fact this is precisely what we do, or at least rely on being able to do.

Strawson therefore contends that as it happens we employ a single fundamental method of identifying particulars; specifically one relying on the use of a single spatio-temporal system with ourselves and our immediate place in that system as a central reference point. It is this framework, Strawson claims, in which we and our immediate environment have a place, and in which each particular enjoys a unique relationship with every other and therefore to ourselves and our setting. It is this framework, and this framework alone, that in his view allows us to add new particulars to our stock of existents. For only by relating such novelties to the contents of our ontology as defined by this system can we satisfy the requirements of identification. Not that a person must be able to specify the precise spatio-temporal coordinates of any particular in order to identify it. But his view of such a particular must be such that it is seen as having a location of this sort at least within a very large range of spatio-temporal particulars, which may then be located within the framework as a whole.

But, granted that a scheme of this sort would provide for the kind of individuating facts we have recognized to be essential, is it the case even in the techniques we in fact employ for identification that this is the <u>only</u> way of generating individuating facts? All that is required by the conditions of identification is that there be <u>some</u> kind of relation such that given an identified particular, P, there is some thing which under a certain description is given a unique relation

to P by the terms of that relation. Any relation which generates this possibility will provide for individuating facts and hence the procedure of identification. Why should the spatio-temporal system centred on our immediate surroundings be the only, or even an especially important, way of supplying these unique relationships?

Strawson's answer is that only this system is comprehensive enough to provide for all our needs in relating particulars to one another for purposes of identification.

> ...the system of spatio-temporal relations has a peculiar comprehensiveness and pervasiveness, which qualify it uniquely to serve as the framework within which we can organize our individuating thought about particulars. Every particular either has its place in this system, or is of a kind the members of which cannot in general be identified except by reference to particulars of other kinds which have their place in it; and every particular which has its place in the system has a unique place there. There is no other system of relations between particulars of which all this is true.*

Strawson acknowledges the possibility of a persistent general doubt at this point. Why must it be the case that an individuating fact is such as to relate the relevant particular in some way to item(s) including those in our immediate surroundings? Why is it not enough to specify a unique relationship with some other particular(s), regardless of whether these are members of that framework which finally relates things to ourselves and our setting? It is easy to guarantee the unique application of a description by including phrases like 'the only...' or 'the first...', etc. We might call these 'logically individuating descriptions'.** Some of these descriptions

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* Ibid., p. 26.

** Ibid., p. 26.

may be framed so as to exclude proper names of persons or places, dates, demonstratives, or other features that implicate their referents in the unified scheme which includes ourselves and surroundings. These we might dub 'pure individuating descriptions'.* (Examples would be 'the first dog born at sea' and 'the only dog born at sea which subsequently saved a monarch's life'.) Surely we might know in the case of some descriptions of this sort that they have an application, and in such circumstances any speaker and hearer who accepted the description must understand its application to be numerically the same. Would this not constitute a case of individuation independent of the general scheme which includes us and what is close to us? It appears we have at least the possibility of counter-examples to the claim that only the unified spatio-temporal system including ourselves can provide adequately for the identification of particulars.

But, replies Strawson, this possibility is merely a theoretical one. For one thing, if we imagine a case in which speaker and hearer communicate about a particular identified only in this way, it is hard to suppose that speaker and hearer can in fact know (apart from speculations based on probability) that the term has an application. If they admit to being unable to say <u>anything</u> about the particular which locates it in any way with respect to the items of our familiar framework, then what grounds could they have? But even if this defect is remediable, Strawson points out that there is another difficulty. A particular identified only in this way could have no place in our overall scheme of knowledge. We could learn nothing about it save by learning new general truths which bear upon it. And presumably its

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* <u>Ibid.</u>

existence could make no difference to our dealings with the world except in our answers to a certain set of purely theoretical questions.

Strawson's view is, therefore, that we have a single fundamental scheme for supplying individuating facts and therefore for allowing us to identify particulars. It is a unified spatio-temporal system, with ourselves and immediate environment as a point of reference. And there is, he argues, abundant reason why this is the system we should use.

C. The Requirement of Re-Identifiability

So far, it has been argued that (1) the possibility of identification is essential to the inclusion of particulars of any given type in our ontology, or list of possible referents; (2) for purposes of identification we rely upon a unified system of spatio-temporal relations with ourselves and immediate setting at its centre, which provides us with the possibility of recognizing individuating facts about any individual; and (3) only this system seems comprehensive enough to permit the scope of identification that we have at our disposal. Now Strawson brings to light another condition of this system's functioning in the way it does. If it is granted that this is the conceptual scheme we use, then a specific condition can be inferred from the fact that we relate material things to each other not only at a given time but at different times. (We say, for instance, that A now is where B was five minutes or ten days before.) This can be done, Strawson points out, only if we accept without question the numerical identity through time of at least some particulars. That is, we must be able to say of some particulars referred to on a specific occasion not only <u>which</u> particulars they are, but that they are numerically identical with some particulars mentioned on another occasion. We must

be able not only to identify particulars, but also to re-identify them.

The argument Strawson gives for this is quite a general one.* Although it is clear that we may sometimes identify a member of the spatio-temporal scheme in terms of its position relative to other members, it is equally clear that not all our identifications can be made relative in this way. We need some kind of centre or primary reference to anchor our system. The observation that we may identify some such elements ostensively is of no help here, for two reasons that operate together. One is that the best this could give us would be a series of anchors, since our location from occasion to occasion is by no means static. The other is that a series of anchors such as this point provides, allows us no way of tying together the different occasions on which we refer to particulars some of which we identify with one another. In order to have a single, continuously usable system of the kind we have, we must regard some particulars as maintaining their identity from occasion to occasion within it. Otherwise, the centre provided by ourselves and immediate setting supplies the basis for a system only on that occasion. Unless some of the particulars from that occasion can be numerically linked with particulars on another, there is no way of bringing together the two systems established by our two spatial locations at different points in time.

A point which lies behind this argument is one with which Strawson insists the criteria of re-identification must cope. It is that our observation of the universe is limited and discontinuous both in space and time. Each of us observes less than all of the universe

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* Ibid., p. 32.

at any given time (our field of observation is limited); our observation of any part of it is never free of interruption (e.g. we sleep); and the point from which we observe it does not remain fixed (we move about). It follows that observed continuity of spatial boundaries and/or spatial relations cannot be the basic standard by which we determine the recurrence of numerically identical particulars. Of course it is possible to think, as Hume appeared to, that this is the only sort of criterion that would suffice to guarantee re-identification. Since we lack such a standard, it might be said, we cannot really distinguish numerical from qualitative identity except in that very limited number of cases where we have continuous observation. According to the sceptic, we must choose between altering the sense of 'numerical identity', and retaining it but being forever unsure as to whether the concept has an application outside continuously observed settings.

Strawson's reply to the sceptic's position* is that in its statement of the problem it must assume the very conceptual scheme it impugns. A doubt about the numerical identity of some particular at one time and place with a particular at another time and place makes sense only if the two places and occasions are in fact regarded as elements of a single system of places and times. Unless they are so regarded there can be no question of, let alone doubt about, there being numerical identity over the gap that divides them. One can doubt, in this sense of believing it impossible to know for sure, the numerical identity of two things only if they are at least candidates for numerical identity. But they are candidates for such identity

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* Ibid., p. 35f.

only if they are members of a single conceptual scheme. It is a condition of having such a unified scheme that we should assume, and therefore have criteria for, the continuity of some particulars over elements in the scheme. Otherwise, as has been pointed out, we should simply have a series of independent systems. So, Strawson charges, the sceptic casts doubt upon the conceptual scheme which we manifestly employ, and in terms of which alone the sceptical question makes sense.*

This, then, is a consideration which our criteria of re-identification must take into account: that whatever criteria we have must work in the absence of continuous and unlimited observation. The basis of these criteria is discovered when we turn to the next topic given attention by Strawson; that of 'basic particulars'.

D. Material Bodies as Basic Particulars

The subject of basic particulars is introduced in the question, asked by Strawson, whether there is a single distinguishable class of particulars which must be 'basic' for purposes of identification, given an overall spatio-temporal scheme of the kind he has suggested. The meaning of 'basic particular' is exposed in the two questions which are seen by Strawson as the outcome of that initial query.

> First, is there a class or category of particulars such that, as things are, it would not be possible to make all the identifying references which we do make to particulars of other classes, unless we made identifying references to particulars of that class, whereas it

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* Strawson notes (p. 35f) that it is possible to construe the sceptic's claim as the recommendation of a different conceptual framework from the one we have; a recommendation which there seems no good reason to follow.

> would be possible to make all the identifying references we do make to particulars of that class without making identifying reference to particulars of other classes? Second, can we argue to an affirmative answer to this question from the general character of the conceptual scheme I have described.*

It will be remembered that according to Strawson we can identify and have identified for us the particulars of which we speak to one another because we share a unified picture of the world. The basis of this shared picture is a framework composed of one temporal and three spatial dimensions. Now from the character of this framework, Strawson argues, we can in fact infer the existence and character of particulars which are basic in the sense just explicated. The reason is that the framework is in fact made up by certain of the particulars which may thus be identified on the basis of that framework's employment. These particulars must be such that they can project their character onto the framework of which they are the skeleton. That is, the spatio-temporal nature of the framework must be something read off from the nature of these 'basic particulars'. Specifically, they must be space and time-occupying particulars in themselves. As well, they must be accessible to our limited powers of observation, and be diverse and yet stable enough to generate the sort of conceptual scheme we in fact employ. The only category of particulars which meets these requirements is, in Strawson's view, that of 'material bodies'.**

Arguments for the basic-ness of material bodies do not end,

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* Ibid., p. 38f.

** Strawson proposes a loose sense of 'material bodies' according to which even, for instance, purely visual occupiers-of-space might count as such.

Strawson submits, with the very general and imprecise argument just advanced. There are other considerations which point to the dependence of certain classes of particulars upon others for purposes of identification, and to one class as basic in this respect. To begin with, we acknowledge such things as 'private particulars' (e.g. sensations and mental events) and 'theoretical constructs', both of which are at least roughly dependent in the above sense.

> A twinge of toothache or a private impression of red cannot in general be identified in our common language except as the twinge which such-and-such an individual person suffered or is suffering, the impression which such-and-such a person is having.*

Of such theoretical entities as the particles of physics, he says;

> in so far as we do make identifying references to particulars of this sort, we must ultimately identify them, or groups of them, by identifying reference to those grosser, observable bodies of which perhaps, like Locke, we think of them as the minute, unobservable constituents.**

The identification of 'private particulars' and 'theoretical contructs' accordingly depends, if Strawson is right, on the identification respectively of persons and (roughly) medium-sized physical objects. It is even the case, he argues, that there are particulars which we may

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* Ibid., p. 41. Strawson admits that this is not a 'pure' case of dependence, as it might be that an experience could be identified as the one and only experience of that kind occurring in a specific place and at a specified time. A person reliably informed that this description had an application would be in a position to identify such an experience when reference is made to it, without identifying it as the experience of some identifiable person. However, Strawson points out, an expression referring to such an experience could gain currency only by someone's being able to identify the sufferer independently of the experience suffered.

** Ibid., p. 44.

describe on occasion as 'observable' which nevertheless are identification-dependent in a similar way. Relatively sophisticated sorts of particulars such as strikes and lock-outs may be observed, but could not be spoken of if we did not have the concepts of men, tools and factories. The sense, therefore, in which basic particulars must be observable is that "different people can quite literally see or hear or feel by contact or taste or smell the same objects of these kinds."*

But even this characteristic of direct locatability is a necessary but not sufficient condition of basic-ness in particulars. Public events and processes are in this sense observable, and their identification on a specific occasion may be quite independent of the identification of particulars of any other kind. (One can, for instance, identify a flash or a bang without necessarily identifying something that flashed or banged.) But such particulars suffer from a fatal disadvantage when considered as candidates for basic particularhood. By themselves they do not always offer a means of identifying themselves or the other things of which we ordinarily speak. That is, it is not the case that there is always some member of a series of such events or processes which anyone can locate directly; nor is it true that all such members can be identified solely in terms of their mutual relations. So in practice, we frequently must appeal to particulars of a different sort, such as those that establish a place from which the event, etc., may be observed. This is so because there seems to be no single, unified system of these particulars (such as flashes and bangs) such that we are always located at some point within

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* Ibid., p. 45.

it and each element may be related to every other.*

Of course it is in precisely this respect that material bodies enjoy an enormous advantage over particulars of other kinds in the contest for 'basic' status.

> Material bodies, in a broad sense of the word, secure to us one single common and continuously extendable framework of reference, any constituent of which can be identifyingly referred to without reference to any particular of any other type.**

Strawson therefore finds one argument for the basic-ness of material bodies in the requirement that a basic particular be of a kind that is capable of supplying a common, comprehensive framework for the identification of particulars of its own kind as well as others. Yet another argument, he claims, is found in the requirement mentioned earlier of criteria for re-identification. If we think of any standard process, such as a thaw or a battle, it turns out to be in principle impossible to specify a way of identifying some thaw or battle as the same one again which does not entail reference to material bodies of some kind; whether to fix its location, or specify the things undergoing the change, or in some other way relate the process in question to that scheme with which we all work. Material bodies, on the other hand, provide the means by themselves of re-identifying objects of that kind; namely existence extended in both space and time.

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* Strawson points out that a great many events and processes are unlike flashes and bangs in being by conceptual necessity happenings to something else. Strawson prefers to rest little weight on this sort of argument (p. 52) since in his view it has no explanatory power; i.e. does not suggest any account of why there is this conceptual requirement.

** Ibid., p. 54.

Strawson's conclusion, therefore, is that

> Both from the point of view ... of distinguishing a particular non-demonstratively referred to from others of the same general kind, and from the point of view of identifying a particular encountered on one occasion, or described in respect of one occasion, with a particular encountered on another, or described in respect of another, we find that material bodies play a unique and fundamental role in particular-identification.*

E. Persons

The idea of identification is intimately connected with the essential business of distinguishing particulars one from another. One specific area in which this procedure is essential but potentially perplexing is that involving the category of persons. Among the distinctions we make in this area is a crucial one between those things that are, and those things that are not, either oneself or a state of oneself. Now, asks Strawson, how is it that we make this distinction and why do we make it in the way that we do?

To begin with, it is a fundamental fact, and one that easily gives rise to puzzlement, that we ascribe to ourselves predicates of two quite distinct kinds. On the one hand, we often speak of ourselves in the same way that we speak of ordinary material objects; we speak of our dimensions, weight, colouring and so on. At the same

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* Ibid., p. 56. Strawson further maintains (chapter 2) that material bodies are not merely basic in our system of particular-identification, but necessarily in any unified scheme composed of spatio-temporal relations. Indeed the arguments summarized above have that implication. This necessity has been contested, e.g. by Urmson in his review of Individuals, pp. 259-60. I shall not try to challenge or defend Strawson on this point, since his statement of the position according to which material bodies are basic to the scheme we in fact have is sufficient, I think, to launch a case against the identifiability of God.

time, however, we frequently speak of ourselves in terms which either concern or at least imply the having of consciousness; terms which we would not think of applying to material objects *per se*. There are, Strawson notes, two connected mysteries in this fact. One is that we ascribe our states of consciousness to anything at all.* The other is that we appear to ascribe them to the same thing as we do certain corporeal characteristics.

Strawson's contention is that the only adequate way of coping with these mysteries is to recognize the idea of a person as a *primitive* concept; which is to say that this concept is not to be analyzed in terms of other more fundamental concepts such as, for instance, that of an animated body or an embodied anima.** The concept of a person

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* In the context of my abridged account, it may not be apparent that or why this is a mystery. Strawson brings out the strangeness of this commonplace by imagining (in chapter 2 of *Individuals*) a purely auditory world, and showing how difficult it appears to be to suppose that in such a world one would have any grip for a distinction between oneself and other entities and therefore for the idea of oneself as a subject of experience. That in our world, which is admittedly of quite a different kind, we should have room for such concepts is thus seen to require some explanation.

** *Ibid.*, pp. 101-3. Strawson does consider other points of view which might be taken to solve these mysteries. (1) Facts about the special position occupied by a certain body in the experience of each of us do not account for them, though they help explain why it is that if one must select some body as his body one makes the choice one does. (2) "Cartesianism", according to which 'I' refers to either of two distinct substances, avoids the question of why we ascribe our states of consciousness to the same thing as certain corporeal characteristics, but pays the price of leaving no room for an answer to the other question. (One can identify oneself as a subject of consciousness only if one can also identify others. If these are construed solely as possessors of private experiences, then others will never be identifiable, since the private experiences one encounters are all one's own. p. 100.) (3) The "No-ownership" theory also avoids the question about applying consciousness-predicates and corporeal-predicates to the same thing, by asserting that 'I' in the former sort of case does not designate an owner. But it is incoherent in that the collection of experiences which, on this theory, are only contingently connected with the career of a certain body cannot in fact be discriminated if the theory is correct (pp. 96-7). Where both Cartesianism and the No-ownership theory go wrong, is, in Strawson's view, in assuming that there must be two distinct uses of 'I'; an assumption rejected in his view of the concept of a person as 'primitive'.

as we use it, is of an entity "such that both predicates ascribing states of consciousness and predicates ascribing corporeal characteristics ... are equally applicable to a single individual of that single type."*

Now acknowledging the concept of a person as a concept of this sort has two very important advantages. It first of all provides us with a basis for identifying and re-identifying persons; and second, secures the possibility of logically adequate criteria for the ascription of particular states of consciousness to other persons than ourselves. Both of these things are supplied in a way that is consistent with Strawson's findings on the subject of basic particulars.

On the matter of identifying and re-identifying persons, the fact that persons are essentially entities such that they possess both corporeal and consciousness-entailing attributes means that in their corporeality may be found the basis for identifying persons in thought and speech. Their corporeality also provides for determining the numerical identity of persons with one another over various occasions of acquaintance. We determine which person is referred to on any occasion by determining which uniquely determinable set of corporeal characteristics is the one had by that person. The essential corporeality of persons thus allows for the recognition of individuating facts about them. At the same time it allows us to identify 'private particulars', i.e. thoughts, feelings, sensations, etc. We identify these things by first of all identifying, via their corporeality, the persons whose private particulars they are. And the temporal continuity of the body having that set of characteristics allows us to frame and to apply criteria of 'same person' over various occasions of encounter

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* Ibid., p. 102.

and reference.*

The matter of ascribing consciousness-entailing characteristics is somewhat more complicated. It is important first of all to recognize the necessity of there being logically adequate criteria for ascriptions of this kind to persons other than oneself. If we did not have such criteria, argues Strawson, then we should have to think of the relation between our ways of telling whether a person is, say, depressed, and his depression, as exclusively that between sign and what is signified. But then we could only have learned of this relation by observing what is signified and its signs independently. In only one case could we do this; our own. But the notion of 'our own case' cannot exist apart from our knowing it exists as one case among many. We could have no conception of our own case if we did not already have the idea of many cases. So generalization from our own experience cannot be the only way we have of learning about other subjects of experience, since the concept of 'our own experience' assumes a previous knowledge of other subjects. It follows that the ways we have of learning about the experiences of others cannot <u>all</u> be related to these experiences as signs are to what they signify. At least some of these ways must constitute logically adequate criteria; i.e. criteria such that it is irrational in <u>some</u> circumstances at least to grant the truth of certain propositions and yet deny or remain agnostic about certain others concerning the experiences of some person.

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* Strawson is careful to acknowledge (p. 133) that the criteria of personal identity are multiple, and not the same as the criteria for re-identifying material objects. His point is merely that personal corporeality provides a necessary grip for the criteria of personal identity.

Having established the need for criteria of this kind in the case of consciousness-entailing predicates, Strawson's way of locating their basis is easily foreseen. We learn of the states of consciousness of other people, he points out, by observing their behaviour; i.e. on the basis of certain truths connected with the corporeality of those people. And some kinds of behaviour which serve as the basis of our learning, in fact constitute logically adequate criteria. So it is that the essential corporeality of persons fulfils a second conceptual need having to do with persons; viz. that of providing of logically adequate means of learning about their states of consciousness.*

So it is that the notion of a person necessarily includes, in Strawson's view, a corporeal aspect. The necessity arises, he argues, from the need to identify and re-identify persons, and also to ascribe consciousness-entailing predicates to other persons. Given the nature of the spatio-temporal system within which we work, the corporeal aspect of persons is required to meet these needs.

Briefly and roughly, then, Strawson's programme amounts to

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* Strawson's position on this point leads to a further question to which he pays considerable attention. It appears that we ascribe many predicates of this kind (Strawson calls them "P-predicates") to other persons on the basis of logically adequate criteria, but to ourselves on no such basis. It appears odd that terms with such disparate canons of application can mean the same thing no matter which canons are used. But, says Strawson, it is simply a feature of P-predicates "that they are both self-ascribable otherwise than on the basis of observation of the behaviour of the subject of them, and other-ascribable on the basis of behavioural criteria. To learn their use is to learn both aspects of their use." (p. 108) This contention is one that has aroused considerable controversy. See, for instance, Rollins, 'Personal Predicates'; also the discussion launched by Freed and Fodor in 'Pains, Puns, Persons and Pronouns', and continued in Mannison 'On the Alleged Ambiguity of Strawson's P-Predicates', Gary Iseminger 'Meaning, Criteria and P-Predicates', and Freed and Fodor 'Some Types of Ambiguous Tokens'.

this: (1) A necessary condition of our including things of a certain type in our ontology is that we are able to identify particulars of that type. (2) The fundamental method of identification that we use requires a spatio-temporal system with ourselves as point of reference. (3) The only category of particulars which can constitute the basis of such a system is that of space and time-occupying objects; i.e. material bodies. (4) In order to be included in our ontology a type of thing must either be, or be uniquely relatable to, a particular material body.

F. The Case Against God's Identifiability

Strawson's programme is not without its critics.* I shall not attempt to identify or assess their criticisms here, but proceed on the assumption that his thesis is substantially correct, as indeed I think it is. The pro's and con's of Strawson's case must be argued elsewhere, and even if a negative assessment of it emerges the worst this is likely to mean is that we have considered a stronger case against the identifiability of God than can in fact be sustained. Since, as will become apparent, I believe that even this strong case can be met, then no great damage will have been done.

It is not difficult to see how an argument aimed against the idea of God's conceivability might be constructed on the basis of the Strawsonian thesis. God, we need hardly be reminded, is regarded as incorporeal. Now being without a body places an alleged person at an enormous logical disadvantage, it might be argued. The objection is three-fold. First, such a God cannot in principle be identified.

* Footnotes occurring in the course of my summary of Strawson include a number of these.

Second, he could not in principle be re-identified. And third, we can have no way of sensibly ascribing to him any of those 'personal' predicates which either concern or imply conscious states in their subject.

Consider first the argument against God's identifiability. It is a necessary condition of being identifiable that a thing be either a material body or uniquely relatable to some material body. God's incorporeality plainly rules out the possibility that he is a material body. And no matter how much is said in traditional Christianity about the association of God with such things as places of worship, holy men and the sacred elements in the Eucharist, his relation to none of these things is of a kind that supports this dependent form of identification. (Although God is regarded as especially associated with these places, people and things, at the same time he is said to be associated in some fundamental way with everything that there is.) This bodily condition of identifiability is established at a very basic logical level by the fact that we require individuating facts for purposes of identification. Only our spatio-temporal system of reference, with ourselves located in it, can supply a framework for these; and only material bodies can be plotted in such a system. If a thing cannot in principle be identified, that is if there is and can be no way of specifying which thing one is talking about in talking about that thing, then it is difficult to know what to make of discourse in which reference is made to such a thing. But the above considerations show that precisely this logical misdemeanor is committed every time we attempt to talk about God.

Second, there is the problem of divine re-identifiability. Being a material object or enjoying a unique relation to such an object is the ground not only of being identifiable, but also of being identifiable as the same thing or person encountered at another time. This process of re-identification clearly requires criteria; means by which we correctly apply the term 'same thing'. Again, given the spatio-temporal system with which we work, and the basic-ness of material bodies to this system, only enduring bodies of this kind can provide these criteria. God's incorporeality therefore robs him of re-identifiability, so that even if we could sensibly say on two or more occasions that God was, for instance, acting in some way, we could in logic have no way of establishing that the entities referred to by 'God' on these various occasions were numerically the same.

Finally, there is the difficulty of ascribing to God predicates that imply states of consciousness. Strawson has shown it to be no accident that we have a concept of 'person' according to which both corporeal and consciousness-entailing predicates may be ascribed to any such thing. Not only may both be ascribed, but both must be ascribable; partly because without the ascribability of predicates related to corporeality we should have no possibility of logically adequate criteria for the ascription of predicates concerning states of consciousness. There is, then, a logical relation of some kind between 'mental' predicates and 'behavioural' ones. Since God lacks a body, he lacks the only thing which could provide a logical foothold for our talk of him which concerns his mental life or implies that he has one.

This is plainly a strong challenge to the intelligibility of the traditional Christian view of God. It is based on the claim that in regarding God as incorporeal, orthodox Christians pull the logical rug out from under practically all their utterances in which God is mentioned. In the next chapter, we shall consider whether the Christian theist has any reply to this challenge.

PART V

TRANSCENDENT PERSONALITY

CHAPTER XIV

DIVINE IDENTIFICATION, RE-IDENTIFICATION AND MENTALITY

The problem posed in the last chapter is a fundamental one. If sound, the arguments advanced there show that the traditional Christian conception of God is incoherent, in that it includes two logically incompatible elements. On the one hand, God is spoken of as though he is in many important respects like an individual person, complete with a rich mental life. But on the other, it is insisted that he is incorporeal; and in this insistence -- so goes the argument -- the logical possibility of regarding him as an individual of this or any kind is removed, for without a body (1) we can have no way of specifying which individual it is that we are speaking of when we speak of God, (2) we can have no basis for identifying him as the same individual met or mentioned on another occasion, and (3) we cannot give any content to discourse concerning his mental life. Let us consider more closely whether divine incorporeality must in fact entail these three liabilities, each of them fatal in itself to the Christian conception of God.

A. Identifying God*

On the subject of identification, the problem is roughly this. It is a fundamental requirement of cognitively meaningful statements concerning particulars that both speaker and audience are able to pick out, according to some criteria, the particulars mentioned from other

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* What I have to say in these next three sections is prompted in part by remarks made by Terence Penelhum in Survival and Disembodied Existence, p. 108; and in Religion and Rationality, pp. 154-7.

particulars which could be mentioned. Material bodies are basic to this procedure in that we select particulars on the basis of which body they are, or which body they possess a unique relationship with. In saying that God is incorporeal, Christians rule out the possibility that God is either a body or uniquely related to some body, and therefore seem to disqualify God as an identifiable being. The effect appears to be a denial that God can be mentioned in any meaningful statement.

The theist's reply to this begins, I think, with his emphasis on the unique character of God and, accordingly, the identification-procedure that is appropriate to him. In the instance of God, he is apt to insist, we are not selecting for comment some member from among those that either compose the physical universe or are uniquely related to specific parts of it. What we are doing when we speak of God is picking out an individual who is distinct <u>in kind</u> from those in the world, and whose relationship to the world is such that he underlies all of it. Granted, in the case of particulars in the world, only a unified spatio-temporal scheme, and therefore material bodies, can provide us with the basis of identifying these particulars as we do. But this system need not, in fact cannot, extend to the identification of individuals alleged to be both numerically and qualitatively distinct from the world and everything in it. Of course it is still the case that even if God is not being selected for comment from other objects in the world, he is still being selected from the class of possible referents. There must therefore be a way or ways of identifying him within this class, even if these are not the same ways as those appropriate to identification within the

spatio-temporal realm. The answer to this need has already been suggested. God is distinguished from the world and its constituents by being of a different kind. We may identify God, therefore, by specifying something of his distinctive character. God, according to the orthodox Christian theist, is the only one who satisfies a certain kind of general description; and that is what enables speakers and hearers to select God from all those things that could be referred to, as the only one actually referred to on some occasions.

This point may be put more precisely with the aid of a distinction. Let us acknowledge a general difference between two sorts of identification: one sort I shall call 'individual-identification' ('I-identification' for short); and the other, 'type-identification' ('T-identification'). I-identification is the kind assumed in the challenge under consideration. It involves picking out one thing from among all the things that might be referred to. T-identification, on the other hand, has just entered our discussion. It is the kind of identification according to which a thing is specified as being of a certain type. (I use the word 'type' quite broadly to include anything that is individuated by a purely general description, i.e. a description entirely free of expressions which effect location in the unified spatio-temporal system.) To make the contrast clear: a speaker performs an I-identification when he enables a hearer to determine which thing, of all the things he might mention, he is mentioning; he performs a T-identification when he enables a hearer to recognize which type of thing, out of all the types of thing he might refer to, he is referring to. Briefly, the theist may argue that in the case of God, T-identification is sufficient to effect

I-identification. God, he may say, unlike particulars constituting the physical world, may be distinguished from all other possible topics of conversation by his kind alone. Specifying the sort of being you are mentioning is, in the instance of God, enough to enable a hearer to recognize which being you are talking about.

Now the suggestion that description in general terms alone might be sufficient to achieve identification, i.e. that T-identification might suffice for I-identification, is one that Strawson entertains but discards. It is worth recalling the grounds on which he rejects this possibility, in order to see whether a defense can be made of accepting it in the case of God. The defense that we shall find being made for accepting it here turns out to involve an important and additional point to the one already made concerning God's uniqueness in kind.

The trouble with purely general descriptions as a means of identification, argues Strawson, is that there is no way of ensuring the exclusiveness of their application. He admits that in practice we often do secure particular-identification by means of description in general terms alone. If, for instance, we knowingly share the belief that there is only one extant snow leopard, it might well be enough to refer simply to 'the snow leopard' to ensure that speaker and hearer picked out the same particular. But this means is effective, Strawson suggests, only because we can assume shared beliefs of this kind. The fact that such a particular has a uniquely specifiable place in relation to those things we can identify demonstratively is not something we need always to rehearse. Nevertheless it is there. Even if practical circumstances often obviate our need to make explicit the

demonstrative element in our identification of particulars, the fact that we may always do so is an important fact about the conceptual scheme we use. It means that we always have at our disposal a means of identification which guarantees its own exclusiveness. T-identification, where it does secure I-identification, therefore only does so by courtesy of our sharing assumptions about the de facto uniqueness of some general description's application. The fact that we may always in principle invoke the demonstratively-related method of identification backs up and supports this practical expedient.

The crucial notion in the procedure of I-identification is that of the individuating fact. It is precisely the shortcoming of T-identifications as I-identifications that they fail to provide for the recognition of truly individuating facts. They do not, and it seems cannot, offer us any assurance that there is in each case only one individual of which the description they offer is a true description. It may be that we believe, in the case of some type, that there is only one individual of that kind. It may even be that we are right to believe this. But this lack of duplication seems inevitably to be a contingent fact, where it is a fact. No scheme of identification which would fail to allow us to distinguish more than one individual of a certain type could be a basic scheme.

We can now see that the need to distinguish among individuals of the same kind or type is decisive in determining the kind of identification-schemes we employ. T-identifications might be theoretically as well as practically adequate for I-identifications, were it not for the fact that given the general description constituting any T-identification, we can never be theoretically certain that it

applies uniquely. It is therefore essential that our means of I-identification provide for the selection of one particular from others of the same kind, as part of its provision for the selection of one particular from among all those that could be singled out for mention. It is mainly in order to meet this need that the basic-ness of demonstrative identification, and with it the basic-ness of material bodies, become features of our identification-procedures.

I have suggested that the theist's reply to demands for identification-criteria may begin with an emphasis on the unique character of God. In fact this uniqueness may be taken as entailing a unique sort of identification-procedure; one which capitalizes precisely on God's uniqueness. God, it might be said, is identified by his being of such a special kind. In saying this, the theist admits, in fact insists, that God is not being picked out from other possible referents in the world. He is picked out as distinct from the world and anything in it by his nature. He is identified by being of a different kind.

What this amounts to is the claim that in God's case T-identification may secure I-identification. The objection we have just rehearsed to T-identifications as I-identifications would have it that whatever expression we use to designate God's type, it can afford no guarantee that there is only one thing of that type. Short of such a guarantee, we lack an individuating fact. And without an individuating fact we have no identification.

I believe that the theist has a reply to this, and that in his reply is revealed something important about the special character of God. Suppose we adopt as a minimum T-identification of God the

expression 'incorporeal person'. The objection we can anticipate to thinking of this as individually-identifying God, is that this or any T-identification must leave open the question of how many individuals there are of the specified type. Identifying God as an incorporeal person merely tells us what kind of particular he is. It does not enable us by itself to determine which particular is being referred to, since some of the particulars from which a selection must be provided for are particulars of the same type. It is at least logically possible that there are more incorporeal persons than one.

To this the theist may reply that in fact it is not logically possible that there should be more than one incorporeal person, and this precisely on grounds laid out in Strawson's discussion. One of Strawson's arguments for the conceptual necessity of corporeal characteristics in persons is, roughly, that without them we should lack any principle of individuation amongst them.* It seems open to the theist to accept that talk of a plurality of incorporeal persons is unintelligible for reasons of this kind. On just those grounds, he may insist, it can be shown that 'incorporeal person' must have a unique reference; unique in the sense that there can be only one type of thing deserving such a description, and there exists, in logic, no way of discriminating particular persons within that type. There cannot, logically, be more than one bodiless being with mental states and properties, since without bodies there are no means by which a

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* This argument is presented most clearly by Strawson in Chapter 4 of Individuals, in which he maintains that individuating persons in any other way, for instance (à la Leibniz) in terms of their unique 'point of view', fails to rule out the possibility that more than one 'person' might answer the same 'individuating' description.

plurality of such beings could be distinguished from one another. Accordingly, we can be sure that if the expression 'incorporeal person' applies to anything, it applies to only one thing. Or, more precisely, it can apply only to something which it does not make sense to enquire about the number of. Therefore the standard objection to T-identifications being employed to effect I-identification does not count against the practice in God's case. There is at least one way of T-identifying God such that it guarantees uniqueness of extension, and the usual need for a means of identifying individuals within the type is simply absent.

Now we can recognize the additional point I mentioned in the theist's case concerning God's identifiability. Not only is God said to be of a unique type, so that in his case we are no longer selecting a particular from among those that constitute the world, but he is <u>also</u> held to be of a type that offers no logical foothold for the process of further individuation. It is these two points together that substantiate the theist's claim that God should be exempted from the usual identification requirements. He should be exempted, it is argued, because he is not being picked out from other particulars in the world, and there is no question of having to pick him out from other individuals of the same kind as himself.

I have argued that if the theist is willing to accept the logical impossibility of distinguishing incorporeal persons from one another, he may use this as part of his grounds for insisting that the identification of God involves a departure from the usual procedure.*

* Any <u>Christian</u> theist accepting this must also recognize that it has implications extending to other beliefs in the Christian doctrinal scheme. The logical indistinguishability of incorporeal persons may

(continued ...)

The departure lies in saying that since God is not being selected from among the contents of the world, and there could logically be no more than one incorporeal person, there is no need for an appeal to material bodies as a means of distinguishing him from other particulars, including other particulars of his own kind. In God's case, therefore, to secure an identification it is enough to specify a certain sort of general description which logically ensures that it could have at most one application.

There is a chance, however, that this contention may run afoul of another point raised by Strawson in his discussion of the logic of identification. After arguing that spatio-temporal relations with those things we can demonstratively identify offer our only comprehensive source of individuating facts, Strawson allows that a general doubt may remain. Surely there are other ways of providing for individuating facts. It is evident, for instance, that we may frame descriptions incorporating phrases such as 'the only...' or 'the first...' which are logically assured of exclusive reference. Some of these may be rendered free of expressions which in effect locate the thing described with respect to the spatio-temporal framework including ourselves and surroundings, leaving us with what Strawson calls "pure individuating descriptions".* Do these not allow for a style of particular-identification which is free of any demonstrative connections <u>via</u> the spatio-temporal system? Strawson contends that they do not, and it is worth asking whether the strictures he applies to this sort of

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tend to rule out anything like the traditional view of angels, unless these are thought of as possessing some form of 'subtle body'. In the case of Trinitarian doctrine, the most such a principle would seem to allow is a version of Sabellianism.

* <u>Individuals</u>, p. 26.

identification apply also to the method just suggested for God.

His objections to this means of identification are two-fold.* First, Strawson suggests, there would be something so odd as to be almost frivolous in the claim by some speaker and hearer that they identified some particular by means of such a description, but that they knew nothing about it which in any way connected it with the objects in their immediate surroundings. Among other things, we should suspect that anyone making such a claim had no grounds for thinking that such a thing exists, apart from general grounds of probability. Second, charges Strawson, a particular identified only in this way would be completely cut off from our overall scheme of knowledge. What we know of other things, identifiable in the normal way, could have no bearing on our knowledge about this particular; and vice versa. The only way in which one could acquire fresh information about such a particular would be by learning new general truths; and so on.

Consider Strawson's first objection. It is, basically, that one hardly imagine a genuine identification taking place by means of a pure individuating expression. For one thing, an identification can take place only when speaker and hearer agree that there exists that thing to which the speaker refers and the hearer understands him to refer. But, asks Strawson, how could anyone know of the existence of a particular identifiable by him only in this way? The point here is presumably that the usual ways one can think of by which we learn of the existence of particulars (coming into direct contact with them, hearing from others who have, inferring from physical traces or remote effects, and so on) all seem to entail placing those particulars at

* Ibid., p. 27-9.

least roughly, directly or indirectly, in the spatio-temporal scheme in which each of us is himself located. That someone should claim to be able to identify a particular about which he knows or can have recalled to him nothing establishing links with what he can demonstratively identify thus seems extremely odd.

Strawson's second objection is connected with the first. Not only do we normally learn of the existence of things in ways that tie them down spatially and temporally, the ways in which we learn anything about them (other than general facts) and the ways in which we connect what we learn with our knowledge and expectations of the world in general, all have a similar effect. Denied such connections with what is sensibly present to us, we cannot learn facts other than general ones concerning a particular of this sort; nor can we infer from what we know about it other facts about the behaviour of the universe. It is hard to see how we could come by facts other than general facts about such a particular, and any that we did accumulate would be 'dead' facts.

At the heart of both these objections is a point concerning the kind of place which any identifiable particular must have in our scheme of things. The requirement has been amply stressed that whatever sort of location is established it must be a unique location. What these objections go on to emphasize is that the sort of location suggested, i.e. the framework in which uniqueness is secured, must be such that it entails some specific relation with oneself and immediate environment. It is not enough to set out an exclusive location for the particular concerned unless the terms of that location also offer a place for other particulars including ourselves and those things in

our setting. Only thus can means be provided for our learning of the existence of these things, learning new facts about them and relating what we learn to our general scheme of knowledge. This is where pure individuating descriptions fail. They establish uniqueness with such phrases as 'the first...' or 'the only...', but they do not provide a real place in any scheme which includes ourselves and surroundings.

Do these objections apply equally to the suggestion I have made concerning the identification of God? In order to see that they do not we must recall the first point made by the theist in his case for God's unique identification-procedure.

In the instance of God, the theist insisted, we are not picking out one item from among those that constitute the world. The assumption made in these objections that a unique place within a scheme including ourselves and what we can demonstratively indicate must be found for any particular about which we wish to speak, is perfectly sound as regards particulars within the world's collection. Selection from such an aggregate is necessarily a process involving exclusion. One necessarily learns about such particulars from facts encountered in this place and time, and not that. That particulars may be individuated within the collection entails that their existence and character is manifested directly at certain times and in certain places, and only, if at all, in different and indirect ways elsewhere. In the case of God, however, we are not selecting an individual from the world's collection. God, it is said, is not merely another of the world's particulars; but an individual distinct in kind and number from the world, who at the same time underlies all of it. This means that the requirement of <u>exclusive</u> connection with particular places and times

is removed. Since God is held not to occupy a place within the world, there is no need to provide for him a means of unique location according to that scheme by which things in the world are allotted exclusive and individuating places. At the same time, however, the fact that he is held to be in some sense 'behind' the world in all its parts* allows for discoveries about his existence and nature. It is significant in this connection that a number of the so-called proofs of God's existence proceed from what are held to be very general facts about the world; e.g. that it exists and appears contingent (in some sense), that there is evidence of design in its character and operation, and so on. There is a consensus that these 'proofs' are unsuccessful as deductive demonstrations, as well as claims from some ** that construed in some other form they may nonetheless have probative force. But the cogency of these arguments is not the main consideration here. The point is merely that the existence and overall character of the world could have consequences for the truth of theism, whether the world we in fact inhabit has such consequences or not.† God's status as creator and sustainer of the entire cosmos therefore allows, logically, for means of learning about his existence and nature, without entailing that those means must effect an exclusive connection between God and some material body. Of course not all arguments for God's

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* See pp. 50-1.

** E.g. Ninian Smart in chapter IV of Philosophers and Religious Truth.

† It is possible to argue that no conceivable facts about the general character of the world could have theistic import. Terence Penelhum has considered this possibility in Problems of Religious Knowledge, pp. 54-65. I think he is right to conclude that such a position is difficult to sustain.

existence and nature are of this kind. Many take as their beginning particular alleged facts about the world; e.g. particular events which may be regarded as miraculous, or at least the special actions of God. Even arguments of this kind (again, their validity is not the issue here) are consistent with seeing God behind the entire cosmos and confined to no single part of it. They attempt to capitalize on what may be held to be an epistemological priority in certain events, people and things.* That is to say, particular happenings or persons or objects may be given a contingent role as manifestations of God. While holding that facts about God are revealed to him in certain events, etc., the theist may happily concede that these or other facts have been revealed to others in quite different circumstances. He will certainly insist that God could have revealed himself anywhere and at any time in the cosmos. Again, the fact that God is regarded as not being confined to any part of the world seems no logical bar to one's learning about his existence and character, as long as it is said that God has some non-exclusive connection with particular events, people, and so on.

Strawson's objections to 'pure individuating descriptions' therefore do not apply to the identification of God by his type. Those objections were based on epistemological necessities attaching to identifiable particulars within the world. In alleging that God is

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* Again, see the comments in Part one on the religious epistemology; pp. 25 and 50-1. I have argued there that believers typically begin with some particular events, people and/or objects and proceed from them to see a holy reality behind all of them. It was also suggested that it is necessary for there to be some epistemologically privileged events, people and/or objects to secure an entry to the theistic outlook. What is denied is that there is any particular set which has to be the entry point.

distinct from the world, yet underlying all of it and specially active or evident in particular parts of it, the theist allows for a logic of discovery about God.

I have argued that God may be exempted from the normal requirements of identification on the grounds that he is not merely one particular among others in the world, and that given the sort of individual he is alleged to be there could at most be one of them. This may be an adequate reply to the objection that an incorporeal God cannot in principle be identified. But what about the claim that such a being cannot be re-identified?

B. Re-Identifying God

The problem of re-identifying persons is a longstanding one in philosophy. It normally appears in the form of questions about the personal identity of human persons. In such a context it seems most reasonable to begin with the observation that we do in fact re-identify human persons. The question is how we do this, i.e. according to what criteria, and how might our criteria be applied or altered in certain odd but imaginable cases. In the instance of divine re-identification, however, it may be urged that the problem is different. Here, it may be said, one cannot so readily take for granted that we are able to re-identify God. The fact that theists do as a matter of fact speak as though the God they discern acting in contemporary events is numerically identical with the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, ought not to mislead us. It is quite possible to develop a form of life around a basically incoherent conceptual scheme. The question of whether God can in logic be identified as a continuing person becomes

more than theoretical when we recognize the basis of our re-identifying ordinary human persons.

Strawson argues -- convincingly, in my opinion -- that it is the corporeality of persons that provides an essential basis for their re-identification. Not that we re-identify persons in exactly the same way that we re-identify material bodies. Strawson is careful to avoid this suggestion. The criteria of personal identity are, he notes, manifold; and it is easy to imagine extraordinary cases wherein our normal means of applying 'same person' would have to be stretched, augmented or applied with some arbitrariness. It is still the case, however, that bodily continuity seems to supply the basis of our normal criteria for personal identity. Without such a basis there seems no way of protecting the vital distinction we observe between 'same person' and 'exactly similar person'.* Such things as character traits and memories are clearly insufficient by themselves to supply this need, for it is easy to imagine these things being exactly duplicated. Lacking corporeal continuity, it is hard to see how in such cases we should be able to make this distinction. It seems, then, that the applicability of corporeal predicates to persons provides the essential means (though not the only means) not only of distinguishing persons from one another but also of determining when some person is the <u>same</u> person as one encountered on another occasion.

The problem this poses for the traditional theist is easy to

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* In <u>Survival and Disembodied Existence</u>, Penelhum shows that criteria of memory, personality traits, and the like, cannot be enough by themselves. Even in the case of a resurrection, he argues that the break in corporeal continuity is enough to make our decision about whether to identify a resurrected person with some pre-mortem person a difficult and perhaps arbitrary one.

see. Suppose that someone is right in believing that in some particular event or experience God is especially manifested to him. On what basis might he legitimately, even intelligibly, take the divine person he encounters there to be the same God that was alleged to be specially present in the Eucharist at his parish church the previous Sunday, or incarnate in Jesus of Nazareth, or active in bringing the Israelites up out of Egypt? This God, or perhaps these gods, are all held to be incorporeal. Without even the analogue of a body, it seems that each god encountered must be regarded as a numerically distinct one. The result would seem to be a potentially infinite series of deities, each identified and identifiable only by the time of his manifestation. And this, surely, is a <u>reductio ad absurdum</u> of the idea of an incorporeal God.

The basis of a reply to this challenge has already been provided. It has been noted that in response to a demand for identification-criteria in the case of an incorporeal deity, the theist may appeal to the unique character of God. In speaking of God, he may reply, we are not selecting for mention one being from among others in the world, and part of his distinction from the world's particulars lies in the fact that it does not make sense to speak of there being more than one individual of his kind. The matters of identification and re-identification are logically linked, so it may come as no surprise to us that this reply is relevant also to the question of God's re-identifiability. To see its relevance, we must recognize a point which lies behind the requirement of criteria for re-identification.

It is in many ways tempting to think that normally we decide whether some particular is numerically identical with one we have come

across on another occasion, on the basis of the qualities they have in common. I decide whether or not this is the book I left on the table last night by noticing, first of all, whether it has the same title, cover, binding and so on, and then whether it has some distinctive features I know the one I left here last night to have had; perhaps a smudge on one corner of the cover, or my name on the flyleaf. Similarly with persons. I recognize them by their facial and other physiological features. In special circumstances one can appeal to things like scars or dental work to decide a difficult case. There are circumstances too in which our appraisal might be based partly or entirely on such things as features of character and temperament (suppose we had only typed letters to go on). In all these cases it appears that what we look for are recurrences of particular arrangements of qualities. In fact it is more than tempting to think that this is how we normally decide. It <u>is</u> how we normally decide.

But this cannot be all there is to the story, for it leaves unaccounted for a distinction which is vital to the matter of re-identification. The distinction is that between <u>qualitative</u> identity and <u>numerical</u> identity. In the case of qualitative identity, of course, we decide that two particulars (encountered either on a single or separate occasions) are exactly similar. In the case of numerical identity we decide that some particular encountered or referred to is the same particular again as one encountered or referred to on another occasion, even if the two particulars are not exactly similar. It may be that we normally decide on the second sort of identity on the basis of recurring clusters of qualities. But this fact leaves us little the wiser as to the theoretical basis of this distinction, for

the 'recurring cluster' procedure seems equally appropriate in principle to determining mere qualitative identity. Whatever our criteria of numerical identity are, then, and whatever their relation to our ordinary practices of determining such identity, it seems that they must allow for a fundamental difference between numerical and qualitative identity.

This is the point underlying the requirement of criteria for re-identification that I wished to bring out: that these criteria must allow us to distinguish between numerical identity and mere qualitative identity. It is at this point that the basic-ness of material bodies reasserts itself. In the case of things that are themselves material bodies, it seems plain that our re-identification procedures are designed to establish the spatio-temporal continuity of any candidates for numerical identity. In the case of those things that are not, we determine identity of this kind by establishing the continuity of bodies to which those things are uniquely related. So, for instance, just as we cannot individually-identify a strike without identifying the men who are striking, neither can we re-identify it (say, as the same strike as mentioned in yesterday's newspaper) without re-identifying the men who are striking. The essential corporeality of persons fits in here, in that without bodies it is hard to see not only how we could distinguish persons from one another, but also how we could identify persons as 'the same again'. In all these sorts of cases it is the spatio-temporal continuity of material bodies that permits the distinction we have between exact similarity and numerical identity.

Now we are in a position to see the relevance of the theist's reply concerning God's identifiability. The primacy of physical bodies is entailed by our concept of re-identification because that concept exists on one side of a distinction; a distinction between numerical and qualitative identity. The concept gains its currency from the viability of this distinction. That we should recognize the possibility, given two things of the same type, either that they are the same thing, or merely two instances of the same type, is a pre-condition of our having the notion of re-identification. The logical grounding of this distinction is obvious enough. It is that particulars are normally in principle duplicable; types normally allow for more than one instance. Were it not for this logical fact we should have no need of criteria for 'same x', for there would exist no such notion as 'different x' with which to contrast it. So we speak of some apple or economic depression or bus conductor as the same apple, depression or conductor, only because it is possible that it might be some other apple, etc. And this is possible, because there is nothing in our rules for the use of 'apple', 'economic depression' or 'bus conductor' to forbid their being applied to different individuals at the same time, and different individuals at different times. In short, the notion of re-identification draws its life from the possibility of distinguishing numerical from qualitative identity; which in turn depends on the logical possibility of there being more than one thing of any given type.

But it is precisely this latter possibility which the theist is able to deny in the case of God. If the theist accepts the impossibility in principle of individuating bodiless persons, it seems

open to him to suggest that, far from being an objection to the notion, this merely shows the logical impossibility of there being more than one God. And to say this is to withdraw the possibility which alone affords a logical foothold to the distinction between numerical and qualitative identity, and hence to the idea of re-identification. We need to decide whether to say 'same God' only if we can be faced with a choice between saying this and 'different God'. If there can be at most one incorporeal God (both at one time and throughout time*) then we cannot be faced with such a choice, and the whole idea of re-identification is one for which there is no place because there is no place needed. There is no question about this being the same God, since there is (logically) no question of its being a different one.

It is now evident why the prospect of a potentially infinite series of incorporeal gods, individuated only by the times of their manifestations, need pose no threat. Such an idea constitutes a reductio ad absurdum of the concept of a bodiless deity only on the understanding that the conept must afford some principle of individuation and the only one that can be extracted from it is absurd. Normally, of course, the concept of a specific type of particular must supply the basis of such a principle, for reasons we

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* It may appear that there are two distinct kinds of type-duplication normally possible, and that any exception must demonstrate its right to each kind independently. Types are normally duplicable both at the same time and at different times. But there are T-identifications (e.g. 'President of the United States') which are logically applicable to only one individual at any time, while being logically applicable to a plurality of individuals over a temporal span. However, whether a T-identification permits a plurality of instances at a single time or only over a period of time there must be a principle of individuation in either case. If, as seems true, bodies necessarily supply the basis of such a principle then the lack of a body will rule out a process of individuation in either case.

have noted. And in such a case, the failure of a concept to provide for individuation in an area where we must and do individuate is a crucial failure. It is therefore easy to see why the concept of an incorporeal God should be expected to supply a principle of individuation, and why its evident failure to do so should attract a reductio of this kind. But the fact is, according to the theist, that the concept need provide for no such principle. We do not, and logically cannot individuate gods. Which does not mean there are no gods, but that there cannot be more than one. Briefly, the notion of God as an incorporeal person entails an absurd principle of divine identity only if it must entail some principle of identity. The reply is that it need not.

C. The Consciousness of God

This brings us to the third problem raised by Strawson's analysis. The problem is how we can intelligibly say anything about an incorporeal God that concerns directly his states of consciousness or even implies that he has them.

The problem arises from Strawson's contention that there must exist 'logically adequate criteria' governing our application of consciousness-ascribing predicates to other persons. The reason he gives is this. We apply, and therefore must have some ways of telling when to apply, predicates of this kind to others. If none of these ways amounts to a logically adequate criterion, then the only alternative we have is to regard them all as signs of this mental state or that; i.e. as phenomena having a contingent though well-attested association with particular states of consciousness. But we could

learn of the relation between these signs and the state of consciousness they are alleged to signify only by observing a regular conjunction of the two. In only one case, however, could we make such observations; our own. But there is no chance, logically, of generalizing from our own case; or even, in this situation, of forming the idea of our own case. To think of one's own case, i.e. to think of a subject of consciousness, is already to recognize it as one among several. And one could recognize it as one among several only if one already had ways of ascribing states of consciousness to others. Thus we cannot learn how to ascribe states of consciousness to others by generalizing from our own case, since recognizing our own case as such assumes that we already have means of ascribing these states to others.

Strawson's conclusion is that the ways we have of determining the mental states of others are not connected in a merely contingent way with those states, as signs would be. Instead, they are logically connected. The grounds on which we normally ascribe to other persons those predicates concerning or implying consciousness are plain enough. We do this on the basis of those persons' behaviour, including verbal behaviour. At least some examples of this behaviour, therefore, are logically connected with those states of consciousness which we attribute to other persons on that basis. The way in which they are connected could be crudely expressed as follows. (Strawson does not express it in just this way.) It is part of what we mean by these consciousness-entailing predicates that the states they attribute or imply have certain natural expressions.* Not that one must manifest

* I have worked out this suggestion in more detail with respect to 'knowledge', in chapter XI. I hope that my argument there excuses the degree of over-simplification in this present sketch.

the appropriate behaviour in order to be said to be in this or that mental state. But there are circumstances in which it would be expected that someone said to be in a particular state should act in one of several ways, and that if he does not we should either find some explanation or abandon the attribution. There are also circumstances in which, if a person behaves in a particular way, we can be sure that he is in a certain mental state. None of this rules out the commonplaces that people may inhibit the natural expression of their states of consciousness, and/or may feign the natural expression of states they do not possess. What is ruled out is that either of these states of affairs should be the normal one. (Here one may quote the old saw about the impossibility of <u>all</u> currency's being counterfeit.)

This is not philosophical behaviourism. To embrace that view would be to say that the meaning of predicates concerning or entailing states of consciousness is <u>exhausted</u> in an account of the behaviour naturally associated with them. The view I am now advancing avoids this extreme in two ways. (1) It maintains merely that in explicating the meaning of these predicates one must include an account of the natural behavioural expressions of the states they may be used to ascribe. And (2), it allows for a looseness in the connection between states and behaviour such that one may in certain circumstances fail to manifest these natural expressions, or one may exhibit the behaviour expressive of some such state without actually having it. The meaning of these predicates therefore does not lie in the behaviour we associate with them, but the connection between them and that behaviour is not a wholly contingent one.

The problem this poses for the concept of an incorporeal God may not be fully apparent. A partial grasp of the view just expounded might leave one with the impression that the problem created is essentially an epistemological one. That is, one might be inclined to think that if true, this view suggests merely that we could never <u>know</u> when God is properly accorded some consciousness-entailing predicate. God could still, it might be thought, have plans, intentions, even hopes and disappointments. The problem is simply that we could have no way of learning that he has them.

In fact the problem is graver than this. According to the view set out above, part of what we mean in saying that someone has plans, intentions, hopes and disappointments, is that certain kinds of behaviour normally attach to the having of these things. We may allow for cases in which the typical behaviour is not exhibited, but only because we recognize the possibility of explanations in terms of other predicates with conflicting behavioural implications. We also allow for instances of insincerity or lying, in which the behaviour-pattern typical of some such predicate is manifested without the person being in that state; but again only because of the possibility of other explanations with behavioural consequences. In short, the attribution of these predicates seems inevitably to entail that the one to whom we attribute them at least <u>could</u> behave in some way, even if we allow for particular examples of his failure to do so. The problem in the case of an incorporeal person is not, therefore, just that we could not know when to apply any of these predicates to him. It is that these predicates could never, <u>in principle</u>, be applied to him in their usual senses.

Could they, then, be applied to him in some slightly different sense, one that preserves the 'inner states' that we want to attribute to him without the behavioural trappings? Again, this question betrays an incomplete understanding of the view underlying this problem. According to this view, these 'inner states' would not be what they are without the behaviour in which they find their natural expression. A pain which did not, for instance, incline its sufferer to avoid its source if he can, can hardly be called a pain. A person who has a plan and wants to bring it to fruition, but is prevented by logic, not just contingent circumstances, from acting upon it, or indicating in any way that he has it, can hardly be said to have a plan. There is, perhaps, a possibility that predicates of the kind we are discussing can be given a sense which is free of behavioural connections.* But whatever possibility there is here is a bleak and purely theoretical one. It offers no consolation to the believer in an incorporeal God, for such a sense can have so little resemblance to our usual meanings for these predicates that they are useless for saying what the orthodox Christian theist wants to say about God.

The problem exposed here is one that we have encountered before in this thesis. It is that predicates having to do with mental states, many of which are traditionally attached to God, rely for their applicability on the assumption that anyone of whom they are predicated is a potential agent; and it is hard to see how an incorporeal God may be an agent. I should like briefly to rehearse again the answer

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* It must be admitted that this is a slim possibility, for what would result appears indistinguishable from the 'private language' that Wittgenstein has arguably shown the impossibility of. See Anthony Kenny's untitled paper in The Private Language Argument.

developed to this in a previous chapter, partly in order to identify a further difficulty which may be detected in that reply. Before doing this, however, it is worth mentioning one tempting way of coping with this problem which is ultimately unsuccessful.

According to the view we have been exploring, at least a great many consciousness-entailing predicates have logical connections with behaviour. But, it may be pointed out, that is not the only sort of thing with which they have logical connections. In explicating the sense of many such predicates not only are we unable to avoid mention of natural expressions in behaviour, we must also give due place to the conceptual connection between the states ascribed with these predicates and <u>other</u> mental states and occurrences. Consider the assertion that A loves B. To be sure, it is hard to understand this assertion apart from the assumption that A will manifest his love for B in loving actions, unless he is prevented by circumstances and/or other dispositions which interfere with his inclinations to behave in a loving manner toward B. But in saying this we must not overlook the fact that it is equally hard to grasp this assertion apart from the assumption that A's loving is logically associated with other <u>mental</u> states and occurrences of his. We should expect A, for instance, to <u>care</u> about what happens to B, to <u>want</u> good things for B, and to <u>hope</u> for B's happiness. Moreover, we should expect A to experience feelings of certain kinds toward B, as well as feelings of joy when B prospers and sadness when he does not. We can certainly allow for exceptions to these rules under certain circumstances, in which instances we might wish to speak of an odd or special sort of love. But it is hard to see how we could allow <u>all</u> connections of this kind to be severed

without emptying our assertion of cognitive content. 'Loves' is arguably typical of at least a great many of the predicates in question, in having logical links not only with manifestations in behaviour but also with other consciousness-entailing predicates.

At first blush this may seem to offer a way out of the problem set for us of ascribing such predicates to an incorporeal God. Robbed of the corporeal manifestations normally associated with the states ascribed with these predicates, may we not still point to a sufficiently rich set of entailments in the conscious life of God to support at least very close analogues of the terms in question? Even if in God's case we cannot expect the behavioural accompaniments of loving, intending, planning, and the like, surely we can say enough about what differences we mean to indicate in God's mental life at least to give meaning to our attributions.

There are at least three difficulties in this suggestion. The first is the epistemological one identified a moment ago and rejected as less serious than the one we now face. If it is alleged that the sense of these consciousness-entailing expressions must be explicated solely in terms of God's internal 'mental' life, then we could never in practice be justified in applying any of them to him. Assuming that one could spell out a 'logic' of these terms, it would be a particularly theoretical and useless accomplishment, for we could never have any use for such a conceptual network. On such a view, God might be allowed to love us, have plans and intentions with regard to us, and all the rest; but we could never know it. His love, plans, intentions and so on would be features strictly of the divine private life, and as such absolutely inaccessible to us. For all we could tell,

God might hate us, and have either no plans or malign ones for mankind. This brings us to a second objection. Not only could we not know about the facts represented by using predicates filled out in this way; even if we could, they would be of no practical interest to us. God's love, plans, intentions, etc., could be expected to make no difference to the world we live in. In saying this, of course, we say something quite different from what Christians have traditionally maintained is the truth on this subject. God's love and care, according to orthodox Christianity, is part of what makes the world what it is; even if this leaves us with some puzzles to be explained. This is one way of expressing this second objection; namely that in granting that God is logically disqualified as an agent, the proposal we are now considering concedes far more than orthodox Christians can concede. A God who cannot act can be of little interest to Christians, so the possibility of maintaining the applicability of consciousness-entailing predicates to such a deity is of still less interest. The third objection may be the least obvious, but it is the most serious since it calls into question even the theoretical possibility of this purely mental explication. The problem is that the other consciousness-entailing predicates which may be logically connected with any particular predicate of this kind are linked in their turn with the possibility of behaviour. Let us suppose that God's loving may be logically connected with his caring, wanting, hoping and having certain feelings. This is no contribution to the problem of how a God who is logically barred from acting may yet be said to love, for how can we understand what it is to care or want or hope or even feel a certain way, in the case of a being who, for reasons of logic, cannot <u>act</u> in any conceivable

circumstances? Once again, this is not to suggest that these things consist simply in behaving in certain appropriate ways in relevant circumstances. It is simply a reminder that they exist in a conceptual network in which relevant behaviour is an element. Without this element the network at least bears no resemblance to the one we normally employ, and probably collapses altogether.

The problem is that we require logically adequate criteria for the ascription of mental states and occurrences to any person other than ourselves. The criteria we normally use and require are those provided in the bodily behaviour of our fellow human beings. But it is difficult to see how we may have criteria of this sort in connection with an incorporeal person such as God. I have, of course, suggested an answer to this problem in the argument of chapter XII. What I maintained there was that God's lacking a body is no logical impediment to his being an agent. If this is so, of course, then roughly the same sort of connections may be allowed to obtain in the case of God between mental states and their natural expression, as obtain in the case of embodied persons. Our point in ascribing to God specific conscious states and episodes may therefore be roughly the same as our point in ascribing them to each other. And the grounds on which we make these ascriptions may be expected to be roughly the same in the two cases. Let me bring out briefly a number of elements in that discussion of God as a potential agent; partly in order to point out their peculiar relevance to this issue of the consciousness of God, and partly to identify what may appear to be a theological difficulty in the solution offered.

In defending the possibility of incorporeal agency I argued

that our normal requirement of bodily movement as a means of distinguishing agents from non-agents and actions from events that are not actions, follows from a number of contingent facts concerning human agency. Among these contingencies was mentioned the fact that in the case of human agency we must have at our disposal a means of distinguishing agents from one another. Given that some event is a human action, we have a very large number of possible agents from which to select. Bodies, it may plausibly be argued, provide the only logically adequate means of making the selection. The suggestion was then made that this means may not be needed in the case of divine action. The backing for this suggestion has been provided in this present chapter. Given the case that some event is the action of an incorporeal person, there is and could be only one possible agent, if the arguments advanced above are sound. There is no need for a principle of individuation among agents where it is agreed that there is only one candidate allowed by logic. With the removal of this need, the logical requirement of bodies as a way of meeting the need is also removed. Here, of course, the intimate conceptual connection between personality and agency is fully apparent. Just as bodies play an essential part in both of these concepts where there is the logical possibility of their having more than one application, so it may be argued that the need for them vanishes with the removal of that possibility. Acceptance of the fact that there is no way of individuating incorporeal persons has its parallel, therefore, in an acceptance of the impossibility of individuating incorporeal agents. In both cases, there can at most be one such thing; so no means is needed of telling which of a number of such things is the one to be picked out on some occasion. Of course

we should not be surprised that this move is relevant to both concepts, since the idea of agency is a part of the idea of personality, and vice versa.

However, even if the need to distinguish among possible agents is removed, there remains the need to distinguish events that are held to be divine actions from those that are not. How can this be done without the criterion of identity of causal connection with bodily movement? The answer given in chapter XII is that we may fall back upon those criteria in addition to bodily movement that we normally use in the human situation. Roughly, these are (1) the inherent unlikelihood of the event apart from agency, (2) apparent contribution of the event to the fulfilling of some purpose, and (3) consonance with what is believed about the intentions and character of some possible agent. I recognized the appearance of circularity in my inclusion of (3). We normally learn of people's intentions and character on the basis of what can be recognized without such knowledge, as their behaviour. It may therefore seem question-begging to suggest that events could be construed as divine actions on the basis of what is believed about divine intentions and general character, since we must first of all be able to discern some examples of divine actions upon which to base our beliefs on these matters. The appearance of circularity is removed, I suggested, by emphasizing elements (1) and (2) as ways of establishing these beliefs. Having come to some estimate of God's intentions and character on the basis of events accredited as his actions by their unlikelihood and apparent purposefulness, one may then use this estimate as an additional element in the discernment of divine action.

There is another reason for dwelling on the notion of God's

intentions in connection with what are regarded as his actions. Even if this notion were not an ingredient in the picking out of events as actions of God, the fact would remain that it must be part of what the theist means in ascribing an action to God that the event in question has some connection with divine intentions. It is surely not enough for the Christian to say in identifying some happening as a divine action, merely that it plays some part in a pattern of events which, say, further the happiness and fulfilment of mankind or some part of it. One who does not believe in God may easily agree that the happening in question plays such a part, but he will call it an 'act of God' only as a figurative gesture. What the traditional theist presumably claims, and the non-believer disputes, is that the personality of God is somehow connected with this event. Part of this connection may be described in causal terms. God 'brought it about that....' But in God's case as in the human one, to speak of a person's actions inevitably brings with it possibilities of speaking about, among other things, his intentions in acting thus. The question 'why did he do it?' is sometimes allowed to take the answer 'for no reason' or 'he just wanted to'; but only as an exception to the general rule that there must be some reason. Part of what makes the concept of action what it is, is that the question of intention always comes with it, even if it may occasionally be deflected.*

In fact it is not just intentions that are normally required of an agent. With the notion of intention comes a host of other consciousness-entailing predicates, such as hopes, wants, disappointments if certain things happen, pleasure if other things happen. Here we

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* See Melden, Free Action, pp. 103-4; and Anscombe, Intention, p. 25f.

encounter again a point of which we have already been reminded in this chapter. It is that we cannot explicate the sense of at least many consciousness-entailing predicates without mentioning other predicates of the same kind with which they are logically linked. Just as, for conceptual reasons, a man cannot always or normally act without intentions, neither can he have intentions without having some recognizable pattern of wishes, feelings, attitudes and beliefs. My reason for recalling this point and applying it specifically to action and intention is this. I have just suggested that some of the world's happenings may provide a possible analogue for the bodily behaviour that we normally find conceptually linked with particular states of consciousness. The risk that lies in this suggestion is that that it may allow one to underestimate the theist's commitment to saying that God has a rich mental life at least analogous with our own. This may be a commitment that many theists are willing to acknowledge. But it may also be one that philosophical theologians are apt to overlook in their anxiety to avoid an excessive anthropomorphism.* It was pointed out a moment ago that the entailments existing between particular mental states, and other states and events of the same kind, offer no solution to the problem of how terms ascribing these states may be applied to an incorporeal God. We are now in a position to recognize that there is

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* In the Christian tradition there is an evident tension between God as he is portrayed in the Biblical literature and God as the philosophical-theologians are wont to depict him. The Biblical God is notably one who feels things, including joy, compassion and anger, who decides and who even changes his mind on occasion. The God of the philosophers, on the other hand is more inclined to be timeless, impassive, changeless. There is no doubt room for and need of a compromise between the two positions. I am suggesting just now that a compromise which paid too little attention to the Biblical tradition would risk evacuating terms of the kind we are discussing of their meaning.

nevertheless a moral for the theologian in a reminder of those conceptual connections. It is that the theologian may not remain totally agnostic about the inner life of God if he wishes to go on speaking of God as active. To be active, we have just had recalled to us, is necessarily to possess intentions, to make decisions, to have particular attitudes, to feel certain things, and so on. A God who is completely cut off from these inner states and episodes is also cut off from the concept of action.*

I have suggested that the content of another chapter in this thesis turns out also to be directly relevant to this one. The notion of divine corporeal action may be given content, I argued in chapter XII, by seeing God as having causal as well as intentional and other relations with specific events in the world. The relevance of this to our present problem is plain. We may agree that many of the consciousness-entailing predicates that theists wish to attach to God have conceptual connections with behaviour. In showing, earlier, that God's behaviour need not be <u>bodily</u> behaviour, I have shown that these conceptual connections may be respected even in the case of an incorporeal God.

In arguing as I did for God's incorporeal agency, however, it was acknowledged that a potential objection must be dealt with. It was that God's capacity for incorporeal agency was not really established so much as his embodiment. It may appear that the world was treated as

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* This is a point also made by Penelhum in <u>Religion and Rationality</u>, pp. 151-4. There is <u>some</u> suggestion in this passage that he views this point as contributing to the solution of the problem of incorporeal action. I do not think it does, but agree that without it talk of action, incorporeal or otherwise, is empty.

God's body. The reply was made that in certain respects, e.g. the scope of basic action, the world does seem to occupy the place of God's body, but that in other respects there are marked differences. On balance, I concluded, the differences are significant enough to warrant a denial of any crude pantheism. But now we must face this difficulty in a new context and with a slightly different articulation.

At the root of the problem we have been considering is the fact that part of what we mean in applying consciousness-entailing predicates to persons, concerns, and must concern, the natural behavioural expression of the states ascribed with those predicates. I have suggested that we may cope with this fact in the case of an incorporeal God by recognizing the possibility of God's activity in the world. The theological problem which this argument raises is that it may appear to imply that the world is in some sense necessary to God. Even if it can be argued that the world is not, strictly speaking, God's body, it still appears that there is a sense in which he cannot get along without it. Without the world, it may seem, the personality of God can at best be grossly incomplete, for the world provides the arena of his activity which is required to support talk of him concerning or implying his consciousness. If the God of traditional Christianity is to be spoken of in the way that he is, then he must be a God who is capable of action. But it appears that he has this capacity only if there is a world in which he may act. The logic of those terms traditionally applied to God by Christians therefore seems to entail that the world is, in an important sense, necessary to him.

That the world should be seen in such a relation to God amounts,

of course, to a direct denial at least of the radical independence of God which was earlier argued* to be a part of divine transcendence. It is clear that this 'ontological independence' is a fundamental claim advanced by orthodox Christians on behalf of God. Yet this claim seems mortally endangered by the logical requirements attaching to consciousness-entailing predicates. It appears that we have an application in the divine case of Strawson's contention that the appropriateness of <u>both</u> corporeal and consciousness-entailing predicates to persons is no accident, but a conceptual necessity.

D. <u>The Transcendence of God</u>

According to the objection just registered, the best our enquiries so far can establish is the conceptual possibility of a kind of pantheism. Even if we can give sense to the idea of an incorporeal God's acting, by construing some events in the natural world as his actions, the fact remains that we can do this only because there <u>is</u> a natural world. If we were to concentrate on the kind of emphasis on God's activity which is most obvious in the Christian tradition -- indications of what God has wrought in the course of the world's history -- then we might think that if there were no world, and therefore no apparent scope for divine action, there would at least be no particular conceptual difficulties. The most, it seems, that such a state of affairs should lead us to say (though of course we would not be on hand to say it) is that God does not, as it happens, act. But, it is urged in this objection, our glimpse of the logic of consciousness-entailing predicates has made us wiser than that. We

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* Pp. 43-4.

now see that the theist's commitments to God's activity run deeper than might at first be apparent. The absence of a world, and therefore of a scope for his activity, would not only change our estimate of what God does. It would rob us of any way of attaching sense to talk of God as a conscious, personal being. For without a world, God must lack the possibility of exhibiting those behavioural expressions we have seen to be linked with what is meant by consciousness-entailing predicates. The most that we could allow God to be, therefore, is something like the cosmic mind or soul; that which animates the natural world. He is an incorporeal person only in the sense that there is no <u>particular</u> body which may be designated as his. But the world at large -- even if it may be argued not to be his body in some strict sense -- still occupies a relation to him that is crucially like the relation of bodies to human persons: without the world, one could not form the concept of him as a person.

It may now be seen that if this objection is granted it is not just God's ontological independence that is in jeopardy; as though God might still be regarded as a distinct entity, but one whose fate is inextricably bound up with that of the universe. Basic to the claim that God is transcendent, I have argued,* is the view that he is numerically distinct from the world. Believers in divine transcendence are committed to a radical dualism between God and the cosmos, which the objection just presented rules out from the beginning. If it is correct, then the universe's fate is not even productive of God's fate; it <u>is</u> his fate. Just as what happens to my body does not merely affect what happens to me; it <u>is</u> what happens to me. What we

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*Pp. 24-6.

have before us, therefore, is a fundamental challenge to the idea of a transcendent God.

We may make a crucial test of this objection by considering whether we can in fact make sense of talk about God which concerns or implies his consciousness, if there were no cosmos. Lacking a material universe in which God's consciousness may be expressed, is any discourse concerning or implying that consciousness necessarily hollow?

Let us look briefly again at the reasons why it might <u>seem</u> necessarily to be hollow. To begin with, we must have ways of knowing when to apply and when not to apply consciousness-entailing predicates in the case of other persons. This need is obvious, for a set of concepts which in principle had no canons governing its application would be a particularly useless set. Next, the ways we have of knowing must be 'logically adequate'; that is, they must be based in some way on the <u>sense</u> of the concepts in question, and not merely on contingent 'signs'. The reason for this is that if we made these judgements merely on the basis of 'signs' we could never <u>begin</u> to ascribe the states of consciousness in question to other persons, for we could never have the opportunity of observing the contingent but regular association between state and sign that would allow us to make the appropriate inferences in fresh cases. The reply that we could observe it in our own case begs the question, for we can have the idea of our own case only if we already recognize it as one among others. Finally, it is plain that the basis on which we do apply these predicates to others is normally that of their behaviour. In at least some cases, therefore, the behaviour which serves as a basis of these ascriptions must be in some way logically connected with the states ascribed.

Whatever the connection is, it must allow for the truisms that one may possess such a state and yet not behave in a way that shows it, and one may manifest behaviour suggestive of a state which he does not possess. The sort of connection that seems to account for all this most successfully may be expressed thus. It is part of what we mean in ascribing particular states of consciousness that they have specific natural expressions in behaviour. What makes a particular state the state it is, is the behaviour that would naturally manifest it. The behaviour may fail to be exhibited for any of a number of reasons, including the strength and relative importance of the state, the presence of other states with their behavioural implications, the particular circumstances of the person concerned, and so on. But given that someone is in such a state we should normally expect some explanation, based on these reasons, of his failure to behave appropriately in relevant conditions. It follows from this that anyone to whom these states may coherently be ascribed must be at least <u>capable</u> of agency. If what makes a state of consciousness the state it is, is the inclination toward certain sorts of behaviour that comes with it, then it would be meaningless to ascribe such states to any entity logically incapable of acting. Thus it may seem that God, without a material universe, is logically disqualified as a candidate for consciousness-entailing predicates, since without a universe he lacks the possibility of acting which is necessary to support his candidacy.

The crucial question here is clearly whether the lack of a world would render God logically incapable of action. Is it intelligible to say that God retains the capacity for action even in the absence of a physical universe?

There is a strong temptation to say that it is not. But once we begin to understand why we are tempted to make this assessment we are on the way to recognizing that the temptation is ill-founded. The source of the temptation may be exposed with the aid of the well-known distinction between 'general capacity' and 'opportunity'. An example may be used to display the distinction. Imagine a normally literate man sitting in a room without any reading matter. Now if we are asked whether or not this man can read, our answer must be that in one sense of 'can', he can; in another, he cannot. The two senses are recognized in the distinction just mentioned. The man can, as a matter of <u>general capacity</u>, read. But he lacks the <u>opportunity</u> to read when he lacks reading matter, and in that sense he cannot. Now we may see why it is tempting to say that to speak of God's being able to act in the absence of a physical world is incoherent. It can easily appear that in supposing the world not to exist we are hypothetically denying to God the opportunity of acting. If this were so, then in one sense it <u>would</u> be incoherent to say that he can act even if there is no world. It would be incoherent if we meant by that to assert that God has the opportunity of acting, and assume that that is what is denied to him in the lack of a world. But with that observation there may appear a possibility that in another sense the proposal is intelligible enough. It may be noticed that removing the opportunity for action has no bearing on an agent's general capacity. A literate man deprived of reading matter can (general capacity) still read, even if he lacks the opportunity on that occasion. Similarly, it may be suggested, God might be judged able, as a matter of general capacity, to bring about events in a physical world, even though the absence of a physical world would deprive him of the opportunity. The general capacity for action is all that is required of a subject by the logic

of consciousness-entailing predicates. This is made plain by the fact that in that logic allowance must be made for failures on the part of persons in some particular state to act appropriately. The most that can be required is an explanation of that failure. But prominent in the list of permitted explanations is the allegation that the person concerned lacked the opportunity (was never in relevant circumstances, or was restrained or inhibited when he was, etc.) of behaving appropriately. So general capacity for agency is all that these predicates demand in a subject, and that sort of capacity is not affected by the lack of opportunity; which is all that the lack of a world appears to be in relation to God's general capacity. Thus the proposal that God can act even if there is no world appears quite intelligible in the only sense required by the terms of our problem.

However, though the distinction between 'general capacity' and 'opportunity' is helpful in diagnosing our temptation to deny sense to this proposal, we do not need to use it in just this way to show the proposal's intelligibility. A closer inspection of the problem reveals that, paradoxical though it may seem, God need lack neither the general capacity nor the opportunity for action even in the absence of a physical universe. The reason for this is that God may intelligibly be conceded the power to create a world; a power which many theologians in the Christian tradition are wont to claim on God's behalf. If God is granted this power, then the lack of a physical universe is something that he chooses and that is within his capacity to remedy at any time. But, as we shall see, a 'condition' that is strictly a matter of the agent's decision is not really a condition at all. To regard something which the agent could provide at will as

fulfilling the role of 'opportunity' is a mistake.

We may begin to see this in an example. Suppose a man finds himself locked out of his second-floor flat. He telephones the Fire Department to ask for aid in gaining entrance. Anxious to avoid an unnecessary trip, the operator at the Fire Department wants to make sure he cannot get in on his own. 'Can you climb a ladder?' he asks the man. Now the man might think that he is being asked just whether he has the general capacity for climbing ladders; i.e. whether he is sound of limb, has a head for heights, and so on. But it is more likely that he will interpret the operator's question as one also concerning opportunity. Besides the fitness of the man to climb, is there a ladder on hand, can it be placed so as to give access to a window, and so on? It is more likely that this is what the operator means to ask about. Let us suppose that with this question in mind the man replies no, he cannot climb a ladder to get in. The operator asks why not. To his astonishment he receives the reply that the man just does not want to. Now apart from anything else, the operator is plainly entitled to complain that his caller grossly misled him with the reply that he cannot climb a ladder to get in. If all that prevents a man from doing something is his <u>wanting</u> to do it, then he can do it. Wanting is not something that contributes to opportunity. We shall return to this point.

We can imagine the same story told with one slight alteration. When asked why he cannot climb a ladder, the man may reply that there is no ladder leaning up against his flat and that he would have to get one from the caretaker. The operator may still feel some pique at this response. Assuming that getting a ladder is just a matter of asking

for it (and it is not the middle of the night, or the caretaker's holiday, etc.) then the reply is still misleading, though in a slightly different way. Here it is initially more plausible to say that the man lacks opportunity. But a moment's reflection reveals that this is hardly a genuine lack, for the agent can remove it at will. If all that is preventing a man from climbing into his flat is the lack of a ladder, and he can supply one if he wishes, then in an important sense he <u>can</u> climb a ladder and get into his flat. The lack of a ladder does not really amount to the lack of an opportunity, when that lack is something the agent can make good if he so desires.

The parallel between this case in its altered form, and that of God in the absence of a world is obvious. If we say that without a world God cannot act because he thereby lacks opportunity, but admit that he could create a world by fiat, then we have said something at least potentially self-defeating. It clearly makes a difference to whether we say that someone lacks the opportunity to exercise some general capacity, whether or not we regard the impediment to his acting as something he can remove if he wants. A man prevented by conditions <u>beyond his control</u> from performing some action genuinely lacks opportunity. But if he may alter those conditions at will, then his lack of opportunity is a mere formality. God's case, of course, resembles the variation on the example set out above. In the absence of a world, it is not just God's <u>wishing</u> to act that is needed to bring about his action. (That is a very misleading way of speaking in any case.) He must first of all bring it about that there is a world. <u>But</u> -- and this is the important point -- it is maintained by most Christians that this is something that he can bring about if he wishes.

So the lack of opportunity suggested by the lack of a world is a lack in name only. If God is able to remove it whenever he wants, then he may act whenever he wants; even though he must first of all create the arena of his action.

M.R. Ayers provides a background to what has just been said in his comments on 'He can do it if he wants (wishes, is motivated, etc.)'.* Ayers shows that although this expression is conditional in form, it is not a genuine conditional, as 'He can do it if the wind is right' would be. To say 'He can do it if he wants', Ayers points out, is to say no more than 'He can do it'. In support of this, Ayers suggests,

> It might be enough to point out that the question whether a person chooses or wishes to do an action is irrelevant to the question whether he is able to do it, and that if all I need to do in order to get an apple is to choose to get it, then, quite categorically, I can get it. For it follows from this that 'I can, if I choose' is not really a conditional.**

The suggestion is that being able to do something, in the sense of having the opportunity to do it, is not necessarily a disguised conditional. Wanting, choosing and so on are not further conditions; not part of what provides opportunity. But the case of God in the absence of a world, like the variation on our example above, is not a direct application of this point. It was admitted that in these instances we have something more like a real lack of opportunity, but one that is in turn within the power of the agent to remove. We could call a lack of this a '<u>remediable</u> lack of opportunity'; meaning by

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* Ayers, <u>The Refutation of Determinism</u>, especially chapter 7.

** <u>Ibid</u>., p. 121.

that that it is within the power of the agent himself to remedy the apparent lack. Now we may see that Ayers' argument is easily extended to cover cases of this kind. The question of whether a person must do some other action, b, in order to do a, is irrelevant to the question of whether he can do a, once it is granted that he can do b. If all I need to do in order to get an apple is do some other thing which it is admitted I can do, then, quite categorically, I can get an apple. A remediable lack of opportunity is therefore not really a lack of opportunity at all. To claim that God has the capacity for action even in the absence of a world, but only in the sense that if there were a world he could act, is an excessively modest claim on the part of the Christian. For it suggests that God's capacity for action is in such a case only a general capacity robbed of any opportunity for its exercise. But if he ascribes to God the power to create a world, as Christians do, then the theist in effect withdraws the claim that God genuinely lacks opportunity in such a case. If all God needs to do in order to act is to create a universe, and he is able to create a universe, then he is able to act.

My conclusion is that it makes perfectly good sense to speak of God's having a capacity for action even on the supposition that there is no physical universe. This provides all the support that is apparently needed for the meaningful ascription of consciousness-entailing predicates to God in such a situation.* The suggestion,

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* Of course we should have an acute epistemological problem in such a circumstance. Although we could give meaning to these predicates ascribed to God 'in the void', we could have no way of knowing which ones actually applied. But that is not a problem about the coherence of those concepts in the circumstance mentioned; merely one about the use we should have for such concepts. Of course there would be no one on hand to be ignorant of God's mental states and thus unable to use these predicates.

therefore, that the concept of an incorporeal God is not viable apart from his having a world in which he may give expression to his mental states, turns out to be a mistaken one. Divine transcendence, insofar as it entails incorporeality and numerical distinction from the world, seems not to be endangered by the facts of what we need, logically, to attribute consciousness to persons.

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