C A N G O D A C T I N H I S T O R Y?

A Whiteheadian Perspective

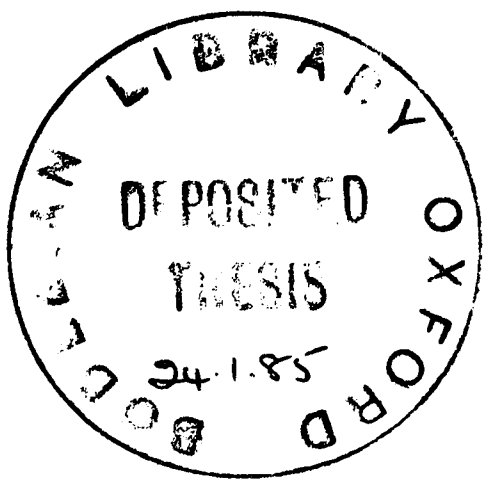

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Table of Contents

Acknowledgements.....iii
Abstracts.....iv

Chapter One Can God Act?.....1
1 'Action'.....2
2 Whitehead and 'Action'.....27
3 God and 'Action'.....32

Chapter Two Can God Act in History?.....40
1 The Writing of History.....40
2 Whitehead on 'History'.....63

Chapter Three Theological Issues.....80
1 Miracle and the 'Laws of Nature'.....80
2 Divine Intervention.....98
3 Divine 'Willing' and Divine 'Permitting'.....103
4 Some attempts reviewed.....105

Chapter Four Whitehead and His Cosmology.....129
1 The Man.....129
2 Exposition.....131
3 The Development of His Thought.....149

Chapter Five Whitehead: Problems of Interpretation.....166
1 God and the Initial Aim.....166
2 Divine Concrescence.....182
3 Is God correctly conceived as an actual entity?.....191
4 Are actual occasions free?.....198

Chapter Six A First Possible Interpretation - Ogden and Williams...210
1 Schubert Ogden.....212
2 Daniel Day Williams.....224
3 A Parallel Approach from outside Process Theology.....237

Chapter Seven A Second Possible Interpretation - Cobb and Griffin..248
1 John Cobb.....248
2 David Griffin.....264
3 Chapters Six and Seven: Concluding Postscript.....278

Chapter Eight Some Applications in Christian Doctrine.....283
1 Miracle.....283
2 Theodicy.....302
3 Final Conclusion.....319

Bibliography.....322

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CAN GOD ACT IN HISTORY?

A Whiteheadian Perspective

The thesis seeks to set the question "Can God act in history" in a Whiteheadian perspective, but first seeks to clarify the question itself. The first chapter examines the concept of action in general terms, and goes on to explore Whitehead's understanding of it, before applying the 'findings' to talk of God's action. The second chapter similarly addresses the notion of history, asking what procedures the historian follows in giving his account of the past, and whether God could be properly used as a referent within such constraints. Again Whitehead's view on the subject is examined. Chapter Three examines more overtly theological issues necessary for consideration of divine action, such as the concepts of violation, intervention, and 'willing' and 'permitting', before reviewing the work of Farmer, Farrer and Peacocke.

The fourth and fifth chapters serve to direct our attention to Whitehead's cosmological system. The briefest biographical outline is followed by a selective exposition of his mature doctrines, and then an attempt to discern any movement or development in his thought through his corpus of writings. The whole of Chapter Five is then given over to an examination of particularly relevant interpretive problems in the system.

In order to see what use has been made of Whiteheadian resources in answering our question we next examine a pair of Process Theologians in each of Chapters Six and Seven. Firstly, Ogden and Williams are found to give too passive an impression of

God's activity which struggles to accommodate the findings of our earlier chapters. Cobb and Griffin are, however, found to give more satisfactory accounts.

In the final chapter we pursue our own position, first by discussing the suitable components of a definition of miracle, then by considering the problem of theodicy in dialogue with Griffin. A brief conclusion follows.

CAN GOD ACT IN HISTORY?

A Whiteheadian Perspective

The thesis seeks to set the question "Can God act in history?" in a Whiteheadian perspective. It tries first, however, to clarify the question itself by examining the notions of 'action' and 'history'. More obviously theological questions are also considered, as are some individual theologians' positions, before the central section of the thesis focuses on Whitehead's systematic doctrines. Following on from that two pairs of theologians are reviewed and contrasted in their use of Whiteheadian resources: one pair being found preferable to the other. In the final chapter, before a brief conclusion, the questions of miracle and theodicy are examined constructively.

The opening chapter first attempts to discover a consensus among the 'philosophers of action' on the necessary component parts of a concept of action. The centrality of the notion of intention is noted, and the related question of responsibility for actions explored. It is noted that the possibility of failure may be ingrained in our talk of acting, and that this risk element increases with the growing complexity of an action. Actions are spoken of as 'basic' or 'simple' and 'complex', and one action may be described in different ways and from different viewpoints. It is further noted that a free agent can act on behalf of another agent in performing his action. The middle section examines Whitehead's thought and states the great importance of the concept of 'action' in his system - "To be actual is to act". A summary account of his actual entities is offered to illustrate this assertion. Whitehead's thought seems congruent with the outline of action previously given. In the final

section an attempt is made to relate the 'theses' recorded at the conclusion of the discussion of 'action' to our talk of God. The question of a 'physical locus' for action is considered also. This exercise allows us to see what is being claimed when action is predicated of God.

The second chapter also tries to arrive at a number of 'theses', concerning the procedures which the historian is bound to follow in reconstructing and describing the past. By way of introduction various theological positions are reviewed, and their inadequacies noted. In this way the 'classical' view, two forms of neo-orthodoxy, 'Perspectivism' in two varieties, and Pannenberg are briefly considered. The discussion proceeds largely in dialogue with the 'philosophers', and not the theologians, of history, seeking to understand history's true subject matter, the relation of fact and interpretation, the historian's requirement to use his own experience as an interpretive tool, and his need to locate 'immanent' causes for the purposes of historical description. J.H. Hexter is used to demonstrate how a historian's Christian experience may help understand the past, and to allow us to explore the proper use of the 'principle of analogy'. Recognising Gardiner's "procedural interconnection" between fact and interpretation, we see the importance of insisting that the latter properly arises from the former. The second half of the chapter examines Whitehead's own thoughts on the subject of history, again seeing much similarity between it and the writers reviewed in the earlier section. Whitehead did not turn self-consciously to the subject of history, as he did not to action, but the investigation proves fruitful. Methodologically, we treat each of our theses in turn, seeking Whitehead's judgement,

after a general introduction to the topic. Dale Porter's suggestion that Whitehead's event-ontology be used for historical explanation is considered, and here the notion of synergism appears for the first time.

Chapter Three addresses more overtly theological issues involved in discussing the action of God. First there is a discussion of 'miracle'. This examines both objective and subjective approaches. In the former category comes C.S. Lewis with his uncompromising supernaturalism. In dialogue with F.R. Tennant we discuss the possibility of defining miracle as that which breaks natural laws - and decide in the negative. W.G. Pollard is chosen as an example of the attempt to locate the objectively miraculous at sub-atomic level: an unsatisfactory procedure. Bultmann's 'eye of faith' and Ian Ramsey's linguistic explanation are taken as examples of the 'subjective' approach: neither adequate. A thread running through this section is an attempt to recapture a biblical understanding by which God is seen as related to all events, and not just miraculous ones. The next section examines the notion of divine intervention disapprovingly, and then the distinction between divine 'willing' and 'permitting' is exposed as unhelpful. Some attempts to deal with the question of God's action are then reviewed, prefaced by a discussion of the Biblical Theology movement and Gilkey's stinging critique of it. H.H. Farmer advocates a theory of God's rapport with his creation - seeing God at work on the 'inner' or 'ontal' side of nature inaccessible to science. Austin Farrer seems to spurn attempts to understand the 'mechanics' of divine action, and yet talks of God allowing creatures to 'run themselves'. Like Farmer, he is not consistent in his treatment of divine power and creaturely

freedom. Peacocke sees God's action in the working of chance - a highly problematic assertion - which runs its 'gamut' and so explores the possibilities inherent in God's creation. He thus divorces God from the world.

The fourth chapter begins with the briefest of biographical outlines and proceeds into exposition of Whitehead's mature position as in Process and Reality. The exposition deals with actual occasions and their concrescence, speaking of the mental and physical poles, the subjective form, causation and causa sui, and the Fallacy of Vacuous Actuality. Especially prominent is the notion of subjective aim. It is noted that God shares many characteristics with the actual occasions, though his superjective nature is not given much weight. God's primordial and consequent natures are discussed. Finally an attempt is made to discuss any developments in his thought throughout his writings. Science and the Modern World, it is noted, contains only part of the later doctrine of God, and in some senses the God there presented may be 'stronger'. In particular God and creativity seem more closely linked. Religion in the Making is notable for the ambiguous treatment of what is later called the consequent nature, and Whitehead's critique of theological tradition, together with his thoughts on the nature of divine power. In Adventures of Ideas these themes recur. In conclusion, after brief mention of Modes of Thought, there is a short discussion of the relation of creativity to God, and the Trinity.

Chapter Five concentrates on particular interpretive problems in Whitehead which are specially relevant to a discussion of divine action. The first section deals with God and the Initial Aim,

insisting against Cobb that God is the sole source of the initial aim, and going on to conceive of God's offering all possibilities open to a given occasion but with appetition on God's part for the 'ideal' possibility. The suggestion that God orders the possibilities once only is rejected on both philosophical and theological grounds. Similar reasoning is employed to insist that God does not aim at all possibilities with equal appetition. We then discuss problems associated with Divine Concrescence, first asking whether God is one eternally concrescing actual entity or a personally ordered series of entities. The question affects that of divine causation. No definite conclusion is reached in discussing Cobb's and Christian's positions. Cobb's suggestion that God prehends the actual occasions throughout their concrescence is considered and put aside. Then we ask whether God is correctly conceived as an actual entity, meaning by this to question both its possibility and desirability. The conclusion is tentatively positive. The final section, in asking whether actual occasions are truly free, perpends Pols' critique of Whitehead. Pols questions how the actual occasions can modify the aim received from God. While his critique may not finally succeed he raises some fundamental questions in our minds, associated with identity through time and the concept of the 'self', which Whitehead's atomism labours to explain.

Perhaps the two most well-known essays by Process Theologians on our subject are by Schubert Ogden and Daniel Day Williams. These two writers are now examined in the light of our previous chapters. Ogden's links with Bultmann are noted, as is his revision of action along lines suggested by Hartshorne and Heidegger - as the process

whereby the self as such is constituted. For Ogden, God's action is the way in which God constitutes himself in each moment for his creatures and ensuring the continuity of the creative process. Ogden's redefinition of action is questioned, as is his suggestion that some acts in the world can be God's special acts without God having any special intention or responsibility for them. Ogden has failed to use the Whiteheadian resources at his disposal. Williams' treatment is more Whiteheadian but again fails to give adequate prominence to any divine intention, yielding a 'passive' account similar to Ogden's. Other ambiguities are present: in the way in which Williams treats the primordial and consequent natures, and in his talk of God's coercion. In the final part of the chapter the work of Gordon Kaufman is examined in order to place a parallel approach from outside Process Theology alongside Ogden and Williams. Kaufman's theory of 'master act' and 'sub-acts' is discussed but found unconvincing. A tendency to 'Deism' is noted.

Chapter Seven turns to the Claremont theologians John B. Cobb Jr and David Ray Griffin. We note Cobb's assessment of the 'theological' function of Jesus with reservations, and proceed to give an account of his notion of God as the "One who Calls". Cobb's Christological thought provides the context for further discussion, both in terms of his full-scale Christology and an earlier essay. While expressing concern at several junctures, it is shown that Cobb has employed Whitehead's concept of the initial aim to good effect in speaking of divine action. This conceptuality is employed with even greater success by Griffin. He insists, against Ogden, that the 'specialness' of a special act of God must be, at least in part, a function of God.

In his Process Christology he develops his position. Our attention is drawn to the character of an action, the intention for the action, and the degree of actualisation of that intention. He speaks of God's 'primary' and 'secondary' actions and underlines the particularity of every ideal aim offered by God as expressing the particularity of God's intention. While welcoming much of Griffin's position, several criticisms are offered. A postscript speculates on the reason for the differences between Ogden and Williams and Cobb and Griffin, in part by enquiring into the influences upon them.

The final chapter has a more constructive task and addresses two problems. The discussion of miracle begins with a summary of previously reached conclusions. Using the conceptuality of the initial aim, a miracle is defined as a wonderful, unpredictable, coincidental and salvific act which is what it is because God is its agent, but which is not held to be in breach of 'natural law' - though it will probably be unusual or distinctive. The Red Sea escape is discussed, as is the possibility of this understanding enabling God's working through natural as well as human forces. Related problems, including panpsychism and God's use of free human agents, are discussed. A Whiteheadian approach to God's action leads into discussion of theodicy and this subject is pursued in dialogue with David Griffin. The reality of evil is stressed and the redefinition of omnipotence set out, though doubt is expressed about Griffin's location of God's limitation in metaphysical necessities beyond his control rather than in the logic of creation. Ex nihilo is discussed and Griffin's rejection of it found unnecessary and unhelpful. Griffin does not finally answer theodicy's perennial questions, but instead rephrases

them, it is argued. The process theodicy has promise however, especially if greater prominence is given to two Whiteheadian motifs - God as the "fellow-sufferer who understands" and the one who "loses nothing that can be saved" - the latter taking on an eschatological overtone usually considered optional in Process thought. A very short final conclusion is generally positive, and notes that Whitehead's critique of theological tradition may have a relevance which reaches beyond his cosmological scheme.

CHAPTER ONE

CAN GOD ACT?

This thesis is an investigation into how (and whether) we might understand and articulate God's working in the world, in nature and in history. There is a rough division of the work into two parts. In chapters one to three we will present a survey of preliminary problems with a Whiteheadian perspective or critique; in chapters four to eight we will examine possible Whiteheadian proposals on the subject, which we will evaluate in a brief conclusion. It is not possible to plunge straight in at the deep end, as it were, with Whitehead. An adequate investigation must first examine two preliminary problems: is 'act' a word which we can intelligibly use of God at all, and if so, what does such use entail and imply? And, does it really make sense even then to speak of God's acting in 'history'. The concepts of 'action' and 'history' will be studied, and then theological issues and attempts will be scrutinised.

Here we are to examine the concept of 'action'. We must be careful to indicate the scope and aims of our study of this topic. We do not seek to resolve, in half a chapter, the 'problem of action' - and so give a definitive, uncontroversial, and flawless statement of the problem. Such a task is beyond any expert in the field, let alone the present author, for there is an enormous wealth of verbiage on the question and several different stances with something to recommend them. We seek to discover some general principles which will be relevant in our later investigations, and perhaps even a fair consensus on the basic components and meaning of action. We will listen to some of the scholars in order

to learn about different aspects of 'action', but we will not usually aim to resolve or take positions on the fundamental questions which arise (no attempt, will be made, for instance, to 'solve' the mind/body problem). The second section of the chapter will attempt to sketch a Whiteheadian 'theory of action', though Whitehead did not turn to this problem in any self-conscious and serious way, and (to the best of my knowledge) neither have his interpreters done so to date. Finally, in the third section, we will relate our findings to the problem of speaking of God's action.

1 'Action'

All changes are acts or events, doings or happenings. This is a common distinction in this sphere - that between an 'act' and an 'event' or 'occurrence' or 'movement'. Broadly speaking, the difference is that in an act I (or some other agent) do something, and in an event something happens to me, or 'just happens'. When I strike a gong, I move and act; when I am struck by a swift uppercut and fall to the ground, I am moved but I do not act.[1] More precisely, an action is only fully explicable (and made distinguishable from an event) by an intention.[2] To refer to an act is to refer, at least by implication, to an intention: "all and only actions have descriptions under which they are intentional."[3] We

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1. cf Sir Malcolm Knox, Action (George Allen & Unwin, London 1968), p 92. We might indicate at this point that 'reflex actions' are not 'action' in the full sense at all, for they are merely mechanical or electrical responses: there is no intention in doing them.
2. Of course, we might know something about an action without knowing the intention of the agent. But we have not fathomed the action until that intention is known, and we usually do not ascribe actions to agents without assuming some intention, however veiled. Knox, Action, pp 93,96; P.F. Strawson, Individuals (Methuen, London 1964), pp 88, 112; Stuart Hampshire, Thought and Action (Chatto & Windus, 1959), pp 47, 51, 74f, 84, 94, 169 - henceforth, Thought; Anthony Kenny, Action, Emotion and Will (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979(2)), p 87 - henceforth, Action; John MacMurray, The Self as Agent (Faber & Faber, 1967), p 189 - henceforth, Self; John Macquarrie, Existentialism (Pelican, 1973), pp 174-177; Jennifer Hornsby, Actions (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980), p 36; Donald Davidson, "Agency" in Agent, Action and Reason (Toronto University Press, 1971), ed R. Binley et al, p 81; Austin Farrer, The Freedom of the Will (Adam and Charles Black, 1958), pp 115, 181 - henceforth, Freedom; Peter Donovan, A Philosophical Analysis of the Doctrine of Providence, with reference to the theology of H.H. Farmer (unpublished thesis submitted to the University of Oxford, 1971), p 190 - henceforth Providence; Donald Davidson, "Actions, Reasons, and Causes" in The Philosophy of Action (Oxford University Press, Oxford 1968), ed. A.R. White, p 89 - henceforth all essays in this volume referred to as in "ed. White".
3. Davidson ("Agent"), referred to with approval by Hornsby, Actions, p 36.

will have to qualify and unpack this assertion as we proceed.

If we say that an action is what it is because it is intentional, it might at first be assumed that this means that the act is preceded by (and caused by) a prior intention. Such an assumption is now quite out of line with the theorists of action. Gilbert Ryle raged against it over thirty years ago in The Concept of Mind. Ryle argued against what he called the official mind/body doctrine - the "dogma of the ghost in the machine".[4] The Cartesian conception of a separate, non-spatial, and private mind, inside a spatial and public body was, he said, a 'category mistake'. The theory was forged in the desire to distinguish mind from the clockwork model of physical causation. Mind's causation became a counterpart to such mechanics, whereas mind and matter are not really polar opposites, for they are not terms of the same logical type.[5] In this 'intellectualist legend' there were two elements in an action: thinking what to do, and doing it; a bit of theory and a bit of practice. But there is no double operation of considering and executing. If, for any operation to be intelligently executed, a prior theoretical operation had first to be performed and performed intelligently, then we would become embroiled in an infinite regress which would prevent us from doing anything. If one act must cause another, then that causal act must also be caused, and that cause caused too - and so on, ad infinitum. "When I do something intelligently, i.e. thinking what I am doing, I am doing one thing not two. My performance has a special procedure or manner, not special antecedents."[6] Ryle is not denying the key place of intention, he is saying that intention should not be considered a prior act which causes another act. Action is one process, not two - or an infinite number.

....in describing the working of a person's mind we are not describing

4. Gilbert Ryle, The Concept of Mind (Hutchinson,London 1949), p 15 - henceforth Mind.
5. Ibid., pp 18-23.
6. Ibid., pp 32, 135-149. Cf Kenny, Action, p 137.

> a second state of shadowy operations. We are describing certain phases of his one career; namely we are describing the ways in which parts of his conduct are managed.... when we characterise people by mental predicates, we are not making untestable inferences to any ghostly processes occurring in streams of consciousness which we are debarred from visiting; we are describing the ways in which these people conduct parts of their predominantly public behaviour. 7

Another nuance is added to our understanding of intention when we see that "Are you doing x intentionally?" is equivalent to "Do you know what you are doing, in doing x?"[8] The more a man knows what he is doing, the more is he free and responsible as an agent: the more he acts with a definite and clearly formed intention. [9] To act is to have an intention - to do something intelligently. The more clear and prominent is one's intention, the more perfectly one is acting.[10]

The sort of account offered by Ryle perhaps causes some misgivings. Despite his disclaimer on the closing page[11], he sounds much too deterministic, or behaviouristic, in his account of motives. One does not ever seem to will something freely, one just acts according to one's character. Ryle seems to commit his own 'category mistake', confusing the publicly observable (behaviourist) self, with the subjective private self of the agent. We might be forgiven for thinking him to have gone too far in his tirade against 'internal events': it seems to be overstating a good case to bar purely mental acts.[12] If we accept a unitive concept of action, where action and intention are not causally related, is such a mental act banned - and are we committed to behaviourism of one sort or another?

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7. Ryle, Mind, pp 50f. It is possible to detect in this, and many, quotations from Ryle, the 'Neo-Behaviourism' for which he seems to have been justly taken to task. This is a debate which we will not enter here. Ryle's point about the 'ghost in the machine' seems to have won general acceptance, even if other parts of his work have not. For the most thorough-going disagreement with Ryle, see H.D. Lewis, The Elusive Mind (George Allen & Unwin, London 1969), esp pp 1-96. It does seem though, whatever Lewis' quarrel with Ryle's mind/body doctrine (Lewis is an unrepentant dualist), that there is not a substantial difference between Lewis' and Ryle's ideas of action as it concerns us here.
8. Hampshire, Thought, p 145.
9. Ibid., p 177. Cp MacMurray, Self, pp 15f, 184.
10. Ryle does not give a detailed analysis of intention, but he does offer one for 'motive', which is (we shall see) a concept somewhat ambiguously bound to that of 'intention'. Mind, pp 93,111ff.
11. Ibid., p 327.
12. In his preface to Ryle's posthumous On Thinking (Blackwell, 1979), G.J. Warnock discusses this possible interpretation of Ryle, but is not clear about its validity: p x.

A theory which seems to avoid Ryle's difficulty has been tendered by Jennifer Hornsby. She says that the statement "All actions are bodily movements" is sometimes true and sometimes not. If we examine this statement the issue becomes clearer. 'Move' belongs to a class of verbs which may be used transitively or intransitively, and the different usage is significant. Action can sometimes be identified with the body's movements in the transitive sense ('bodily movement$_T$'), but never in the intransitive sense ('bodily movement$_I$'). It is often possible to answer the question 'what did he do?' by describing some bodily movement$_T$. "Movements$_T$ cause the body to move$_I$. And actions are movements$_T$. Thus all actions that are movements$_T$ occur inside the body."[13] Actions that are <u>not</u> bodily movements$_T$, for example standing to attention or mental arithmetic, can obviously be spoken of in this way too.[14] It is difficult to get much of a feel for this argument, but we will return to Hornsby's work later. For now we note her willingness to posit some sort of purely internal/mental act, and she is not alone in this.

At this stage our purpose will be best served if we turn to the 'classic' modern account of intention - that of Elizabeth Anscombe. Her case is that intention is neither an <u>antecedent</u> act, nor merely a descriptive term. It is a form of explanation with its own logic answering to the question 'why?'[15]

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13. Hornsby, <u>Actions</u>, p 13.

14. See Hornsby, <u>Actions</u> ch 1, esp pp 1, 5, 11, 14; also p 28. Also D.G. Brown, <u>Action</u> (University of Toronto Press, 1968), p 29: he says that doing a sum on the blackboard is an act, but doing it in one's head is not. This seems somewhat arbitrary and questionable. Two comments may be made about Hornsby's examples: (i) We should note that some reflex actions are described with transitive verbs ("he shielded his eyes", "she jerked her arm") but are not fully actions: the distinction is not final and complete; (ii) "Standing to attention" may not be the best example, for one has to move to this position to begin with, even if remaining there is not a movement.

15. Hampshire, whom Lewis fears is even more materialist than Ryle, says that a mental act relates to a 'full act' like a shadow which remains when the public aspect of an action is inhibited. Lewis, <u>The Elusive Mind</u>, p 97. Hampshire, <u>Thought</u>, pp 163 - 165. Cp MacMurray, <u>Self</u>, p 179

Anscombe is as sure as Ryle and Hornsby that intention is not a prior interior, causal act. She holds this opinion despite several impressions given by our use of language. We speak of expressing an intention, so we might be led to consider that which is being expressed. Intention can remain interior, i.e. not carried out, because one is prevented from executing, or because one changes one's mind. All this, she says,

> conspires to make us think that if we want to know a man's intentions it is into the contents of his mind, and only into these, that we must enquire; and hence, that if we wish to understand what intention is we must be investigating something whose existence is purely in the sphere of the mind; and that although intention issues in actions, and the way this happens also presents interesting questions, still what physically takes place, i.e. what a man actually does, is the very last thing we need to consider in our enquiry. Whereas I wish to say that it is the first. 16

In fact what distinguishes an action as intentional is that it is an action to which a certain sense of the question 'why?' is given application. The "sense is of course that in which the answer, if positive, gives a reason for acting."[17] This means that when we call an action 'intentional' we are not mentioning any extra feature attached to it,[18] for intention is never (says Anscombe) a performance in the mind,[19] and one cannot trace an action back to an intention which initiates or causes the movements which occur.[20] What the philosophers seem keen to show us is

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16. Elizabeth Anscombe, Intention (Blackwell, Oxford 1957), p 9.
17. Ibid., p 9.
18. Ibid., pp 28-30.
19. There appear to be many instances of intentions which get no further than our minds. E.g. I may intend to take back a library book, but forget to do so; I may intend to speak bravely at a public meeting, but lack courage when the time comes; I may intend to go on holiday in the U.S.A. in ten years time - what of that intention in the meantime? Such intentions do not receive fully adequate treatment by Anscombe or many others, though I believe that it may be possible to incorporate them within this general approach. Too many 'grey' areas are whitewashed: Anscombe is a little too sweeping and unguarded. Even though we would want to maintain that some intentions do not get beyond being some sort of 'performances in the mind', it is possible that she means something else by this phrase here, i.e. the mere performance of words in the mind.
20. When I push out the boat, it is not possible to trace this act back to an intending to push out the boat which is causally prior; deliberation on acquired skills does not usually take place (Intention, p 54). Anscombe here makes a neat point about more everyday types of action, but what of my American holiday? Is not my holiday caused by my ten-year-old intention to travel? Most of us would be unhappy to use the word 'caused' here - clearly our intention does not cause our holiday. But Anscombe does not give enough treatment of the way in which intentions frequently go dormant, or unfold. To these questions we will return in the main text.

that intention and act are irrevocably bound together; the intention does not cause the (outer) act as another (inner) act prior to it. [21]

We have followed a meandering path through others' thoughts on intention and action, and before we continue perhaps it is as well to summarise the main points which have emerged so far. i Intention is what makes an action an action, rather than an occurrence; ii Intention is not a separate, prior event causing the act, but rather an integral part of the act. It is, if you will, its direction; iii To intend an action is to be thinking about it. Action, in other words, is rational, thoughtful behaviour. Further development is required.

We have already seen Ryle's notion of motive - Anscombe makes the matter clearer.[22] She notes that philosophers distinguish between motive and intention (between what determines an agent's aim or choice, and what he aims at or chooses), though popularly the two terms tend to become interchangeable. Even then 'motive' is a term with wider reference than intention. Motives may explain or interpret action; but they do not determine them.[23] Motives should not be confused with mental causes,

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21. Knox, Action, p 95; cp pp 97f, 102. Hampshire, Thought, pp 74, 77, 90f, 97, 99; Lewis, The Elusive Mind, pp 51, 56. Farrer, Freedom, p 40: "We ought not ....to speak as though there were two actions: an act of deciding an action, and an act of acting. The two may be distinct in some circumstances, as when we decide to act on some future occasion, and then do act when the occasion arrives. But the typical case is that in which we decide to act, by acting." (cp pp 39, 109, 112 and Hampshire, Thought, pp 163f). We may feel inclined to challenge Farrer on the nature of the typical case. I suggest that very often action in the fullest, intentional sense, is planned, by its very nature as 'out of the ordinary'. To use MacMurray's words: "To represent action as consisting of a cognition which is the cause of a movement is to misrepresent the unity of action radically. We relapse into the mind-matter dualism if we analyse an action into two events, the one subjective and the other objective, which stand in causal relation.... An act may indeed be analysed into a number of elements which compose it, but each of these elements is itself an act, and itself therefore a unity of knowledge and movement. What is distinguishable theoretically is not necessarily separable in fact.... call knowledge and movement dimensions of action". (Self, pp 128f; cf pp 139f, 118.)

22. Intention, esp sections 10-14.

23. We might say that motives limit actions, and thus function as material causes. Motives limit actions by defining the limits of an agent's interest and involvement.

Anscombe says. A 'mental cause' is a perceived event which results in a response or action. Anscombe seems to conceive of a mental cause as some sort of a 'trigger'. I may be angry at someone, but what makes me angry now (mental cause) is some reminder of their offence. A mental cause need not be a purely mental event (such as a thought, feeling, or image), it may be a physical event which triggers off some mental event - such as when a particular knock on the door reminds me of someone. [24] A reference to a mental cause is usually a reference to something past, and this (says Anscombe) is perhaps the source of confusion with motive. There are, very roughly, two sorts of motive. Backward-looking motive, like revenge ("I killed him because he killed my brother"); and motive in general, or 'interpretive motive' ("he did it out of friendship"). A backward-looking motive is distinguished from a mental cause for Anscombe by the involvement of the notions of good and harm, as in revenge, for example.[25] Ryle is criticised for an over-universalising or generalising of human behaviour: people can act from motives only once, after all. She continues, "I call a motive forward-looking if it is an intention."[26] This provides us with a useful crude distinction. In Kenny's words,

> It is sometimes said that when a reason for acting refers to something prior, or contemporaneous with the action, it is a motive; when it refers to some future state of affairs to be brought about by the action, then it is an intention. [27]

Intention, then, seems to be a concept which usually has a future reference. It refers to a particular state of affairs which the agent desires to realise. [28]

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24. At this juncture I see no need for us to ask if mental and psychological causes might need to be distinguished from each other. We allow Anscombe's label to stand.

25. Anscombe seems to draw a somewhat arbitrary line between a mental cause and a motive, and the criteria of good and harm seem difficult to apply.

26. Anscombe, Intention, p 21.

27. Kenny, Action, p 86; cp pp 84, 92, 144. Cp also Anscombe, Intention, pp 86, 34f; Davidson, in ed White, on 'primary reasons', pp 80-83; A.R. White, "Introduction" in ed White, on motive as explanation, pp 13f.

28. Kenny, Action, p 77.

It may be useful to make a further distinction between motive and intention. As will already be presumed from our linking of intentionality with 'thinking about', intention must be conscious. An unconscious intention is a contradiction in terms. Motive, however, need not be conscious. Indeed, while all the scholars seem to be agreed that we cannot fail to be aware of our intentions[29] (even though we may not articulate them properly),[30] our motive may remain a mystery to us - or at least the subject of some confusion.[31] This necessary consciousness of intention may still obtain even when we have not consciously formed our intention.[32]

We mentioned, some while back, that Anscombe sees the expressing of intention as a particular answer to the question 'why?' of an action. But she is aware that not always will the answer to such a question be appropriate. The question 'why?' is refused application in this context in a number of instances: if the answer is i "I did not know I was doing that"[33]; ii if the action was involuntary (a difficult enough notion)[34]; iii if the answer is "I was not aware that I was doing that" or "I observed that I was doing that"[35]; iv the answers"for no particular reason", or "I just thought I would" sometimes makes sense and sometimes do not.[36] So not all answers to 'why?' will produce a statement of intention. We may wish to add to Anscombe's list the provision that answers to 'why?' might be normally be expected to contain a future reference for a statement of intention to be offered. Clearly the exchange "Why did you do it?" - "Out of revenge" does not seem to yield an intention, but only

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29. Anscombe, Intention, pp 24f, 49-57; Davidson, in ed White, pp 93f; Hampshire, Thought, pp 48, 54, 102f.
30. Hampshire, Thought, pp 95f, etc.
31. MacMurray, Self, pp 152, 195, 197.
32. Hornsby, Actions, p 37.
33. Anscombe, Intention, pp 11f.
34. Ibid., pp 12f.
35. Ibid., pp 25f.
36. Ibid., pp 26-28.

a motive.[37]

Let us explore another oft-used action word: 'voluntary'. 'Voluntary' and 'intentional' are not synonyms.[38] i An act may be voluntary but not intentional if no thought is given to the act, for example doodling.[39] ii Something can be voluntary but not intentional if it is a known concomitant result of an intentional act which can only be avoided by abandoning the act. That something would be voluntary in the sense that we acted knowing it would follow, but involuntary in the sense that we might have wished this consequence not to follow. Either way, it is not intentional.[40] iii Some 'act' might be unintended but voluntary if we allow something to be done to us, though it may be possible to make a case for intention in some instances. iv But every intentional act must also be voluntary (by definition), though it is also in a sense involuntary if for some reason we regret having to do it. 'Reluctant' may be a better word here than 'involuntary'. Duty affords a convenient example of this phenomenon. Doing my duty as a church member may mean going to a meeting instead of to a football game: I regret to do it, am in a sense coerced by my obligation, and yet go to the meeting intentionally.

We have delineated the relationship of 'voluntary' to 'intentional' in order to further clarify our notion of action, and reduce confusion to a minimum. It is now necessary to retrace our steps.

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37. We might note in passing that intention is usually seen to give a reason for acting, not a cause of acting: cf Anscombe, Intention, p 15f; cp Davidson, in ed White, pp 80ff where he explains intentions as 'primary reasons' - but see also pp 87ff, which is ambiguous. Cf Farrer, Freedom, p 112.

38. Anscombe, Intention, pp 88f.

39. Even this innocuous example is open to some objection. Is doodling still unintentional, if it is Picasso who is doodling? My own feeling is that doodling is, by definition, thoughtless and unintentional if it is truly doodling.

40. A good example of this point might be what ethicists call the Law of Double Effect. A surgeon performs an obortion to save a mother's life, and in so doing kills the foetus. He did not intend to kill the foetus, even though he knew the operation to save the mother would do so and he performed the operation voluntarily.

When we looked briefly at the work of Hornsby we saw the beginnings of her position that actions were events inside the body which had external issue. She goes on to characterise every action as "an event of trying or attempting to act".[41] Trying to act is intentionally acting, though not all tryings reach the 'surface of the body'.[42] Whereas we usually only say 'he tried to x' if there is an element of doubt or denial in our report,[43] Hornsby thinks that success is a sufficient condition for the term's usage. Agents try to do something in every case where they set out to do it and succeed.[44]

One of the advantages of this notion of an act as a trying (or intending) is that it enables us to see that the possibility of failure may be part of our concept of action. "Within the concept of action lies the distinction between an attempt and an achievement..... One cannot fail to intend to do something".[45] Of course, to try to act in some way is sometimes actually to act in another.[46]

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41. Hornsby, Actions, p 33.

42. Ibid., p 34. Hornsby here tackles the problem of unactualised intention.

43. As in Hampshire, Thought, p 107.

44. We must recognise though, that the problem of locating action and intention is intensified when action may be only a 'trying'. How do we know whether or not he tried to do it? The problem is nothing particularly new, however, since there always is a problem of knowing an agent's real intentions, whether or not they are actualised. Hornsby's account of actions as tryings seems to avoid charges of Rylean regress . She requires a fine distinction between the old 'Cartesian' view which says that actions are caused by volitions or conations, and her position which is that actions are conations. Again, we must pass this topic by.

45. Hampshire, Thought, pp 170f, 182f; cf pp 192f.

46. Hornsby gives the example of a tennis player who tries to return service but strikes the ball into the net.(Actions, p38; cf pp 44f). Knox seems to think that whatever we really intend, we achieve (Action, p 97). Whatever we fail to achieve is not a real intention suited to our objective situation, or just a dream or ineffectual wish. So far as this indicates that realistic intention only aims at that which is genuinely within reach, Knox gives a helpful reminder (cp Anscombe, Intention, pp 34-36). So far as it suggests that we are omnicompetent in realising our intentions, it is a misleading idea. I may intend to catch a bus, or return a library book; that I fail does not mean either that these were impossible for me, or that I did not really want to do them.

Let us shift the focus of our looking at acts and failures slightly and ask whether an agent may be held responsible for an act which fails, i.e. one which turns out in another way than had been intended. Austin Farrer says that when we plead an error or an accident we say that we did not 'do' something in the full sense of 'do'. He considers this a sound legal excuse, as legal responsibility depends on wilful intention.[47] This might seem,much in accord with our stress on the intentional nature of action, but in fact to accept Farrer's statement and universalise it to cover all contexts of 'responsibility' for action would be a rather misleading simplification of the position. It is true that the law seeks to establish the mens rea (intention) as well as the actus reus (act done), but the law recognises that lack of intent to do the act done is not the whole story - if it were, juries would never convict of manslaughter. Two examples may make the matter clearer.

A driver runs down a pedestrian because his car has gone out of control. Is the driver responsible? i Where the inability to control results from previous behaviour which was within the agent's control, then he is still responsible. If our driver is drunk, and drank himself so, then he is responsible for the pedestrian's injury. (If his drink had been 'laced' the situation is more ambiguous). ii Where the driver's inability is no fault of his own, but he could have avoided putting himself in a potentially hazardous situation, then he is still responsible. Perhaps the driver is an epileptic who has been advised not to drive. He had a seizure at the wheel; he is responsible. iii But it may be that

47. Farrer, Freedom, p 257. Anscombe (Intention, pp 91-93) gives a peculiar instance of 'failure' which shows how complex the notion of intention is: Peter denied Jesus - he could do what he intended not to do, without changing his mind, and yet do it intentionally. Kenny formulates the same point: for an intention statement to be untrue it is required not that it be unfulfilled, nor that the utterer expect it not to be fulfilled, but that it not be meant. (Action, p 219).

the circumstances are in every way beyond the control of the driver. Perhaps in our case, he was overcome by fumes. If responsibility must be ascribed somewhere, then perhaps we need to look to the car manufacturer, or the driver's garage. He is not fully responsible. The principle which seems to emerge is that where matters are properly beyond the agent's control he is not to be held responsible.[48]

It is tea time. I reach over the table to take some cake, and spill the milk jug over my wife's new dress. Is her wrath justified - am I responsible, though I did not intend it? Few would have much sympathy for me, but why? This act was in no way voluntary, but I am only spared responsibility for an 'involuntary action' if the involuntary aspect of the act is externally afflicted. In the action of reaching over the table, there was some intention, albeit not for spilling the jug. Such a side-effect of spilling may be due either to a lack of thinking through the logistics of obtaining cake (if I had thought about it properly, I would have realised that my sleeve was bound to hit the jug if I approached the plate in that way), or to sheer carelessness (I might have worked all this out, only to have been very careless and exhibited a general lack of competence in executing my intention to reach the cake). Either way, I am responsible for the spilling because firstly, at no time was a relevant circumstance out of my control - we will assume that I did not start at a loud crash from the street, so spilling the jug. Secondly, I was conscious, rational, and acting intentionally. It is rather like the distinction between murder and manslaughter; I intended to do something but not what actually occurred.

These two examples already clarify the issues, a third extends our coverage further. Someone might act intentionally and in good faith, and yet still be 'found guilty', held responsible. A man might run away with

48. See P.J. Fitzgerald, "Voluntary and Involuntary Acts", in ed White, esp pp 122, 137.

a woman at the office. He does not know that she is married, and that he has helped break up that family's life. He did not intend it, and perhaps he would not have acted in the same way if he had known all the facts, but he is still partially responsible. The exact extent of the responsibility seems to depend upon factors difficult to quantify, i.e. whether, and how seriously, an agent seeks to find out all the details relevant to his action. The situation is complicated by the difficulty of knowing exactly what is relevant, and this is more obvious in some contexts than in others. We might suggest that the home life and marital status of one's eloping companion is very relevant and should be looked into![49]

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49. The point is missed rather by A.R. White (in his "Introduction", in ed White, esp p 12). He says that it is not true to suppose than x is not an action of an agent because the agent had no intention to bring about x. The example he gives is of a trespasser - we all know that he is trespassing, whether he intends it or not. But the wrong question is being asked. We should not be asking "did he intend to trespass?", but "was he acting intentionally, were all the factors within his control, and had he taken all reasonable steps to find out all details relevant to his journey?" We just do not know that the man is guilty, legally or morally, of trespassing until certain facts have been established. We know only that the man was on land owned by someone else (assuming that this has been established). If he goes on to Farmer Giles' land with malice-aforethought, or just for a short-cut, then he is trespassing - and intending to do so - and guilty. If he just strays on inadvertently then the law will say (and trespass is a legal term so we will adhere to the legal model), that he should have found out who owned the land, or map-read more carefully and avoided the Giles property. He is still responsible, and guilty, for though he did not intend to trespass the law says that he should have taken greater care or acquired greater knowledge (what we have termed the relevant details) - that he should have intended more adequately or carefully, if you will. If however, he is hypnotised, or if he is an acute case of somnambulism, or if he is insane, we would say that the trespassing really was not any sort of act for which he could be held responsible (unless he had asked to be hypnotised, because he was afraid of the bull, or the like): things were not within his control. The point is this, that while a human being is conscious, he is acting intentionally, though sometimes more intentionally than others, i.e. with intentions more clearly formed and more carefully executed than at other times. We have already correlated intention with 'thinking about what we do' intention being the purposive element in such thinking. The more we think about it, the more our acting is action in the fullest sense. When we do not think about what we do the question comes back: should we have been thinking more and therefore intending differently or more adequately? Intention in the pure sense might be considered as at the upper end of a continuum of rational behaviour: to the extent that all conscious action is such that we might be thinking about it intentionally, we are responsible for all within our control, and so all related to our intention.

Lack of intention is not enough to absolve an agent of responsibility - intention that is for the particular resultant state of affairs. P.J. Fitzgerald is nearer the mark than Farrer, when he indicates that the law will not convict on an involuntary act. We have already seen that 'involuntary' is not the same as 'unintentional', so that this statement of legal requirement seems broader and more satisfactory.[50] But intention does still need careful consideration, for if lack of it is not needed to convict, one cannot usually claim responsibility for an act without having had the appropriate intention in performing it. If a jury is to find someone guilty of larceny, they must be satisfied that the defendant intended (at the time of taking) permanently to deprive the owners of their property; for a jury to convict of murder, it must be satisfied that the defendant intended to take another person's life. The need of intention in ascription of responsibility can vary, according to the act under consideration. Many crimes have intention 'built into' their definitions, such as the two referred to above. Certainly in ordinary day-to-day affairs, no one credits another with a good act unless positing some intention on their part. Intention radically alters the character of an action which may appear to be just the same as another: this is what is so unsatisfactory about theories which totally externalise action. Again, a simple illustration makes the point.

Three men are walking down Cornmarket Street in Oxford, all towards Carfax and each of them carrying a carving knife. Externally the acts look identical, but if we consider the intentions of the three men we will realise that the acts are radically different. One is walking to an appointment in the High with an associate whom he intends to stab to death. He may perhaps be arrested for just this intention which he is

50. In ed White, see p 120.

beginning to actualise. True, all that he has done so far is walk the road with a knife, but if the police know of his intent they would certainly arrest him for possessing an offensive weapon, or conspiracy to murder. Legally the first man is punishable even now.[51] Legally the act is punishable; morally it is despicable. Now look at the second man. He is walking back to his car. He had been planning (intending) to stab his associate to death outside the Ashmolean Museum, but he has repented and forgiven his fellow. Perhaps he can still be charged for his intention of ten minutes ago. Legally this act is ambiguous; morally it is praiseworthy, for a sinner has repented from evil (this may show, incidentally, that a legal model is not universally helpful in problems of action). The third man has just bought a new carving knife so that he may carve next Sunday's joint more easily, and he is now walking back to his bus. Legally and morally this act seems neutral. This example highlights how intention changes the character of an act; or more precisely, how intention largely constitutes an act for what it is.

We are now in a position to clarify two more issues which arise regarding the nature of intention. The first is this: one can act intentionally by not doing anything at all. For example, when I remain sitting as the Queen enters the room, I am judged to be guilty of an act of impertinence. My not 'doing' anything is only apparent - I do not move, but act nevertheless. When one does not do something intentionally, or when one can have been reasonably expected to have done something, one can be held responsible. Theologically, we might be talking of sins of omission.

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51. We need to note an important point here. Intention is not causally prior, yet the intention to murder precedes the completed act - and indeed the act may not follow at all, as in the second man in our example. There clearly comes a 'point of no return' in action, beyond which one cannot go and still draw back from the act. The man in the Cornmarket is beginning to execute his act. If he gets so far as raising the knife, but no further, he will be guilty of attempted murder. If he kills, of murder. The point is that the act of 'trying to murder' (in Hornsby's phrase) has already begun before the knife is aimed - but the act may still be stopped. Intending properly begins to change my acting immediately I start intending it, so that in some sense it is being actualised as soon as it is intended. Knox (Action, p 97): "The decision to act is the beginning of the action, not the last step before the action starts.... the intention, if genuine, begins at once to be fulfilled, though the fulfilment may not be complete until days or even years afterwards".

The second point we might wish to clarify is that of habitual action. Suppose someone were to say "that act is not intentional, it is only routine"; would they be justified in their assumption? In fact, a brief example will show that 'habitual' and 'intentional' are not mutually exclusive.[52] A man thinks about jogging each morning before breakfast: he thinks it will do him good. For a week or two he considers the relevant questions for his decision. He chats with his wife about re-scheduling breakfast; he talks to his doctor about health risks and gains; he examines a map for an appropriate route; he costs running kit, etc. Then he decides that he will jog each day. Let us suppose that this decision was made one year ago, and that he is still running today without thinking about it any more. Is his running intentional? Of course, it is. He is no longer wrestling with the question, no longer assessing evidence pro and con, but he still jogs intentionally and habitually. Life would be too much for most of us if we had to make every decision consciously over and over again. Life would soon degenerate if he went through the decisions to jog over again, and lay awake at nights worrying. It is true, he may get up one morning, see two feet of snow, and decide not to go out that day - but such fresh intentions are the product of extraordinary circumstances.[53]

Let us draw breath here, and make a tentative list of the main points which seem to have come to our attention. i Intention is what makes action an action in the full sense of the word; ii Intention is not a prior cause, but an integral part of action; iii To intend an action is to be thinking about it; iv Intention (unlike motive) has an essential future reference, it seems; v Intention must be conscious; vi We are given an intention as a proper answer to certain questions 'why?' asked of an action; vii

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52. Farrer makes a similar point: Freedom, p 168.

53. The runner's habitual intention to jog might well arise from in a question of the justification of his action, e.g. "why do you run on a morning like this?" Faced with such a question, he thinks about his intention again.

'Intentional' and 'Voluntary' are not synonomous, though they overlap to some extent; viii The concept of action seems to include within it the recognition of possible failure; ix Habit or routine does not preclude that that activity is intentional; x Agents may be deemed responsible for effects which are intended by them or which (if unintended) they might have reasonably been expected to avoid, i.e. if the effects were not beyond the agent's control. Some of these points will obviously prove more important than others, but we list them all for the present as the fruit of our labour so far.

But before our examination of 'action' is complete there are still a few vital concepts to consider. The idea of 'basic actions' was first mooted by Arther Danto. He contends that there are some things that an agent does which do not first require him to do anything else; other acts, however, require another 'doing' for them to be done. If an agent performs a basic action he performs nothing first that causes it to happen.[54] For Danto, bodily movements are a primary instance of basic actions. Each agent has his 'repertoire' of these basic actions which he can perform without first doing another action.[55]

Jennifer Hornsby has refined Danto's somewhat crude notion of a 'basic act'. She distinguishes two notions of 'basicness' in action: causal and teleological.[56] We do not normally talk of a man's doing something causing his doing of something else, so what is 'causal basicness'? Two examples throw the issues into relief. I might (intentionally or not) cause myself to write to a friend by summoning up an image of him. This causes my writing the letter. Summoning the image is 'more basic' than writing the letter. But when I enter a dark room and put on the lights,

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54. Arther C. Danto, "Basic Actions", in ed White, p 45. Cp A.R. White, "Introduction", in ed White, pp 2-3.
55. Ibid., p 51.
56. Hornsby, Actions, pp 66ff in particular.

we do not say that I cause myself (intentionally or not) to turn on the light by flicking the switch. From this Hornsby adduces three types of basicness: causal (where one action depends causally upon another), preparatory (where two actions are related not causally, but where one is done in preparation for another - e.g. I get my key in order to unlock the door), and compositional (an action may be composed of parts which are in turn actions - to make a cake I perform a series of acts first). Thus Hornsby seems to 'split' the teleological type into two kinds.

This more sophisticated theory hinges upon the way in which one action can be described in different ways, like one act being both flicking a switch and turning on a light. Later we will see how both causal and teleological basicness might be useful tools for speaking of God's action.

That one action may have more than one description is shown us very effectively by Anscombe. She uses an illustration which is perhaps the most often referred to and reused by other theorists.[57] It is this: a group of Nazis are gathered in a house for a meeting, and a person unknown has put a slow-acting poison into the water-tank (by the time they know that they are being poisoned, it will be too late). A man is pumping water into the house, What is he doing? He is : moving his arm (A); operating the pump (B); replenishing the water supply (C); poisoning the Nazis (D).[58] All these descriptions are correct, and all the 'actions' are intentional, i.e. each is intended. It is conceivable that in certain circumstances someone might only be doing A, for instance;

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57. Anscombe, Intention, pp 37-41; cp White "Introduction", in ed White, pp 8-10.

58. It is true that while all these are correct descriptions, they are not all on the same level. Indeed that is the whole point. A-C can be accounted for in a purely physical way; a mental attitude is required for D. But these are not four acts, but four descriptions.

perhaps someone might only be intending A. If we ask the question 'why?' we get four answers (A, B, C, D), each one depending on the previous: four intentions relating to four acts, or (more precisely four descriptions of the same act). If we seek one intention, or one description of the act by the agent, and that the most adequate, the agent would go to the end of the sequence (assuming that he knew that the end of the sequence was, i.e. in this case, assuming that he knew the water to be poisoned and the house to be inhabited - that he was poisoning the Nazis, in other words): the intention with which the other 'acts' were done. This intention 'swallows up' the previous intentions, so that we can answer 'D' to a question about 'A', while 'B' and 'C' tell us how 'D' was done. Some intention may fall outside the sequence A-D and not be 'swallowed up' by D - e.g. if the man pumps out the rhythm of "God save the King" with the pump.[59] The important thing is to note that our pumper is doing only one thing: poisoning the Nazis by replenishing the water supply by operating the pump by moving his arm.[60] One doing, not four. 'Moving his arm' is what Hornsby calls the causally basic action. But an important word is 'by'. As Hornsby indicates,[61] we use the word 'by' to form more complex verbs out of other verbs and verb-phrases. Thus the full description above is one complex verb description, the preposition 'by' showing that only one doing takes place. More complex verbs give a fuller account of action. While operating the pump, there was nothing that the pumper was doing which could possibly count as his poisoning the inhabitants unless it was

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59. Anscombe, Intention, pp 45-47.

60. If he is also intentionally pumping out "God save the King" that clearly does not fall within this sequence. We might have to write A, B, (E), C, D.

61. Hornsby, Actions, pp 7-9.

operating the pump.[62]

One action then is capable of many descriptions, and further, these descriptions might show the action in different lights. One person may enjoy the actions under one description but not under another. Our pumper may find the physical exertion invigorating, but the poisoning even of Nazis distasteful.[63] The same 'doing' may look different according to the description or perspective adopted.

But we have only discussed one sense in which an action might be said to be complex, i.e. a causally complex description. There is another sense of complex, in Hornsby's terms the 'teleologically complex', with a sequence of doings: it may be that for our purpose this type of 'complexity' may be more significant. Something that we do may be one act and yet involve a succession of doings or acts - 'sub-acts', if you like.[64] Very often (indeed this is hardly surprising if we take the social nature of human existence into account), such a complex item will be made more complex yet by interaction with other entities and agents. The more complex an action is, in this sense - i.e. the more 'others' involved, the more the risk of failure (which as we have seen, may be

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62. By 'complex act' we mean an act which is not 'basic' but has component parts - one of which may be basic. Thus 'renegotiating EEC terms' is a complex act because it is a series of actions (with a variety of agents) - issuing from the more basic act of 'briefing' by Mrs. Thatcher. Normally this label 'complex' will apply to these 'teleological' (whether preparatory or compositional or both) categories of act, though it may be used of the 'causal' too. It is just that its elucidatory power is obviously greater in the teleological instance. Further, a complex act (of either type) is capable of a variety of descriptions. A 'simple' act is perhaps the proper opposite of 'complex'. The terms may not be strictly used, and are relative. Mrs. Thatcher's basic act is her initial one; an official's simple act is, perhaps, his compiling a document for the case; the complex act is Mrs. Thatcher's whole renegotiation. Simple acts are sometimes 'sub-acts' when related to a complex whole, but they are always discrete.

63. Oedipus may have enjoyed making love to Jacasta, but not to his mother. The example is Kenny's: Action, pp 130ff.

64. Cf MacMurray, Self, p 89, e.g.; the reader may also be referred to ch VI of the present thesis, specifically to the treatment of Gordon Kaufman (God the Problem, Harvard University Press, Harvard 1972) and his notion of 'sub-acts'.

'built into' action itself) increases.

Let me illustrate my meaning. i I resolve to sit down. This act involves myself and a chair. It is relatively simple and the number of things that can go wrong are limited. I may break my leg, or slip, or the chair may be too flimsy to take my weight, but normally the risk is minimal. ii I may resolve to teach my dog to sit down on the command 'sit!'. The action of 'teaching my dog to sit' is more complex than my sitting. Dogs have limited freedom and a certain 'personality' (if you will forgive the anthropomorphism). In the park I must contend with the elements, and with other dogs distracting Fido from his classes. But, if I have the requisite skill, and if my dog has more or less average propensity for training and discipline, I should succeed. iii I may resolve to persuade my wife to teach my dog to sit. Now my wife will encounter all the problems mentioned under ii, but before she even comes to them there is the problem of persuading her to do it. Perhaps she is scared of dogs,or agrophobic, or too busy, or lacking the requisite 'know-how', or perhaps she just does not want to do it! Each time a new element is introduced the action becomes more complex and more risky. This risk is magnified when we deal with free (human) agents. My wife has much more a will of her own than Fido, and is also in a position to apply subtle pressures on me if she does not want to conduct dog training classes - she may refuse to cook dinner.

From these trivial examples we begin to see the point. But note something else: we often speak of one person acting through another person or many others. That is, A performs p through the agency of B. In one sense, p is B's act, but we usually think of it being much more A's act. Thus I buy my wife a book for her birthday. I make the purchase by giving specific instructions and cash to a friend. He goes

to the shop, finds the book and hands over the cash, yet the book is my present which I bought. In a similar way we say "Mrs Thatcher renegotiated Britain's terms of membership with the EEC". We all know that most of the finer details and much of the 'wheeling and dealing' was done by other officials at her behest and guidance. These officials are still responsible for the settlement in a real way (as my friend is responsible for the purchase), though their action may have been limited somewhat by the terms of reference dictated to them. But we still say that it is Mrs Thatcher's act - indeed, much more her's than their's. This is a complex action and one with greater risk of the agent's intention being thwarted because it is entrusted to others. Indeed, we often only talk of the responsibility of my friend or the negotiators for their acts, if they botch and fail to actualise the intention of their instructors. If the wrong book is purchased, (provided I gave the correct instructions) it is my friend's fault; if the correct book is bought, it is to my credit (all else being equal). It is J.R. Lucas who points out that outside of philosophy text books, the word 'agent' is commonly reserved for one who acts on behalf of another.[65] In terms of the basic/complex distinction which we have been adumbrating, Mrs. Thatcher's basic action was to brief officials; but her complex action was the renegotiation of terms, even if others (the 'agents' in Lucas' sense) did the negotiation.

We must attempt to trace responsibility in the case of complex actions too. Mrs. Thatcher is responsible for our new terms of EEC membership insofar as they reflect her intentions for the renegotiation. To be responsible for one's own complex action is properly to have one's simpler

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65. J.R. Lucas, "Freedom and Grace" in his Freedom and Grace (SPCK, London 1976), pp 6f.

actions identified as the cause of an upshot; to be responsible for one's simpler actions is only to be properly identifiable as their doer.[66] The problem becomes much more ambiguous in the case of failure. If Mrs. Thatcher's renegotiation were judged a failure, would she be responsible? If the results were as she intended (i.e. if she aimed for failure), then she would be responsible. If not? Either she might be held responsible for aiming unrealistically, or for not briefing her team well enough. But it is just as likely that the 'fault' will lie with the negotiating team, or with the hard-nosed attitude of the other sides. If, on the other hand, the agreement turns out to be much better than she had hoped or aimed for, then she can hardly take any credit at all. If she was to ask for a £500m refund, and the German Chancellor opens the talks with an offer of £750m, Mrs. Thatcher may be wise to try to make political capital from the new terms, but these terms would not be 'her's'.

Where we draw the line between one action and another is often somewhat arbitrary. Particular intention can mark off particular action, so that when intention is realised (or when it fails finally) we know that an act is complete. This is another aspect of the importance of intention: it marks off one act from another, so far as it is possible to do so. But often our dividing of life up into particular actions is only an expediency. We can nearly always find a 'bigger', more complex action under which to bracket another complex action, and such ever more complex descriptions are commonplace in everyday life. How far was Mrs Thatcher's renegotiation a ploy to achieve good press reports?

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66. We borrow this definition of responsibility from Feinberg ("Action and Responsibility" in ed White, p 109), not thinking it exhaustive, but for convenience.

How much are popular press reports a ploy to "get away with" more unpopular policy? How far are unpopular policies a means to something else - "national economic recovery"? And so we could go on. In this context we see that intention can play the role of unifying our action and so our whole lives. If someone acted without consistent intention we should describe their behaviour as highly abnormal. Intention provides some continuity or consistency in our action, and gives our actions a certain trajectory.[67]

How specific is intention? Kenny says that intention relates to a "particular state of affairs in the future",[68] and it seems inevitable that when we intend something we have in mind a state of affairs different from that currently existing. A certain specificity, though possibly within certain limits rather than 'spot on' at first, is implied in the very use of the word. 'Intending this' is 'intending this' and not 'that', else the term seems meaningless. It is true that I might, as Hampshire says,[69] state my intention roughly, but we should not allow ourselves to be misled by this. At each stage before proceeding, before acting, intention must be determinate. For example, we say "X built the hospital" (a very complex act with many 'agents': the only stone which X touched was the one he unveiled at the opening). He contracted out the design to experts, but they were to work within certain limits. They decide at each step what precisely they will do next: if they did not, it would never get built. In so far as they decide to build the

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67. Hampshire, Thought, p 72, but also p 133; cp Farrer, Freedom, p 289, and MacMurray, Self, pp 166-169. There is a sense in which intention, as a continuous expression of our character, integrates our experience. There is a reciprocal relation perhaps: with actions and intentions forming our character. This experience of intention as integrating our whole experience of life may lead us to consider our whole lives as, on one level, one highly complex action with a continually modifying intention. As actions grow ever more complex (with more and more 'agents'), it may be possible to see how MacMurray sees the world as one action and a unity of intention: God's intention (Self, pp 204, 220f). We are becoming highly speculative and must take care. Yet such thoughts seem a short step from recognising some sort of divine, providential 'economy' (cf Ian T. Ramsey, Models for Divine Activity, SCM, London 1973, ch 2).

68. Kenny, Action, p 77.

69. Hampshire, Thought, p 121.

Nurses' lodgings in a way which X did not specifically intend, then those lodgings are not X's act, even if the project as a whole is.[70] Or suppose I say, "I intend to go to College today and either read or play snooker". What sense does this make? Insofar as it makes any sense at all, it may state my priorities (if a certain book is available....., if not....), or it may tell you that I intend to go to College, but that I have not yet made up my mind what to do there. But I will have to decide and intend one or the other before either gets done.

Our study of 'action' draws to a close, and it remains to summarise our tentative conclusions by adding to, and completing, the lists already given. We will enumerate fifteen theses concerning action, of varying importance and offered with varying confidence. It is my contention, which I hope to validate in the remaining parts of this chapter, and throughout the thesis, that these propositions may yield a rich and suggestive resource for speaking of God's action. i Intention is what makes an action an action in the full sense; ii Intention is not a prior cause, but an integral part of action; iii To intend an action is to be thinking about it; iv Intention seems to have an essential future element; v Intention must be conscious; vi We are given intention in reply to certain questions 'why?' about an action; vii 'Intentional' and 'Voluntary' are not synonyms, but they overlap; viii The concept of action includes within it the recognition of the possibility of failure; ix Habit or routine can still be intentional; x Agents are deemed responsible for effects which they intend, and for those for which they have no reasonable excuse; xi Some of our actions are basic, others are complex in one of two ways; xii One action can

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70. This example will be discussed again when we consider 'sub-acts' in ch VI.

be described in different ways and from different perspectives; xiii The more complex the act the greater the risk of failure, of it not realising its intended effects; xiv One agent may act through another agent's free agency, and yet we still say that the act is properly and mostly the act of the first agent, and in certain cases the first agent may be held responsible for the failure of a complex act; xv Intention must be at least fairly specific, and before acting, completely determinate.

2 Whitehead and 'Action'

It is my purpose now to show how a Whiteheadian view of action can 'dovetail' into the sort of conclusions that we have just cautiously put forward. Indeed, at certain points Whitehead will illuminate and enrich the findings, while at other points he may be found to be a little 'thin' or inadequate. Insofar as Whitehead is adequate to help us understand 'action', then the credibility of his system will be enhanced.[71] But the main purpose of the thesis is not a continual and detailed critique of Whitehead's cosmology. Rather, our aim is to see whether Whitehead's system and ideas are an appropriate vehicle for a particular Christian doctrine: to some extent, inadequacies in this regard might lead us to question the system as a whole, but this is not our major concern. We intend to see if Whitehead may be used, not destroyed,- 'used' not in any arbitrary way, but considering the approach as a whole and in its various parts. It may be that we come to feel that some parts need to be modified, but we will come to that in good time.

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71. "Speculative Philosophy is the endeavour to frame a coherent, logical, necessary system of general ideas in terms of which every element of our experience can be interpreted. By this notion of 'interpretation' I mean that everything of which we are conscious, as enjoyed, perceived, willed, or thought, shall have the character of a particular instance of the general scheme". Alfred North Whitehead, Process and Reality (MacMillan, New York 1929), p4; Henceforth, Process.

The detailed and more technical exposition of Whitehead's thought must wait until chapters IV and V. This inevitably means that the reader may find the argument somewhat terse and a little mysterious. I must ask the reader to bear with us here and to trust that any impatience for fuller and more satisfactory treatment can be held at bay until later. At this juncture we seek only to say enough for our immediate purpose. We say anything at all here, in the conviction that this brief account written from a particular perspective may still be helpful because few other Whiteheadian studies approach his work from this angle, and because there will not be the opportunity to be so 'action-orientated' in the later chapters.

It is no exaggeration to say that Whitehead's whole system is based on the notion of 'action'. For Whitehead, 'to be actual is to act'.[72] Reality is comprised of atomic units of becoming known as actual entities.[73] These entities inherit data from the past, integrate the data into a complex unity of feeling, and aim at a satisfaction. In the attainment of this they cease to become and assume the character of data for new actual entities. This unity of becoming is atomic, admitting of no division: it either happens or it does not. The unit of becoming is initiated by the inheritance of the past together with an impulse from God, without which it could not become. This impulse is in the form of a goal or aim for it to pursue to satisfaction. The actual entities are all free, causa sui. They are all a unity of 'physical' and 'mental' features (poles), though in most one pole is developed much more than the other. Consciousness emerges in actual entities with a

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72. See Ivor Leclerc, Whitehead's Metaphysics (George Allen & Unwin, 1958), p 70, and many other references.

73. Whitehead uses this term often: e.g. Process and Reality, pp 40f, 104f. Clearly, Whitehead means by 'atomic' something different from his erstwhile colleague Russell, for whom an atom was something complete and unafffected by surrounding fact. For Whitehead 'atomic' meant 'indivisible individual'.

very highly developed mental pole. To whatever extent the mental pole is developed, to that extent the actual entity is potentially more free from its past. An electron of iron is not so 'mentally' developed as a moment of human experience. Because all actual entities are relatively free they may deviate from God's aim and adopt their own. This is known as their subjective aim. The subjective aim 'governs' the whole process of becoming, integrating all feelings and issuing in the satisfaction.

From this ludicrously brief summary of the 'concrescence' of an actual entity we see how Whitehead is able to underscore several of the crucial propositions adopted in the first part of this chapter. Action is basic to the whole system. All entities 'act' in some way. And that action is governed throughout by an intention (subjective aim), which integrates experiences and provides direction for becoming.[74] The epochal theory of becoming is also significant: it allows no causal regress in which the agent is forever prior to the act in all relevant aspects.[75] And Whitehead's resolution of the mind/body problem, which is to make mind and body two aspects of every actuality, ensures no "ghost in the machine". The theory of action is properly unitive: the subjective aim, or intention, is 'internal' to the actual entity, but inevitably issues in the 'external' act - the objectification at satisfaction - the two are inexorably linked as one act. The objectification is nothing but the objectification of the 'internal' integration and aim. Intention cannot be a prior, separate causal act. We are also assured that the subjective aim, as it guides the actual entity

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74. We have already indicated how intention might be considered a model for integration of character and personality. In Whitehead, it is certainly this 'aim', intention, directionality, which also integrates. We do not however, wish to be dogmatic about the integrative role of intention. Motive, for instance, is also a good model for such purposes.

75. This point is made by John Bennett, in "A Whiteheadian Theory of the Agent Self", a rare study of the subject, in Philosophy Today 17/4 (Winter 1973, p 339.

to satisfaction, must have a future orientation. It must be fully determinate and specific. This 'act' in Whitehead extends to all reality. We said earlier that action in the fullest sense refers to that action which is the subject of conscious thought and intention. Whiteheadians would agree with this. Human action is (potentially) action to the full, but 'action' is a continuum reaching right down through reality. It may not be proper to speak of an electron's intention, but Whitehead would talk of an electron's subjective aim.[76]

It is possible to see how another distinction from part 1 also operates in Whitehead's thought. A basic action in Whitehead would be that action which an actual entity does simply in its own coming to satisfaction: a private, internal action, not yet (as it were) involving any other entities contemporary or future. But Whitehead also has much room for complex actions. Indeed, the actual occasion is such a fragmentary pulse of experience that nearly all significant 'acts' are complex. This is, of course, true in our everyday experience. In Whitehead, any intention with a future-distant (as opposed to a future-immediate) reference would involve a self (a series of actual entities)[77] in a complex act involving a series of actual entities' actions. And when other 'selves' and 'entities' are involved the actual entities have to objectify themselves (intend to affect others) in a particular way. Any explanation of a complex act at this level is going to be highly complicated.

Two more points need to be noted. Firstly, the use of 'agent' in

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76. While we have insisted that intention must be conscious, even in human occasions the subjective aim may not be fully so. But these cases would probably be covered under the head of 'imperfectly articulated and formulated' intention. The ideal aim though, from God, need not be conscious.

77. Problems of the 'self' in Whitehead will be discussed in chapter V; cf Bennett, "A Whiteheadian Theory of the Agent Self", e.g. p 338.

Lucas' sense, of one who acts on behalf of another, is given a dramatically increased scope. If I, in this moment of becoming now, decide to go shopping this afternoon, then my current actual occasion of experience will objectify itself accordingly, i.e. by aiming to affect future occasions of my becoming in such a way as to ensure that I go shopping later. But the actual occasions who constitute me when I go shopping will be different pulses from those which earlier resolved to shop; they are, if you like, agents of the occasions who made the decision. Of course, the term also has the more natural application - if my wife does the shopping this afternoon at my suggestion, the system accommodates this situation in a similar way. This point exposes what we may well consider a weak spot in Whitehead's thought; his radical atomism struggles to express the unity of human experience. Secondly, because all actual entities are causa sui and (to some extent) free not to be dictated to by inherited data (and this is more true of humans than lumps of iron), the more complex an action becomes and the more actual occasions involved (especially truly free actual occasions), the more risky the whole enterprise becomes.[78]

It is clear now how Whitehead 'dovetails' into the propositions on action given at the end of part 1. To list them again would be pedantic, but we might note in passing (chapters IV-VIII are, after all, devoted to full extrapolation of this) Whitehead's notion of divine agency. God has his own subjective aim and also gives the "initial subjective aim" (what we spoke of as an impulse) to every actual occasion, i.e. to all reality. God's action is conceived on strict analogy with all actual entities', for he too is classed as an actual entity. Thus he objectifies himself

78. On another point, the significance of action for human existence, cp Bennett with Macquarrie, Existentialism, pp 174-177, and Knox, Action, p 110, etc.

according to his intention and so 'acts' on all becomings. In this way God not only holds all reality together, but acts on all reality in this 'basic' way. His action is universal and 'perfectly' informed and intentional. It may well be that a distinction between God's 'basic' and 'complex' acts, on Whiteheadian grounds, will prove an exciting and fertile one for an elaboration of God's agency.

3 God and 'Action'

Much is made of the inadequancy of theological language. We speak of God analogically, if at all. No theology could surely exist on this side of Neo-Orthodoxy without realising the enormity of the task of applying human concepts to divine reality. When human concepts are applied to God, which aspects do we refuse to apply, and which do we press home? Overall theological coherence and adequacy should be the criteria by which human concepts are applied to God.

Our purpose in this final section is, then, to see whether the propositions adumbrated earlier may illuminate what we mean when we speak of God's action, and in what way they might do so. First though, we might note that we formed no proposition expressing a necessary bodily referent of action. Such was ommitted with good reason: "It is a familiar observation in recent philosophy that the concept of agency cannot logically be reduced to that of bodily movement".[79] Purposes, aims, intentions, cannot be grasped in a purely physical way; it is one thing to say that an action requires some sort of physical locus, but it is quite another to say that a bodily movement always fulfils that role.

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79. Donovan, Providence, p 208; cp Brown, Action, pp 3-6.

In some actions no physical change takes place. Peter Donovan points out that some 'actions' cannot be individuated simply by pointing to a human agent because complex mechanical and institutional machinery are drawn in: as in a Pilot's forced landing, or a British Rail fares increase, or a cricket captain putting the other team into bat.

Some Process Theologians have wished to speak of the world as God's body, but there are very good reasons for proceeding with the utmost caution in this matter. If we do start talking of the world as God's body we might undercut his transcendence or independence in some way. The world does not display the degree of unity which a human body possesses. A body has an external environment as an important feature of its definition: what would be God's external environment if the universe were his body?[80] These and other issues advise caution. Since it seems that a bodily referent is not absolutely necessary it seems to invite trouble to push the point either way here. We need not commit ourselves. It may well be a helpful metaphor, in certain respects, to speak of the world as if it were God's body, but no more need be said on the question. If all we need is some sort of 'physical locus' for action, then the physical pole/consequent nature of God as prehended by the actual occasions' physical pole may afford just such a locus in Whitehead's system.

It is as well to state also a further aspect of our proposition on the responsibility for an action, i.e. that the agent must have done something without which the act would not have been. This is an important point to remember with respect to God's action. Without God's act, this event, E, would not be as it is, or was. Our account of God's action must make sense of this - how God may ' contribute' to an act

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80. These objections are by no means original to me: see Ian G. Barbour, Myths,Models and Paradigms (SCM, 1974), pp 160f. Also note R.H. King, The Meaning of God (SCM, 1974), pp 86f; henceforth, Meaning.

which we call his, how he makes it what it is.

Some argue hard for agnosticism concerning the 'mechanics' of divine action.[81] Peter Donovan shows the path which leads to the desire to ask for an explanation of these mechanics: if God cannot employ the 'normal' means of agency, can we continue to ascribe action to him without some other explanation?[82] Donovan advocates agnosticism and reminds us that there are other actions (e.g. basic actions, speech acts) for which we can offer no modus operandi.[83] He ends up saying that God's actions are 'basic actions', in Danto's sense, i.e. that there is no causal mechanism involved - God just does them! If this seems rather arbitrary, it appears more so in view of the further qualifications which Donovan goes on to add.[84] It looks suspiciously as if he has grasped at the only straw in his sight - a fortuitous notion of un-caused acts - and used it in some Houdini-like evasion of the issue. He washes his hands of the question 'how'?, or rather avoids all the attendant problems of speculating on the relation between divine and human wills by giving the most vacuous of answers. One is left wondering whether he has opted for a pious Fideism, or a rather unholy playing with words. His warnings about the dangers of spelling-out too fully the means of divine action are well-said,[85] but not wholly convincing.

Indeed, from a Whiteheadian perspective, we might question Donovan's basic assumption - that God does not use the 'normal' means of agency. In Whitehead's work God is another actual entity, albeit a far superior

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81. See the discussion of Austin Farrer in ch III.
82. Donovan, Providence, pp 214f.
83. Ibid., p 218.
84. Ibid., pp 219f.
85. Ibid., pp 223f.

one, whose means of acting is at root the same as the acting of all other entities. He does use the 'normal' means of agency. This will become clear as we refer back to our propositions now with an interest in God's action.

In later chapters we will examine the concept of God more closely, especially that of Whitehead. For the moment we proceed with an undefined, general concept of God and ask what might be implied about his action were we to speak of it in terms of the propositions adumbrated in the previous chapter. Thus for God to be said to act (in the fullest sense, i.e. fuller even than human action, as ours is 'fuller' than natural agency),[86] he should have (i) an intention for a particular state of affairs. God's act (ii) is his intention for an event; in Whiteheadian terms, the giving of the initial aim. We need hardly say that God is able (iii) to think about his acts far more rationally and with far greater vision than we. God's intention has (iv) a future reference, i.e. (xv) it is directed to a specifically desired state of affairs: he intends this, not that. God (v) is conscious of his intention, and (vi) statements of his intention are the way of giving answers to the questions 'why?' asked of certain events. (vii) All God's intended acts are voluntary, indeed it is difficult to give a satisfactory account of how God might be constrained (if at all - we discuss God's power in chapters III and VIII). The only way in which God's acts can be considered involuntary are a because of states of affairs in the world which God wishes were not so, and which he must take into account in acting - this is certainly not a 'strong'

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86. cf Farrer, Freedom, chapters IX and XV. We might note here that we will not pursue at any length the question of temporality and God. Obviously, some sort of 'before' and 'after' seems necessary in asserting intention and action of God. R.G. Swinburne, The Existence of God (Clarendon, 1979), pp 93 ff, is an excellent 'non-Process' discussion.

sense of 'involuntary'; b if the best for a given situation which God is able to intend for it (the initial aim) will still bring inevitable discord and suffering. Again, this is hardly a 'strong' sense of 'involuntary'. These last remarks will perhaps be controversial, but their full explication must wait.

God is responsible (x) for all events which occur according to his intention for them and as a result of his intention for them. Such an act is his act (as the renegotiation of terms is Mrs Thatcher's act). He is also responsible for effects which he could reasonably have been expected to have prevented from occurring, i.e. if they are not beyond his control.[87] An agent is responsible if what he did made the act what it was. For an act to be God's act he must have intention for it and have made it what it was. Mrs. Thatcher would not be credited with renegotiation unless she had been the impulse and force behind the agreement.[88]

In the examples of the last paragraph we have been assuming (xi) the distinction between basic and complex actions. God's basic actions are simple objectifications of himself for prehension by each actual entity as he offers it its initial aim. His basic action is one of influence. God acts in this basic way on every actual entity at every instant.[89] God's love for an actual occasion (i.e. his objectification as loving) is a basic action. He can love each occasion immediately,

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87. A full discussion of divine power is found in chapter VIII.

88. It is my hope to remain politically neutral in using this example!

89. R.G. Swinburne, The Coherence of Theism (Clarendon, Oxford 1977), has a similar notion of God's basic actions: "God is supposed to be able to move any part of the universe directly...He can make any part move as a basic action. ....He does not act through intermediaries, but directly". (pp 103f) Swinburne is here describing traditional Christian views, and in the latter part of the quotation, those of Aquinas. See also his The Existence of God, pp 32ff.

without doing anything else. His revelation of himself in religious experience may be such a basic action too for some. His giving of the initial aim is a basic action. These actions are, as it were, irresistible: he does them to us whether we like it or not, whether we notice it or not, and he goes on doing them. His actions may be causally or teleologically basic. But God also acts in a complex way. When God saved the Israelites from Egypt (see chapter VIII), that was a complex act involving the realising of God's intention through other free agents.[90] God can act (xiv) through the free agency of another, and yet we may still say that it is properly and mostly his act. And, (xiii) from the point of view of Moses the Red Sea escape was one thing; from God's and the Egyptians', it was another. By one description, Moses led the people out, by another God did so; it was an act of salvation, and an act of judgement.

We must recall what was said concerning the nature of complex actions: they bring with them the increasing possibility of failure (viii, xiii). Some will not countenance such a suggestion in this context. R.H. King is an example. His study of 'action' is stimulating and insightful. He even comes somewhere near our idea of more complex acts being more fraught with risks.[91] But he does not try to develop the distinction he makes between large-scale and small-scale acts in relation to God. And he seems to rule out in advance any thought of God 'failing' in any sense.[92]

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90. We do well to remember Lucas' point about the Agent as one who 'acts on behalf of'. Lucas has an excellent discussion of dual responsibility for one 'doing': Freedom and Grace, pp 6ff; cf Farrer, Freedom p 310.

91. Meaning, p 62.

92. When one examines King's own theory it is difficult to fathom any intelligible meaning. He says that God's action is universal in scope and that means, amongst other things, that God's intention is always efficacious - and he intends for every event. As we prepare to bracket King with Calvin, he asserts that God is not however responsible for all that happens, only for all he intends, and he does not intend all that happens. How these ideas are reconciled, and what can be made of them, is not immediately clear. See Meaning, pp 90-99.

If Stuart Hampshire is right that "within the concept of action lies the distinction between an attempt and an achievement",[93] and if the possibility of failure is 'written in' to action, then traditional theology faces a stiff challenge if it wants to go on using the concept. Especially when we propound a theory of God's complex acts in 'history' (if I may artificially distinguish them for a moment from his basic acts on individuals), then the task seems to demand our recognition that as acts get more complex, they get more risky. What are we to do? Some would analogise the problem away. 'The concept of analogy', they say, 'removes any human limitations when applying a concept to God'. But is this so, and how do we recognise a truly human limitation? Is the possibility of failure to actualise an intention a human limit, or is it knit into the very fabric of action?[94]

Ian Barbour turns aside from the agent model of God on this very question - that it prohibits, he assumes, creaturely freedom - and he turns to a 'Process' model instead.[95] But if our propositions viii and xiii are anywhere near the mark, Barbour may be misguided: the very thing he sees threatened by the agency model may be integrally preserved in it. MacMurray says that

> The possibility of action depends on the Other being also agent, and so upon a plurality of agents in one field of action. The resistance to the Self through which the Self can exist as agent must be the resistance of another self. 96

This would seem to indicate that it may be useless to attempt a conception of God's agency unless we envisage this agency as operative among other autonomous agents.

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93. Thought, p 170.

94. Vernon White seems happy to treat it as a human limit, and to ascribe agency to God in such a way as to rob all other agents of truly free agency. The Concept of Special Divine Action (Unpublished Oxford M.Litt, 1980), p 95.

95. Ian G. Barbour, Myths, Models and Paradigms, p 161.

96. John MacMurray, Self, p 145.

There is another way of applying analogy. We need not mutilate our concept by hacking it about at will. We could apply it 'a fortiori' to God. Thus, for instance, King would be right to suggest that God's agency is superior, or universal in scope, but not to consider that in some respects (i.e. perfect efficacy) it is totally unlike ours.[97] God's basic actions cannot fail, but his complex actions are inevitably more precarious. We suggest, then, that 'action' may well include within it the notion of possible failure, and the reader will already have surmised our willingness to apply propositions viii and xiii to God. The justification of this decision cannot be wholly set out here. It is a complex decision, and must be taken in conjunction with many others. Again, we are having to presuppose the results of succeeding chapters.

Perhaps the one proposition which does not seem to 'fit' is fairly innocuous, and may be applied in a modified form. It is not so much that proposition ix (relating to habit or routine) does not apply, but that it is not really relevant. It is not clear whether it can be meaningful to talk of divine routine or habit. One presumes that God is always aware of his intentions and of what he is doing. But there is a sense in which we may be confident even here: God's aim and intentions are constant, and he is always acting (basic) and seeking to act (complex) according to his constant love.

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97. The Meaning of God, pp 90 ff.

CHAPTER TWO

CAN GOD ACT IN HISTORY?

"Even historians who hold that God reveals himself in history would not today feel entitled to use him by way of explanation". 1

"A serious historian may believe in a God who has ordered, and given meaning to, the course of history as a whole, though he cannot believe in the Old Testament kind of God who intervenes to slaughter the Amelekites, or cheats on the calendar by extending the hours of daylight for the benefit of Joshua's army. Nor can he invoke God as an explanation of particular historical events.... I shall assume that the historian must solve his problem without recourse to any such *deus ex machina*, that history is a game played, so to speak, without a joker in the pack". 2

1 The Writing of History

Having decided that the concept of action may have application to God, we now turn to the problem of history: God may *act*, but can we speak of him as an actor in *history*? Again, the problems are too complex to be unravelled conclusively in the space of one chapter, but it is hoped that a brief treatment may be as worthwhile as it is undoubtedly necessary. In the first part of the chapter we will begin by noting and criticising some theological 'solutions' of the problem of God and history. Then we shall turn to the 'professional' historians and philosophers of history in an attempt to find a way forward, beyond mere prevarication. In the second part of the chapter we will again look to Whitehead, this time to compare his idea of history and historical method with our conclusions.

In order to facilitate our discussion, and to form a background to it,

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1. G.R. Elton, *The Practice of History* (Fontana, London, 1969), p 57. Henceforth, *Practice*.
2. E.H. Carr, *What is History?* (Penguin, London, 1961), pp 74f. Henceforth, *What?*

I suggest that we examine the main types of treatment of this question under six crude headings: all approaches being more or less adequate.

(1) What we might call the 'classical' view rested on a clear-cut distinction between 'natural' and 'supernatural', and invoked the doctrines of natural law and intervention. The argument is like this. God created the world and set it running with a system of 'natural laws'. These laws govern all 'normal' events. However, God sometimes wishes to do something specific himself, and then 'intervenes' and suspends these laws. Nowadays natural law has been redefined as a statistical generalisation, but for this reason the argument has flourished with a new quasi-scientific appearance. Most historians, and scientists, still reject it forcefully.[3] Theologically, it seems uncomfortably close to a return to the 'God of the Gaps'.[4] It implies that God only acts when things go wrong, or that he plays a minimal part in ordinary events - a view which the biblical witness would not endorse. Further, such a belief undermines all history and human action by casting the shadow of a capricious God across it. It brings God 'into history', but leaves him quite beyond the reach of a historian.

Fearing that (secular) historians are unable to see God in history because of the nature of their brief,[5] some twentieth-century theologians have sought a solution in what amounts to a separation of theology and history - "disengagement from history".[6] Two contrasting

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3. Carr, What? p 75; Colin Brown, "History and the Believer", in ed Brown, History Criticism and Faith (IVP, 1976), pp 165ff; cf also Mary Hesse's article in ed C.F.D. Moule, Miracles (Mowbrays, 1965).

4. To say that certain events are currently inexplicable without God's intervention is to put God as one factor among others, competing at the 'same level', as it were - and this is what Bultmann calls a mythological notion. As our knowledge and range of explanation increases there is less and less for God to 'do'. More of this in the next chapter.

5. On this point the work of Troeltsch is especially important.

6. The phrase is from Alan Richardson, History - Sacred and Profane (SCM, 1964), ch 4. Henceforth, Sacred.

methods of disengagement emerged. (2a) The younger Barth said that the resurrection is an event in Urgeschichte (Primal History).[7] In the Church Dogmatics he says that the significant events of the Christian faith lie beyond the reach of the historian - they occur in "non-historical history"![8] True history must include non-historical (unhistorisch) and historical (historisch) elements,[9] but it is illegitimate for Christians to 'play their joker'[10] in a neutral discussion. (2b) Bultmann makes a similar flight from factual history - this time into existential encounter. Cullmann accuses Bultmann of a "gnostic flight from reality", but his own position is close to Barth's: his Heilsgeschichte is not real history either. The neo-orthodox have become a sort of twentieth-century Docetism with their seeming-history, their flight in one direction or another to an invulnerable area which the historian cannot reach to disprove anything (an expedient move!), "where the critics cease from troubling and the faithful are at rest".[11] How do we attach meaning to 'historical' happenings which are in principle beyond the reach of the historian? If God has acted in the real world and in the real history of mankind, it is not enough to remove his action from the historian's ambit, for in so doing we remove him from history and so defeat our object.[12]

(3) Another group we will call (with Harvey) the Hard Perspectivists.[13] Their argument for allowing God to do as he wishes in history is at first sight more plausible, and has three main thrusts to it: i It criticises the 'unhistorical' use of analogy[14] - to decide what is and is not possible

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7. Epistle to the Romans (OUP, 1968), pp 29f.
8. Church Dogmatics, III.1 (T & T Clark, 1958), pp 78f.
9. Ibid., p 83.
10. Carr's phrase, What?, p 75; cf Barth, C.D. IV.3 (1962), pp 70f.
11. This is Richardson commenting on Brunner: Sacred, p 134.
12. Van Harvey suggests that Barth wants all the advantages of history with none of its risks, The Historian and the Believer (SCM, 1967), p 158. Henceforth, Historian.
13. Ibid., pp 203 ff.
14. Again, a reference to the work of Troeltsch - his principle of analogy.

in advance is unsound historical method; the evidence must mould our account. ii As all historians have presuppositions, an 'objective' account is impossible - all historians write from a perspective. The evidence does not so much speak for itself as yield information when subjected to 'cross-examination' by the historian. The questions of each historian will reflect his perspective. iii As every historian is inevitably selective in his use of evidence, this will serve to further underline his particular perspective. So the argument for a miracle can now run: to say miracles are impossible is only your perspective, and your a priori ruling out of miracle is unhistorical; your presuppositions rule it out, mine do not; your selection of the evidence militates against such an interpretation, mine does not. One of the key ideas upon which the argument rests is that fact and interpretation cannot be separated - here some historians are called in as witnesses, Collingwood well to the fore. Judgements of 'fact', they say, inevitably contain interpretation: they are inseparable.

The case against this position can be outlined under five points, which we state tersely. i Can we be happy with the complete subsumption of fact under interpretation? In everyday life we continually have need of this distinction (in law courts, newspapers, politics) and the working historian continually repairs to it. Neither does it do justice to the question of an event having different significance for different people (e.g. Hitler's death). It is edifying to note that certain NT scholars are eager to press the inseparability into use in order to 'prove' the resurrection, but make the distinction quite happily on other matters.[15] ii It may be doubted if it is an adequate definition of truth to say that it refers to the 'coherence of a perspective', as is implied here. Richardson says that

15. See the discussion of 'fact and interpretation' below. Here note John Knox, Christ the Lord (Chicago, 1945), p 67. Harvey, Historian, p 218

objectivity is God's alone, and to want to be like God is sinful.[16] But the call for objectivity is a call for ruthless honesty and open-mindedness. Cullmann recognises that all scholars have presuppositions, but he says that we should keep them in the backs of our minds rather than the front, for to turn this necessity into a virtue is more dangerous than not to observe it at all.[17] This point seems valid. iii Furthermore, the notion of selectivity here uses as its 'foil' an irrelevant standard of objectivity - carried to the position's natural extreme, we could know nothing at all. Here the idea of a scientific history resurfaces, though the Perspectivists profess to reject it.[18] iv How do we know which perspective is true? Richardson says that the Christian perspective enables us to see the facts as they 'really are' [19] and that it is differentiated from other 'myths' in its universal application and because its base is in a witness to actual history.[20] But surely any such assertion of the superiority of one perspective over another assumes that the criteria on which the judgement is made transcend both perspectives: Richardson has qualified only God for this job! If this is not accepted (and its acceptance would require considerable modification to the position) then we lapse into a complete relativism where 'anything goes'. v Also at issue is the nature of our presuppositions. Harvey objects that these may be said to take two forms. Firstly, the 'cultural furniture of the age', e.g. its scientific know-how, and the idiosyncracies of scholars. Secondly, they may include very specific 'beliefs' about scripture, e.g. that it is inspired and that events described in it must be accounted 'historical'. So NT scholars often

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16. Christian Apologetics (SCM, 1947), p 107; Harvey, Historian, pp 209 ff. Harvey asks if it is also sinful to try to love like God.
17. Oscar Cullmann, Salvation in History (SCM, 1967), p67.
18. 'Scientific history' is commonly associated with Ranke, and his attempt to describe events 'as they really were', with no layer of interpretation. In removing much of the ambiguity from history, perspectivists approximate this position.
19. Christian Apologetics, pp 105, 147.
20. Sacred, ch 8.

ask us to abrogate our presuppositions proper, our understanding of the world shared with all our contemporaries, in favour of these specifically held beliefs. Harvey's distinction may be a little too simple and begs the question of the legitimacy of either set of presuppositions. But he is right to comment on the breadth of the so-called 'Christian perspective' which must embrace Bultmann, Cullmann, Barth, Pannenberg, Gogarten, Ebeling - not to mention Fundamentalism. NT scholars do not share presuppositions, even about the NT. Harvey concludes that no specifically Christian warrants are being used here, but that normal ones are often suspended.[21]

Much stress is laid on the fact that the historian judges the truth of events according to his own experience.[22] This might well be true, but it cannot prove all that it is here being asked to prove. Why do I believe an 'historical' account of the resurrection? - what in my experience would count as 'evidence' for the resurrection of a corpse or the visionary experience of the disciples? The chances are that the most I can point to will be a 'feeling' which I may call 'renewal' or 'resurrection' - it may parallel the gospel accounts of Easter in some ways (not least in my interpretation of the experience and the relation of this to the gospel accounts) but it does not prove a bodily resurrection, an empty tomb, or anything else like that: the parallel is not that close. The Hard Perspectivists seem unaware of this.

(4) Harvey puts forward a more reasonable case for 'Soft Perspectivism', which accepts the distinction between fact and interpretation. The Christian sees the 'dimension of depth' in an event and interprets the meaning that a public event has for faith. Thus

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21. Harvey, Historian, pp 113-118; cf ch II, pt iv.
22. Richardson, Sacred, p 203, e.g.

communities adopt certain 'paradigmatic events' which symbolise, focus, certain truths about life in their experience.

Harvey gives an example of a paradigmatic event in the history of the U.S.A. - the assassination of John Kennedy.[23] But one is given the uneasy feeling that the interpretation which Harvey gives is foisted on to the event from the outside, as it were.[24] Event and interpretation are separable, but when we seek to interpret events we must try to make sure that the move from event to interpretation is made legitimately. Harvey's insistence that there is no one true interpretation of an event, but that an event has different levels of significance is true to the extent that the same event may look different to different eyes; but this raises the question of whether the valuation of an event is equivalent to its interpretation. Valuations are more subjective, interpretations are right or wrong - albeit only at their own level.[25] What we seek to establish here is how an event reveals God not by accident, but because he does something in it - because there is something about the event (not just in my, or your, perception of it) which demands the interpretation. Harvey's position is inadequate at this juncture. We might say, in terms of our previous chapter, that God must have intention for the event which we raise to paradigmatic status.

(5) A different position is occupied by Pannenberg. Like the Hard Perspectivists, he disallows the use of analogy to say what cannot happen in advance, and criticises the neo-orthodox flight from

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23. Harvey, Historian, pp 255 ff.
24. cp H. Butterfield, "Historical Scholarship and its Relation to Life", in Christianity and History (Bell, 1950), p 23; henceforth Christianity. (Reprinted in ed. C.T. McIntire, God, History and Historians (OUP, 1977), pp 379 ff.).
25. Harvey, Historian, p 221.

history - "Faith is not something like a compensation of subjective conviction to make up for defective knowledge."[26] Pannenberg advocates a new sort of historical method with God as its key element: only so does history make sense, he says. Event and interpretation are very closely related - the "meaning of events inheres in them".[27] The significance of an event must belong to the event itself if it is to be the basis of faith. The event's meaning is fully 'public' and should be obvious to all. The obvious meaning manifests itself whenever we consider the context of the event: the expectations and beliefs of the situation, the event's 'sitz im leben', yield the event's meaning. Thus in the context of the disciples' apocalyptic expectation, the meaning of the resurrection is plain (and its possibility?).

It is worthy of note that even Pannenberg says that sometimes 'divine illumination' must be given so that one can see the 'obvious' meaning of an event.[28] This admission does two things: i It makes him a lot closer to his opponents, the Barthians and others;[29] ii and it underlines the problematic nature of his claim: the only thing that is obvious is that if the meaning of an event was 'obvious' many of our existing problems would disappear. They do not. Pannenberg insists that the difference between his view and others' is that he does not see the 'illumination' as 'adding' anything to the event: it enables us to see what is really there. In so far as this distinction is a valid one it reinforces some of the points made about Harvey's position. But the word 'obvious' when used in the way that Pannenberg uses it is surely an overstatement of his case.

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26. Wolfhart Pannenberg, Basic Questions in Theology, Vol. I (SCM, 1970), pp 64f.
27. A. Galloway, Pannenberg (Allen & Unwin, 1973), p 38.
28. Pannenberg in Theology as History, ed J.M. Robinson and John B. Cobb Jr. (Harper and Row, 1967), p 88. (Cp Theologische Literaturzeitung 1963, p 89).
29. Theology as History, p 18f.

Six thumb-nail sketches. There are variations on these themes, but these positions seem to be demanding attention and dictating the issues in current theological debate. Where do we start outlining our own position?

What is the subject matter of history? When we clarify what is being spoken about in much contemporary debate among theologians we find that disagreement is often at an early, presuppositional stage.[30] Again and again we are told, in one way or another, man is the subject of history; man and his actions, his story, his possibilities.[31] Let us examine the debate occasioned by Pannenberg. Martin Buss says that history is only the study of past human action.[32] Thus for him, talk of God acting in history is a contradiction in terms. Buss might admit that God can act, and that he might have acted in the past, but such an assertion is not for him historical. Kendrick Grobel stands apart from Pannenberg for a similar reason. He says that the historian studies spatio-temporal events.[33] As for God's action, while it may be temporal, it is difficult to conceive of it as spatial. Therefore God's action is not a proper subject for the historian; it lies outside his scope. Pannenberg insists against Buss and Grobel that the historian studies all past events. It matters not if they fit into some pre-conceived 'definition' (human, or spatio-temporal): that they happened is enough.

It seems that Buss' sort of answer rests upon a common but too clearcut separation of historical and natural processes. Even allowing

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30. John Cobb's article in Theology as History brings out this fundamental rift in its discussion of the reactions to Pannenberg.

31. E. Troeltsch, "Historiography" in ed J. Hastings, Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics (T & T Clark , 1908-21), vol 1V,p 719; R.G. Collingwood, The Idea of History (OUP, 1948), pp 209, 302, et al, henceforth Idea; Carr, What?, pp 26, 33, 55, 86, et al; J. Macquarrie, The Scope of Demythologising (SCM, 1960), pp 59 ff, et al - henceforth, Scope; J. Macquarrie, Existentialism (Penguin, 1973) pp 221 ff; M. Bloch, The Craft of the Historian (MUP. 1954) p 194 et al.

32. Theology as History,ch 3 (see also ch 6).

33. Theology as History,chs 4 and 6.

for, say, Collingwood's qualification that occasionally a 'natural' event will shape a human event or response,[34] it still seems too narrow to conceive of history as strictly confined to man. We have a picture of man as part of nature. While many of his actions may reflect a supreme consciousness and reflection, there are also many of his actions which have a 'natural' element. Think of the influence of genetics, environment, even biorhythm, on human action. To give an adequate account of human actions one must include, or take account of, these 'natural' components. Nature is a continuum and man is, we like and hope to think, at its upper end. Thus it seems that any adequate 'historical' account must make room for certain 'natural' factors, beyond such things as unconscious factors. But such an extension of history's scope will not necessarily admit God. The Historian, in so far as he is a 'scientist' (I use the term very broadly) involved in public debate, must always seek a 'natural' cause for events, i.e. one that can be located strictly in space and time, one that is finite and quantifiable. Grobel is nearer the mark than Buss. To say that a historian must look for natural causes is another way of saying that he must try to explain events by the "factors which are ordinarily immanent in history".[35] This does not bar God's action, but may indicate its mode.

So we have two points: the historian must seek 'immanent' causes, and he must not put God in as an alternative to an immanent cause, or in desperation because he cannot see one (God of the gaps). But here I wish to bring in another factor upon which we have already touched:[36]

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34. Idea, p 212 etc; cf Macquarrie, Scope, p 82.
35. Macquarrie, Scope, p 72; see the quotation from Carr at the head of this ch.
36. Above, p 44.

historians are (almost) unanimous in their assertion that they interpret the past according to their "critically interpreted present experience". The idea is given widespread credence.[37] Allied to this is Butterfield's point that "history is a peculiar science in that it depends so much on things which can only be discovered and verified by insight, sympathy and imagination".[38]

A good deal of controversy surrounds the question of 'fact and interpretation', and a correct balance between extremes must be found. Butterfield:

> If I demonstrate that my grandfather was born....on January 1st 1850, then that thesis must be equally valid whether I present it to a Christian or atheist, Whig or Tory, Swede or Dane. In respect of points which are established by the evidence, or accepted by the judgement of common sense, history has a certain validity of its own, a certain minimum significance that is independent of philosophy, race or creed. 39

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37. e.g. E. Harris Harbison, "The Marks of a Christian Historian" in ed McIntire, pp 334f; Collingwood, Idea, pp 210-217; Carr, What?, p 24; E.W. Ives, God in History (Lion, 1979), p 57. See below for J.H. Hexter. G.R. Elton says: "In truth, historians like other people tend to judge their world from their own experiences and practice". (Practice, p 25). He says elsewhere that the historian's presuppositions are a 'fact of life'. "They cannot be eliminated, nor should they be". (Practice, pp 134f). They should be neither underestimated nor overestimated - they are much less important than intellect. In some sense though, each historian begins not in the past, but in his own present (George Florovsky, "The Predicament of the Christian Historian", in ed McIntire, pp 410, 412).

38. Butterfield, Christianity, p 17. This point again wins wide acceptance (J.H. Hexter, The History Primer (Penguin, 1972), pp 278 ff - henceforth, Primer. A good statement of the need for empathy is given by Antonia Fraser in an interview published in the Observer magazine, 23/9/79, p 47). Collingwood's theory of re-enactment of events by historians underlines the use of imagination (Idea, pp 282 ff; Patrick Gardiner offers a cogent critique of this concept in his The Nature of Historical Explanation (OUP, 1952), pp 28 ff, 115 ff - henceforth, Nature). Carr talks of the historian's need "of imaginative understanding of the minds of the people with whom he is dealing". (What?, p 24). Imagination is part of the 'present'that is brought to bear on the past. It is used not only for understanding the past but also for reconstructing it, or, as Hexter says, 'predicting the past' (Primer, pp 50 ff; cf Leon J. Goldstein, "Collingwood on the Constitution of the Historical Past", in Critical Essays on the Philosophy of R.G. Collingwood (OUP, 1972)). Thus interpretation becomes a 'subjective', or rather, imaginative tool in the historian's task.

39. Christianity, p 19.

There is a compulsive logic about this talk of 'minimum significance', even given that all events come to us 'second hand'.[40] But a little later he seems to tip the scales too far in his argument for 'bare facts': "our interpretation is a thing which we bring to our history and superimpose upon it....We cannot say that we obtained it as technical historians by inescapable inferences from the purely historical evidence".[41] Indeed, for Butterfield the 'Academic Historian' is "the man who will try to show what can be established by concrete external evidence, and will respect the intricacy and complexity of events, bringing out the things which must be valid whether one is a Jesuit or a Marxist".[42] This seems a little simplistic: a history of the lowest common denominator with 'offense' to no one may have some value, but would be insipid and of little use.

It is easy enough to find those who disagree with Butterfield. Marrou reviews the nineteenth-century 'scientific historians', saying wistfully that for them "history is the past, objectively recorded, plus, alas! an inevitable intervention of the present of the historian.... ((a)) quantity which must be rendered as small as possible - or even made quite negligible, tending toward zero".[43] The analogy they used was that of a photograph of the past, but, says Marrou, now we recognise the subjectivity even of photography.[44]

It is Carr who warns us that the facts of history never come to us 'pure': "they are always refracted through the mind of the recorder".[45] This is commonly accepted in theological studies - by gospel critics,

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40. cp Elton, Practice, p 80; E.W. Ives, God in History, p 29; Gardiner, Nature, p 80.
41. Christianity, p 23.
42. Ibid., p 24.
43. H.I. Marrou, "History and the Historian are Inseparable", in ed McIntire, p 392.
44. Ibid., p 393.
45. What?, p 51.

for instance. But Carr warns against 'over-sell' of this very point. He draws out the dangers inherent in Collingwood's position:

> In place of the theory that history has no meaning, we are offered here the theory of an infinity of meanings, none any more right than any other - which comes to much the same thing.... It does not follow that, because a mountain appears to take on different shapes from different angles of vision, it has objectively either no shape at all or an infinity of shapes. It does not follow that, because interpretation plays a necessary part in establishing the facts of history, and because no existing interpretation is wholly objective, one interpretation is as good as another, and the facts of history are in principle not amenable to objective interpretation. 46

He talks of the danger of interpretation "riding rough-shod over facts",[47] and so assumes the distinction while refusing to allow a subjective free-for-all. "Interpretation is the life-blood of history", he says;[48] it remains a question of balance - "history is a continuous process of interaction between the historian and his facts".[49]

To be sure, the relation between fact and interpretation is complex. But as Gardiner suggests, it would be wrong either to identify them too closely (as Pannenberg seems to)or to rend them fully asunder. Finding out what happened and why are not two distinct procedures - there is a "procedural interconnexion" between them, and yet they remain relatively independent.[50] Such a distinction might prove fruitful in arbitrating between claims of theologians - historians would seek recourse to 'fact and interpretation' to justify or attack positions. The whole issue is important because of what some theologians have sought to 'smuggle in' with the distinction: we need to distinguish between fact and interpretation, but nevertheless to seek to establish the correct interpretation.

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46. Ibid., pp 26f.
47. Ibid., pp 26f.
48. Ibid., p 28.
49. Ibid., p 30.
50. P. Gardiner, Nature, pp 77-79.

Lets draw breath here before going on, and see what we come to so far. i The subject matter of history includes all past events, especially as they have relevance for the 'human story'; ii But the historian is duty-bound to search for, and if possible locate, 'immanent' causes. iii It is unsatisfactory to substitute God for one of these immanent causes - as knowledge increases 'natural' explanations may or may not be found, but the mark of a 'miracle' may not be its 'inexplicability';[51] iv In both reconstructing and comprehending the past the historian inevitably uses his own present experience - subjective elements enter with the use of imagination, empathy, and interpretation - though it may be sensible to talk of certain facts of 'minimum significance', as Butterfield's grandfather's birthday.

I want to illustrate the historian's use of his own experience now by reference to a working historian. J.H. Hexter talks about two 'records': the historian's first record is the source with which he deals; his second record is the cluster of experiences and concerns which constitute himself, which he brings to the first record in order to interpret it. He shows awareness of the dangers and sometime inadequacy of this second record,[52] but insists that the question is not whether we should use it, but how and how best can we use it?

Hexter lists six examples of historiographical problems he encountered while working on Thomas More's Utopia. He indicates these, together with the solutions he arrived at, and the sources he used in coming to the solutions.[53] The first four problems he 'solved' in fairly 'orthodox' ways by reference to appropriate written sources.

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51. Its sign-like character may also be important; see the discussion in our next chapter. Here we note Brown, "History and the Believer", p 158.
52. Primer, p 125 (esp the second footnote here).
53. Ibid., pp 118f.

But the answers to the last two problems came by less easily defined, and perhaps less scientifically acceptable, means. The first of these problems he puts thus: "What accounts for More's enthusiasm, clearly expressed in Utopia, for measures to ensure security for families in case of the premature death or disability of the bread-winner?"[54]

Hexter answer:

> In the record of the past the points of evidence on his situation - his standards of consumption, his income, his own sense of being under financial pressure, his family situation - were widely scattered through a variety of documents.... the scraps of information readily combined into a picture of a man with a large family, high views on what should be spent on educating children, a generous standard of expense, several daughters to provide for, and a son to start in the world. He was moreover, at the moment he wrote, short of money, and his income was cut back to the bone by enforced absence from his law practice, a practice that he pursued ably but out of necessity and without joy. In such a context the outburst in Utopia acquired an added dimension. It became a cry from the heart.
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> But what made me raise the question in the first place, and sent me to the record of the past to gather scraps that made the picture plausible? It was the precision with which the passage from Utopia spoke, as the theologians say, to my own condition at the time I was writing. On a meagre salary I was supporting a wife and three children under six years of age. I had taken no steps to ensure their care or welfare in case of my death or disability; and with no other secure way of providing for them in sight, I was about to undertake a writing job I thoroughly disliked in order to meet my obligation to those who were dear to me. It was this flash from my experience, my second record, that fused a couple of bits of information from the record of the past into an insight into More's dilemma and sent me back through the first record in quest of other bits that might confirm it. 55

His own experience provided the key which opened the lock to resonstruction and comprehension. He had 'documentary evidence' from More for these points, but it was his own experience which asked the right questions.

The second problem he puts thus: "What accounts for the extremely harsh and repressive character of so many of the institutions that More provided for Utopia, his ideal commonwealth?"[56] No prevailing explanation

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54. Ibid., p 119.
55. Ibid., pp 126f.
56. Ibid., p 119.

satisfied Hexter - he thought that many reflected the historian's own ideological commitment rather than More's concerns. But while re-reading Utopia, a brief sentence referring to the human sin of pride caught his eye. He reworked Utopia with this sentence in the forefront of his mind. His conclusion begins:

> Once we recognise that More's analysis of sixteenth-century society led him to the conclusion that pride was the source of the greater part of its ills,the pattern of the Utopian commonwealth becomes clear, consistent, and intelligible. Its fundamental structures is a great social instrument for the subjugation of pride. The pecuniary economy must be destroyed because money is the prime instrument through the use of which men seek to satisfy their yet insatiable pride. 57

Why, Hexter asks, did he hit on this possible solution which has eluded other historians? He reminds us of the two components involved: the passage by More (first record), and his mind (second record) - "private, personal, individual to me, inaccessible to others, that made me perceive the passage as I did".[58] His second record contained meditations upon Scripture, Luther, Calvin, and more recently a reading of Rheinhold Niebuhr's The Nature and Destiny of Man, and an acceptance of much of their thought on the Christian doctrine of sin, especially the sin of pride. Again, his own experience, Hexter testifies, illumined and explained the past.

We leave Hexter for a moment, though we will be constrained to return to him presently. At this juncture I only wished to illustrate this crucial point. But now we must raise another related welter of issues. Talking about the historian using his own experiences to interpret the past inevitably leads us back to Troeltsch's principle of analogy. Must we accept, modify, or reject this principle?

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57. Ibid., p 129.
58. Ibid., p 130.

Certainly it would seem that some sort of analogy-principle is necessary. Just as it is difficult to imagine how we could say anything about God without using analogies in our experience, it is difficult to conceive how we could know anything about the past without referring to our own experience.[59] For all language and conceptuality would be totally meaningless unless it could 'strike a chord' within us. Communication is something that can only take place in a community of common experience.[60] But how rigid, how prescriptive, does our analogy principle need to be?

It is at this point that the protestations of Pannenberg, Richardson, and others, have real force. For to bestow 'omnipotence' upon analogy is surely unhistorical in the extreme. Pannenberg must be on to a real truth here: his use of analogy binds us to accept that unique events must not be ruled out *a priori*. To respect the integrity of the past is to allow it to be treated as a series of unique, particular facts. Analogy merely shows the similarities between unique events. Collingwood makes a similar point in criticising F.H. Bradley's view that the historian uses only his critically-interpreted present experience to interpret the past.[61] Later in his book Collingwood talks of the historian's 'picture' - it must be spatio-temporal, self-consistent, and most important - "what we mean by asking whether an historical statement is true is whether it can be justified by an appeal to the evidence".[62] Alan Richardson's most compelling positive argument is his plea for an account of the resurrection which makes the best sense of the evidence, such as it is, rather than one

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59. This is the crux of Nineham's argument for complete cultural relativism in his *The Use and Abuse of the Bible* (MacMillan, 1976). The tenor of Hexter's thought would probably be conducive to John Barton, who replies very ably to Nineham in "Reflections on Cultural Relativism" in *Theology*, March and May, 1979.

60. Hexter says something similar, *Primer*, pp 357-9.

61. *Idea*, p 139.

62. *Ibid.*, p 246.

governed by pre-conceived notions.[63] The historian must find out what happened and is not allowed to rule out anything in advance. His job is to interpret the evidence, not glibly to discount it.

But again we find the whole issue very finely balanced: the pendulum swings back. 'Analogy' cannot operate in a rigidly prescriptive way, but it must operate. As we said earlier, without it we would be unable to understand anything at all. Van Harvey puts this point nicely: any appeal to the complete uniqueness of, say, the New Testament events, undercuts all historical argument. Such a claim is just beyond our comprehension. "We simply do not know what would 'count for' an absolutely unique event".[64] Pannenberg may be 'hoist by his own petard'. He says that analogy can only point to similar things in unique events, but what similar element can it point to in the resurrection? He must argue more from some sort of 'universal' concept of resurrection: if such a thing exists the historian may speak of it. One is tempted to re-phrase the issue as: if a unique event is well enough attested (how well enough?), should we then believe it? But even this will not do, for if an unparalleled unique event was well attested it would be beyond us precisely because it could strike no familar note within us. It may have happened, but whether it did or not it would be beyond our grasp and comprehension. There is no way we could know one way or the other.

So we seem to adopt a somewhat ambivalent attitude to analogy. We need some doctrine of analogy, for without some correspondence between past and present experience it is impossible to understand and

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63. Sacred, pp 195 ff.

64. For Harvey, it is "impossible to isolate data, to employ warrants, to offer a rebuttal, or to attach any degree of probability to a claim... The problem no longer has to do with the truth of the claim but with its meaning. It is not about any particular step in the argument but whether one could identify what a step would be". (Historian, p 227). This quotation, Historian, p 229.

reconstruct the past. But analogy cannot dictate totally what we 'do' with evidence, which must be allowed its own independence. The way out of this dilemma is again illustrated in the work of J.H. Hexter. He makes two points relevant for us at this stage in our discussion.

(i) Given the fact that a historian sometimes solves a problem by recourse to his second record, how can he convince others of the truth of his solution? He cannot appeal solely to documentation, he must appeal to their second records. He does this with 'supercharged' language, the function of which is to create emotional impact and response.[65] He says that this use of language, designed to 'expand the consciousness' of the reader, is 'psychedelic' in nature[66] and also 'translational' - "it aims to assist the reader to translate his experience from a familiar accepted context into a context strange and perhaps initially repugnant".[67] This use of language does not just show history to be an 'art', it is an indispensable means for communicating about the past alongside the more logical type of argument.[68] "As a result of the impact of the translational and psychedelic language on their second record, readers indeed learn things about what happened in the past that they could not learn otherwise."[69] Now we leave here the implications of this talk for the writing of all theology[70] (perhaps especially for the theology of preaching), and concentrate on the psychedelic function of this language - to expand consciousness even though it ultimately rests on analogy in experiences of the writer and some, perhaps dimmer, analogy in the reader. It leads into our second point.

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65. Primer, p 136 (see also pp 134f).
66. Ibid., p 139.
67. Ibid., pp 137f.
68. Ibid., pp 134 ff.
69. Ibid., p 141; cp Brown, History and the Believer", p 184.
70. There may be connection with 'the cognitive value of religious experience', cf Peter Donovan, Religious Experience (Sheldon, 1979), ch IV.

(ii) Hexter asks what is the criterion of credibility in historical accounts? Like Richardson he believes it to be the historian's job, quite simply, to give the most credible account of the evidence. But how does one judge that credibility? He gives an example of what he considers an incredible explanation (one with a demonic character) and a credible account. He ruminates on why he believes one and not the other, putting it down to 'common sense'. He is not very obliging as regards unpacking the meaning of this phrase 'common sense', but it seems to mean something similar to "critically interpreted present experience". Broadly interpreted this recognises history as a "field-encompassing-field", and sees this to include the sciences and all branches of knowledge[71] - the whole of our modern totality[72] - the sum total of "what we know, or are compelled to believe, as modern western beings".[73] It is a phrase which resists the atomisation of truth, recognising that the historian is a scholar working in an atmosphere that must take into account the claims of other disciplines, for truth is one. This 'common sense' is not infallible, says Hexter, but it is all we have. And neither is common sense closed, a completed set of experiences.[74] He admits that the common sense of 'Everyman' in the USA in the 1970s is not an entirely sound instrument for judging what it was like to have been Luther at Worms, or Paul on the Damascus Road, nor (he says) can common sense alone render credible here and now what these men experienced there and then. But 1970s common sense must neither be abandoned nor transcended, instead it should be transformed. Historians

> can take their readers with them, over the path they went, to where they got to. After all they started their own journey, long ago perhaps, with only the equipment of here-and-now common sense. And if they were worth their salt, without ever wholly abandoning that common sense they extended it and intensified it,

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71. Harvey, Historian, pp 98f; cp Ives, God in History, p 11.
72. Dennis Nineham, The Use and Abuse of the Bible, pp 14 ff, 106f.
73. Ibid., p 237.
74. cp Collingwood, Idea, p 139.

> till they did begin to attain some intimation of what it was like to have been Luther at Worms or Paul on the Damascus Road. The certification that they had attained such an intimation was the credibility of what they said and wrote not only to those whose followed after them along the path of understanding they discovered but also to those who had hewn out not quite identical paths themselves. By remaining in close contact with his own second record as he writes, a historian stands a chance of carrying his readers, their common sense transformed but not excised, with him to where he has been in the past, and of enlarging their understanding so that they can grasp what he has understood. 75.

Here then we see how our consciousness can be extended and expanded. By having only the merest inkling of a past event, or by having none and instead having read a historian with whom we do have something in common and who in turn does have a link with some past event (using the historian as the 'mid-point' between ourselves and the past), we can hope to have our 'present experience' transformed to take it in and comprehend it. This reminds us of the so-called hermeneutical circle.[76] We cannot understand a love poem without some previous understanding of love, but the text then deepens and enriches our comprehension of the theme. And so also our understanding of previous historical events may be deepened as our 'common sense' is transformed. Similarly, our understanding of the possible may come to be enlarged.

This sheds much light on our ambivalent attitude to 'analogy', but what does it tell us about the possibility of events? We have, it will be observed, had to move the discussion away from the possibility of events pure and simple, to our possibility of understanding them and therefore of being able to assert them coherently. It may well be that we will have to put a question mark against some evidence because there is nothing in our experience which can make sense of it; or we may have to seek a 'rationalisation' of the evidence that does make sense.

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75. Hexter, Primer, pp 361f.

76. For a discussion see A.C. Thistleton, "The New Hermeneutic" in New Testament Interpretation, ed I.H. Marshall (Paternoster, 1977). Also Cullman, Salvation in History, pp 66f.

Some echo in our experience is essential for us to grasp an event. But as Hexter shows, that does not immediately limit the past to what our experience contains. What might this enable us to say, for example, about the resurrection of Jesus? It does not enable us to speak easily of a full, bodily resurrection, but it may well be able to cope with some other presence of the risen Jesus.[77] It also seems to allow us to speak of God's action in history in a way that has some analogy with our experience: if we experience God at work in us, then we posit his analogous action in others, though this not in a proscriptive way.

Let us take stock for the last time. i History takes as its subject all past events; ii the historian must seek immanent causes; iii God must not be substituted for an immanent cause; iv the historian uses his present experience in reconstructing and comprehending the past; v some analogy must be affirmed in order for any sense to be made at all; vi the evidence must be accounted for adequately; vii while analogy must be affirmed, there is a circular motion in which our arbitrating 'experience' or 'common sense' can be transformed and expanded. Our discussion may have veered between causation and description of events: this is right and proper. The historian must seek particular kinds of causes, but must describe according to his experience of the world.

Point iv above is crucial. For a historian who has God (if anyone can be said to 'have' God) as an element in his experience it may be legitimate for him to use this in interpreting events, and discussing them with other historians, provided that all the other conditions are met. Every other historian uses all his 'experience', and to ask a

77. Perhaps Pannenberg's non-hallucinatory visions may be appropriate? Jesus, God and Man (SCM 1968), pp 93 ff.

Christian historian to try to ignore part of his 'second record' would be wrong. Hexter uses his commitment to the Christian doctrine of sin in order to interpret a document of the past. As long as the principle of critically-interpreted present experience arbitrating in historical study is accepted (and it seems to be universally so), it is difficult to see how a Christian who feels God at work in his life and in the life of the Christian community, will be able to refuse to consider God as an element in history. However, the other theses on method arrived at above put severe constraints upon such recourse. Having seen how the concept of action dictates that we speak of God, so we see how historical method channels our discourse: the intention has not been to prove the point, but to open up its possibility in order to show the validity in the assertions to be made later in the thesis.

It might be asked: in what way does this position differ from the Hard Perspectivists criticised earlier? It does so in significant ways, not least in the greater tentativeness of this approach. The Hard Perspectivists try to make experience do too much, and would not have felt bound by theses ii and iii. Neither did those writers see sufficient ambiguities in historical interpretation; they were too confident of their success in the arbitration of perspectives. In the terms of our first chapter, we are after all speaking of the way in which different events are open to different types of description - i.e. that, amongst other possible descriptions,an event might be described as an act of God: it is only one description, and offered cautiously. Hard Perspectivism can easily collapse into a supernaturalism which jettisons history instead of respecting it. But with the Hard Perspectivists, we recognise presuppositions, and insist on the integrity of the evidence. The Soft Perspectivists leave themselves open to the charge of reading

meaning into an event, whereas we wish to insist on the meaning belonging to the events: Pannenberg and Harvey must be held in creative tension here! We also reject that commitment is a prerequisite for understanding, while saying that it is in itself no bar to it - indeed, is inevitable. One must be committed to something, and yet honest and 'objective' enough to take one's commitment into account in making judgements.

We seem to have concluded in such a way as to go against the quotations with which we prefaced this part. But such a first impression is misleading. Take Carr: he sees progress in history, and it is this "sense of direction", he says, which alone enables us to order and interpret the events of the past. "History properly so-called can be written only by those who find and accept a sense of direction in history itself".[78] This 'sense of direction' is no more objective or empirically observable than God himself. I suggest that Carr is being inconsistent to rule out all historians' talking about God - he does so because God does not (he thinks) enter into his experience. But, and perhaps this is more important, like Harvey and Elton and others, the God he really rules out is the "joker in the pack" God, who is used as a substitute for immanent causes. Our task is to use God as a referent in history without such a short-circuit[79] in normal causal explanation, and it is precisely this task which lies ahead of us as we consider the Whiteheadian understanding of history, and of God's action in it.

2 Whithead on 'History'

Having sketched broad guidelines for historical method, we turn

78. Carr, What?, p 132, cp p 121.
79. "Short-circuit" is a phrase of Harbison's, "The Marks of a Christian Historian", p 342.

to Whitehead to see if such guidelines are consistent with his approach. What follows is not an exhaustive account of Whitehead's ideas on history. Indeed he never wrote on history and so attempts to deal with his thought on the subject necessarily involve combing through his works to find ideas and comments which are pertinent. It also involves thinking through the 'historical' implications of his cosmological scheme.

While he never wrote on history, he did write on the history of ideas, and on various aspects of culture and civilization.[80] The notion of civilization is particularly important for his ideas of history. By it, Whithead means a society which exhibits the qualities of Truth, Beauty, Adventure, Art and Peace.[81] Adventure is especially important for our purposes.

Whitehead does seem to have had an enormous knowledge of history and a great breadth of reading.[82] He constantly used historical examples to bolster his arguments.[83] And he sets great store on the need for us to understand history: "Until mankind understands its own history, intimately as a concrete passage into an unknown future, our culture will never be adequate".[84]

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80. For our purpose the most important works are perhaps: Religion in the Making (Meridian, 1974), henceforth, Religion; Science and the Modern World (MacMillan, 1967), henceforth Science; Adventures of Ideas (MacMillan, 1967), henceforth Adventures; Modes of Thought (CUP, 1938), henceforth Modes.

81. Adventures, p 274. Cf A.H. Johnson "Whitehead's Philosophy of Civilization", in Lowe, Hartshorne and Johnson, Whitehead and the Modern World (Boston, 1950), p 43; Also Victor Lowe, Understanding Whitehead (John Hopkins Press, 1966), p 14; henceforth, Understanding.

82. See Bertrand Russell's comments recorded by Lowe: Understanding, p 8.

83. Whitehead, Symbolism, Its Meaning and Effect (CUP, 1928), pp 83f; henceforth Symbolism.

84. Whitehead, Essays in Science and Philosophy (Rider & Co, 1948), p 150; henceforth Essays. Whitehead's understanding of history as this ceaseless passage is underscored in Adventures, p 274.

Two points are worthy of note. The possibility of historical knowledge is everywhere assumed,[85] but the assumption is never given more than a cursory treatment.[86] Whitehead sees his whole system as producing an epistemology which knows the world not as a mental construct, but as it is.[87] Paul Weiss has argued that the notion of objective immortality is a stepping-stone to an understanding of how historical knowledge, of the world 'as it was', is possible.[88] He claims that such knowledge would no longer need to be inferential in nature[89] since the past is now present in its 'incarnation' in present events.[90]

Secondly, cosmological description and the history of ideas and human institutions go hand in hand: Process and Reality, Adventure of Ideas, and Science and the Modern World are a trilogy.[91] Only by including history in this way can we rest our thought on an appeal to the whole of experience, as Whitehead wishes to do.[92] But history implies a metaphysic (as does everything else, according to Whitehead's "coherence" theory):[93] Whitehead agrees that some philosophy of history is inevitable.

> It is a curious delusion that the rock upon which our beliefs can be founded is an historical investigation. You can only interpret the past in terms of the present. The present is all that you have; and unless in this present you can find general principles which interpret the present as including a representation of the whole community of existents, you cannot move a step beyond your little patch of immediacy.
>
> Thus history presupposes a metaphysic. It can be objected that we believe in the past and talk about it without settling our metaphysical principles. That is certainly the case. But you can only deduce metaphysical dogmas from your interpretation of the past on the basis of a prior metaphysical interpretation of the present. 94

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85. E.g. Science, pp 89f, 140.
86. E.g. Ibid., pp 43f.
87. Process, p 236.
88. "History and Objective Immortality", in The Relevance Whitehead, ed Leclerc. (Allen & Unwin, 1961).
89. See esp part II of his article.
90. It could be argued that all knowledge is inferential when it comes through the full complement of Whiteheadian perceptive modes.
91. Adventures, p vii.
92. Process, pp 4 ff; Lowe, Understanding, pp 269f.
93. Process, p 4f.
94. Religion, p 82; see also Adventures, pp 4, 172; Lowe, Understanding, p 272.

We will structure our argument loosely around our seven theses, so we begin now with the first - history is the record of all past events, at least insofar as they have bearing on the human story. You will remember our discussion of history's subject-matter, of where we draw the line between history and nature. 'History' is a word which Whitehead uses with a broad meaning, and he applies it to nature without qualm. Molecules have a history, as do electric charges.[95] The breadth of meaning in the term is indicated by his introductory summary to The Function of Reason, where 'history' seems to include the whole gamut of natural history.

The human being is inseparable from his environment.[96] Whitehead talks of the difficulty of deciding where the body ends and begins, as illustrated by the breathing of air. "But the ((human)) body is part of the external world, continuous with it. In fact, it is just as much part of nature as anything else - a river, a mountain, or a cloud".[97] The body "is in fact merely one among other objects".[98] The cosmological system renders a continuum, with even mentality being found (at some level) at every stage.[99] The history of ideas which form our civilization can be traced back, perhaps even to animals![100] While apparently mapping human bodily experience at the same contour-level as nature, Whitehead seems to distinguish distinctively human experience, i.e. experience peculiar to human kind. Such a distinction is implicit in such a statement as "The body is that portion of nature with which each moment of human experience intimately cooperates".[101] Such

95. Science, pp 110, 153.
96. Adventures, p 63.
97. Modes, pp 29f.
98. Ibid., p 156.
99. Ibid., p 214; Also The Function of Reason (Princeton, 1929), p 25; henceforth Reason.
100. Modes, p 89.
101. Ibid., p 157.

discrimination may well be questionable were it not for Whitehead's belief in the thorough interdependence of body and soul. What we in fact see here is (quite in accord with the cosmology developed) the results of evolution to greater intensity and coordination of the mental poles of experience. And it is in this 'super-developed' mental faculty that man is, says Whitehead, to be distinguished from nature in general.

Whitehead talks of 'plasticity' in nature - the quality of moulding, of being moulded, of producing novelty and responding freely. "It is a false dichotomy to think of man and nature. Mankind is that factor in nature which exhibits in its most intense form the plasticity of nature".[102] This plasticity better enables man to 'attack' and mould the environment to improve his life-quality. Reason directs the attack.[107]

Man does not excel nature in all things - we are, for instance, "mere amateurs" in the area of sense experience.[104] What precisely makes mankind 'stand out' from nature?[105] In one context, Whitehead hints that language is a major factor - language, which combined with mentality in mutual creation.[106] At the most basic level, as Whitehead indicates when discussing Alexander's Space, Time and Deity, the difference is explicable in spatio-temporal reflective terms:

> But when all analogies between animal life and human nature have been stressed, there remains the vast gap in respect to the influence of reflective experience. This reflective experience exhibits three main characteristics which require each other

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102. Adventures, p 78
103. Reason, p 5.
104. Modes, p 154.
105. The use of this term invites an interesting comparison with Existentialist positions: compare, e.g. John Macquarrie, Principles of Christian Theology (Scribner's, 1977), p 60 et al.
106. Modes, p 57.

> for their full understanding. There are experiences of joint association, which are spatial experiences. There are experiences of origination from a past and determination towards a future. These are temporal experiences. 107

Elsewhere he describes the difference simply in terms of 'civilization', i.e. ideas of adequate generality respecting their own actions and the world around them.[108] In a very important pair of paragraphs Whitehead explores more the role of ideas in human and animal existence, and moves towards a definition of history:

> Thus the expression of these various feelings produces the history of mankind as distinct from the narrative of animal behaviours. History is the record of the expressions of feeling peculiar to mankind. ((Feelings here refer to morality, religion, beauty, etc))
>
> There is, however, every gradation of transition between animals and men. In animals we can see emotional feeling, dominantly derived from conceptual functioning. In mankind, the dominant dependence on bodily functioning seems still there. And yet the life of a human being receives its worth, its importance, from the way in which unrealised ideals shape its purposes and tinge its actions. The distinction between man and animals is in one sense only a difference of degree. But the extent of the degree makes all the difference. The Rubicon has been crossed. 109

This quest after the ideal, the as yet unrealised, is linked intimately with consciousness, which only arises with the ability to contemplate alternatives in their full range of contrast. To distinguish what is from what might be is a human capability. "But what distinguishes man from animals, some humans from other humans, is the inclusion in their natures, waveringly and dimly, of a disturbing element, which is the flight after the unattainable".[110] Whitehead is thus able to call men the "children of the universe, with foolish enterprises and irrational hopes".[111]

All this follows from the statement of the plastic and evolutionary

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107. Ibid., p 141.
108. Ibid., pp 4f.
109. Ibid., pp 37f.
110. Reason, p 51
111. Modes, pp 42f.

qualities of nature, so that in a sense this human distinctiveness is still very much part of nature. It seems that Whitehead would be in agreement with our refusal to limit history to merely human actions. The place of 'natural' processes must be allowed insofar as they affect men and women. In our previous discussion we were not only concerned to defend the inclusion of some 'natural' influences in history but also the possibility of referring to God in history (if our other conditions could be met). The place of the ideals in this system seems to allow this, though there will be more pertinent asseverationsto be made with a bearing on this theme later when we discuss the nature of causation.

Our second and third theses stated that the historian must seek 'immanent' causes, and not substitute God for such an one. Whitehead enjoins condemnation of the purely positivistic history which locates only discrete facts and does not look for causes ("we seek that thread of co-ordination").[112] Such a 'causeless' view of history does, though, follow naturally from the Newtonian mechanistic model which "has even robbed us of reason for believing that the past gives any ground for expectation of the future".[113]

"How can one event be the cause of another? In the first place, no one event can be wholly and solely the cause of another event.... The only intelligible doctrine of causation is founded on the doctrine of immanence".[114] History is a 'seamless robe', but this fact does not rule out non-observable causes. Whitehead argues for a doctrine of Final Causation, the possible implications of which, for us, need no

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112. Ibid., p 25.
113. Ibid., pp 210f.
114. Ibid., pp 225f; cf Reason, p 22.

underscoring. The issue is that

> in the transformations of matter and energy which constitute the activities of an animal body no principles can be discerned other than those which govern the activities of inorganic matter. There can be no dispute as to the main physiological facts. No reactions between the material components of an animal body have been observed which in any way infringe the physical and chemical laws applying to the behaviour of inorganic material. But this is a very different proposition from the doctrine that no additional principles can be involved. 115.

But there is another element in life which "almost every sentence we utter and every judgement we form, presuppose".[116] Without some notion of final causation we cannot speak of purpose, intention or aim.[117] "The universe, as construed solely in terms of the efficient causation of purely physical interconnections, presents a sheer, insoluble contradiction".[118] Such a view omits the 'counter-agency' which is at work in the world.[119] Thus Whitehead repudiates the radical rejection of Final Causation and the Baconian exclusion of purpose. "We require a Counter-Agency to explain the existence of a universe in dissipation within finite time.... A satisfactory cosmology must explain the interweaving of efficient and final causation".[120] Neither should limit, or intervene on, the other.

What is the nature of this Counter-Agency? It is constituted by that which we call Reason, and it works upon the ideals and their appetition in Actual Occasions.[121] Human beings as high-level occasions, are freer to respond to a wider range of ideals: they are more capable of being 'persuaded' by Reason. This is the considerable difference of degree which marks mankind off. In all occasions,

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115. Reason, pp 8f.
116. Ibid., p 9.
117. cf Ibid.,p 11.
118. Ibid., p 20.
119. Ibid., p 20.
120. Ibid., p 22.
121. Ibid., p 25.

freedom and necessity are finely balanced. Thus the Ninth Categoreal Obligation runs: "The Concrescence of each individual actual entity is internally determined and is externally free".[122] The past is the 'given', the "customary basis of society".[123] While this necessarily proscribes certain avenues for the future, the occasion (especially a human occasion) is free to respond to the ideal. Reason functions by directing and criticising the appetition towards the attainment of an end realised in imagination but not in fact.[124] It is "the self-discipline of the originative element in history".[125] If one over-stresses the environment as a factor in causation, then determinism is a danger; if one over-stresses the role of anticipation of the future, then we fall into another half-truth, that of teleological idealism.[126]

Now Whitehead has been accused of talking too much about the ideals and their role, and of insufficiently developing the implications of his Process and Reality doctrines for historical causality. Porter says that Adventures could have been written by Hegel,[127] and that it is a real disappointment after Process and Reality! There is a measure of truth in this charge, but it is not a case to be pushed too far: if Whitehead had pretended to write a piece on historical method and had still not developed his Process doctrines then it would be a fair critique. It is questionable whether it is useful to criticise someone for not writing on a particular subject: we might as well take Whitehead to task for not writing romantic novels.

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122. Process, p 41.
123. Adventures, p 63.
124. Reason, p 5.
125. Ibid., 'Introduction'.
126. Modes, p 228.
127. Dale H. Porter, "History as Process" in History and Theory, 1975, pp 306. I have examined the possible relationship between Whitehead and Hegel in an article, "From Hegel to Whitehead", Journal of Religion vol 61 No 4, October 1981, pp 403-421.

Let us pause to consider some of the things that Whitehead says about the ideals, which it may be correct to more or less identify with what he elsewhere calls eternal objects, or pure possibilities, and bear a close relationship also to 'propositions'. These ideas are the very subject matter of Adventures.[128] They define civilization.[129] "As we think, we live. This is why the assemblage of philosophic ideas is more than a specialist study. It moulds our type of civilization".[130] History can be discussed in terms of how groups of men have 'handled' ideas.[131] Indeed, "History can only be understood by seeing it as the theatre of diverse groups of idealists respectively urging ideals incompatible for conjoint realization".[132] Ideas themselves have histories,[133] and also exert an independent causal influence: they become almost 'hypostasised' - "The idea is a prophecy which procures its own fulfilment",[134] rather like the Old Testament othim. An idea can be said to 'grip' people and ages.[135] In each epoch there is a drive towards an ideal or ideals. Like a theologian of hope he says, "This ideal is never realised, it is beyond realization, and yet it moulds the form of what is realised".[136] The ideal of liberty and the concrete existence of the American constitution are cited as examples; Whitehead makes a sort of 'now/not yet' contrast familiar in eschatological debate. Elsewhere[137] he says that we have seen the 'pathway of mankind through history' in fact and allegory "in the immigrant who in ships across ocean and in covered wagons across the prairies pursued the lure of their hopes to

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128. Lowe, Understanding, p 14
129. Adventures, p 64.
130. Modes, p 87.
131. Reason, p 36.
132. Adventures, p 276.
133. E.g. Science, pp 27f, 32, 50, 60; Adventures, p 42; Lowe, Understanding,pp 29f.
134. Adventures, p 42.
135. Science, p 60.
136. Modes, p 163
137. Essays, p 152

enlarge the boundaries of life".

God is the source of the ideals.[138] And as the Principle of Concretion[139] he performs a function similar to Reason[140] as the one who sorts out the ideals relevant for each occasion. Religion serves to emphasise the unity of ideals inherent in the universe.[141]

We should examine Porter's argument in more detail. In itself it seems to represent an important stage in Process studies, as a rare application of Whitehead's thought to historical method. Porter states that his inquiry proceeds from a dissatisfaction with both historians' thinking, and with Whitehead's own explicit interpretation of history. He is convinced that Whitehead can give a broader context for historical inquiry, and restore history to its rightful place back with its roots in the humanities. The question which needs an answer is 'how did an event occur in just that way?'.

Porter argues that neither of the two currently fashionable theories of causal explanation are adequate. The Hempelian 'covering-law' idea, based on a false analogy between history and the natural sciences, fails to account for the specifics of history; and the genetic, 'following-a-story', type of explanation fails to account for the systematic mode of explanation still implicit in its method.[142] The argument between these two 'camps' is based on two different modes of perception (Hempel's on what Whitehead calls 'presentational immediacy'), and so each is valid when applied in a proper context.[143]

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138. Modes, p 142.
139. E.g. Science, p 174.
140. Reason, p 25.
141. Modes, pp 39, 142.
142. Porter, "History as Process", p 300. Patrick Gardiner has an excellent discussion of 'history as science' in Nature, pp 28-33, 54-64, etc.
143. "History as Process", p 303.

Whitehead, says Porter, defines events as "genetic processes involving acts of synoptic judgement about the past".[144] The traditional doctrines of substance and external relations put aside, Whitehead sees events as temporal interactions where it is not possible to explain anything except by a theory of internal relations. Porter applies Whitehead's theory of events as a way of explicating historical events, even very complex ones, to show how Whitehead's thought could aid the historian.

> ....It is important to emphasise, as Whitehead did, that the subjective side of the process has very little to do with consciousness.... This distinction is crucial because it allows us to talk about the subjective aim of historical events, and to analyse the phases of integration through which such events emerge as unique entities. 145

Porter seeks to illustrate the applicability of his interpretation of Whitehead with an historical example. How can a complex historical event like the unification of Germany have a subjective aim? Other non-human occasions have aims, says Porter, so its not implausible in this case. At this point the keen Whiteheadian may leap in with an accusation to the effect that the 'fallacy of misplaced concreteness' is being committed,[146] for an event such as the unification of Germany is really a cluster of occasions. But Porter has anticipated the objection, and justifies his crediting of one aim to the complex event (or complex of events) on two grounds: because all events which form the cluster have almost identical antecedent worlds and relevant futures, their aims are practically unified though theoretically distinct; and Whitehead himself uses complex events to illustrate arguments. But we may wish to question the 'blanket' way in which the fallacy is invoked. Porter could have made another point in his defence, which he hints at later. He talks of the synergistic nature of causation: the

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144. Ibid., p 301.
145. Ibid., p 304.
146. For an explanation of this in Whitehead's own words, see Science, pp 57f.

whole is always more than the sum of its parts (e.g. as in baking a cake), and it takes something new to itself as a unity in its coming together. To be sure, this is relevant to causation as he says, but it may also speak to the issue of the unity and individuality and proper concreteness of a complex event. In itself, as a unity of individuals, the event is more than the sum of its parts. It becomes something with its own proper identity, and so with its own aim, which is more than the sum of its ingredient identities and aims.[147] Porter outlines well the way in which Whitehead's events can be seen as dynamic, synoptic processes. He deals especially well with the question of propositions, including disregarded ones.[148] He also writes competently about the tragic element in history which is necessary as a goad to a more complete future.

Porter criticises Whitehead's own application of his cosmology to history.

> Whitehead himself failed to apply his doctrine fairly to historical method. After studying Process and Reality, one turns to Adventures of Ideas expecting a systematic analysis of historical events in terms of the categories and phases of creative process. Instead, one finds a conventional idealist interpretation of the course of western civilization. Individual events are treated not as creative entities, but as passive, imperfect embodiments of immutable ideals derived from ancient Athens....((he)) settled for a civilization predisposed to the progressive realization of the ideal of freedom. Except for the separation of individual liberty from obedience to the state,the author might have been Hegel. 149

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147. This sort of talk has important implications and reverberates around the whole doctrinal structure of actual entities. Allow two brief suggestions. (i) The human soul is a succession of occasions. How do we explain personal identity through time? Can we say that the succession is both a cluster of occasions and an occasion itself, with an existence of its own? (ii) Likewise, in the controversy over Whitehead's God - a series of occasions or one eternally concrescing entity? (see ch V) - can we mediate by saying that God must be understood as both? Whitehead wanted his categories to explain all aspects of experience, and it seems that we may have to apply them in this way to make sense of all things, i.e. to use the term 'actual entity' as a picture for free descriptive use, rather than as an ultimate, inviolable, and desperately atomistic category. The price of this shift may be to lessen the 'realism' of the system. We might note before closing this subject that the notion of synergism may have its uses in the explanation of divine action.

148. "History as Process", p 311.

149. Ibid., p 306; cp p 309.

Even allowing for the fact that this side of Whitehead was not developed, I think that Porter fails in his grasp of Whitehead at two points: he fails to see the role of these ideas in Process and Reality, for the ideals do not suddenly appear in Adventures; and he fails to see the influence of the cosmological scheme in Adventures (especially in the middle sections). If Whitehead had set about writing a treatise on historical method, he may have come up with something more to Porter's liking. It may further be asked whether Porter has not, in talking of the subjective aim of historical events, made Whitehead more Hegelian.[150]

Whitehead would surely accept our theses two and three, so we may move our attention to four and five - that the historian uses his own experience to interpret, and that some analogy is essential. I doubt that Whitehead's approval on these matters will take long to demonstrate. The whole Whiteheadian system is based upon analogy from human experience.

> The elucidation of immediate experience is the sole justification for any thought.... the true method of discovery is like the flight of an aeroplane. It starts from the ground of particular observation; it makes a flight in the thin air of imaginative generalization; and it again lands for renewed observation rendered acute by rational interpretation. 151

This statement also hints at compliance with our seventh thesis, which spoke of the hermeneutical circle. In this we start from our experience, set off to test it against others', and come back enriched. It is the case that, when encountering novelty which will expand our consciousness, we have to receive it as graded so as to be continuous with our present experience in some way,[152] so that the whole concept of increasing

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150. Some references in Religion provide an interesting insight on Whitehead's thought concerning religion and history: pp 27, 32, 36 ff, 39 ff, 54, 91 ff, 107 ff, 115, 128, 144-150, 151-154; see also Symbolism, pp 82, 104, and Essays, p 150.

151. Process, pp 6f.

152. Religion, p 111.

knowledge in Whitehead implies such a circle.

What of the historian's present experience? Whitehead frankly acknowledges the Vorverständnis - "Unless there is a direction of interest we do not observe at all".[153] He notes that it is important to locate writers' unquestioning assumptions.[154] He also feels the need for empathy. In some dialogues he criticises historians who pronounce authoritatively on matters they cannot understand - Gibbon and Thucydides are, for him, two men eminently suited to understand their subject.[155] He also sees the necessary perspective: "When we are observing some things, we are in a bad position for observing other things".[156] The historian is autonomous, his own authority: "The historian in his description of the past depends on his own judgement as to what constitutes the importance of human life".[157]

Whitehead also separates fact from interpretation to some extent,[158] though indicating a wish to consider only interpretations which emerge genuinely from the facts.

> It is the genius of religion to point at the facts and ask for their systematic interpretation. In the Sermon on the Mount, in the Parables, and in their accounts of Christ, the Gospels exhibit a tremendous fact. The doctrine may or may not lie on the surface. But what is primary is the religious fact. [159]
> Christ gave his life. It is for Christians to discern the doctrine.[160] Its glory ((the life of Christ's)) is for those who can discern it, and not for the world. [161]

We have one thesis outstanding - the evidence must be accounted for. On

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153. Ibid., p 120.
154. Science, pp 48, 51.
155. Dialogues of Alfred North Whitehead, as recorded by Lucien Price (Mentor, 1956) pp 274f; henceforth, Dialogues.
156. Religion, p 121
157. Adventures, p4.
158. Ibid., p 4.
159. Religion, pp 56f.
160. Ibid., p 155.
161. Ibid., p 156.

this point we have no Whiteheadian guidance other than an overwhelming impression that he would have found any manipulation or short-changing of the evidence abhorrent.[162]

Having adumbrated seven theses on historical method, which do not make it impossible for us to speak of God acting in history within certain limits, we can now see that Whitehead's thought is able to operate within those limits. We must now turn to our final preliminary task - an examination of more overtly theological issues involved in such a task. After that we will return to Whitehead for a more thorough exposition, and an examination of his conception of divine action.

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162. It might be noted that references can be supplied for Whitehead's views on historical questions beyond our immediate concern. Note for the 'historicity of man': Modes, pp 98, 131, 141, 232, (cp the existentalists). For 'revelation in history': Religion, pp 31, 120, Adventures, p 162.

CHAPTER THREE

THEOLOGICAL ISSUES

In the previous two chapters we have examined the problems concerned with two specific terms in our investigation: action and history. In this chapter we will concern ourselves with more overtly theological questions which must be faced. Once again matters will have to be deferred: only in chapter eight will the question of God's power be properly dealt with, and only then will our full and positive interpretation of 'miracle' be advanced. Here we confine ourselves mainly to critical reflection on three related problems, and then examine the adequacy of some (more or less) contemporary attempts at solving the problem. It should be obvious how conclusions reached in this chapter support, and are supported by, those already put forward in the previous chapters. First we will look at the question of miracle, including the relation of science to that problem; next we consider the issue of divine 'intervention'; then we examine the oft-made distinction between God's willing some events and permitting others. These three issues overlap considerably, and are separated only for convenience in discussion. In the fourth section a brief critique will be offered of biblical theology, and of the views of H.H. Farmer, Austin Farrer, and A.R. Peacocke. It is hoped that this chapter, together with the first two, will deal with the major preliminary issues which must be dealt with before turning our attention to the Whiteheadian 'angle' and a constructive proposal based upon it.

1 Miracle and the 'laws of nature'

What is it that constitutes a 'miracle'? This apparently

innocuous question has been answered in many ways. Some insist that the distinctively miraculous element in a miraculous event is something quite objective - a divine agency which enters and diverts the course of nature, breaching its normal continuity. Others seem to locate the distinctively miraculous more subjectively in the perception of the said event. Those favouring the 'objective' approach may seek to speak in terms of 'violation' of natural law, and even of 'indeterminacy'. Those who favour the 'subjective' definition often analyse the language which we use to describe the 'miraculous'. We must examine these approaches, with examples, to see in what ways they are inadequate. We will also have to bear in mind the peculiarly biblical concept which should inform our deliberations.

C.S. Lewis writes that if we believe in God, then we must believe in miracle.[1] Perhaps most theologians would agree, if given leave to define 'miracle' as they wished. But Lewis is uncompromising: "I use the word Miracle to mean an interference with Nature by supernatural powers".[2] Notwithstanding that some would also feel able to redefine these latter terms, it seems clear that Lewis has something very 'traditional' in mind. Ever since men have used law-like generalisations in their descriptions of the natural world, miracle has been understood by many as an event which 'violates' such a law. The concept of miracle has occupied a fairly secure, if sometimes controversial, role in Christian tradition. With miracles recounted in Scripture, theologians have sought to understand the world in such a way as to accommodate miraculous events in their thinking. The issue has re-emerged for us today in this form: has the 'new science', with its talk of statistical laws and indeterminacy,

1. C.S. Lewis, Miracles (Collins Fontana, 1960), pp 110 et al.
2. Ibid., p 9.

allowed us to re-habilitate a 'neo-traditional' concept of miracle?

For Lewis, the answer to the question just asked is clearly in the affirmative. Some events would not have happened had nature been allowed to run its course normally, without God's agency: such events are what we call miracles.[3] Lewis' picture of normal events is sufficiently 'God-forsaken' that any divine influence which is efficacious must demand some sort of 'interference'. God is not normally involved with nature. From science's point of view, he concedes, miracle is a form of tampering, cheating.[4] He notes that a 'law' as now understood merely states a pattern to which every event of a particular type conforms. So a miracle does not break a law of nature: "The divine art of miracle is not an art of suspending the pattern to which events conform but of feeding new events into the pattern". Nature (who is an "accomplished hostess") "naturalises the immigrant".[5] In a 'forward' direction it is interlocked with nature in the normal way; its peculiarity is that it is not interlocked 'backward' into the previous history of nature. A miracle is 'taken over' by nature and then conforms with it.

With this Lewis is apparently satisfied. But there are two directions from which we might charge him with inadequacy. Firstly, it seems false to assume that no 'law' is broken because a miracle 'interlocks forwardly'. We have already reviewed, and accepted, the principle of correlation. Events must tie together forwards and backwards: if they do not they will be classed as 'interventions', and will become liable to the criticism we will mount in section II. And they will certainly break out of the 'uniformity' of nature assumed by

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3. Ibid., p 48.
4. Ibid., p 62.
5. Ibid., p 64.

the scientist. Secondly, his attitude to science seems to leave something to be desired. A fuller discussion of this point is required.

Over fifty years ago F.R. Tennant produced a seminal treatment of this subject which, though we will have cause to modify it, has much still to commend it. It will serve as an excellent starting point for our consideration of the scientific claims about miracle. Tennant confesses that the Deists' assumption that the reign of law is all-pervading, unconditional, immutable necessity binding all things in fate, is groundless. 'Laws' are but descriptions, and so no event can be ruled out strictly a priori.[6] A broken law is an inadequate description. Exceptions are examined, new hypotheses formed, and the descriptions modified or re-cast. But natural law is more than a description - it presupposes a relatively stable nexus which the word 'description' ignores.

Defining miracle as an event not reducible to law is problematic: an event not so reducible in one generation may well be so in another. Science on the one hand seems to leave us free to assert the possibility of miracle, but on the other hand seems to preclude our being able to pronounce any given event to be a miracle in an objective or absolute sense, i.e. in which it will never be subsumed under law.[7] He refers to Aquinas saying that a miracle is caused by something absolutely hidden from all. But of such we have no right to speak in any final sense; we may discover the cause.[8] In the strict sense, we have no right to believe in miracles even if they are not ruled out a priori.[9] Tennant does not phrase it so, but we can best understand the implications

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6. F.R. Tennant, Miracle and its Philosophical Presuppositions (CUP, 1925) p 13.
7. Ibid., p 32.
8. Ibid., p 34.
9. Ibid., pp 82f. It should perhaps be noted that, later in his book, Tennant advances an unsatisfactory account of miracle himself, which seems to fly in the face of some earlier material such as we review here. See, e.g., p 48.

of his treatment for us by saying: a priori we cannot rule 'miracles' out, i.e. as a possibility; but a posteriori we can never assert that a particular event is a 'miracle', i.e. as an actuality - where 'miracle' means 'violation'.

It cannot be denied that Tennant is in danger of overstating his case, and ending up by denying the possibility of any 'objective' scientific knowledge.[10] But his position can be defended from that attack. Much more recently Tennant's case has been vindicated by the philosopher of science, Mary Hesse. She notes that the current 'statistical laws' do not determine occurrences of single events, but only proportions in large classes of events. But this gives us no carte blanche for miracles. The statistical laws are regarded as violated if events occur which, according to them, are excessively improbable. The credibility of so-called miracles is not enhanced by pointing to quantum laws. But Hesse goes on to say that it is

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10. W.J. Abraham accuses him of setting up an unreasonably high standard of knowledge, saying that science seems to be fairly certain about some things, e.g. that water does not turn into wine, that the sun does not stand still, that corpses do not rise. Once certain laws are established beyond reasonable doubt, he says, Tennant's objection to miracle founders. (Divine Action and History, Thesis submitted for D.Phil, University of Oxford, 1977, pp 81-83). But Abraham begs three questions: (i) To say that some generalisations seem scientifically secure is not to say that all are. Indeed, many miracle claims are made in just those 'grey' areas where it is difficult for science to make such laws: this helps to account for the continuance of those claims. For instance, modern psychology and medicine shed light on the 'grey' areas of healing, and demon-possession. That we can find no natural cause for an event may well be explained in the future. Abraham's examples are, moreover, misleading in their extremity, and his objection does not have the blanket coverage which he assumes. (ii) The nature of scientific knowledge is assumed to be too thoroughly objective. It is not clear how far this is the case. Scientific knowledge is genuinely relative,and yet 'true'. Newton's world-picture was adequate for many years, before needing revision and replacement. His theories did the job, as it were; the knowledge was instrumental, allowing particular tasks to be carried out, understandings gained, and further progress to be made. Yet it was not objective in any thorough-going and absolute way. It was true, so far as it went; it was subsumed by both more detail and more generality. So science's laws seem secure and yet are both useful and relative. (iii) Abraham accepts too uncritically the traditional notion of intervention, but we must put this aspect of the problem on one side for the moment.

impossible to say that an event is a violation of generally accepted laws.[11] However 'loose' is our understanding of scientific laws, there is still a distinction to be made between events within the ordinary course of nature which are surprising, and events which disturb more fundamentally its expected order.

Two points seem to emerge: (i) the fact that the laws are now considered to be statistical does not enable us to smuggle in all sorts of strange claims. The uniformity of nature, a relatively stable nexus, is still assumed.[12] (ii) Even if we were able to present evidence for such an event, we cannot say that a law will never be formulated to include that event within the scope of its description.

We do not seem able, then, to posit God as a direct, immediate cause of an event in an absolute sense. This would be a 'God of the Gaps', and the gaps would always be likely to close.[13] Science may expand its area of competence and locate a 'natural' cause. Are we therefore bound to abandon the concept of miracle altogether because of the problems in maintaining a 'violationist' account, or can an essential part of it be saved? Such an abandonment is by no means necessary. Indeed, it may be possible to formulate a doctrine of 'miracle' which has much in common with biblical ideas just because the 'violation' avenue is not open to us. First of all, we need to go on a biblical excursion.

While aware of the difficulties of speaking of 'the biblical view' of any subject, it is possible to make some generalisations which are

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11. Mary Hesse, "Miracles and the Laws of Nature", in Miracles, ed. C.F.D. Moule (Mowbray, 1965), p 40.
12. Ibid., p 40; Ian G, Barbour, Issues in Science and Religion (S.C.M.,1968), pp 181f shows agreement on this point.
13. Austin Farrer uses an illuminating figure: see reference to Apollo and Jove, A Science of God? (Godfrey Bles, 1966), pp 16f.

tolerably accurate and not too misleading. The Hebrews had no notion of a self-regulating, self-contained nature. God was in control of everything, and performed ad hoc acts as appropriate.[14] Yahweh had agreed to abide by certain 'ordinances',[15] but there still emerged amidst the uniformity some truly unique events: Yahweh's special, 'one-off' acts. What was different about these events was not that they were causally different from all regular events, i.e. caused by Yahweh instead of some 'natural' cause, but that Yahweh had decided to do something spectacular and meaningful at a particular moment. Yahweh did something in such events that was different in degree, and not in kind, from what he did in all other events (to borrow an analogy from Christological discourse). The whole environment, regular and irregular, was controlled from the outside. As such, 'miracles' served to confirm belief in the regularities (i.e. that they were regulated by Yahweh) and not to destroy such belief. Some of God's recorded acts, the 'magnalia dei', seem to involve 'direct', blatantly 'miraculous' action - e.g. the slaying of Sennacherib's army - while other acts could also be explained by recourse to 'immanent' factors, e.g. the exile.[16]

The point of this brief referal to the bible is this. At the root of the Judaeo-Christian tradition is the conviction that God has the same relation 'formally' to all events, and that a miracle is in one sense just 'one more of the same'.[17] This is subtly different from the

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14. I refer here quite often to an unpublished address given by Dennis Nineham at the annual conference of the "Science and Religion Forum", at Oxford in 1981. It was entitled "The Biblical picture of divine intervention in history and the law-abiding universe of modern science".
15. See Genesis 8:22- 9:17; see also I Enoch 68.
16. Walther Eichrodt, Theology of the Old Testament (S.C.M., 1961), vol. II, pp 167 ff.
17. See Eric Rust, Science and Faith (OUP, 1967), p 288.

position which the tradition has propagated as the proper definition of miracle as a causal exception - a "sensible fact produced by the special intervention of God for a religious end, transcending the normal order of things usually termed the Law of Nature".[18] The miracles witnessed to by the biblical writers were not thought of as special interventions or violations. A miracle was an act of God which was distinctive, wonderful, and significant, i.e. "An event, whether natural or supernatural, in which one sees an act or revelation of God".[19]

It is possible to take up just this sort of account of miracle and see its consequences for a theology which considers miracle from another angle. Some thinkers seek to locate the activity of God in 'miracle' at the point of sub-atomic indeterminacy. Such views have found a remarkable range of support.[20] Such a position seems to make a proud point of putting God into a 'gap' which they say will never be filled. We will see that such scientific thinking is by no means universally accepted, and that theologically such an approach may be undesirable anyway.

An illuminating example of this approach is found in the work of W.G. Pollard. He claims to show that, at the sub-atomic level at least, there is a point beyond which one is unable to go in describing the cause of any event. Chance is invoked, not as a causal explanation itself but as an acknowledgement that we do not know what the cause of this event is. Pollard suggests that it is at this level

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18. Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church (OUP, 1974: 2nd Ed), ed. F.L. Cross, E.A. Livingstone, p 920. On this point see also Michael J. Langford, Providence (S.C.M., 1981), pp 19, 23.
19. S.V. McCasland, "Miracle" in Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible (Abingdon Press, 1972), II p 392. Also: Norman Pittenger, "On Miracle" in Expository Times, 1969, pp 105 ff.
20. Rust, Science and Faith, p 282 etc; Donovan, Providence, pp 227 ff.

of indeterminacy that the world is open to God's influence.[21] Thus the Christian sees the chances and accidents of history as the "very warp and woof of the fabric of providence which God weaves". This does not mean that providence is added as a non-physical force like some kind of vitalism, for this could never be empirically established: chance and accident are real stopping-points in causal explanation.[22] Thus, God "throws dice" and works through chance.[23] A miracle is an event which is apprehended by a worshipping community as a clear instance of the divine activity in the shaping of history. The question about its relation to 'natural laws' is secondary.[24] Understood biblically, says Pollard, a miracle is "an occasion in which the essentially providential character of all events is made manifest in an especially clear and striking manner".[25]

> Both the history of life on earth which we call evolution, and the history of men and nations are filled with turning points of a miraculous character. A miracle in history is not a violation of natural laws by some outside intervention in an otherwise orderly process. Rather it is the extraordinary coming together in accidental and unforseeable ways of the most improbable instances of various natural laws. Most of the time we can count on the most probable thing happening...The great creative moments in history are the unexpected events when none of this is true. 26

A view such as Pollard's is not without its problems. 'Chance' is an ambiguous word, as Pollard himself recognises. If we mean by 'chance' that the cause of an event is not known to us, then we must realise that there is still here (or may be) a fully determining cause and therefore no room for God to act separately at that point. If,

21. W.G. Pollard, Chance and Providence, (Faber and Faber, 1959); also "Creation through alternative histories" in Science, Faith and Revelation (Broadmen, 1979), ed Robert E. Patterson; and "Science and the Bible", in Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, Supp vol.
22. Chance and Providence, pp 78 ff, 93.
23. Ibid., p 97.
24. Ibid., p 106.
25. Ibid., p 112.
26. Science, Faith, and Revelation, p 311; cp Interpreter's Dictionary, pp 793f.

however, 'chance' refers to genuine ontological indeterminacy (i.e. no cause is known because there is no fully determinating cause to know - scientists disagree on whether there is such "ontological indeterminacy"), then the event in question is still not attributable to God immediately. Such an event only has a limited number of options open to it, and these options are to some extent inherent in its past. These past limits are necessary but not sufficient causes for its present indeterminacy. Such an event might have to be understood on analogy with human freedom: no cause dictates completely our action, yet certain limits narrow our choice. But if this freedom is our freedom, then the choice must be ours; likewise, if the indeterminacy is part of nature per se,then it must be the randomness of that event - its own randomness as it were, not God-guided apparent randomness.

Which 'chance' has Pollard in mind? - he seems to speak of both. His talk of accidents seems to refer more naturally to the first type; his references to evolution fit more readily with the second. What is not clear is how this analysis, as it stands, enables the Christian to speak of God's influence: how can God enter here? If there are fully determinating causes, then Pollard has to advise some sort of explanation of how God works through a system otherwise closed to him; if there are not fully determinating causes, we run the risk of another gap-filling exercise. At any rate, Pollard gives no hint as to how God would exert influence at such a level.[27] One would think, perhaps, that God must (as it were) 'tilt' the balance of 'choice' to a particular determinate outcome in any random situation? But no guidance is given as to how

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27. Michael J. Langford (Providence, p 79) makes a similar criticism of Pollard: he indicates the location but not the manner of divine influence.

this might be conceived. Neither it is spelt out whether God's influence at this sub-atomic level is all-pervasive and irresistible. If this were so, and Pollard does not try to correct such an impression, it has serious consequences which we will have cause to discuss later.

A more serious ambiguity is evident when we consider whether Pollard properly falls into the 'objective' or 'subjective' approach to miracle. He is keen to point up the subjective side, underlining the importance of the event's reception by a worshipping community. But the lengthy quotation given above puts a question mark over the content of the objective side of his argument. Is the "extraordinary coming together in accidental and unforseeable ways of the most improbable instances of various natural laws" purely coincidental (as may be gathered from that passage) or is it in any real sense guided by God?[28] Perhaps we are in fact ruminating on the nature of 'chance' yet again: pure coincidence (ontological indeterminacy) - in which case what right have we to ascribe such an outcome to God or anyone else? or cause unknown, in which case we are putting God into the smallest of gaps. Clearly, both are problematic.[29]

'Chance' as accident is very different to 'chance' as indeterminacy: a collision of two causal sequences which were previously separate is quite different to randomness. This 'accident' seems to be Pollard's sense when talking of God's action in history (as opposed to nature). But

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28. If it seems not to be so guided, then Pollard will come under the same attack as we will subject Peacocke to later(part 4). It may be argued that God 'allows' chance to work in this way, and thus it is his act because one which he allows: see part 3.

29. Langford (Providence, p 79) does not think that 'God of gaps' criticism particularly compelling against Pollard, arguing that these are very different gaps - infinite, all-pervasive and ultimate. But even if we were to grant this questionable finality, the question as to the manner of the divine operation within the gap is still left unanswered.

there is no hint of the same type of inscrutability with this type of chance. A computer could predict where and when determinate causal patterns would intersect. Accident turns chance into ignorance. Even if we lump in human freedom, with the unpredictability brought in by that, Pollard still makes no real effort to show how this accident may also be an act of God. Pollard has a generally unsatisfactory account of the relation of chance and providence, wanting to assert the freedom of the creature and the total controlling power of God in unison.[30] Whether or not one believes such an assertion to be ultimately justifiable, most would agree that it takes a certain amount of shoring up before it will stand on its own feet. Pollard is content with the starkest of juxtapositions. The tensions raised are 'explained' by recourse to the 'complementarity principle' of modern science.[31] But this is ill-conceived: is it not rather different to hold up two models for the same process, than to posit two equally sufficient causes for the same effect?

There is, of course, another objection to the procedure advocated by Pollard. The establishing of indeterminacy at a 'micro' level in nature still yields uniformity at the 'macro' level. The incidence of deviation from a norm at the micro level is so slight as to make no practical difference at the level of our sense perception. What is required is a broadening of the scope of the theory, so that God's influence is exerted at all levels of natural and historical process.[32]

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30. Chance and Providence, ch IV; see p 123. Michael J. Langford suggests that, just as individual waves and freak tides are not predictable but the general nature of tides is always so, in the same way individual human actions are free while in the 'long term' history will achieve God's purpose. (pp 62, 100, 127, 130) Apart from Langford's self-criticism he seems to miss the essential weakness of the analogy: if all human actions are genuinely free, the good end of history is only a statistical hope, not a sure thing based on the nature of God and the carrying out of his purpose.

31. Chance and Providence, p 138

32. See, for a similar point, A.R. Peacocke, Creation and the World of Science (OUP, 1979), pp 94f.

We see, then, the limitation and problems of approaching the question of miracle from the point of indeterminacy. We have found the straight violation, and the recourse to 'chance' inadequate as 'objective' interpretations. We must now turn to more overtly 'subjective' approaches: those who locate the miracle 'in the eye of the beholder'. We shall need to take two contrasting examples of this method.

First we should look at Rudolf Bultmann's approach. We may characterise his view by two statements. Firstly, Bultmann believes that we can only talk about God as he is related to us. "For only such statements about God are legitimate as express the existential relation between God and man".[33] This existentialist supposition immediately circumscribes the scope of theological assertions quite markedly. It also begins to undermine the 'objective' element claimed for them. He goes on that "images which describe God as acting are legitimate only if they mean that God is a personal being acting on persons".[34] This action of God bestows upon persons a new self-understanding.[35] While Bultmann would perhaps object that this self-understanding is no 'intellectual' thing, the action of God here is still made to seem somewhat cerebral. He himself describes it as an act of revelation.[36] Secondly, Bultmann is very much aware of nature as a seamless robe of cause and effect. God does not break in and act <u>between</u> events, but <u>within</u> them.[37] Intervention is here ruled out as 'mythological'. The technical sense of this word will not detain us here. Despite what he says about the closed nature of worldly causation, and about the existential character of theological assertions, Bultmann still sees the world as the sphere

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33. <u>Jesus Christ and Mythology</u> (Scribner's, 1958), p 69
34. <u>Ibid.</u>, p 70.
35. <u>Ibid.</u>, p 73.
36. <u>Ibid.</u>, p 73.
37. <u>Ibid.</u>, p 61.

of God's action.[38] But only the 'eye of faith' can discern this action. The Christian recognises the normal cause and effect and yet paradoxically affirms that "nevertheless" God is acting in and through these events.[39] We who have this modern world view, must (he says) live as if we have none in this respect.[40]

This is a highly confessional approach. The scope of discourse is limited, and there seems no 'objective' sense of God's action - no way in which we can articulate what it is that God does in the acts of his which we claim to see with our eyes of faith, i.e. how it is that they are his actions, what he intends for them and how he effects it. Further, not only the scope of assertion but also the scope of action is curtailed. Unlike much of the Christian tradition, Bultmann is apparently happy to confine God's action to the sphere of persons and their self-understanding, and to bar him from nature. We have already questioned this facile demarcation in our discussion of the nature of history, and will later seek to rehabilitate God's action in nature. A full critique of Bultmann must be dependant upon an analysis of his existentialist position as a whole: these comments fall far short of that.[41]

Another way of classifying miracle according to our perception of events is afforded by those who rely upon the analysis of our use of language. We take Ian Ramsey as our example here. For him, an adequate treatment of miracles is largely a matter of analysing our

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38. Ibid., p 85. The 'world' is of uncertain extent as used here.
39. Ibid., p 65.
40. Ibid., 9 85.
41. For such a full-scale critique see John Macquarrie, The Scope of Demythologising (SCM, 1960). Also Schubert M. Ogden, Christ Without Myth (Collins, 1962).

discourse about them.[42] Ramsey sees the prime significance of miracle-talk to be reference to a 'sign', an event of relevance and significance, "a focal event which somehow demands description in terms of God's activity".[43] A miracle is an historical event which demands explanation in terms of both 'personal activity' and 'God'. Ramsey's account is persausive in so far as it focuses on the recognition of this 'personal' encounter or disclosure. But he still leaves us with reasons for uneasiness.

(i) He assumes that a miracle will not 'conform' to the normal run of events, that it will be irregular, yet he does not indicate how he conceives this irregularity - whether it is, to use Hesse's distinction, within the normal run of events or not. The question of breaking the laws of nature is dismissed unhelpfully as a 'pseudo-question'[44]: we can never know that a miracle will not occur, because such laws are only descriptive of the regular. But Ramsey, while he is entitled to say this, leaves himself unnecessarily obscure and open to a God-of-Gaps interpretation. His answer is evasive, he has fudged the issue: he has used the statistical nature of scientific laws to evade what still remains an important question after that statistical nature has been pointed out. For even a statistical irregularity would be considered by science to be in some sense inherent in the past of that event: this is why Lewis, who seeks to be unambiguously interventionist, talks of miracles as only interlocking in a forward direction. While Ramsey sees the essence of miracle in our response to an event, he is unwilling to abandon the idea that it is also somehow a non-conforming event. (ii) While

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42. Ian T. Ramsey, "Miracles: An Exercise in Logical Mapwork", in The Miracles and The Resurrection (S.P.C.K., 1964), pp 1-30.
43. Ibid., p 21.
44. Ibid., p 25.

content to build theories of first and second order actions, Ramsey does not sufficiently indicate the relationship between these two types.[45] God's first order activity is covered by science, while his second order activity is on,with and through persons. A 'miracle' is a word used in the logic of history to describe an event which witnesses to, and is an occasion of, a personal, second order activity of God - of which we are in some basic and non-inferential sense aware. It is an historical event which demands for its explanation both 'personal activity' and 'God'.[46] He uses the analogy of doctor and patient to explain. The doctor acts towards the patient; if that patient is his wife then the activity takes on a new, personal element.[47] In the analogy it is possible to describe and explain the first order activity which underlies the second. But Ramsey does not indicate how and why, in certain situations, we are justified in 'seeing' God's second order, or personal, activity. At no time does he address himself to the issue of causality: of what causes a miracle, God or some other cause (or both). Neither does he specify how God's causality is exercised, and how miracles differ from other events in terms of God's involvement in them. One begins to suspect that his account is only after all the stating of a definition of minimal content.

We have tried to show in this section that 'miracle' does not, and cannot, depend on some proof of scientific abnormality and inexplicability. Many writers have given priority to the close link between miracle and revelation, and this link is the most important feature of a proper definition of miracle.[48] And yet it is not in itself enough. We have to say something else if we are to align ourselves properly with the tradition and its major concerns. For a

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45. Ibid., pp 24f; also pp 6, 12.
46. Ibid., pp 25f.
47. Ibid., pp 23p
48. Ibid., pp 8, 21.

miracle has been considered in some sense 'irregular' - in what way can we give due content to such an intuition? We must clarify the nature of the abnormality which may be asserted. It is beyond us, we have seen, to locate that abnormality in an event which defies scientific explanation. The abnormality must be located elsewhere. Certainly, 'oddness', or unusual-ness, seems to be a necessary feature of the 'miracle', as opposed to the special act. But a further clue to the character of this oddness is given in the revelatory significance already spoken of. An event is, and becomes, revelatory because of its peculiar relevance and appropriateness to a particular individual or group at a particular time. The abnormality is in the strange, odd, collocation of certain factors at that particular time: the 'co-incidence' of significant features. It is, if you will, the extraordinary timing of a set of circumstances. This definition will certainly need to be expanded to include elements of 'demand' and faith-evocation, but more on these topics will have to wait: these elements are subjectively felt by the miracle's recipient(s), whereas the extraordinariness and timing of the event should be evident to 'spectators' too.

The outline we have made could be criticised from two opposing camps. On the one hand it might be objected that defining miracle as we have just done unduly prescribes God's activity, and is not fully loyal to the biblical witness. It might be further objected that our philosophy of science is too 'old-fashioned', too positivistic. It might be suggested that if weird and wonderful events happened in biblical times, why not now? These, I anticipate, would be stock objections from those who fear some 'reduction' of their faith. The answers to such objections are already implicit in the preceding pages, but there may be call here for two further comments.

In our approach we are not prescribing but describing God's action in miracle. Furthermore we are recognising both science's unending quest for more knowledge, and the ultimate relativity of scientific knowledge at any one time. Such recognitions are not the hallmarks of scientific positivsm. Indeed, the approach is consonant with the attitude current towards laws of nature - we are saying 'this is the way things are, so far as we know'. The omission of scientific explicability as a criterion for judging an event to be a miracle is in fact clearly implied by the method and spirit of the sciences themselves - and as we shall soon see, has grave theological difficulties anyway.[49]

We may also be attacked from a more radical position. By way of example Dennis Nineham seems to draw unnecessarily bleak conclusions on the matter. His argument seems to run as follows: the biblical writers had a very different world-picture from ours; they believed that God acted in history and in irregular events; because our world-view is different we must cease to talk in any way about such action of God. Such a position is questionable and itself assumes a view of

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49. There may well be a case for speaking of a very special category of truly unique event, with God as sole cause. The resurrection of Jesus may best be considered in this way, perhaps, on analogy with creation 'ex nihilo', which presumably was an act without other causes. Jesus dies and goes into the nothingness of non-existence, and is 'raised' to new life on a new plane by God. Abraham points out that science 'knows' that corpses do not rise to life. Corpses do not indeed. But Abraham is wrong to suppose that 'raising a corpse' is a near adequate explanation of the resurrection of Jesus. Jesus has passed, as it were, into nothing and so is created again 'from nothing'. Such an understanding considers the resurrection body in some way continuous with, and yet quite different from, an earthly body turned corpse: this places the resurrection on a distinctive,and necessarily unique level (only the resurrection of the dead in general could begin to compare). Events which must, as it were, interlock in the causal network forward and backward are rather different - or rather, normal. Science speaks of laws as operative in certain 'regimes' - a different regime operates beyond the grave. However, given the strictures of our last chapter, the historian would be unable to account for such an event.

miracle which we have discarded. What is required is not a disposal of all language concerning God's miraculous activity, but a new articulation which is appropriate to all else that we know of the world, and to our theological sensibilities. Ancient folk believed they experienced God's action around them; so do many modern folk, and the task of theology is to articulate properly this continuing experience.

Jesus is reported to have told his disciples that they would do miracles as he had done them: that the early church had a very practical belief in this is shown in the "Acts". The difference between biblical and modern eyes is in the vehicle of expression and in the expectation of the miraculous (although these two factors were and are by no means independent). Nineham conjectures that even in biblical times miracles were remembered from yesterday or hoped for tomorrow, but seldom experienced 'today'. The New Testament reports more miracles, he says, because it was part of their credibility structure as apocalypticists to see God's hand at work in the last days. Just so: where the eye looks to see God's action with expectancy, there God's hand can be seen. In "Luke-Acts", with the delay of the Parousia admitted, the miracles still appear. Apocalyptic atmosphere intensifies the likelihood of seeing God at work because the eye looks expectantly: it is not that God is more at work here than elsewhere, but that men are more ready and able to see his work.[50] Of course, not all reports are accounted for in this way. A thorough investigation is required into the use of interpretive tools in Old and New Testament storytelling which 'objectivise' God's working through the use of 'myth'.[51] But that task is beyond us here. Our principal difference with Nineham may be stated thus: it is our task not to write-off God's action in 'miracle'

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50 Here I refer again to Nineham's address.

51. See, e.g., Oscar Cullmann, Salvation and History (S.C.M., 1967), pp 96, etc.

but to re-articulate it in contemporary terms.

We have tried, then, to make our notion of miracle independent of scientific considerations, while at the same time noting that statistical laws do not give a carte blanche for all miracle reports. There are more important features of a miracle than whether or not science is able to explain it,[52] and we can never know whether or not science will explain such an event one day. We have, though, sought to begin to sketch out a concept of miracle as an unusual, revelatory event which we must assume is capable of natural explanation, or may be at some future time. Only a fuller exposition and development will show whether this concept can be made properly plausible. Now we must approach the same issue from a different point. We move from focusing on the notion of violation to that of intervention.

2 Divine Intervention

In this section I hope to add to the cumulative case against the concept of divine intervention as popularly conceived: no one argument may be decisive on its own (though the first which we will consider comes close to it), but together they constitute an impressive argument for rejecting interventionism.

To show that we are fighting no imaginary foe, we need only refer again to the work of W.J. Abraham. His thesis is not so much a sustained defence of interventionist ideas (for he never attempts to defend the notion as such) as a sustained assertion or assumption of them. His account of the Exodus will serve as an example.[53] What makes the

52. I maintain this in direct contradiction to Langford, Providence, p 23, for reasons which are apparent in the argument stated.

53. Abraham, Divine Action and History, pp 47f.

Exodus an act of God, he asks? The Exodus comprises certain sub-acts which we may specify: preparations to leave, the issuing of instructions, packing, the actual journey from Egypt, and an escape through the sea. These events are 'ordinary', acts of men and not of God. God does not, for instance, pack the bags of the Israelites. There is a sense in which, without God's sustaining power, none of these human actions would be possible: human activity depends on prior divine activity. But why say that God brought them out of Egypt? He says that (i) there must be other events that are a part of the complex of events known as the Exodus which are believed to be specific acts of God, and (ii) these acts of God are crucial in the chain of events. Thus God appoints Moses, and later 'intervenes' at the sea.

> In other words, if God is said to have done something crucial in the total nexus of events, then God can be held responsible for and hence praised for the Exodus from Egypt. Remove this from the account, however, and all that is left is a tale of human acts that cannot be attributed to God and which therefore cannot be an act of God.

(i) Firstly, we object that the concept of intervention fundamentally misconstrues the relation of God to the world, and undermines the nature of God's transcendence. Bultmann has expressed this well:

> The only way to preserve the unworldly, transcendental character of the divine activity is to regard it not as an interference in worldly happenings, but something accomplished in them in such a way that the closed weft of history as it presents itself to objective observation is left undisturbed. 54

Of course, Bultmann wishes to characterise all talk of intervention as mythological, and I have already shown unwillingness to be drawn into that debate: a different point is at issue here. With Bultmann we concur God is not to be thought of as one agent among others in the natural world. He does not operate on the same level, so to speak, as we do. Apart from

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54. Bultmann, Kerygma and Myth (S.P.C.K., 1953), p 197.

all the problems which would follow from pursuing such a path, it should be immediately clear that it undermines God's transcendence by putting his activity on to the same plane as our own and that of all other natural 'agents'. God becomes a cause like any other.

It would be possible to amass considerable support for such a rejection,[55] but Austin Farrer provides an interesting example. He writes that

> God's action must actually be seen to work omnipotently on, in, or through creaturely agencies without either forcing them or competing with them. But as soon as we try to conceive it in action, we degrade it to the creaturely level and place it in the field of interacting causalities. 56

Or again:

> But God does not stand alongside us or on a level with us, nor do we become aware of him through any external collison, mutual impingement or interaction between his activity and ours. How could we? He is related to us in quite another way: as the will which underlies our existence, gives rise to our action and directs our aim. 57

It may seem strange to invoke Farrer in support of Bultmann. My purpose is not to claim that they are really saying the same things in all their work,[58] nor is it to say that I agree with either or both of them widely. But bearing in mind the considerable differences between them, their agreement on this fundamental is all the more impressive - and it is to this single agreement which I draw attention: that God's transcendence requires that we not think of him as a cause like other causes, to be spoken of on the same 'level' as other causes in causal explanation, and so that talk of his intervention into the causal network

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55. Vernon White, The Concept of Special Divine Action (Thesis submitted for M.Litt, University of Oxford, 1980), pp 30f; A.R. Peacocke, "God's action in the world: A Scientific perspective" in Epworth Review, Sept 1979, p 79, January 1980, p 79; cf M. Wiles "Religious Authority and Divine Action" in Working Papers in Doctrine (S.C.M., 1976); J. Macquarrie, Principles of Christian Theology (Scribner's 1977-2nd ed), pp 248 ff.

56. Faith and Speculation (A & C Black, 1967), p 62; cf pp 142, 83f, 95-7.

57. A Science of God?, pp 106f; cf p 16.

58. This would hardly be possible in the light of Farrer's contribution to Kerygma and Myth.

is inappropriate.

(ii) Secondly, the doctrine of intervention carries a latent danger of conceiving of the transcendence of God spatially. This is implied in the very word 'intervention', which seems to imply a coming in from the outside. The idea that God has to intervene in the world implies a normal absence of God from the world and its processes, which the term itself reinforces. The doctrine of immanence (an even more obviously spatial term) seems to indicate that God is always 'in' his creation, and always acting upon it. Certainly this was the biblical attitude, and we tried to represent this position in insisting that the biblical writers did not conceive of miracle as a sudden in-breaking of God as opposed to the natural world running its course: God was involved with all events. For them, and for us, talk of God 'coming in' at particular occasions is essentially problematic. Insofar as God affects the world at all it must be from 'within' not from 'without',[59] as a permanent relationship rather than as a sudden flurry of remedial activity. Linked to this is the clearer conception of transcendence, not as implying spatial distance, but instead referring to a supreme transcendence of power, wisdom, love, and scope.

(iii) Thirdly, it is by no means clear, given what we understand of action, that the idea of a direct, im-mediate act of God can be made intelligible. Recall the discussion earlier in the thesis: action need not have a bodily referent , but it seems to require some sort of physical locus. The point is that whenever we do anything, we do it in or with or by something. We think 'with' our brains, punch with our

59. A Science of God?,pp 76, 80; cp G. Wainwright, Doxology (Epworth, 1980), pp 79f, 81f, 351; also David Cairns, A System of Christian Doctrine (St Andrews Press, 1979), pp 246, 124.

fists. We run foı election not with our legs (there is no simple bodily referent here), but in all sorts of physical loci; by making speeches, gestures, voting in ballot boxes, writing publicity. Action seems to be physically mediated or supported. How could we grasp or recognise im-mediate action? God's acts,however we seek to describe them, seem to require this physical locus too. This is given through the doctrine of immanence, and universal influence and involvement. As Farrer puts it, "Though the history of God's action is the history of God's action, and not simply man's, yet the form his historical action takes is exhausted by what he causes his creatures, rational or irrational, animate or inanimate to do".[60] Intervention, direct action of God, appears unintelligible.

(iv) Fourthly, if we were to grant an interventionist his position, very severe problems would then have to be faced. The greatest of these is the problem of evil. Once we grant that God may intervene in the causal sequence we then must ask why does he not do so more often. In one of his earlier books, John Hick assumes that God could, if he so wished, intervene at will.[61] This assumption in itself raises grave problems, which we will consider in chapter VIII in dealing with theodicy. Hick's argument as to why God does not intervene at all shows the serious trouble which follows those who try to say that he sometimes does, or could. All values and morality are undermined, and it becomes terribly difficult to 'justify' God's particular interventions ('here and not there') in the face of the relativity of good and evil. Hick succeeds in showing what a treacherous course interventionism is.

These arguments, together, show the enormous difficulties connected

60. Faith and Speculation, p 95
61. Evil and the God of Love (Fount, 1979) pp 360 ff .

with the assertion of occasional divine interventions. Insofar as they succeed in this, they bolster the conclusions already reached in the first section. But there is another related 'traditional' notion which must also receive a brief examination.

3 Divine 'willing' and Divine 'permitting'

Traditionally for Christian theory, the omnipotence of God has meant the conviction that God controls everything either actually or potentially. The only limit put upon omnipotence has tended to be the purely logical limit: God cannot make black white for example. God is related to every event as one who wills or permits it. The question then is transposed into one as to why God permits certain things which appear unwholesome (it is the existence of these things which the distinction between willing and permitting has generally been evoked to explain). The resort to divine permission is the resort which preserves (it is thought) both God's omnipotence and omnibenificence, while at the same time absolving him from direct responsibility for all that happens - he allows some things, rather than wills them.

Augustine says:

> So the whole creation is governed by its Creator, from whom and by whom and in whom it was founded and established. And thus the will of God is the first and supreme cause of all corporeal appearances and motions. For nothing happens in the visible and sensible sphere which is not ordered, or permitted, from the inner, invisible and intelligible, court of the most high Emperor, in this vast and illimitable commonwealth of the whole creation, according to the expressible justice of his rewards and punishments, graces and retributions. 62

Such a notion is no stranger to recent theology either, but two things

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62. Augustine, de Trinitate, 3-9.

need to be said about it.[63]

Firstly, Calvin saw the will/permit distinction to be a fraud (though he then moved to a conclusion which I should not wish to embrace). "But why shall we say 'permission' unless it is because God wills?....I shall not hesitate, then, to confess with Augustine that 'the will of God is the necessity of all things'".[64] If God has the power to intervene, or will something, and does not do so (if he permits it), that 'permission' must in some sense represent his will, and certainly in no way clears the permitter of responsibility (see our chapter I). The distinction does not perform its function in a satisfactory way.

Secondly, if the idea of permission is not used in this sense then it can have no clear meaning at all. Permission is only intelligible in the context of the power to prevent. The term 'creation as permission' may have evacuated most sensible meaning from the term 'permission', for those who talk in this way seldom seem to conceive that God is able to curtail any or all developments.[65]

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63. H.H. Farmer tentatively and provisionally recurs to it at one point (The World and God, Nisbet, 1935, p 105); David Cairns is particularly explicit: "God is in such complete control of his world that there is no event which does not happen either by his decree or by his permission" (A System of Christian Doctrine, p 23); Langford places himself in an awkward position by insisting on the intervention type of miracle, and then saying that God may be said to 'permit' the death of a child (e.g.), (though this does not connote 'divine approval') (Providence, p 89) - he ends up saying that God cannot intervene too often, in order to preserve our freedom, etc, in a 'Hick-ian' type argument.

64. John Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion, III.23.8 (S.C.M., 1960), vol 2, p 956.

65. We may do well to note the objection made by Edward Schillebeeckx in Christ; the Christian Experience in the Modern World (S.C.M., 1980), p 699. "Therefore the expression .... 'God's permissive will' has no theoretical meaning as an explanation: it simply describes the dead end of human thinking when it is confronted with the incomprehensible history of human suffering". As we shall suggest in chapter 8, the idea that evil is permitted for the sake of good does not, as Schillebeeckx also suggests, underline the reality of evil. In fact it tends to make evil less real - i.e. not really evil, but serving good.

This critique of 'willing' and 'permitting' does not have, it would seem, the same gravity in our general critique of traditional expressions as do those of the concepts of 'intervention' and 'violation'. Yet it is instructive to notice that such a distinction is vacuous either because God has no power to permit, or precisely because he does have this power!

4 Some Attempts Reviewed

The need for a fresh approach to this particular doctrine, that of God's action in the world, should be becoming clear. We have examined some traditional devices designed to help the theologian make the statement of God's action, and we have found these devices to be deficient. They still recur in much modern writing. Not all writers, though, attempt to justify their thought by recourse to such ideas. But even those who escape those charges generally do not give due consideration to the meaning of 'action', or the problem of history; very few offer a near adequate explanation of how God's action might be understood. In this section I will highlight three more recent English approaches. Before turning to those statements it is appropriate to make a few comments on an important biblical movement of the last few decades.

a) Biblical Theology

In the early 1950's there was a great revival of interest in the subject of God's action in history.[66] Biblical Theology, as this movement became known, believed that for the biblical writers theology was the

66. G.E. Wright, God Who Acts (S.C.M., 1952); G. von Rad, Old Testament Theology (S.C.M., 1957); O. Cullmann, note 51, p 97.

"confessional recital of the redemptive acts of God".[67] G. Ernest Wright maintained that in this facet the Old Testament religion was unique in the ancient near east. The central act of God in Old Testament faith was the Exodus-Election event: the biblical writers sought not to prevaricate on the divine attributes, or other theological abstractions, but on what God had done for Israel in the Exodus; the Election was the inescapable interpretation of the Exodus.[68] Thus God's revelation is mediated through his action in history.[69]

One flaw stands out most clearly of all in Wright's work. He seems to want to recite God's acts at the Exodus and elsewhere, and yet is not able to say how and why the events in question are God's acts. We are left feeling that he would be unhappy with Abraham's interventionism - he seems to consider the Exodus in a quite immanent and naturalistic way. The events are emptied of the precise features which gave content to the label 'act of God' (e.g. the dividing of the sea), and no new content is poured in to replace it. Wright is typical of the biblical theologians in this respect. He is also typical of very many Protestant thinkers on the subject.

Langdon Gilkey has written a vital article on this topic, examining the works of Wright and other Biblical Theologians. He notes that this approach is half liberal and modern (in its world-view and cosmology), and half biblical and orthodox (in its language). So, says Gilkey, we have two problems: (i) we think that we use biblical language merely because we use the same words - but we put different meanings in them; (ii) granted that we use words analogically (and not

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67. God Who Acts, p 13.
68. Ibid., p 50.
69. Ibid., p 55.

univocally as the biblical writers did) we need to know how analogy is being used and what it points to,else our language becomes mere equivocation.

Against Gilkey, I am by no means convinced that the 'primitive' Hebrew authors of the Old Testament always used language about God univocally. He seems to somewhat overstate his case. But the main point at issue is not language but the world-view which gives that language the content required to function.

Gilkey goes on to point out that for Wright and others the 'mighty deeds' of God have been reduced to one deed - the Exodus/Covenant complex. The bible has become a book not of the 'acts of God', but of 'Hebrew interpretation'. Gilkey caricatures their stance thus:

> For us.... the bible is a book of the acts the Hebrews believed God might have done and the words he might have said had he done and said them - but of course we recognise that he did not. 70

For the event of the Exodus to be a miracle, or a mighty act of God, it must be in some way objectively or ontologically different from other events, says Gilkey.

> Only an ontology of events specifying what God's relation to ordinary events is like, and thus what his relation to special events might be, could fill the now empty analogy of mental acts, void since the denial of the miraculous. 71

The only cosmological statement which is usually forthcoming is a denial of the miraculous, and so the only thing left to be special about a special act is our response to it.

> What we desperately need is a theological ontology that will put intelligible and credible meanings into our analogical categories of divine deeds and of divine self-menifestation through events.... We say that the biblical God acts, but we can give neither concrete examples nor an analogical description.... This general truth

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70. "Cosmology, Ontology and the travail of biblical language", Journal of Religion, 1961, p 197.

71. Ibid., p 200.

> about God we then assert while denying all the particular cases on the basis of which the generalisation was first made. 72

Gilkey goes on to judge that we need to make two changes in our theological thinking: first, we need to take theological ontology more seriously; and second, we need to work out how God is related to all events before saying that he has acted specifically here and there.

What Gilkey has shown us, by first showing the biblical theologians, is this: if we wish to speak of God's action in the world in such a way that our language has real content, then we must be prepared to speculate as to how and what God does when he acts.

All the theologians we review next are English, and all have written in the last fifty years. Each of them has a very different background: one comes from what we might call "Pre-Barthian English Liberal Protestantism", and places some importance on the data of religious experience; another may be characterised as a "Neo-Thomist"; the other comes to theology from a career in the natural sciences. The three will exhibit certain differences and certain similarities, but it it not the purpose of this examination to engage in comparative study. The purpose is to show that none of these well-known approaches finally does justice to the issues, and that a new approach is required. That is not to say that all that is to be learnt from them is negative, for they each offer many worthy insights and (broadly speaking) keep to within the sort of parameters which we have enunciated.

b). H.H. Farmer

Farmer's book The World and God was published almost fifty years ago, and remains remarkable for its sensitivity and insight. Farmer

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72. Ibid., p 203.

writes that "to deny providence is to deny religion".[73] This seems to be a rather sweeping assertion, as other religious faiths seem to manage without such a doctrine,[74] but the point is well-made with regard to the Christian faith. Having so stressed the centrality of God's action, Farmer offers some advice for the understanding of the notion.

For Farmer 'miracle' is a fundamentally religious concept, not a scientific or philosophical one. The proper place to begin consideration of it is therefore not by talking of natural law, but within the sphere of religion proper.[75] Miracle is thus a special case of revelation. The essential ingredient of a miracle is the apprehension of the absolute demand and final succour of God, with the concomitant movement to obedience and trust known as faith.[76] Because revelation, and so miracle, is highly personal - relevant to, and only understandable in terms of, the individual's concrete situation - it is by nature beyond intellectual proof.[77]

We have already spoken in similar terms of miracle as being primarily revelatory, and the relation of such an event to natural laws being secondary. We would also agree that no finally valid, universally acceptable <u>proof</u> may be offered for any miracle. But it is still necessary to qualify Farmer's point to this extent: proof is out of the question, but it is theology's duty to present a general theory of God's action which will make any particular claim more credible, i.e. the conceptual framework must exist so that if not proven, a miracle claim

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73. <u>The World and God</u>, p 99.
74. See Geoffrey Parrinder, "The Idea of Providence in other religions", in <u>Providence</u> (S.P.C.K., 1969) ed M. Wiles.
75. <u>The World and God</u>, pp 107f; cf pp 145 ff.
76. <u>Ibid.</u>, p 111; cf p 116.
77. <u>Ibid.</u>, p 114; cf p 118.

is at least worthy of consideration.[78]

While Farmer indicates that natural law is not a vital issue, and thus seems ready to jettison 'intervention', he is sometimes rather ambiguous. We are all familiar, he says,with 'volitional initiation' - events which would not happen were it not for personal volition. Yet science is not abrogated by such assumptions.[79]

> If, then, what is familiar in man's relation to his world is declared, on theoretical grounds, to be impossible when it is transferred to God, it may be presumed that theory has somewhere got wide of the facts in a way that it should be possible to lay bare. 80

Scientific laws are only observed regularities. Their predictive power is limited. Exceptions to them show, not their 'suspension' but that they are inadequately general. Scientific knowledge is never exhaustive, it is unable to offer ultimate explanations as to why given causal sequences converge. Indeed, it does not really explain at all, but only describe.

Such talk as this leaves us wondering whether Farmer is trying to open up some of the infamous 'gaps'. It may well be that he seeks to leave such an option finally open, but he does go on to consider and reject an interventionist position. He notes that very often we work by routine, and break out of that routine when required.[81] We observe routine or regularity in nature. We may wish to conceive of this routine as either [82] (i) a "direct expression of the continuous creative activity of the divine will", or (ii) so that nature may be thought of not as an immediate expression of the single divine activity, but an

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78. cp John Macquarrie, Principles of Christian Theology, p 17 on a faith which is "reasonable" but not proven.
79. The World and God, p 146.
80. Ibid., p 147.
81. Ibid., pp 164f.
82. Ibid., pp 170f.

infinite number of entities of a psychical kind in continuous interplay with one another.

The advantage of (i) seems to be that the activities of nature are attributed straight to God, with no secondary cause. Thus it would not be too difficult to imagine that God could - given certain exigencies - "act in a new and unprecedented way, breaking through the routines which he had hitherto followed, so soon as wisdom demanded it".[83] Farmer makes two criticisms of this conception.[84] First, that it goes against the grain of our intuition that nature has a relative independence. This is the meaning of his saying (with F.R. Tennant) that Christian Theism must be 'tinged with deism'. Second, that conceiving of miracle as just a new manifestation of the creative will which is equally involved elsewhere, contradicts an important element in the religious awareness of miracle, i.e. that it is different, that it would not have happened had the 'normal' course of events run their course.[85] While these two points are well made, there are two more serious objections, viz: firstly, that man is not easily separable from nature, so that to deny independence and freedom to nature (which may in itself be quite wrong) puts human freedom in jeopardy; secondly, as we have already indicated, to put God forward as responsible for all that happens raises most serious problems in theodicy.

Farmer favours (ii), and outlines a theory of panpsychism as a framework for his theory. Human personality is at the upper end of the range of created entities, yet all others are "relatively independent creative entities" which (even at the lowest levels) are "of a fundamentally mental kind." All are in "continuous relationship or rapport with God,

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83. Ibid., p 172.
84. Ibid., pp 172f.
85. We will argue in chapter VIII that an event does not need to go against 'the normal run' in order to be 'different'.

though not in a personal way."

> Now God's problem in relation to such a system of created creators, who have already fashioned a determinate past and a relatively determinate routine character as the basis of their present activity, is to achieve his own purpose, so far as it is concerned with the time-series, in a way that does not negate the system - though that is perhaps a misleading way to put it, for the creation of such a system and the giving to it some latitude to create itself is itself part of the content of the divine purpose, so that the idea of negativing the system is, from God's point of view, self-contradictory. 86

God's control will, by nature, be limited by the determinate routines of the past.

God's control may be understood as control on two levels. On one level it is a"direct rapport", "inaccessible to our observation", with sub-personal entities "which uses the routines of their activity in relation to a given situation". An analogy, he suggests, is our influence on one another by suggestion. On the other level, of personality, that personality must be respected, i.e.

> it must be conceived as waiting continuously for its fuller realisation upon man's spontaneous alignment of his will with God's as this is revealed to him.... Doubtless the first method may also be used in respect of man, so that when he refuses to be God's agent he may still in a measure be taken up into His purpose as its unwitting instrument... 87

The working of God is what Farmer calls the "inner", "ontal" side of nature, inaccessible to science.[88]

He illustrates his idea by reference to the Red Sea crossing: a strong wind drove back the waters just at their moment of dire need. There are two possible explanations: either "it was a fortunate coincidence," or it was a miracle - "will of God acting relevantly to that situation and in response perhaps to a prayer of need".[89] Science is

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86. The World and God, p 175
87. Ibid., p 176.
88. Ibid., p 176; cf p 155.
89. Ibid., p 178.

indifferent as to whether we opt for the first or second explanation.

> If we must form a picture, it might be along the lines suggested above, namely that God so uses his all-inclusive rapport with the ultimate entities which constitute the inner, creative, present reality of the natural order, that their various routine activities are not overridden, but used by redirecting them in relation to one another. Just as man brings about effects in nature which would not otherwise happen by redirecting routines in relation with one another, so does God, except that God acts from the inside, so to say, by inner rapport and not by external manipulation in the gross. Such rearranging and bringing together of different series of routine events would in the nature of the case not be observable by science. 90

Farmer's (ii) does indeed seem to be preferable at first sight. Indeed, preferable it is; adequate it is not. He should be congratulated for his bold speculation on the mechanics of the divine action, which shows the best kind of theological imagination. But ultimately Farmer fails to convince for two reasons. Firstly, the second account places more emphasis on God's working from within, on the 'plasticity' of nature rather than the more pantheistic/deterministic 'nature as an expression of God'. Yet on close examination (i) and (ii) seem too close for comfort, and Farmer has slipped into a concealed use of the willing/permitting distinction. He says, in his rapport theory, that at the personal level God waits for man's response, implying that God has no such delay at the sub-personal level, i.e. he suggests, and nature 'jumps'. The difference between (i) and (ii) then becomes: in (i) God wills all things, (ii) he permits most things (though has the power to force any outcome), and occasionally ad hoc wills a particular by combining events in new ways. In fact, (ii) is an 'acting from within' theory with an 'occasional intervention' ring to it. Nowhere is there a suspicion that God would be unable to work on nature in the way he wishes, with the proviso that he always keeps 'within the rules'. He is therefore, indirectly at least, responsible for all natural events, good and evil. There is no real independence

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90. Ibid., p 178.

of nature, only at most a very 'provisional' type. And if there is not freedom and independence in nature, and man is emergent from nature, again man's freedom is threatened. Farmer allows human resistance, but must find a place more securely for natural resistance.

Secondly, Farmer's 'panpsychism' is put forward with very little backing. Baldly stated as it is, many questions are raised which need more serious thought. Donovan has pointed out the problems of such positions.[91] These problems will exist in the best expositions, but when ideas are given insufficient conceptual defence they are multiplied. Farmer needs a more clearly thought out conceptuality to sustain panpsychism, or at least to give it a fair chance! Such a conceptuality is, for that matter, required for his 'rapport' approach as a whole, otherwise it remains suggestive but not finally as coherent as it might be. We will find that Process thought addresses these questions more thoroughly.[92]

c) Austin Farrer

Farrer accords 'action' a very high status. A person, even the person of God, is his voluntary action. Farrer spends some time wrestling with the general question of God's action and how it is to be understood, after offering this highly functional view of personality.[93]

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91. P.J. Donovan, Providence, pp 215 ff. See our ch VIII.

92. Donovan says that Farmer offers two theories of how God acts (Providence, pp 215 ff). As well as this rapport theory, he is referring to the hint at the possibility of using the analogy of spatial dimension (see The World and God, pp 102 ff). Donovan rightly considers that while this analogy is religiously suggestive, it "fails to contribute materially towards establishing the conceivability of divine agency". Donovan is right to conclude that the analogy on its own is insufficient. But the point is that it is not on its own: the rapport theory may be taken as an elucidation of what is implicit in the analogy. The two theories do not, as Donovan suggests, compete, but complement. (In this regard we note D. Emmett, The Nature of Metaphysical Thinking (MacMillan, 1953), p 209 on the dangers of analogy).

93. "If 'God's will' means 'God's voluntary action' then it is a synonym for God himself; for what is a person but his voluntary action?" (Faith and Speculation, p 57). This may even have a 'behaviourist' ring to it.

Understanding how central is the notion of 'action' for that of 'person' in Farrer's thought, we can also understand why it is so important to speak of the action of a personal God. God's action in history is thus exhausted by the action of his creatures,[94] yet it is not simply the action of those creatures. It is something else - not alongside, but "on, in or through" that action.[95]

One thing that Farrer is keen to rebuff is any 'God-of-the gaps'. The idea that God is one factor among many others in the universe is he says, a pagan idea. Thunder was attributed to Jove. So when we learnt to explain thunder naturally, we could dispense with Jove: the gap is plugged. But it is tempting for us, suggests Farrer, to substitute a God of 'enlightenment' for the lost God of Lightening - "God does not blast us, he inspires us".[96] In this way we might try to hold on to deity more like Apollo than Jove. But Farrer believes, that with the growth of psychology, even Apollo has been eroded: or rather, his gaps have been filled by more convincing explanations. Farrer does not wish to deny all divine influence at the moment of inspiration, but he rejects God's filling the gap of a missing 'natural' agent in such a process: God's action must be universal. We have already reached similar conclusions.[97]

These thoughts of Farrer's lie behind his concept of creation. God creates through the self-creation of his creatures. This is so whether we follow a creationist or evolutionary view; the difference

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94. Ibid., p 95. It is not clear whether God's creation may also be largely exhausted in this way, given Farrer's idea that creatures create themselves.
95. Ibid., p 62.
96. A Science of God?, p 16.
97. Farrer is keen not simply to move the gaps from 'outside' us to 'inside' us; he would not want to remove the concept of divine inspiration, but only certain cruder manifestations of it.

between them is that in one creation goes on before our eyes, in the other it is out of sight.[98] Even creationists did not, he says, see the world as a divine puppet show. They thought that the world's constituents, once created, run themselves.[99] Of course, God's unceasing support was still required, but "Things went by their own life, energy or momentum, according to the principles of action or of movement built into each of them".[100] We cannot go back on this conviction. "What are we to say, then, when we find ourselves driven to admit that God creates things through the natural running of things? Shall we not be bound to say that he guides and supports them in their creating of themselves, and their creating of one another?".[101] This accounts for the slowness and wastefulness of the process.

Farrer in this way asserts what seems to be some level of independence for the world.[102] How then does he conceive of God's influence or power on it? There are two ways in which he tries to answer this question. The first is bluntly negative. "The causal joint (could there be said to be one) between God's action and ours is of no concern in the activity of religion".[103] Farrer seems to miss the essential and mutual link between 'religion' and theology, the life of faith and reflection. They feed upon each other: devotion is enriched by any knowledge of God and his ways which we can attain to; and religion must soon pass over into elementary theology - the believer

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98. A Science of God?, p 44.
99. Ibid., p 62.
100. Ibid., p 62.
101. Ibid., p 63.
102. In places he states this independence in the strongest possible way - e.g. "running oneself one's own way is the same thing as existing. If God had made things to exist, but not to run their own way, he would have made them to exist, and not to exist". (Saving Belief, Hodder & Stoughton, 1964), p 52.
103. Faith and Speculation, p 66.

must articulate for himself and others at least a suggestion of how, for instance, a'causal joint' might be understood.[104] Farrer says that "the relation of created act to creative Act is inevitably indefinable, and that its being so is neither an obstacle to religion, nor a scandal to reason".[105] It is no scandal not to reach a final and definitive statement of truth on such matters; it is scandalous not to attempt to articulate coherently such a belief.

But Farrer does in fact give some hints at the 'causal joint', though they remain largely undeveloped and do not seem wholly consistent. These hints constitute the second answer I mentioned above. Farrer talks of a "creative pull" in evolution,[106] and talks in several places of divine "persuasion". We have already quoted from him on the independence of creation, yet even there the seed of obscurity was present. God 'lets things go', but the principles by which they go are 'built in' to the creatures by God. This Aristotelian notion seems to threaten again to deprive creation of any meaningful independence. This ambiguity is shot through Farrer's work.

> God thinks things the way they are and designs them to go the way they go. He does not impose an order against the grain of things; he makes them follow their own bent and work out the world by being themselves.... The seemingly free action of nature is not a put-up job.... He is like the good novelist who has the wit to get a satisfying story out of the natural behaviour of the characters he conceives. And how does he do it? By identifying himself with them from within. 107

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104. Maurice Wiles makes the point about devotion and theology in "Farrer's Concept of Double Agency", Theology, LXXXIV, July 1981, pp 247. Picking up Farrer's statement that "Not knowing the modality of the divine action we cannot pose the problem of their mutual relation" (Faith and Speculation, p 66), Wiles says that given this lack of knowledge we may not even be able to posit the existence of the 'causal joint'. (p 248).

105. Faith and Speculation, p 170.

106. A Science of God?, p 45; cf pp 102 ff.

107. Ibid., p 76.

> But the active existences of created beings are all things that God directly means and put into effect; for that is what is meant by calling him the Creator of them. How can God fail to know them directly, and from the inside? Are they not bound to go as his thought of them goes? They spread the field of their activity, they make contact with the action of other beings. God's thought spreads through them, and at the same time through the beings with which they make contact. 108

But what does it mean to say that God does not make creation 'go against the grain', if that grain is wholely of his making - if the creatures are'bound to go as his thought of them goes'? It is not clear what cash-value is to be ascribed to the insistence on creaturely independence and self-creation.

Farrer discusses the Old Testament view of the 'causal joint'.[109] Isaiah saw the Assyrians as instruments of Yahweh, yet he knew that they were neither conscious of this themselves, nor were they somnambulists. "If we can make out a prophetic theory about the mechanism of divine control, it lies in the openness of men's thoughts to pressures of which they are unaware".[110] The Hebrews were ready to speak of the 'breath of the Lord' as a finite force - "an agent among agents, moving the cogitations of the heart as the wind sways the trees".[111] Such an idea is only possible to us, says Farrer, as poetry.

But having rejected this kind of interpretation, Farrer is not too constructive.

> If he ((i.e. the 'modern Christian')) speculates on the way in which the divine control takes effect, he probably goes no further than to tell himself that there is room for it to act; for the grid of causal uniformity does not (to any evidence) fit so tight upon natural processes as to bar theinfluence of an over-riding divine persuasion. If asked what on earth he can mean by 'persuasion' or 'influence' in such connexion, he may

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108. Ibid., p 80.
109. Faith and Speculation, pp 61f.
110. Ibid., p 61.
111. Ibid., p 62.

> simply refuse the challenge. What sense is there in demanding an exact account of an action which, by hypothesis, is outside our knowledge? 112

Such a statement uses two highly obscure, indeed perhaps obscuring, phrases. The 'grid of causal uniformity not fitting tightly' sounds much as if a gap is being sought into which we can smuggle God, even though Farrer has spent some time in denying this. More important, what can 'over-riding persuasion' be? Persuasion is surely not, by definition, over-riding. If it is, how is the independence of the world maintained? Earlier we quoted Farrer's assertion that God works omnipotently "on, in and through" creaturely agencies. What sense has 'omnipotently' here? If it means total power, in what sense can we speak of genuine creaturely agencies? [113]

Yet Farrer still wishes to speak of creaturely resistance. He compares human with 'brute' resistance: a creature which can feel or understand the forward pressure of the divine will would ease and hasten the creative process by acting in line with its aims. Yet Farrer speaks dangerously of such human capacity to resist:

> It goes without saying that brute things have no power wilfully to resist the will of God, for they do nothing wilfully. They stand in the way of the swift or economical advance of the Creative Purpose by their sheer bruteness, and by the uncontrolled randomness of their collisions with others like them. We may not say that they defeat or delay the will of God itself, for God does not desire the impossible. ....The control of the Creative Purpose over the elements its steers is effective; and yet it is (humanly speaking) an enormously loose control.
>
> Surely we must suppose that creative control over the intelligent creature we are imagining is closer, not looser; divine purpose not having to wait upon the action of brute agents which have no concern with it, but being served by one who has some notion of the part he should play in God's larger designs. God will wait for him, too; but he will not wait so long. He will wait for delays and false starts due to limitations of view, downright errors, relapses, even, into brutal self-regard. But the grip of his purpose on the voluntary instrument will be firmer, because it offers more hold to him than brute things can do. 114

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112. Ibid., p 62; it is true that Farrer does not present the case quoted here as his own position, but he uses it as the 'popular' view which he seeks to articulate. To that extent it is justified to criticise Farrer through this statement.

113. Ibid., p 97: see also our note 107.

114. A Science of God?, pp 104f.

How is God to maintain his 'grip'? Farrer seems to give two highly contrasting pictures of God's relation to nature: one in which nature goes according to his thought, another in which (because of its sheer bruteness) God is resigned to being continually frustrated by it. Farrer speaks of divine 'patience', but seems to think God more patient of nature than of man.[115]

We have reviewed Farrer's ideal of God's action and found many ambiguities. If we had invoked his response to the Kerygma and Myth debate we would have added another dimension to our problem: here he seems to want to talk of 'miracles' in a rather interventionist sense - certainly, such talk might be construed as pointing to a God who has the natural world at 'his beck and call'.[116] We have identified two sorts of answer to the question 'how does God act in, on or with his creatures?' The first was agnostic, and so unsatisfactory. The second is riddled with apparent contradictions: concerning the extent of God's power, the independence and freedom (and responsiveness) of creation and man. Yet we do warmly embrace Farrer's insight that God in working through other agents, only seeks to make them 'act' according to the limits 'ingrained' in their existence. This point we shall take up later in our reconstruction of 'miracle'.

d) A.R. Peacocke

Peacocke came to theology from natural science and thinks that the former is bound to take account of the latter in its work. Any affirmations about God and the world are about the world which the natural sciences describe. His Bampton Lectures,[117] and their summary given to the 1978 Science and Religion Forum,[118] are ample

115. Faith and Speculation, p 153.
116. Kerygma and Myth, pp 212 ff.
117. Creation and the World of Science, henceforth Creation.
118. "God's action in the world", reprinted in the Epworth Review (Henceforth, Epworth), Sept 1979, pp 70-80; Jan 1980 pp 72-82; May 1980, pp 75-79

evidence of this belief.

Again we find it vigorously insisted that God's agency is not to be conceived of as entering into 'gaps' in the natural process. Modern science presupposes a "continuous, law-like nexus",[119] a seamless web,[120] though this does not mean that everything is totally determined and inflexible.[121] God is not an ordinary 'cause' in the physical nexus of the universe. He compares God's action in the world to our action in our bodies.[122] God is not in the gaps, but is in the whole continuous process.

We may be a little disquieted at the implied identity between God's action and the whole process. Such an identification may totter towards pantheism or predestination. Indeed there may be little to choose between such apparent opposites, just as there may be little to choose between life under extreme political regimes of Left or Right. Such disquiet is never wholly resolved by Peacocke; it is in fact compounded.

Peacocke introduces, and makes much of, the notion of 'chance'. He tries to distance himself carefully from Pollard, but fails to secure overall success. According to Peacocke, it is chance which elicits the potentialities of matter-energy-space-time over an ensemble of possible universes. "'Chance' can thus be seen as a creative agent and we need not be daunted by the fact that the existence of life and, perhaps also of our actual universe, is the result of its operation".[123] Yet it seems a barbarous use of language to speak of 'chance' as a 'creative agent' or even to talk of its 'operation'.

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119. Creation, p 60.
120. Epworth, Sept 1979, p 74.
121 Creation, p 203.
122. Epworth, Jan 1980, p 79.
123. Epworth, Sept 1979, p 77.

Like Pollard, he distinguishes two kinds of chance:[124]
(i) whether a coin comes down on 'heads' or 'tails' (we say) is 'due to chance'. But chance here means "ignorance of the multiple parameters involved and does not imply any denial of causality". (ii) "The second use of the word 'chance' is that of the intersection of two otherwise unrelated causal chains". When we describe an event as 'due to chance' the phrase functions as a 'stop-card', telling us that the event has multiple causes, or is the result of the intersection of unrelated causal chains.

But it is difficult to evaluate properly this idea of 'chance' in Peacocke's thought. He seems to repudiate 'pure' chance, that is, sub-atomic indeterminacy.[125] Chance is what appears to us to be chance.[126] The causality of nature is not mechanistic, he asserts, in the sense of being wholly predictable before it happens. To us the network of causality fits loosely, but given his two definitions of chance there seems to be a definite mechanistic 'ring' to his explanation. This in turn casts doubts upon his talk of the "interplay of risky chance and law-like necessity" in creation.[127] If risky chance is merely our ignorance of all relevant factors, can we not presume that such ignorance is not shared by God, and that from his perspective this interplay is the interplay of mechanistic forces? What muddles and confuses further though is Peacocke's resorting to the term 'random'[128] to describe these chance events: how does this adjective accord with his two definitions of chance?

The next stage in Peacocke's argument is also a difficult one to

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124. Ibid., Jan 1980, pp 72f.
125. Creation, pp 90 ff.
126. I rely here, and elsewhere below, upon a personal conversation with Peacocke.
127. Creation, p 199.
128. e.g. Ibid., p 105 - "random chance micro-events".

grasp.

> If we propose that the world owes its being to a Creator God then I see no reason why God should not allow the potentialities of his universe to be developed in all their ramifications through the operation of random events; indeed, in principle, this is the only way in which all potentialities might eventually, given enough time and space, be actualised ....it is as if chance is the search radar of God, sweeping through all the possible targets available to its probing. 129

Thus he develops images to help us understand this mode of God's working - creation as a musical fugue, a dance, or as play.[130] The Creator elicits the potentialities which he has 'written in' to Creation. They are "unveiled by chance exploring their gamut, a musical term which has come to mean 'the whole scale, range or compass of a thing' (OED)".[131] So he speaks of the 'creative role' of chance "operating upon the lawful 'necessities' which are themselves created",[132] and talks of the models' indicating God's gratuitousness and joy in creation as a whole, not only in man. The created world is thus seen as an overflow of divine generosity.

There may well be a place for such models in theology, but three problems arise immediately through Peacocke's use of them. Firstly, such images are only properly expressive of the positive in creation. Farrer was more ready to speak of waste and hurt. With such an exploring of the whole gamut of potential, waste is inevitable.[133] The 'positive' models of play, music and dance mask this negative aspect somewhat. Secondly, it is not at all clear how chance can be either a creative agent in itself, or how it can be used as such by an agent. If chance is truly chance, then God only acts through it in a rather

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129. Ibid., p 95.
130. Ibid., pp 105 ff; cf Epworth, Jan 1980, pp 76f.
131. Epworth, Jan 1980, pp 76f.
132. Creation, p 111.
133. Peacocke seems to recognise this fact without acknowledging it as 'waste'. He told me that just as you cannot have printing without the possibility of misprints, so you cannot have cell-replication without mutations.

Pickwickian sense. He does not formulate any clear intention, nor does anything to actualise a particular effect. He just sets the whole thing going, by giving chance its run. This begins to resemble what we know as Deism! Thirdly, this then brings us to another problem: Peacocke's God appears to be present in the first impulse of creation but - in leaving chance to explore its gamut - seems to be absent from it subsequently.

While Peacocke adopts this radically affirmative attitude to chance, he still sees the emergence of man from such chance as a "problem and a clue" - "why should the universe self-generate structures composed of its basic units that should seek intelligibility and meaning"?[134] If chance is truly chance, why should it not?

We noted earlier that Peacocke distinguished his position from Pollard's, but it is difficult to evaluate this distinction.[135] He agrees with Pollard on the statistical character of many scientific laws, and that alternative possibilities follow any particular event with varying probabilities attributed to each. But, apart from events "at the level of the fundamental sub-atomic particles",[136] these probabilities do not imply a lack of causality in the situation itself, they represent our ignorance of all the relevant factors. He goes on:

> Since Pollard denies that he means that God alters the natural probability of a pattern of events to achieve his purpose, I find it hard to find any other meaning in 'Providence', as he uses the term, than as a label or description of the particularity of the single, unique, events which constitute history - and so, it seems to me, it is not capable of carrying the theological weight, in relationship to biblical tradition, which he places on it.[137]

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134. Creation, p 76.
135. Ibid., pp 95f.
136. The waters are muddied further by this phrase: Ibid., p 96.
137. Ibid., p 96.

One difficulty is locating Peacocke's objection. Does he object to Pollard's denial that God alters natural probability? In the light of what he says elsewhere, we imagine not. But in that case he seems to differ from Pollard only in confining chance to sub-atomic events. It's no more clear in Peacocke than in Pollard, how God affects macro-level events. The charge which Peacocke brings against Pollard, that Providence becomes identical with whatever happens, surely rebounds back on to himself. For Pollard, God has influence in the process when we cannot locate a natural cause; for Peacocke, God (as it were) 'devolves' his activity onto randomness, and the 'causeless' events are not directly God-caused but are still his actions by proxy. For Pollard, God is active at every stage; for Peacocke, he sets the whole thing going and chance does the rest on his behalf. Pollard hints that chance is not really chance, but the working of God; Peacocke says that chance certainly is chance, exploring the possibilities built into God's creation on his behalf. Their use of 'chance' is not so close as a first reading might suggest.

Peacocke asks us to see the "interplay of risky chance and law-like necessity in the creative processes of the cosmos"[138] as expressions of God's love. Insofar as this is a statement of the radical freedom of creatures, and the 'risk' which that involves on God's part, it is something with which I would not disagree. But how chance may be an expression of anything, love or something else, is problematic. In one passage[139] Peacocke talks of the resistance to God from <u>personal</u> agents, again making the status of nature uncertain. It is by no means clear that it makes sense to say that God <u>gives</u> anything to anyone/thing (let alone freedom to man) by allowing chance its gamut.

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138. <u>Ibid.</u>, p 199.
139. <u>Ibid.</u>, p 198; cp p 138.

How, according to Peacocke, does God act in the world? He offers two sorts of answer. The first hinges on 'chance', and we have already discussed some of its problems. The second uses more common theological language, but is equally problematic. 'God working through chance' seems to leave little place for God's action here and now. In sailing this other tack, Peacocke again fails to explain how God can exercise his influence.

He seems to say that all natural processes are 'acts of God': his purposes must be pursued through all these processes.

> How can God's general purposes for his creation, and, in particular, for man, the self-determining person and paradox which he has elicited within it, be consummated and yet not belie, or be self-contradictory of, the laws of the immanent creative processes which <u>are</u> themselves God's own mode of action in the world? 140

God is spoken of as the 'agent' of the natural processes.[141] We might be unhappy with such a clear identification, though it is not certain whether Peacocke is referring to the form or content of such processes. This is a distinction which he does not make, but which may prove useful for him.

All creative processes are <u>equally</u> 'acts of God', and he is not more present in some than in others,[142] And yet

> ....man finds that in some sequences of events in created nature and history God <u>unveils his meaning</u> more than in others. God is equally and totally present to all times and places but man's awareness of that presence is uniform neither in intensity nor in content. God may well communicate meaning which is neither comprehended nor apprehended. So, though in one sense, God as Creator acts in all events, yet not all events are received as 'acts of God'. 143

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140. <u>Ibid.</u>, p 185. (It is interesting to consider whether it is correct to say that <u>God</u> elicits man, or whether chance elicits man).

141. <u>Ibid.</u>, p 241.

142. <u>Ibid.</u>, p 204.

143. <u>Ibid.</u>, p 208; cp p 138. Can one communicate meaning through the random run of events? We might interpret 'equally active and present' to mean 'not active and present at all'! Peacocke does use the female image of 'internal creation' at one point (<u>Ibid.</u>, pp 142 ff) and if he developed this it may be helpful.

For Peacocke, some events are more 'important'.[144] Here then all the processes are God's act, but particular ones which we respond to are more his acts, as it were. But he is at pains to point out that this 'more' is only in our response, and does not reflect any different relation to the event on God's part.[145] From this situation he is unable to retrieve himself. His talk of 'particular initiatives'[146] (e.g. in Jesus) appears vacuous - how can this God make any initiatives? Peacocke has not allowed God to get truly inside the system. Chance works itself out; all are equally divine acts. Particular initiatives are really only particular responses to the most general of activity, for God can do nothing differently.[147] God is basically passive here. He has devolved freedom on to his creatures[148] and while this might show the extent of his initial freedom,[149] he has left himself no 'handhold' in his creation for future influence. It is not so much true to say that God's purposes are "opaque"[150] and less discernible because of human freedom; it is difficult to say how any purpose is worth speaking of with no means to effect it. Farmer and Farrer both seemed to threaten the independence of nature, Peacocke gives us a thoroughly independent nature but at the cost of totally removing God from it.

We may well have laboured the inadequacy of Peacocke to drive home a point, but we have not caricatured his position. He has totally

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144. Ibid., p 209: this sense of 'importance' is in fact the technical Whiteheadian sense as developed in Modes of Thought.
145. Creation, cf pp 204, 208; also see our ch. VI.
146. Ibid., p 239; cp p 138.
147. In conversation Peacocke made two salient remarks: (i) that we should not ask 'where' God is acting. He is acting everywhere, and if we want to see an act of God we must look at the world. God is 'in' the world as Beethoven is in his symphony, i.e. that is Beethoven being a composer, the world is God being creator. Action is thus very generally regarded, and if this is the limit of immanence it is a disturbing thought, (ii) God's will is much more general than we usually think. God wills things for his creation in general, but not in particular instances. He wills not that I as an individual worship him, but that evolution will produce creatures capable of knowing and loving him. "Will" is too personal for God, and is only appropriately used of finite agents; for if God is an agent at all, he is infinite.
148. Ibid., p 138.
149. Ibid., p 199.
150. Ibid., p 138.

removed God from the process, or at the very least has not sufficiently indicated how he is involved in it. Either is a grave error.

CHAPTER FOUR

WHITEHEAD AND HIS COSMOLOGY

To understand Whitehead's theory of divine action properly, and especially to grasp its implications for our investigation, it is necessary to set the theory firmly in the context of Whitehead's cosmological system. Certain critical and constructive comments will be offered, but it must be made clear that a full-scale critique of the whole system is beyond the scope of this study. We will begin by making some observations of a biographical nature, and go on to give an exposition of the system with particular interest in our problem. It will then be instructive to turn away from the mature doctrines of Process and Reality to the Whiteheadian corpus as a whole in order to attempt to trace any developments or alterations in the course of his thought. In the next chapter we will delve more deeply into particular problems which arise for those considering Whitehead's theory of divine action.

1 The Man

Alfred North Whitehead was born in Kent in 1861, the son of an Anglican clergyman. After excelling at school in sport and academics he went up to Trinity College, Cambridge, as a Maths undergraduate. Afterwards he became a fellow at Trinity, and Senior Lecturer in the University in Maths and Physics. One of his pupils was Bertrand Russell, with whom he later collaborated on the still standard text Principia Mathematica. In 1911 he took a lecturing post at University College, London, and in 1914 accepted the Chair of Science and Technology at

Imperial College. In 1924 he resigned this post to become Professor of Philosophy at Harvard. He returned to this country to give the Gifford Lectures a few years later, and these were published under the title Process and Reality in 1929. This is his magnum opus, though elsewhere he refers to it as the middle work in a trilogy which must be considered together (i.e. with Science and the Modern world, 1925 and Adventures of Ideas, 1932). Whitehead died in Cambridge, Mass., in 1947.

Whitehead sought to provide a metaphysical base to the 'new physics', to solve some of philosophy's perennials: the dualism of mind and body, permanence and change, among others. Other thinkers had tried to develop their thought along similar lines. On the continent Henri Bergson, and in Britain Lloyd-Morgan made their contributions, while Samuel Alexander's Space, Time and Deity was the most momentous of all. Alexander apparently dropped out of the quest for a new cosmology because he felt that Whitehead's work was of superior standard and promise. That Whitehead's work has been so long in the shadows can probably be accounted for by noting one or two other publication dates. In 1921 Wittgenstein published his Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus, and in 1936 Ayer his Language, Truth and Logic. The philosophical rebellion against metaphysics found a strange theological echo: in 1919 Barth's Der Romerbrief exploded on to the scene, and by 1932 the Church Dogmatics was being seen in print. Bultmann may stand for a very different type of 'neo-orthodoxy', but he too rejected metaphysics as the unfaithful search for security. His History of the Synoptic Tradition of 1921 was followed five years later by Jesus. In philosophy and theology Whitehead was swimming against the tide, and for some years it engulfed him.

2 Exposition

For Whitehead, whatever is actual and concrete is in process. Actual entities are the concrete things of which the universe is comprised, and they are infinite in number. Perhaps their alternative designation, actual occasions, gives a better hint as to their nature - they are events or pulses of experience which come into existence, perish, and are succeeded by new pulses.[1]

What we perceive with our sense perception as individuals are in fact high-level abstractions - individual walls, dogs, men, are in fact nexūs of occasions. These occasions or entities are combined in two ways: in terms of temporal succession as 'series', and in terms of spatial groups as 'societies'. A human person is a society of actual occasions which endures through time as a series; there is also here a dominant actual occasion, which we call mind or soul, and because of this Whithead says that humans are an example of 'monarchical societies'.[2] When an individual series takes on this continuing character the features responsible are termed its 'defining essence'.

There are two levels of process: macrocosmic and microcosmic. The process, transition, or passage of occasions is the macrocosmic process; but within the occasions there is a microcosmic process which is called 'concrescence'. Just as actual entities are atomic and cannot be split

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1. Whitehead includes God under the title 'actual entity' but not under 'actual occasion' (Process, p 135). This indicates that the former term is used to cover any existing thing, while the latter has a somewhat narrower scope. By 'experience' Whitehead points us not towards a universal consciousness, but towards the notion of all actuality as subjective.

2. For Whitehead a plant is a democratic society, having no dominant occasion; Process p 166.

up into smaller units and still remain real (an occasion either happens or it does not - it cannot half happen, as it were), so concresence cannot be divided up except for analytical purposes. We will be able to analyse three phases of concresence, each one termed a 'prehension' or 'feeling'. An occasion is the sum total of its prehensions.

Each occasion[3] or event inherits from its predecessors by 'prehending' them. With the reception of data from the past the internal process begins. The actual occasion also prehends possibilities for the future which are relevant to its situation, and then 'decides' on what to do in its own coming to be from the alternatives available to it, and finally reaches 'satisfaction'. Thereupon it perishes and is succeeded.

Each occasion is said to have two 'poles' 'where' (so to speak) it prehends different types of entities. Having said this we should not think of these poles in spatial terms, and we should remember that any actual entity is truly a unity: to consider one of its poles in isolation from the other is to abstract from its unity. Occasions have a physical and mental pole. They may prehend at these two poles positively or negatively, i.e. either in a feeling, or in an elimination of feeling. Whitehead

> generalises the mind/body problem, and suggests that a certain contrast between two modes of activity exists within every actual occasion. An occasion is a throb of experience, so of course its 'physical pole' cannot consist of matter, in the sense of permanent unfeeling substance; and consciousness is too slight and occasional to define the 'mental pole'. The physical activity of each occasion is rather its

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3. One might interrupt to ask - what exactly is an actual entity? - point to one! Already with a cell we have an abstraction from concrete reality: it is a nexus. Even an atom is an abstraction. Lowe recalls asking Whitehead whether the emission of a single quantum of energy by an atom should be considered an actual occasion. He was told that such would be "probably a whole shower of actual occasions"(Lowe,"The Concept of Experience in Whitehead's Metaphysics" in Alfred North Whitehead, ed G.L. Kline, Prentice-Hall, 1963). In Adventures, he speaks of occasions of human experience before the present one as existing between one tenth and one half of a second ago (p 181). "Immortality" in The Philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead, ed P.A. Schlipp, New York, 1951, p 689.

> absorption of the actual occasions of the past, its direct rapport with the environment from which it sprang; and its mental side is its own creativeness, its desire for and realization of ideal forms (including its own terminal pattern) by means of which it makes a novel, unified reaction to its inheritance. 4

At its physical pole the actual entity received data from the past. The data is the 'given' in any experience. The whole of the past occasion(s) is given for prehension, though not all of it will be positively prehended. The perished occasion considered alone, for itself, is known as the 'initial datum'. All occasions prehend with a 'subjective form': this describes the 'how' of the prehension. How data is received, and to some extent therefore what data is efficacious. Each new occasion prehends past occasions from its own perspective, i.e. it prehends the past occasion not as 'initial datum' but as 'objective datum'. We say that a past occasion is 'objectified' in a new one, and it is objectified in such a way as to sum it up from some perspective.[5] The actual world of an actual entity, i.e. its immediate past, thus becomes objectified - its 'objective world' - i.e. that past as it has chosen to objectify it. The 'choosing' will have to be explained in due course.

More needs to be said about the fundamental notion of 'subjective form'. Whitehead acknowledges a debt to F.H. Bradley[6], and subjective form may be understood by reference to Bradley's 'living emotion'. Says Whitehead: "My reason for using the term 'subjective form' is that I stretch its meaning beyond 'emotion'. For example consciousness, if it be present, is an element in the subjective form".[7] Still, there can be no contesting that subjective form refers primarily to the emotional reaction of the subject to its data.

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4. Victor Lowe, Understanding Whitehead (John Hopkins, 1966), p 43.
5. Edward Pols, Whitehead's Metaphysics (S. Illinois UP, 1967), p 44. Henceforth Metaphysics.
6. Process, viif. Eugene Peters, The Creative Advance (Bethany Press, 1966), p 57 ff. Henceforth Advance.
7. Adventures, p 231.

Peters explains that

> When I experience the shriek of a fire siren, I am aware of emotion surging up in me, bearing within itself the loud, piercing sound on which my mind rivets attention. The soul of the experience is emotion - characterised by certain auditory qualities. 8

This emotional aspect is not confined to human experience, and leads us to an important methodological point: "The basis of experience is emotional. Stated more generally, the basic fact is the rise of an affective tone originating from things whose relevance is given".[9] And again: "The notion of physical energy,which is basic in physics, must then be conceived as an abstraction from the complex energy, emotional and purposeful, inherent in the subjective form of the final synthesis in which each occasion completes itself".[10] Thus Whitehead is prepared to take his 'working hypothesis' from human experience and, taking the latter seriously as part of nature,[11] then apply it as a universal tool of understanding.[12]

At its mental pole each actual occasion prehends the Eternal Objects. The term 'object' might be a little misleading here if it carries too many of the connotations of ordinary speech. Perhaps we would better describe eternal objects by their alternative designation, Pure Possibilities. An eternal object is that which can be defined without reference to its actualisation in any concresence, i.e. it is basically possible rather than actual. The analogy can be readily made to Plato's Forms. Eternal Objects are those 'things' (ideas, forms, colours)[13] which exist independently of any manifestation in actuality. They account for identity, permanence, universality, abstraction, and possibility.[14]

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8. Advance, p 58.
9. Adventures, p 176.
10. Ibid., p 186, cf pp 183f: subjective form and continuity of nature.
11. Ibid., pp 184f.
12. Process, p 8; Advance, pp 21f.
13. Process, p 82.
14. Everett W. Hall, "Of what use are Whitehead's eternal objects", in ed Kline, p 104.

Eternal objects only cease to be potentials and become actuals when they 'ingress' into an actual entity in that entity's prehension, either when the entity prehends a past entity which had prehended that eternal object, or when it prehends the eternal object as a novel possibility as yet unrealised. It is at this point that novelty may enter. Every actual occasion has a mental pole, and so some chance of realising a novel possibility. We may never say that the mental pole is not present, though we may say that its contribution is often trivial.[15] When the possibilities do ingress into an occasion, they are more than 'secondary substances' (for all Whitehead's love of Locke), but are integral to the occasion - part of its 'real internal constitution'.[16]

At the physical pole the datum prehended (the 'given') prescribed to some extent what the occasion can become: it cannot escape completely from its actual world. But this prescription is not in any rigid and deterministic sense, Whitehead would say,but the very givenness of the past rules out certain possibilities for the future. "The actual world..... conditions and limits the potentiality for creativeness beyond itself".[17] Without a mental prehension of significance the actual entity would tend to reproduce the past. Thus physical prehension is sometimes referred to as the 'Conformal Phase'.

A physical prehension is an entity's prehension of another entity. God is considered an actual entity, so when a human or natural occasion prehends God it does so by physical prehension. Such an assertion should testify to Whitehead's peculiar use of language. In fact, pure

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15. Process, p 88.
16. Whitehead gives two different lists of the 'modes of ingression' of an eternal object. Process, pp 249, 445. See also W.A. Christian, An Interpretation of Whitehead' Metaphysics (Yale UP, 1959), pp 210f; henceforth Interpretation. Also Dorothy Emmett, Whitehead's Philosophy of Organism (MacMillan, 1966 - 2nd ed), p 133; henceofrth Organism. Also relevant: Process, pp 366f; Reason, p 26; Leclerc, Metaphysics, pp 177f.
17. Process, p 101, cp pp 96f.

physical prehensions are rare, perhaps even non-existent. We could say, though, that physical prehension has: i mental content. In prehending an occasion which has an eternal object in ingression, the occasion also prehends the eternal object. Or sometimes an occasion is 'objectified' by an eternal object - this is called 'hybrid prehension'. It seems possible that, ultimately, all prehensions belong to this category. ii It has mental mediation, for as we have just said, the past occasion is objectified in the new by an eternal object as a form of definiteness. Thus an eternal object 'mediates definiteness' between occasions and in doing so it is involved in 'dative ingression' and shows its 'two-way' functioning as part of the data and as a partial determinant of the subjective form which governs prehension of the data.[18] iii Physical prehension also has mental implications. Whitehead first encapsulated this in the Category of Conceptual Reversion.[19] It had to do with the way in which the prehension of an eternal object derived from objectification of an antecedent occasion gives rise to the prehension of a related but novel eternal object. In his initial explanation this prehension is seen as a new conceptual feeling.

But later in Process and Reality Whitehead says that this prehension of further eternal objects in fact comes from a hybrid prehension of God. The Category of Conceptual Reversion is then abolished. There is some dispute as to whether the fate of this Category shows Whitehead's muddleheadedness,[20] or his willingness to offer a provisional, working solution at an early stage and then wait until the development of the system before offering a more complete explanation.[21] Why this 'secondary origination of conceptual feeling' is important is that it enables the

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18. Process, pp 368, 249; also Pols, Metaphysics, p 35.
19. Process, p 40.
20. John B. Cobb Jr, A Christian Natural Theology (Westminster, 1965), pp 178 ff; henceforth, Natural.
21. Christian, Interpretation, pp 213f.

subject to prehend eternal objects which have neither physical nor conceptual ingression in its past world, but which are relevant possibilities for its becoming. In tracing this prehension of new possibilities to God Whitehead is consistent with his ontological principle which states that actual entities are the only reasons. It also says that everything must be somewhere, i.e. in some actual entity, and in the case of potentiality that 'somewhere' is the 'non-temporal' actual entity, the Primordial Nature of God.

God is part of the actual world of every actual entity. God orders the eternal objects according to their graded relevance for each becoming occasion. Thus he is the Principle of Concretion,[22] ordering possibility and thus enabling definiteness to emerge from a situation otherwise "riddled with ambiguity". The occasion thus prehends novel possibility through a hybrid prehension of God. God is 'objectified' by the graded relevance he offers; and this order includes the initial subjective aim for the occasion which is the best possible outcome for the occasion to realise in its concrescence in that situation. The occasion prehends not only this order but the subjective form of God's envisagement of the eternal objects which is in the form of appetition for the 'best' possible outcome.

Just as the occasions are dipolar, so also is God - we talk here of his Primordial and Consequent Natures. The former is his envisagement of the eternal objects. Alone, it is imperfectly actual but includes appetition for actualisation. God becomes properly actual through his

22. Process, pp 278f, 343f.

Consequent Nature where he prehends all other entities.

Each actual occasion is given an initial aim, at the best for their situation. Here we come to the nub of Whitehead's cosmology for our study.

> An actual entity is responsible to God as a result of entertaining in its initial phase a conceptual aim, derived from God, which points toward the manner of becoming on the part of that actual entity which would result in maximising intensity and harmony of feeling in the evolving universe. The actual entity can 'turn its back', so to speak, on this divine lure as it makes its own autonomous decisions by which it becomes actual. 23

Each occasion will react to this initial aim in the data which it prehends in a different way. It will 'aim' at its own ideal of itself as 'superject' at 'satisfaction' in order to maximise its 'enjoyment'. These latter terms require elucidation.

Each occasion experiences with 'subjective immediacy': for Whitehead all occasions are in some sense subjects with physical and mental poles. He denies what he terms the 'Fallacy of Vacuous Actuality' - that something can be actual and not 'enjoy' it's actuality, be for itself.[24] With its own subjective aim, its ideal of itself, the occasion aims at its perishing, which is called its satisfaction when seen from its own perspective: this satisfaction is more or less intense according to the elements it combines and harmonises within itself as contrasts. To say that an actual entity experiences or enjoys does not imply that it is necessarily conscious. Consciousness only emerges with much more

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23, Donald W. Sherburne, "Responsibility, Punishment, and Whitehead's Theory of the Self", in ed. Kline, p 184. Sherburne here uses very anthropomorphic language - perhaps Whitehead invites this by basing his system on analogy from human experience. See also: Lowe, Understanding, p 47. It may be possible to draw comparisons between this teleological notion of Whitehead's and similar ideas in other thinkers. In a real sense, this is God presenting himself as the 'object of desire' to each occasion, so that to fulfil the initial aim is to seek to imitate God's satisfaction and perfection.

24. cf John B. Cobb Jr, and David Ray Griffin, Process Theology: An Introductory Exposition (Westminster, 1976), pp 16f: henceforth, Introductory.

complex mental feelings than are present through most of nature. The genetic process of concrescence is analysable into prehension or feelings, starting with 'primary' feelings, followed by phases of complex feelings involving integrations of feelings in antecedent phases, and terminating in a completed unity of feeling, the satisfaction - which is not a separate or distinct feeling, but the consummation of the antecedent feelings. Nor are the antecedent feelings distinct from the superject.[25] Whitehead uses subject/superject almost interchangeably, and says that when he uses the term 'subject' it is usually as a shorthand for both terms. The relation of the subjective aim to the mental pole is demonstrated by Leclerc.[26] We will see later that if these two are too closely identified problems may arise. We will also have to ask whether the language used of phases in concrescence enables us to posit a successiveness within the atomic actual entity, and whether Whitehead would wish it to be so. The occasion, on point of perishing, ceases to be a subject and becomes superject, i.e. it moves from being indeterminate and experiencing in subjective immediacy to being determinate and offering itself up as an 'object' for the next occasion. The superject functions as final cause in the occasion, while the efficient cause is constituted by the data prehended. Thus

> according to this account, efficient causation expresses the transition from actual entity to actual entity; and final causation expresses the internal process whereby the actual entity becomes itself.... an actual entity is at once the product of the efficient past, and is also, in Spinoza's phrase, causa sui. [27]

The integration of the many feelings of an entity is performed by the subjective aim - the occasion seeing itself as superject, the final cause, as an inherent element in the process. It is an ideal in that i it is an ideal end, a perfection to be aimed at, and ii it is the end entertained conceptually as an idea. The occasion must be guided by an

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25. Leclerc, Metaphysics, p 186.
26. Ibid., pp 187f.
27. Process, p 228.

idea of itself as superject, which is its subjective aim, a general category applicable to all occasions.

We might note that the subjective aim 'controls' all the feelings which make up the occasion. That is to say that all prehensions and phases of concrescence will be guided by it. It also controls the subjective forms of the feelings. But a problem arises: if the subjective aim controls reception of all data, what controls the reception of the subjective aim? This question will be among those occupying our attention in the next chapter.

The notion of causa sui is central in Whitehead's presentation of his philosophy of organism, though we will have cause to ask if he is able to offer a thoroughly coherent account of it. Hitherto, the notion has traditionally been used of God. But now we see its scope broadened to include all actuality. For ultimately, each occasion causes itself; it is not at the mercy of efficient causes. This is despite an account of the latter which we might call 'incarnational': that is to say that the perished occasion becomes (as an object) immanent in the novel occasion.[28] But this efficient cause is not fully determinative of the novel occasion's concrescence.[29] As Leclerc notes, to be actual is to act, but an efficient cause is an objectified, past 'actuality'. It cannot act, else it would not be an efficient cause. Contemporary occasions cannot prehend each other,[30] and an efficient cause is such by virtue of its pastness. The past does not act in the present but merely functions in the present by being a 'ground of obligation' conditioning to some degree the activity of the present occasion.[31]

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28. Emmett, Organism, pp xxii ff; Process, p 142; Leclerc, Metaphysics, p 70.
29. Given that the occasions create themselves from the data given in the form of other occasions, it may be truer to say they are mutually self-creative.
30. Process, p 95.
31. Leclerc, Metaphysics, p 110.

Efficient causation is connected largely with physical prehension, though we will see that final causation must be rooted there too. Novelty and subjective aim centre more on mental prehensions. The relation between the two poles can, for some purposes, be summed up by the notion of appetition, which is an "urge towards the future based on an appetite in the present".[32] The physical pole representing the world as it is, and the mental pole prehending the world as it might be, appetition is a desire to transform the past into a novel future. Limited and conditioned by its past, an occasion may have appetition for some new possibility for its satisfaction. The new element is felt as desired in the immediate present or the relevant future. Appetition is the most fundamental thing about nature: things grow because of a feeling of something as yet unrealised, yet present in the form of an urge towards realisation.[33] Appetition is a sort of self-transcendence within nature: the whole creation seeking to become what it can be through this universal 'principle of unrest', which closely parallels Alexander's 'nisus'. "The immediate experience would not have come into being at all were it not for some appetite for potentialities as yet unrealised".[34] Without appetition physical conformity and decay will set in.[35]

The subjective aim is a propositional feeling,[36] in that a proposition is a "complex entity which stands between the eternal objects and the actual occasions",[37] sharing some characteristics of each. It is a 'lure for feeling' - it "is a manner of germaneness of a certain set of eternal objects to a certain set of actual entities".[38]

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32. Process, p 47.
33. Emmett, Organism, p 147.
34. Martin Jordan, New Shapes of Reality: Aspects of A.N. Whitehead's Philosophy,(London, 1968) p 45; henceforth, Shapes. Cf Peters, Advance pp 62, 69.
35. Some useful material, with illustration, is found in Reason, pp 26, 72.
36. Christian, Interpretation, pp 315f.
37. Process, pp 299f.
38. Process, p 286; cp Emmett, Organism, pp 164f.

The subjective aim, this appetition for a proposition, is essential for an occasion's individuality.[39]

The occasion's subjective form (which depends on the subjective aim) helps define this individuality. Every occasion is unique, so has a novel subjective aim, and subjective forms.

Now the subjective aim, 'through' the subjective form of feelings, decides on negative and positive prehensions of data. "A negative prehension is the definite exclusion of that item from positive contribution to the subject's own internal constitution".[40] Positive prehensions are the positive inclusion of items through the feeling of them: thus a positive prehension is termed a 'feeling'.[41] Negative prehensions "eliminate from feeling".[42] But"this doctrine involves the position that a negative prehension expresses a bond.....this determinate bond is its prehension of that item".[43] In fact Whitehead seems clear that an occasion may only negatively prehend an eternal object,not another occasion. An occasion must positively prehend every other occasion in its actual world,[44] though it may abstract from them. While each occasion is positively prehended, not all of that occasion is felt, or objectified. The prehending occasion abstracts from its initial data - only God's prehension is complete.[45] It is because of this necessary positive prehension that Whitehead can say that each occasion 'sums up' the whole universe. And while an occasion may negatively prehend an eternal object, this does not mean that those eternal objects not felt are negligible.

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39. Christian, Interpretation, pp 215f.
40. Process, p 66.
41. Ibid., p 337.
42. Ibid., p 35.
43. Ibid., p 66. Emmett gives a diagrammatic explanation of prehension: Organism, pp 181f.
44. Cobb, Natural, p 233.
45. Process, pp 66, 335, 366; Christian, Interpretation, p 65.

> For each negative prehension has its own subjective form, however trivial and faint. It adds to the emotional complex, though not to the objective data. The emotional complex is the subjective form of the final 'satisfaction'. 46

It is possible to isolate five factors in feeling.[47] i The subject which feels; ii the initial data which are to be felt; iii the elimination in virtue of negative prehensions; iv the objective data which is felt; v the subjective form which is how that subject feels the objective data. (We might say that v turns ii into iv). Or to analyse another way, we can discern two broad phases:[48] i a receptive, responsive, conformal phase or phase of enjoyment, in which a 'vector' character is dominant,[49] and ii the supplemental phase, or phase of emotion, appetition, in which a 'scalar' character is dominant.

The subjective aim is a conceptual prehension; it is the idea of itself as superject.[50] But, by the ontological principle, the subjective aim must derive from somewhere, i.e. some actual entity. "Since the subjective aim is a conceptual feeling, and since it arises.... in the primary phase, it must be a primary conceptual feeling....what then is the physical prehension from which it arises"?[51] The subjective aim is gotten from a physical (hybrid) prehension of God: a unique actual entity is required.[52] As principle of concretion, and in other ways, God is a unique actual entity. But Whitehead is fully aware of the dangers of violating his system's coherence - a deus ex machina is to be avoided. In fact, "God is not to be treated as the exception to all metaphysical principles, invoked to save their collapse. He is their chief exemplification".[53] That is, God must be conceived, philosophically,

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46. Process, p 66.
47. Ibid., p 337.
48. Pols, Metaphysics, p 49.
49. Nathaniel Lawrence, Whitehead's Philosophical Development,(Los Angeles,1956), p 364.
50. Leclerc, Metaphysics, p 190.
51. Ibid., p 190.
52. Ibid., pp 180f; Christian, Interpretation, pp 287f.
53. Process, p 521; cf Science, pp 173 ff. Also Harry K. Wells, Process and Reality,(New York 1950)

in terms of the generic metaphysical principles applying to all actual entities. Such a successful application of the categoreal scheme to God is one of the crucial tests for a system's coherence.

We must ask: is Whitehead able to conceive God as both a unique actual entity, and yet one which exemplifies the metaphysical categories? Indeed, perhaps there is a prior question, i.e. should Whitehead wish to describe God as an actual entity? Such comments as "God is an actual entity, and so is the most trivial puff of existence in far-off empty space"[54] seem to cause concern. However it should be noted that the term 'actual entity' is not contrived to refer to something tiny and by definition insignificant. Rather, it refers to the basic blocks of actuality: anything which is actual is put under this heading and, while they may be describable in similar terms because they belong to one genus, they are infinitely diverse. Whitehead simply means to say that the far-off puff of existence and God are both actual things. With this traditional theism would hardly disagree, though it has not usually sought to describe such different actualities in the same way.

God's existence is not generically different from other occasions', "except that he is primordial".[55] This fundamental difference means that God originates at no time, and does not have his physical experience prior to his conceptual experience, as do other actual entities.[56] God's conceptual experience is unlimited: in his primordial nature he is eternal, and in his consequent nature he is everlasting and so does not perish.

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54. Process, p 28.
55. Process, p 116.
56. Ibid., pp 378, 382, 398.

Does God exhibit the characteristics of all other actual entities (the actual occasions)? i God is a unity of conceptual and physical experience.[57] God is a sort of mirror-image of temporal occasions in that "the origination of God is from the mental pole, the origination of an actual occasion is from the physical pole".[58] Thus God is also[59] a concrescence, who iii aims at, and achieves, satisfaction.[60] iv Just as all actual occasions have a threefold character, so God has a similar character.

> God differs from other actual entities in the fact that Hume's principle, of the derivative character of conceptual feelings, does not hold for him. There is still, however, the same threefold character: (i) The 'primordial nature' of God is the concrescence of an unity of conceptual feelings, including among their data all eternal objects. The concrescence is directed by the subjective aim, that the subjective forms of the feelings shall be such as to constitute the eternal objects into relevant lures of feeling severally appropriate for all realizable basic conditions. (ii) The 'consequent nature' of God is the physical prehension by God of the actualities of the evolving universe. This primordial nature directs such perspectives of objectification that each novel actuality in the temporal world contributes such elements as it can to a realisation in God free from inhibitions of intensity by reason of discordance. (iii) The 'superjective nature' of God is the character of the pragmatic value of his specific satisfaction qualifying the transcendent creativity in the various temporal instances. 61

v It will be noted from the above that God also has a subjective aim,[62] and vi subjective forms of feeling.[63] We should also note one difference between God and actual occasions: contemporary occasions cannot prehend each other, for only perished occasions may be prehended. Yet God is both prehended by an occasion at the start of concrescence, and then prehends it as it perishes.

God is described as the primordial, non-temporal "accident" of creativity.[64] Creativity is Whitehead's'ultimate': it is that which

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57. Ibid., p 54.
58. Ibid., p 54.
59. Ibid., pp 47, 54, 134.
60. Ibid., pp 48, 135.
61. Process, pp 134f.
62. Ibid., pp 134f, 522, 534. cf Nathaniel Lawrence, "The Vision of Beauty and Temporality of Deity in Whitehead's Philosophy", in ed. Kline, p 173. Also Peters, Advance, pp 71f.
63. Process, pp 50, 134, 522.
64. Ibid., p 11; Emmett, Organism, pp 248f.

denotes the ongoingness of the process. As causa sui, actual entities are instances of creativity, and this creativity exists only as instanced, or embodied.[65] Eugene Peters supplies us with a brief commentary on an important quotation from Adventures:

> The way past occasions propel themselves into the future and thereby provide the objects required for the formation of new occasions is termed 'creativity'. "The creativity of the world is the throbbing emotion of the past hurling itself into a new transcendent fact". It is the ultimate metaphysical principle, in accord with which the world is ever achieving new instances of concrete unity (i.e. concrescences). 66

Creativity is ultimate but random. Without God to give direction, co-ordinate, the activity of creativity is futile. It could be said that God is the 'hegemon', the 'one who leads'. Thus with God's help, as it were, the creativity, the 'cutting edge' of creation is able to 'bring on' new fact.

In his primordial nature God is the multiplicity of eternal objects which are potentials for actualisation in the creative process. In this primordial nature (mental pole) issue God's subjective aim, which is at 'depth of satisfaction' for all actual entities "as an intermediate step towards the fulfilment of his own being".[67] In his primordial nature God is comparable to the Unmoved Mover,[68] but is 'deficiently actual' in two ways. Firstly, in that his feelings are only conceptual and so lack the fullness of actuality; secondly, in that conceptual feelings, apart from complex integration with physical feelings, are devoid of consciousness in their subjective forms.[69] While God does not create the eternal objects[70] or the actual entities, Whitehead links

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65. Process, p 47, et al.
66. Advance, p60; quotation from Adventures, p 177.
67. Process, p 161.
68. Ibid., p 522. See also Emmett, Organism, pp 257f; and Charles Hartshorne, "Whitehead and Contemporary Philosophy", in ed. Leclerc The Relevance of Whitehead,(London, 1961), pp 36f; and Lawrence, "The Vision...." in ed. Kline pp 168 ff.
69. Process, p 521.
70. cf Reason, p 7.

him very closely to creativity, and it seems that God plays a role akin to creativity's 'mid-wife' - "The primordial nature of God is the acquirement by creativity of a primordial character".[71]

Now God's primordial appetition is an urge towards realisation, and this in turn issues in the Consequent Nature.[72] God acts by presenting each occasion with an initial aim thus allowing the occasion to become definite and actual. This is clearly linked with the primordial nature; but can the consequent nature of God act?

The Consequent Nature is spoken of as conscious, and as "the realisation of the actual world in the unity of his nature, and through the transformation of his wisdom".[73] It prehends the world with all its sufferings and sorrows, and weaves them into a harmony transforming evil and preserving good with "a tender care that nothing be lost".[74] He 'saves' the world, and 'judges' it as it passes into his, objectively immortal, saving "all that can be saved", and using "infinite patience" to overcome destructive force with the "overpowering rationality of his conceptual harmonisation".[75] Of the fourth and fifth phases of the creative process he says that

> the creative action completes itself. For the perfected actuality passes back into the temporal world, and qualifies this world so that each temporal actuality includes it as an immediate fact of relevant experience. For the kingdom of heaven is with us today. The action of the fourth phase is the love of God for the world. It is the particular providence for particular occasions. What is done in the world is transformed into a reality in heaven, and the reality in heaven passes back into the world. By reason of this reciprocal relation, the love in the world passes into the love in heaven, and floods back again into the world. In this sense,God is the great fellow-sufferer who understands. [76]

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71. Process, p 522.
72. cf Emmett, Organism, p 259.
73. Process, p 254.
74. Ibid., p 525.
75. Ibid., p 525.
76. Ibid., p 532.

The consequent nature clearly makes its own contribution to God's action, but does this mean that God acts in more than one way? At this point we shall anticipate some of the next chapter's discussion. Whitehead himself admits to carelessness in speaking of the two poles too often as if they were separate entities in God.[77] Properly speaking, for instance, God is no more conscious in the consequent than in the primordial nature. God is conscious when considered as a unified actuality (though it may be true to say that the consciousness is 'contributed' by the consequent nature).

Actual entities act in one way, though that action might be said to have three component parts. i They act in prehending other occasions; ii they act in their own internal process, in such a way as does not directly affect the external world; iii and they act by becoming superject and being objects for other occasions as they become. It would seem that if God is properly described as an actual entity, we should expect him to act in corresponding ways. Remembering that to consider an entity by only one of its poles is to abstract from the whole, for the entity is a unity or nothing at all, we should not be surprised to find it unhelpful (even misleading) to speak of God acting in this nature or that. God acts, so the passage quoted above in reference to the consequent nature has to be related to what has been said about the primordial nature. Following the analysis offered above we see that i corresponds to God as consequent (prehending the occasions), ii to God as primordial (envisaging possibility and 'deciding' his own aim), and iii to God as superject (making himself available to other concrescences). i is passive, ii internal, iii has God objectifying himself to provide the initial aim. For all the crediting of the initial aim to the primordial nature, the offering of that aim must be God in his superjective nature - as indeed must any prehension of God by an occasion. So how is i related to iii?

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77. cf A.H. Johnson, Whitehead 's Theory of Reality, (Boston, 1952) pp 58, 218; henceforth, Reality. At Process, p134f, Whitehead even speaks of the primordial nature as a concrescence.

In occasions the relation is clear. The occasions formulate their aims (ii) and then objectify themselves (iii) only according to the limits set down for them (i). In the long quotaton from Process above the consequent and superjective natures may have been confused. Indeed, Whitehead does not seem to have distinguished them properly throughout his work. The clue is the "particular providence for particular occasions". The particular aims given are particular because of God's prehension of the actual world in his consequent nature. i Provides the data on which ii may work, so God objectifies himself through the aim offered at iii.

Until now we have been almost wholely concerned with the exposition of Whitehead. Because of an interest in clarity the pure expository style has been increasingly difficult to maintain. Latterly we have spilled over into the sort of interpretive problem which will occupy us in the next chapter. Exposition of Whitehead is no easy task because so many notions presuppose so many others. Progress is not so much linear as spiral, for one has to recur to a point each time saying a little more, adding a fresh nuance.

3 The Development of His Thought

The exposition which we have just offered is an exposition of the system as set forth in Process. We will now pause to consider any developments or changes in direction in his work which can be traced from his works as a whole. There will be the opportunity for us to offer general comments, as well as suggesting one or two theologically-motivated 'reconstructions' of his thought. But again here, limits of space will restrict our coverage. The pre-1925 books can be set aside

immediately. In these it is possible to chart his path as the mathematician broadens his sphere of work to philosophy of natural science, and then to philosophy of nature and cosmology.

It is not certain when Whitehead first postulated his cosmology or his doctrine of God. Scholars debate whether cosmology issued from, or moulded in part, the early philosophy of science.[78] Regarding Whitehead's religious beliefs, he apparently read much theology for about eight years after his marriage (1890), but then sold all his books unimpressed.[79] Russell reports that from 1898-1912 (their period of collaboration) Whitehead was definitely agnostic,[80] but he also comments on Whitehead's respect for religion and remarks that the 'vicarage atmosphere' of his childhood comes out in his later work.[81]

In Science we have only part of Whitehead's God, and this quite literally! Only the principle of concretion is expounded here. Yet, though Science is offering only an embryonic doctrine of God, it might be true to say that in this book we have both some of Whitehead's more promising hints, and an indication of some of the system's limitations.

Whitehead condemns those who have used God to 'save' their systems[82] - not that this is in itself unacceptable, for indeed he does it himself. But he argues against the totally arbitrary introduction of God as a systematic 'prop', when God is then left beyond explanation within the terms of the system.

In Science 'creativity' is termed the 'underlying activity' and is

78. Lowe, Understanding, pp 195f, 239; Dialogues, p 263.
79. Dialogues, pp 13, 125.
80. Lowe, Understanding, p 232
81. Bertrand Russell, Portraits from Memory (London, 1956), pp 95f.
82. cf Cobb, Natural, pp 136f.

compared to Spinoza's 'one infinite substance'.[83] Whitehead seems much keener on this comparison in Science than in later books, though Cobb states Whitehead's rejection of it rather too strongly - two references in Process seem to show that Whitehead still took the comparison seriously.[84] For Whitehead this 'substance' is not the static entity which undergoes change, but is rather the 'active ongoingness of things'.[85] The 'substantial activity' is totally formless and neutral with respect to form; it is given only in actual entities which are called its modes.[86]

God is needed as a limitation on the 'substantial activity' or creativity or ongoingness, and is variously called the principle of limitation,[87] concretion,[88] and determination.[89] It is at this point that another philosophical comparison is invited. Aristotle is praised for his insight, and for being the last truly dispassionate philosopher to consider God. While his speculation did not lead to a God "available for religious purposes", it may be doubted whether any purely metaphysical speculation can.[90] But "In the place of Aristotle's God as Prime Mover we require God as the Principle of Concretion. This position can be sustained only by the general implication of the course of actual occasions - i.e. the process of realization".[91]

The more pointed comparison with Spinoza directs our attention to an issue which we may wish to pursue. One or two scholars[92] have noted that

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83. Science, p 177.
84. Process, pp 10, 125; Cobb, Natural, pp 139, 213.
85. Cobb, Natural, p 139; Johnson, Reality, appendix, et al.
86. Science, p 177.
87. Ibid., p 176.
88. Ibid., p 174.
89. Ibid., p 178.
90. Ibid., p 173,
91. Ibid., p 174.
92. e.g. Shahan, Whitehead's Theory of Experience, (New York, 1950), p 114; also Lowe "Whitehead's Philosophical Development", in ed. Schlipp, p 98.

in some respects Science contains Whitehead's 'strongest' concept of God. In Spinoza, the 'one infinite substance' does not produce God as its 'attribute' (Science) or 'accident' (Process) - for Spinoza the 'infinite substance' and God are identical. There are hints at a similar identification in Science. It is the 'substantial activity' which envisages the eternal objects, a task later assigned to God himself,[93] and God is spoken of freely as in some sense 'ultimate'.

> God is the ultimate limitation, and His existence is the ultimate irrationality.... God is not concrete, but He is the ground for concrete actuality. No reason can be given for the nature of God, because that nature is the ultimate irrationality. 94

In Science the 'underlying activity' and God share other features which might make us suspect that God and creativity can be more firmly tied together than they are in Process. God is not yet spoken of as an actual entity, and neither is the activity an entity. God, while not concrete, is "the ground for concrete actuality"; the substantial activity "underlies all occasions".[95]

It is possible that the close identification of what was to be called creativity and God found here hints at a more adequate concept of God than Whitehead finally offered. Christian tradition has found it necessary to posit creativity of God, and generally still does.

> However much it might seem to ease the intransigent problem of evil, there is no possibility of going back on the Christian conviction of creation ex nihilo. Implicit in awareness of God is awareness of that which is the source and the ground of everything else. 96

Our point is straightforward: it seems right that the creativity which flows through all creation should be predicated of God, for our tradition

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93. Science, pp 105, 177.
94. Ibid., p 178. In Process the concept of ultimacy is never applied to God. For its usage there see, e.g., pp 10, 30, 32, 519.
95. Science, p 177.
96. Maurice Wiles, The Remaking of Christian Doctrine (SCM, 1974, p 33. John Macquarrie (Principles, p 215) adds an interesting qualification).

rightly testifies that this creativity is of God. Later in the thesis we shall have cause to consider Whitehead's motives in splitting this apparently natural pair, God and creativity.[97]

While it may be the agreed orthodoxy among most scholars that there is nothing of significance on God in Science which is not later expanded or given more adequate treatment, such a view ignores the possibilities inherent in Whitehead's unsystematised thought in that book. We note the close link between what later became the 'creativity' and the primordial nature, but there is no mention of the consequent nature. Note also the hint of what many consider to be the limits of the system. Admiring Aristotle Whitehead remarks that "The Greek gods who surrounded Aristotle were subordinate entities, well within nature".[98]

The theologically minded may be forgiven for turning to Religion in the Making (1926) with more hope for sustained and well-worked out doctrine. Here he talks self-consciously of religion, and much about God. But it must be said that if this was his chance to develop his theological ideas, it was not taken.[99] There are differences from Science. i The substantial underlying activity is now called creativity; ii it is now God, not the underlying activity, which envisages the eternal objects; iii God suddenly, and without explanation, is an actual entity;[100] iv while in Science "God is not concrete",[101] here he is not only actual, but the attributing of personal qualities follows

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97. On this question see Shahan, Experience, p 126; Cobb, Natural, p 143. There is evidence for the close relationship of God and creativity even in Process, e.g. "The primordial nature of God is the acquirement by creativity of a primordial character". (p 522) See Johnson, Reality, appendix, and Whitehead's comments. See the discussion of evil in our chapter VIII.

98. Science, p 173.

99. Despite its lack of systematic theology, Religion is in many ways Whitehead's most attractive book. It claims importance for its sustained discussion of the western theological tradition.

100. Religion, p 88.

101. Science, p 178

naturally.[102]

But there is a danger of accepting too swiftly Cobb's judgement that "After Religion, nothing really new is added to the doctrine of God".[103] There may well be a possibility that we read more of the consequent (and superjective) nature into Religion than its author would have allowed for in 1926. Cobb continually speaks of the world's action on God in Religion, but not always with as much documentation as we should like or expect.[104] It is true that Whitehead says that God is an actual entity, but not until Process is that concept given full elucidation. Here, while asserting that God is actual,[105] he seems in general to speak exclusively of the primordial nature. God is described as a "conceptual fusion"[106] and, more worryingly: "This ideal world of conceptual harmonisation is merely a description of God himself".[107] One hopes that this description is not exhaustive.

Kenneth Thompson, writing after Cobb's Natural, argues that the consequent nature is in no way present in Religion. He makes a plausible case for Whitehead's conceiving God as a "purely spiritual being".[108] Cobb on the other hand assumes that Whitehead has the consequent nature clearly in mind. Both can cite texts, but neither is right: neither have allowed sufficiently for Whitehead's obscurity and confusion. Cobb is too ready to read Process back into Religion; Thompson might have the stronger prima facie case because the consequent nature is not present as such, and certain texts point his way. But he ignores at his peril those texts which ascribe to God

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102. e.g. Religion, p 152.
103. Natural, p 149.
104. Ibid., p 149f.
105. Religion, p 146.
106. Ibid., p 150.
107. Ibid., p 148; cf Kenneth F. Thompson, Whitehead's Philosophy of Religion (Paris), 1971 pp 56ff; henceforth, Philosophy.
108. Thompson, Philosophy, p 58: referring to Religion, p 106.

functions later given to the consequent nature.

The omission, or lack of prominence, of the consequent nature in Religion is the more vexing because it is here that he is trying to take account not only of general experience but also of religious experience. Indeed he makes some staggeringly ultimate claims for the value of religious 'evidence'. But in his whole corpus the only sustained discussion of the consequent nature is the purple patch which concludes Process, which is an interpreter's nightmare where philosophic prose gives way to ecstatic poetry.[109]

Whitehead notes that there is but one theological dogma in the main debating arena of his day, and everyday, the doctrine of God.[110] He outlines three main concepts of God developed in human history. It must be admitted that the distinction between two of these concepts is thin. He contrasts the Semitic concept of a personal, absolute, underivate, transcendent, metaphysically ultimate God, with the

> Eastern Asiatic concept of an impersonal order to which the world conforms. This order is the self-ordering of the world; it is not the world obeying an imposed rule. The concept expresses the extreme doctrine of immanence. [111]

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109. The confusion and lack of consistency in Whitehead's theologising is evident in a related matter to which we have already alluded. While every occasion has mental and physical poles, each aims at becoming superject. Here the entity is a "public fact" (Process, p 443), and is objectified - becomes a cause. At least early on in Process, Whitehead is clear that the actual entity God shares this threefold character: primordial/mental, consequent/physical, achieving satisfaction as superject (see our pages 144f, and the further discussion in our chapter V on the problem of God's satisfaction). God is objectified by his superjective nature. It is then a vital component of the whole doctrine, but after its initial statement it is ignored. Yet properly, not the primordial but the superjective nature 'offers' the initial aim. According to his early definition of the consequent nature it must be passive; yet in the closing pages of Process it seems to take on its own activity. Much of that final part of Process should be 'about' the superjective nature, and this (as well as the consequent nature) must have been present in germ before Process. (See Religion, p 152, e.g.).

110. Religion, pp 66 ff.

111. Ibid., p 66.

and with

> The Pantheistic concept of an entity to be described in terms of the Semitic concept, except that the actual world is a phase within the complete fact which is this ultimate individual entity.... The actual world has the reality of being a partial description of what God is.... This is the extreme doctrine of monism. 112

It may perhaps be better to see these latter two as opposite sides of the same coin. In one, God is given ultimate identity at the expense of the world, and in the other the world has ultimate identity at the expense of God.

The Semitic concept, says Whitehead, is the most influential in the western world, through Judaism, Christianity, and Mohamedism, but it is not without its problems. God is left outside all metaphysical rationalisation, and there is the difficulty of proof. The ontological argument is rejected: It could only lead to the discovery of an immanent God, not a transcendent God.

Is Whitehead's God in no way transcendent? The infamous antithesis may put us off: "It is as true to say that God Transcends the World, as that the Word transcends God".[113] But it is too often ignored that Whitehead indicates that in each of his antitheses there is a 'shift of meaning' as one moves from the first part to the second - God's and the World's transcendence are not the same. Each actual entity transcends all others. But God's transcendence is of a different order. His causality is universal; his vision is complete; "the love which is partial in us is all-embracing in him".[114] But clearly this sort of transcendence does not exhaust what theologians

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112. Ibid., p 67.
113. Process, p 528.
114. Religion, p 152

have meant to assert when speaking of God's transcendence. The concept of transcendence has told of God's priority over the world - it implies "an element of asymmetry in God's relation to the world".[115] It is open to discussion as to how much of this sort of predication is possible if God remains, so to speak, subordinated to creativity.

Whitehead says that Christianity has made three modifications to the concept which it inherited: the kingdom of heaven is made immanent ("within you"); God is called 'Father'; and with the Johannine Logos there is a move towards modification of the notion of unequivocal personal unity of the Semitic God. But for Whitehead the doctrine of God as the one entity who creates the universe is to be reckoned as an extreme position.[116]

Dovetailing into his comments on concepts of God are his comments on power, and the life of Christ which precede them. Again he snipes at the tradition: "the worship of glory arising from power is not only dangerous: it arises from a barbaric conception of God".[117] Of Christ's life he says that it

> is not an exhibition of over-ruling power. Its glory is for those who can discern it, and not for the world. Its power lies in the absence of force. It has the decisiveness of a supreme ideal, and that is why the history of the world divides at this point of time. 118

God's aim in the world is for "quality of attainment. His purpose is always embodied in the particular ideals relevant to the actual state

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115. Macquarrie, Principles, p 120.

116. Religion, pp 69f, 144. We might wish to add that there is no contradiction between Whitehead's notion of causa sui and the traditional ex nihilo, which asserts God as the ultimate creator and source of all things.

117. Ibid., p 54.

118. Ibid., p 56.

of the world".[119] Here then is the early form of the doctrine later to be developed as the initial aim in Process. Again, "Every event on its finer side introduces God into the world....the power by which God sustains the world is the power of himself as the ideal..... The world lives by its incarnation of God in itself".[120]

In Adventures he takes up again his critique of the theological tradition. "Christianity has only escaped from the Near East with scars upon it".[121] This sums up Whitehead's criticism of the traditional concept of God - based too much on the Semitic model of One who is totally self-sufficient and transcendent, and (more importantly) omnipotent, modelled on a tyrant. The failure of all forms of Christian theology, orthodox and heretical, and especially of the Protestant Reformation, is that it has failed to purge its doctrine of God of its "barbaric elements".[122]

Whitehead examines the 'threefold revelation' given to western civilization. First there was Plato's late and unsystematised recognition that "the divine element in the world is to be conceived as a persuasive agency and not as a coercive agency".[123] Second is the event which the Christian religion sees as the "supreme moment in religious history". "The essence of Christianity is the appeal to the life of Christ as a revelation of the nature of God and of his agency in the world".[124] Though

> The record is fragmentary, inconsistent, and uncertain....there can be no doubt as to what elements in the record have evoked a response from all that is best in human nature. The Mother, the Child, and the bare manger; the lowly man, homeless and

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119. Ibid., p 152.
120. Ibid., p 149. Reason may be quickly passed over. God is mentioned here under the guise of Reason or the 'Counter Agency' which works to prevent the decay inherent in conformation of physical feeling.
121. Adventures, p 85.
122. Ibid., p 166.
123. Ibid., p 166.
124. Ibid., p 167.

> self-forgetful, with his message of peace, love, and sympathy: the suffering, the agony, the tender words as life ebbed, the final despair: and the whole with the authority of supreme victory.... Can there be any doubt that the power of Christianity lies in its revelation in act, of which Plato divined in theory? 125

The third phase is the early development of Christian doctrine. There is an interesting reversal here: so many liberal theologians saw the Fathers as villains who lured the Faith from its biblical ground. But Whitehead praises the early thinkers as the only metaphysicians who improved on Plato! While early doctrine was Platonist, Plato was the originator of the heresies of Christian theology.[126] Whitehead uses two illustrations to demonstrate Plato's relation to the theologians. The Arian solution, involving a derivate image,is orthodox Platonism but Christian heresy.[127] With respect to the person of Christ Whitehead considers that the fathers were right to reject the doctrine of associating a human individual with a divine individual, involving human response. They correctly opted for the direct immanence of God in Christ, and for the direct immanence of God in the World generally through the third person of the Trinity.

But Whitehead laments that the Fathers never made the next step; their barbarically-originated concept of God was not purified by this insight, and he remained outside the scope of their metaphysical categories. God was put on the other side of a great gulf between God and the World. "The worst of a gulf is, that it is very difficult

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125. Ibid., p 167.
126. Ibid., pp 167f.
127. Cp. Maurice Wiles, "In Defence of Arius", reprinted in Working Papers in Doctrine, (SCM, 1976).

to know what is happening on the far side of it".[128]

In Adventures Whitehead speaks of the primordial nature of

128. Adventures, p 169. There is a similar, shorter, critique of the tradition in Process. ("..... The Church gave unto God the attributes which belonged exclusively to Caesar". p 519). While we may wish to applaud some, or much of this critique, nevertheless it may legitimately be asked whether Whitehead's view of Jesus ("The Galilean vision of humility") is not altogether too 'cosy'. John O'Donnell (Trinity and Temporality, OUP, 1983) perhaps accepts too uncritically that Whitehead's 'vision' "springs" from Christianity. (pp 163f).

An interesting dissenting voice in Whiteheadian interpretation may be noted at this point. Laurence F. Wilmot sees Adventures as marking a new departure for Whitehead. This 'new departure' has two elements. (1) In this book Whitehead realises, he claims, the decisive uniqueness of Jesus Christ as a revelation of God and his mode of activity in a way not evidenced in Whitehead's previous work (Whitehead and God: Prolegomena to Theological Reconstruction (Wilfrid Lauder University Press, 1979) pp 74, 98f, 137.). (2) Wilmot claims that at the close of Process two different sets of theological and philosophical ideas were held together in unresolved tension - the Platonic and the Christian (p 69). Whitehead came to see that the Christian had to overcome the Platonic (p 73) and in Adventures set about this task. In Process Whitehead followed the framework of Plato and the Timaeus, putting the ultimate (Creativity) out of reach of reason and effecting a determinateness in the world through a non-ultimate 'accident' or 'creature' of this ultimate (pp 132, 172). Indeed, at the close of Process Whitehead is forced to hypostasise Creativity (p 157). Thus in Adventures his critique of the Arians (p 168) is also a judgement on his own system as developed in Process. Adventures contains a "devastating criticism" of the Platonic account of the God-world relation (p 173). Some comments must be made.

i It is not clear that Whitehead "announces" a new "discovery" of the uniqueness of Jesus' (p 74) in Adventures. Close comparison with earlier books reveals that Whitehead says nothing new about Jesus in Adventures which cannot be explained by the different nature of the book. ii While we indicate elsewhere that Whitehead does not seem over-concerned with complete consistency, it seems extraordinary that he should make such a fundamental change in Adventures without acknowledging it. Wilmot seems convinced that Whitehead is conscious of this 'change'. iii Wilmot ignores the account of the 'system' offered in Adventures (esp ch XI). iv The much referred-to passage on Arius draws two rejoinders from us - (a) while Whitehead comments favourably on Athanasius' use of 'multiplicity in God', he goes on immediately to aver that he passes no judgement on the precise form of that multiplicity, i.e. Trinity. The tone of this and the following paragraphs in fact suggests he remains unconvinced (cf Religion, pp 69f) (b) His purpose is to applaud only the general doctrine of "mutual immanence", and it is significant that Wilmot's quotation begins after the indefinite article 'a' - "The point is the recourse to a doctrine of mutual immanence". He laments (p 169) that they never took this into 'general metaphysics', which is what Whitehead wants to do with it. He is arguing against Plato and Arius to the extent that he wants God, and not a derivative image of God, directly immanent in the world. This is the case for his Process doctrine of God. However, finally, v In fairness to Wilmot it must be said that Adventures does give much less space to Creativity. The Dialogues (pp 296f) is interesting. Whitehead states a preference (long after Adventures was written) for the Greek god over the Hebrew God, and yet seems to ascribe 'creative power' to God in a way different from Process.

To say that Wilmot's case is not made is not to preclude sympathy with his goal - of revising Whitehead's God so as to 'incorporate' Creativity. It may well be that such a move adds coherence. We discuss it later in this chapter, and again in chapter VIII.

God under the pseudonymn of the 'Eros'.[129] It urges the soul,[130] is creative.[131] "We must conceive the Divine Eros as the active entertainment of all ideals, with the urge to their finite realization".[132] The consequent nature is little mentioned, though we hear of the everlasting nature of God which builds a relationship of "mutual immanence" with the soul,[133] and of the doctrine of Peace, which must bear relation to the consequent nature.[134]

Modes seems to stress the primordial nature also, i.e. the divine envisagement and presentation of ideals - "Deity expresses the lure of the ideal which is the potentiality beyond immediate fact".[135] He indicates that in so far as we entertain, realise, or fall below ideals, we are experiencing the 'Deity' in the universe.[136] In "Immortality", God is the entity who brings together the worlds of value and action; he "is to be conceived as persuasive towards an ideal co-ordination".[137]

In each book, then, Whitehead expounds variations on a theme of the primordial nature. It is difficult to account for his preoccupation with the primordial as against the consequent nature. Insofar as it points us to a more abstract, 'conceptual' God, it may be a cause of some concern. But it must be said, and this has bearing on a discussion in our next chapter, that it often seems to be that the consequent nature is presupposed (i.e. God's prehension

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129. Adventures, pp 198, 251.
130. Ibid., p 277.
131. Ibid., p 276.
132. Ibid., p 277.
133. Ibid., p 208.
134. Adventures, ch xx.
135. Modes, pp 139; cf 142, 163-5.
136. Ibid., p 141; cf Johnson, Reality, p 66.
137. "Immortality", Whitehead's essay in ed. Schlipp, p 694.

of the actual world) in what Whitehead says about the relevance of the aims presented by the primordial nature.

It is time to step back from Whitehead's publications for a moment, and focus our attention on two general, related, points. If Whitehead did not bring 'creativity' into the Godhead, why not? And with or without the creativity, can Whitehead offer a feasible interpretation of God as Trinity? The answer to our first question can be supplied briefly and illustrated easily. Whitehead was much exercised by the problem of evil. Again and again he returns to it, and refuses to make God ultimate because, he believed, that would make him responsible for everything, good and evil, in the world. This can be illustrated from each of the major books reviewed in this section.

> ((God)) has been conceived as the foundation of the metaphysical situation with its ultimate activity. If this conception be adhered to, there can be no alternative except to discern in him the origin of all evil as well as good. He is then the supreme author of the play, and to him must therefore be ascribed its shortcomings as well as its success. If he be conceived as the supreme ground for limitation, it stands in his very nature to divide the Good from the Evil, and to establish Reason 'within her dominions supreme'. 138

> If the theory of complete determinism.... holds true, then the evil in the world is in conformity with the nature of God. 139

> Also the worst of unqualified omnipotence is that it is accompanied by responsibility for every detail of every happening. 140

If we are not to deny the reality of evil, as many theologians

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138. Science, p 179.

139. Religion, p 92.

140. Adventures, p 169. It should be noted that in Process Whitehead mentions another reason for rejecting God's creation ex nihilo, though we might question its force. He says that the doctrine makes it less likely that we will come to see the evolutionary nature of the universe and of matter (p 146).

have done, then Whitehead's concern needs to be taken seriously. His extreme position seems neither necessary nor desirable. We may affirm that the creative energy at the root of the universe is divine without falling into determinism. It is God's nature to be creative, but in creating God effectively limits himself by creating a free creation. Evil - the consequence in Whiteheadian terms, of ignoring God's ideal aim, and of the mutual obstructiveness of occasions - is the risk inherent in creation. It is real, and it is tragic, but God works through it to bring good, and suffers with his creation in the travail of this 'fallen' state. Whitehead does not seem to have considered this option: we will develop it further in our final chapter.

If we incorporate creativity into the Godhead, or to put it better, if we ascribe the creativity to God, do we have leave to speak of 'Trinity'? Dorothy Emmett suggests a Trinitarian parallel like this: [141]

Creativity//Father
Primordial//Son
Consequent//Spirit

There is an immediate superficial attraction to this schema involving these three oft-used terms. But it will not do. Certainly, the creativity is an outflowing activity which might well look appropriate in its place here. And the primordial nature, the 'receptacle' of potential (so often spoken of as immanent) might appear to fit for the second person. While the consequent nature, as God's prehension of all the world, seems to give a cover 'general' enough, far-ranging enough, to describe the Spirit's work. But the primordial

141. Organism, pp 252-4. See Wilmot's discussion of Whitehead and the Trinity and of Arius: Whitehead and God, esp pp 69, 172 ff, 177 ff.

nature is God "alone with himself",[142] in abstraction from the world. It can only be immanent in the world through the superjective nature, of whom there is no mention in the formula. And the consequent nature would provide a very pale, shadowy, and passive Holy Spirit - all reception and no reciprocation. The impossibility of this suggestion is seen in that the only member this Trinity who is most immanent and active is the 'Father'!

The task of making new wine fit into old skins is made even more complex when we recognise the difficulty of ascribing to any particular person of the Trinity any particular function.[143] If Trinitarian doctrine is merely a search for any (arbitrary) threeness in God then we would have to go on worrying and juggling our terms.[144] But if the Trinity bears witness to the fact that the one God includes within his unity a complex of aspects ('modes of being') then we may rest. Or better, if the Trinity bears witness to the same God who is at once Creator of all, who was present specially in Jesus the Christ, and works through all and in all by his Spirit, then this framework is adequate to account for this. The creativity of God flows through all, undergirding the universe; the best possibility for human existence envisaged in the primordial nature which was 'incarnated' in Jesus is closely related to the possibility envisaged there for the creation of the universe - the Logos is the agent of creation and redemption - though is made immanent through God the superject; and God is affected by, and related to, all the world so that he is able to respond to it and work on it. Trinity is a theological explication,

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142. Process, p 50.

143. cf Maurice Wiles, "Some Reflections on the Origins of the Doctrine of the Trinity", Working Papers, pp 3ff.

144. I am sceptical of Ogden's recent attempt at a 'Process' Trinity for this very reason ("On the Trinity", Theology, March 1980).

and we should not be too surprised if philosophical abstractions are stubborn in their wilfulness not to describe God from the perspective of Christian experience and belief as formulated in this doctrine.

We must conclude our consideration of issues dealt with and raised by Whitehead's other books at this point. We might draw some tentative conclusions. i While there may be an overall consistency in his writings, there are marked differences of emphasis and possibly content. It is possible to detect developments of both clarity and thought from Science onwards. Whether the doctrine of God changed before or after Process in any substantial way is difficult to estimate, but not all of the texts seem adequately explained by insisting that there were no substantial changes in Whitehead's thinking. However, the primordial nature was described in much the same way throughout. We need to beware then of treating his writings as all of a piece. We must exercise some caution in moving from source to source: some differences are explained by differing subject matter, some are not. ii The consequent nature of God, and the superjective nature, are never properly worked out. This 'fog' causes much of the confusion in interpreting his doctrine of God. iii His critique of the theological tradition is well worth the theologian's attention; it is also a vital 'backdrop' to his own suggestions.

CHAPTER FIVE

WHITEHEAD: PROBLEMS OF INTERPRETATION

Before it is possible to properly assess the use to which theologians have put the doctrines adumbrated in chapter four it is necessary to consider in greater depth problems which arise in interpreting Whitehead which impinge on to our specific area of concern: God's agency. These problems will be considered under various headings, though it will not be possible to avoid some overlap in treatment. It is hoped that this chapter will add clarity to the understanding of Whitehead already set out, and face some fundamental questions. We will also prepare ourselves for the discussions which follow later concerning theologians' use, or possible use of Whitehead's thought.

1 God and the Initial Aim

In this section we have to consider four related questions. i.e. Is God the sole source of the initial aim? Is God's initial aim one or many? Are the possibilities 'offered' by God ordered once or continually? For what does God aim?

(i) Is God the sole source of the initial aim?

John Cobb, motivated by a concern that Whitehead has made his God too 'unique' (and therefore no longer the exemplar of metaphysical categories he was intended to be), suggests that all prehended entities contribute to an occasion's initial aim. He makes this judgement on

the grounds that each occasion constitutes itself so as to influence other occasions.

Whitehead is clear that each occasion has its own unique, appropriate lure - yet it is difficult to imagine how these individual aims can be wholly timeless and also relevantly effective at a particular moment. God's aim, says Cobb, is at universal intensity of satisfaction, and this determines a specific aim at the appropriate satisfaction of each individual occasion. In temporal occasions the initial aim is always at some intensity of feeling both in the occasion itself and in its relevant future. In a human occasion there may be a tension between its own immediate good and the satisfaction of another's good, or its own in some relevant future time. But in God there is no such tension between self and others, because the ideal strength of beauty for himself and the world coincide: God's aim is at ideal strength of beauty, and this aim is eternally unchanging. But even in God there must be some sort of 'good-now-or-later' tension. Cobb builds his argument with an illustration. A

> man aims at the realisation of some ideal satisfaction in the present occasion and in his future occasions. His subjective aim in the strictest sense is a propositional feeling about himself in that immediate moment of becoming, but ..... He aims at so actualising himself that other occasions will actualise themselves as he desires. His aim at ideal satisfaction for himself will be unchanging, but it will take a different form according to every change in his situation. 1

So God's aim is unchangeably directed to an ideal strength of beauty. In this unchanging form it must be indifferent as to how this beauty is attained. God's subjective aim will be so to actualise himself that the feelings he entertains with respect to each occasion will have the maximum chance of realisation.[2] So each occasion

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1. Cobb, Natural, p 181
2. Ibid., pp 181f.

prehends God's ideal for it, and to some extent the subjective form of God's feeling. The occasion shares God's appetition for that possibility, and God's ideal for the occasion becomes its ideal for itself, the initial phase of the subjective aim.[3]

If the relation between God and man is understood in this way, so can some relations between temporal occasions, for example the human occasion frequently actualises itself so as to aim at influencing other occasions, as in the process of swallowing. Also in the human body, to pursue the example, there are degrees of responsiveness to this influence: swallowing usually goes without any problems; if I aim to remember a far distant appointment I may be less fortunate; if I aim to affect others, the success may be still less likely.

The point Cobb wishes to draw out is that each new occasion feels past occasions in terms of their aims for it, and the new occasion will be affected to some degree by these feelings in the formation of its subjective aim. If this is so, says Cobb, then Whitehead's sharp distinction within the initial phase between the 'initial aim' and the 'initial data' may require modification.[4] Amongst the feelings felt will be propositional feelings about the new occasion now feeling, and these will include some whose subjective forms include desire for realisation. As the subjective form of the new occasion will at least partly conform to that of the occasion it prehends, its aim will always partly conform to that of the prehended occasion. The new occasion's aim for itself

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3. Ibid., p 182
4. cf Thompson, Philosophy, pp 73 ff.

> will always partly conform to the aim that past entities have entertained for it. Among the entities so felt, God will always be by far the most important one and, in some respects prior to all others. The subjective aim of the new occasion will be some synthesis and adaptation of these aims for it, which it also feels conformally. 5

Cobb admits that while he could cite passages from Whitehead to support his analysis, it deviates from the apparent implications of his main statements in two ways. Firstly it rejects the association of God's aim exclusively with the primordial nature, understood as God's purely conceptual and unchanging envisagement of the eternal objects. We have already indicated, however, the implausibility of such a position given the analysis of actual entities: God's immutable aim alone does not adequately explain how he functions concretely for the determination of events in the world.[6]

Secondly, Cobb interprets the subjective aim of each occasion as arising more impartially out of hybrid feelings of aims (propositional feelings whose subjective forms involve appetition) entertained for the new occasion by its predecessors. That is, he denies that the initial aim must be derived exclusively from God.

Several comments must be made, and first we must address ourselves to Cobb's motive. His interpretation does make God a little less unique within the system - this is as he intends. God's role is now akin to all other occasions in the actual world of every novel occasion. However, this may rebound and become a problem. Perhaps Cobb senses that his reduction could edge God out of the system

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5. Cobb, Natural, p 183.
6. cf Thompson, Philosophy, pp 179 ff.

altogether,[7] and he reserves for God "by far the most important" place.[8] Perhaps Cobb wants to have his cake and eat it. It is in fact unnecessary to go to such lengths to be assured that God will exemplify metaphysical categories instead of breach them, though Cobb's distinction between the influences working on an occasion may be useful.

The initial data does contain aims for the new occasion which must, in some way, influence it. This is what Whitehead means by the objective lure of the objective datum. God exemplifies this influence which occasions exert upon one another in a particularly momentous and important way. But it is an influence of the same kind. Furthermore, in speaking in this way about the initial aim Cobb ignores a significant element in Whitehead's doctrine which says that God's aim is the initial aim because of its particular character - a character which only God can give it - in that it always represents the best possibility for each concrescence.[9] Clearly only God could provide such an aim. His breadth of vision, envisaging all possibilities, gives an aim to each occasion which a temporal occasion could never give. It may be better, if we admit (as we have to) that occasions do influence each other's aim, to refer to God's aim as the 'ideal aim' rather than the 'initial aim'.[10]

It may be added, if the ad hominem nature of the argument not be considered out of order, that Cobb himself seems to have little use for his neat and precise distinction elsewhere in his work: God

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7. See Donald Sherbourne's attempt, "Whitehead without God", in Process Philosophy and Christian Thought(Indianapolis 1977), ed Delwin Brown et al, pp 305-328.
8. Cobb, Natural, p 183.
9. Process, p 373.
10. David Griffin uses this distinction, and we will notice it (and his use) in a later chapter: A Process Christology (Philadelphia 1973), pp 174f (henceforth, Christology).

is clearly identified as the source of the initial aim, and for all practical purposes perhaps, the sole source.[11]

(ii) Is God's initial aim one aim or many?

Throughout much of our exposition we have spoken of God's initial aim as if it were an aim for a specific end, but there is in fact a certain ambiguity in Whitehead which demands that we justify this interpretation. Its importance should be obvious by reference to our very first chapter: in order for us to speak of action, we must introduce a certain amount of specificity of intent so that the question "Does God intend something in particular in his aim for each concrescence"? takes on limpid importance.

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11. e.g. God and the World, ch 2; Christ in a Pluralistic Age, chs 3-4, Cobb's interpretation does have reverberations in two other aspects of Whiteheadian discussion however. i Whitehead labours to account for the phenomenon of personal identity through time. In helping us to see how a personal 'routing' of occasions has this dimension of continuity of inherited aim, Cobb may allow us to move closer to a satisfactory account. ii Whitehead seems to say that each occasion has its standpoint in the spatio-temporal continuum settled by God in his giving of the initial aim to an occasion. Cobb: "the initial aim so understood determines what locus or standpoint will be occupied by each occasion. This, in turn, determines just what occasions will constitute the past of the new occasion.... Occasions now perished cannot settle just what regions shall become the standpoints of their successors....The occasion that determines itself does so in terms of a perspective which is already settled for it. This settlement is given in the initial aim of the new occasion....Thus, by determining the standpoint of each occasion, God determines also just what other occasions it will prehend". (Natural, pp 152f). Though Cobb refers to several key passages in his discussion (notably Process, pp 104f, 195, 434 ff), it must be said that Whitehead does not seem as clear on this point as Cobb. In the 'rigid' form of the doctrine presented by Cobb we seem to totter into determinism - with each occasion strangely at the whim of the divine. It would be natural to assume within the system that the creative process produces new occasions without God having to 'locate' each one. "Each actual entity arises out of its own actual world" (Process, p 434) expresses the point - especially if we add the commentary 'and so is located in it'. Christian ("Whitehead's explanation of the past", in ed Kline, p 100) seems to present the doctrine in milder guise so that it is almost reduced to tautology - 'if the initial aim is to be relevant it must locate the occasion in its actual world'. However, we do not wish to enter this controversy. Cobb's bold statement seems at odds with his 'sharing out' of the initial aim - which would rather seem to support our position - that the perished occasions 'locate' their successors.

"Each temporal entity....derives from God its basic conceptual aim, relevant to its actual world, yet with indeterminations awaiting its own decisions".[12] What weight do we attach to the words 'basic' and 'indeterminations'?

Strictly speaking, no doubt, the initial aim contains a set of related and relevant possibilities from which the occasion selects its own aim. For all practical purposes however, the term becomes used for that one possibility which is at the ideal end of the scale, so to speak. The subjective form of the aim is an appetition for this one possibility's achievement (see below). God may well offer the whole range of possibility open to an entity, and in such a mode he is the principle of limitation, though we might question whether his functioning in this respect is not somewhat superfluous if the givenness of the past is taken seriously. Is God required to indicate the range of possibilities, or actually to make those limitations? - surely the former, for the limitations are built into the actual world of an entity.[13] Within the range of possibilities which God indicates ('offers') there is an ideal possibility. This is the specifically divine contribution, for the occasion prehends God in such a way as to

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12. Process, p 343; cf p 46.

13. There are passages in Whitehead which seem to indicate a somewhat stronger position. In Religion (pp 91f) he seems to imply that God does not indicate all possible choices to an occasion, but limits them somewhat. He does go on to say that complete determinism is avoided by occasions' freedom of choice. However, such freedom is questionable if God can seriously restrict the choices in the first place. To be safe, we must rather talk of the momentum of the past in limiting choice, and in 'loading' that choice by the power of efficient causation. To be sure, Whitehead himself seems to speak in this way often enough (Process, pp 227, 281; Modes, pp 226f. Cobb seems to espouse the 'stronger' form: Natural, pp 151 ff). The 'weaker' doctrine which is much more acceptable talks of the Principle of Concretion as "the principle whereby there is initiated a definite outcome from a situation otherwise riddled with ambiguity".(Process, p 523 - interestingly called the 'primary act' of God, not in such a way as to imply other acts or modes of action, but other components in the act; for God as the element producing natural law, which may be related, see Process, p 434). The Principle of Concretion here is the God who, by giving the initial aim, gives the occasions the potential to become actual, concrete. Yet here we would want to say that the limits of the concreteness for any occasion are inherent in that occasion's past (on this point, cp Daniel Day Williams, "Deity, Monarchy, and Metaphysics" in The Relevance of Whitehead(Allen & Unwin, 1961). ed I.Leclerc, p 366 - henceforth, Relevance).

take in all the possibilities for a situation yet also feeling God's preference ('lure') for the best possibility possible for its concrescence. Indeed, to speak merely of divine 'preference' may be misleading, and not do sufficient justice to the persuasive power of God. An entity cannot be lured to all possibilities - at the most to a few related ones. This is why Whitehead, and generally his interpreters, so often speak of God's aim (singular): it is God's distinctive contribution not to choose what things are possible for an occasion and lure it to any or all of them, but to indicate what is possible, and to persuade the occasion to adopt the best possibility as its own aim. An overwhelming number of texts speak of the aim in this way.[14]

(iii) Are the possibilities 'offered' by God ordered once or continually?

With this question we approach the initial aim from another angle, by asking about the way in which God orders the eternal objects which form such a crucial part of the initial aim. The question might be rephrased - does God's primordial nature order the possibilities eternally (i.e. once and for all), or does his ordering of them take place continually (i.e. is it in a process of continual revision or 'up-dating'?)? To follow the argument we will examine the way in which William Christian builds his case. We shall see that a further question underlying this problem is how God's aim is made relevant for the infinite number of occasions with infinite variations in their actual worlds.

Whitehead speaks of a 'realm' of eternal objects in his earlier

14. Including: Process, pp 164, 248, 373f, 424f; Modes, pp 139, 163-5; John Cobb, Natural, 97, 128, 129; Pluralistic, pp 76, 172; Griffin, Christology, pp 174 ff; Cobb and Griffin, Introduction, pp 105, 125. Texts which may point the other way, but which are quite within the scope of the interpretation offered above include: Process, 46, 31, 343; Cobb, Natural, pp 96, 129.

works,[15] though in Process he speaks instead of a 'multiplicity'. Christian is troubled by the use, and then lack of use, of the term 'realm' and seeks to establish its meaning. He fears that a realm might connote a "fixed and necessary order among the members of the collection, so that these entities could not exist except in this order".[16]

In the actual world, each occasion (guided by its subjective aim) achieves a certain ordering of eternal objects among its feelings as it concresces. In satisfaction this order has become completely determinate. This ordering is an occasion's contribution to the future, but does not render the objects into a 'realm' in the strong sense of the word, for this ordering is incomplete and relative.[17] This ordering is what Whitehead calls the objective lure,[18] and it is that gradation of eternal objects relevant to a particular concrescence.

By contrast, God's envisagement of the entire multiplicity of eternal objects is something more like a realm in strong sense, according to Christian.[19] Unlike the orderings derivative from occasions, the togetherness of eternal objects derived from God is absolute and complete: absolute because effectively relevant to all occasions, complete in that no possibilities are omitted. There is, for Christian, a complementary relationship between these two orderings of eternal objects. The relative ordering is ultimately dependent on God in that it is ordered by the subjective aim, which originates in

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15. Science, chs 10-11; Religion ("realm of forms"), pp 91, 148, 154. In Modes, pp 93-5, 138, he speaks of the Platonic 'realm' of forms as a doctrine requiring revision.
16. Christian, Interpretation, p 259.
17. Process, pp 69, 64.
18. Ibid., p 281.
19. Ibid., pp 46, 48, 64; cf 73, 393, 522.

God. Christian needs to beware of overstatement, lest it appear that the occasion is fully determined by God. An ordering is dependant on God, but the actual ordering the occasion offers is its own responsibility, causa sui. God's ordering also seems dependant, to require the relative ordering. Christian suggests that the relative orderings add something to the relevance of certain possibilities for certain entities. He assumes that God's valuation of eternal objects is timeless, so that it cannot be affected by what occurs in time. Instead, the eternal object 'blue' would have some relevance for any occasion by virtue of its inclusion in God's primordial nature; but it would have added relevance for an occasion in whose actual world blue things were important. In this interpretation the general relevance of all eternal objects to an occasion depends on the primordial nature of God. But a special relevance of some eternal objects is added by the character of the actual world. So the timeless ordering of eternal objects in God's nature does not change, but the pattern of relevance of eternal objects changes with the creative advance of nature. Christian uses this interpretation to distinguish between real and pure possibility.

Christian has the cart before the horse. The notion is that in prehending God an occasion is put in touch with pure possibility, i.e. prehends all eternal objects in their 'togetherness'; the occasion also prehends its actual world and its ordering of eternal objects which, as it were, enables it to locate the relevant objects in its prehension of God.

What is to be said against this view that God orders the possibilities eternally? It may be objected, and this ties in very closely with our next question in this section, that such a prehension

of God will only produce the most general of results - not a specific ideal aim. This objection carries little force however on these grounds. It is theoretically possible for an occasion to gain a specific aim from God by this procedure. Objections to it are based on other criticisms.

Whitehead's use of the term 'primordial' is interesting. Christian assumes that it is used in some sort of chronological sense: an ordering before, or at least apart from, any actual world. It is possible, however, that primordial expresses logical priority and not chronological priority. This may not be the standard dictionary definition of the term, but Whitehead is not noted for using standard dictionary definitions. Further, other evidence hints that his usage of the term falls into this category. There may indeed be some ordering apart from any actual world but the primordial nature of God is not something that exists before the consequent nature - it only ever exists alongside it. The primordial nature of God is a "mere factor in God".[20] So that to speak of an order of possibility not 'infected' by actuality is to speak in abstractions which could become misleading.

We must explore the problem further by asking two more questions. (a) Is this interpretation desirable? Philosophical and theological perspectives hint that it is not. Theology certainly seeks an understanding of God which is, as far as possible, responsive to the world rather than purely passive. The God which Christian presents is one which occasions 'plug into' in order to get their relevant 'divine computer reading'. However, it must also be said that Whitehead may not have been over-concerned with the needs of Christian theology. All other things being equal, though, this factor may legitimately be

20. Process, p 50.

brought into play if we are called to judge between two otherwise equally valid interpretations. But even on philosophical grounds this once-for-all ordering by God seems improbable and undesirable. We have already spoken several times of the loose way in which Whitehead spoke of the primordial and consequent natures, as if they were separate (almost self-contained) entities. This is not so, and the primordial nature is a "mere factor in God". As we have already made clear[21] the primordial and consequent natures must function in a reciprocal way for Whitehead's analysis of the functioning of occasions to have any application to God, and this is so notwithstanding the fact that God (unlike the occasions) originates conceptually. This observation leads to the other question.

(b) Is this interpretation Whiteheadian? This is perhaps the crucial question, though it may well be that Whitehead himself needs revision either to make him more self-consistent or merely to make the system less vulnerable. But what did Whitehead himself say? Whitehead is clear that "there is always a definite relevance derived from God".[22] While admitting that the ordering of objects by antecedent occasions has an important role in determining limits for the novel occasion, the prehension of God is made so that God is objectified by eternal objects which are not pure possibilities but real ones for that concrescence. Indeed, one might conclude that the concept of 'relevance' was being mutilated by the assertion that all pure possibilties are'relevant' to all concrete occasions. The ordering of eternal objects is in some way affected by events: there is not a necessary contradiction between calling God's primordial

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21. See our pp 140 ff.
22. Process, p 46.

nature the "non-temporal actual entity"[23] and asserting that God as concrete entity orders by responding to specific events.

Finally, we should take the opportunity of clarifying our understanding of how the objective lure is related to the divine lure. It is not that the former is specific and the latter vague, the one to do with real possibility and the other to do with pure possibility. The objective lure functions by putting a sort of 'bias' into the occasion's selection in favour of the possibilities already offered by the past. As such it exhibits the force of efficient causation.

(iv) For what does God aim?

When God offers an initial aim to each occasion, for what sort of thing does he aim? Again, the question is necessary because of William Christian's interpretation. He points out that God's conceptual experience is devoid of negative prehension. This is indisputable: God envisages all possibilities.[24] But he draws the wrong conclusion from this. He states that the primordial nature is the urge to the realisation of all possibilities. He quotes from Process: the primordial nature "has within it no components which are standards of comparison". But in citing this Christian takes a line on the subject of subjective intensity out of its context. Further, such a statement about God's appetition is both theologically

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23. Christian asserts that there is no final and necessary order of eternal objects even in God, but there are as many orders as there are occasions. He asserts this for the wrong reason. He is afraid that a fixed order(there is a difficulty in precise meaning here: I read Whitehead to mean simply 'a graded relevance of eternal objects')will itself be an eternal object, (Interpretation, p 272) which would (he thinks) result in determinism. The second-point seems to be a non-sequitur, dependant on other pre-suppositions; the first is curious - if one fixed order is itself an eternal object why are not many relative orders themselves eternal objects, and the collection of these infinite orders itself another eternal object?

24. Norman Pittenger, Alfred North Whitehead (Lutterworth, 1969), p 26.

and philosophically unsound.

To be sure, certain texts give Christian's case a prima facie appeal.[25] But the details must constantly be interpreted in the context of the whole. Christian's main intent is to avoid determinism.

> There is not one fixed and necessary order of eternal objects. There is not one and only one way in which all things must happen. There is not even a pre-existing concept in the mind of God of how all things will happen. There is not even an ideal pattern of how all things may happen. There is not as it were a heavenly city, an ideal cosmos conceptually realised in the mind of God which the earthly city the totality of temporal events, approximates. 26

A footnote added to the passage exposes the difficulty. "Does it follow that, in the absence of any such ideal order, God cannot be said to be disappointed by the particular order in which things do happen"?

The answer must be that it does follow, for how can God be disappointed if he has no standards of comparison, and so wills all outcomes impartially? Christian compares Whitehead's God to Leibniz's - both envisage all possible worlds. But Whitehead's does not choose any of them: he values them all, though they are not compossible.

The theologian may wish to affirm that God does not lay down what will happen in advance. The statements about the heavenly city might be true if Christian wished to say that God does not dictate a particular final outcome, which the world must realise. Yet we cannot allow it to state that God does not will (have appetition for) the best possible outcome at any one moment. There is a continually changing, kaleidoscopic, ideal pattern of how things may turn out

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25. E.G. Adventures, p 277 - "active entertainment of all ideals, with the urge to their finite realisation".
26. Interpretation, p 273.

from this present moment if initial aims are taken up. God does not will all possible outcomes equally - he envisages them all as possible in a free creation,but wills the best from the particular impasse of the world at any moment.[27] This is not to say that in certain circumstances the best is not particularly good: "But if the best be bad, then the ruthlessness of God can be personified as Ate, the goddess of mischief". Whitehead seems clear on this, and uses the term 'best'. "The initial aim", he writes clearly, "is the best for that impasse".[28] Indeed, speaking of the primordial nature Whitehead can write that "The limitation of God is his goodness".[29] A God who wills with equal appetition both holocaust and peace is a strange sort of God.

Christian is forced to give a strained account of God's goodness. He explains it not in moral terms, but in terms of perfection of function. God is good because he is good at his job![30]

Christian's inability to see the concept of goodness inherent in the system is at the root of the problem, and it is this point which both validates the theologian's objection, and makes Christian's proposal philosophically unacceptable. God's aim is at universal intensity of experience. Because all occasions are inter-related, the enjoyment of A's satisfaction will have some effect on the intensity experienced by B,C,D and even X,Y,Z. This enables us, within Whitehead's philosophy, to broach a sort of utilitarian ethics of the enjoyment of the greatest number of actual occasions.[31]

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27. Process, p 373.
28. Ibid., p 373, stress mark mine. His comment about Ate rescues him from simple optimism.
29. Religion, p 147, cf Lowe, Understanding, p 108. Whitehead may sometimes speak of God's 'goodness' under the guise of his 'tenderness': e.g. Process, pp 160f, 526.
30. Interpretation, pp 399f.
31. cf. Kenneth Cauthen, The Ethics of Enjoyment (Atlanta, 1975).

God's aim being so, he will will those possibilities which are social and conducive to maximising novel enjoyment, rather than those which are anti-social and destructive of enjoyment. This much is reflected in the social nature of the subjective aim of occasions; they aim not only for their own enjoyment, but for the relevant future.[32]

Whitehead's talk of the consequent nature as God's judgement on the world, and his using the wreckage of the world and transforming evil, suggests approval of our interpretation. God accepts evil, positively prehends it and the possibility of it,but always seeks the actualisation of good.

Again the problem seems to have arisen because of abstracting the primordial nature from the rest of God. It can hardly be spelled out often enough: God is the unity of primordial and consequent, and while these two may be separated for the purposes of analysis it must always be borne in mind that such a separation is artificial and could become dangerous. God is only and always the two aspects of primordial and consequent together in reciprocity.

A further corollary of Christian's interpretation will justify our treatment of the question. If God aims at all things, not at a particular ideal for a particular occasion, it would then have become very difficult to speak of God's intention and so of his action. Such a predicament is, however, precluded by the vitiation of Christian's argument.

In closing, note that Cobb points out to us that when an occasion prehends another it does not just prehend the other's aim for it.[33] My feeling of my immediate past, e.g., also feels many

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32. Process, p 41.
33. Natural, p 184.

other aspects of it - perhaps my discomfort, or my hope for some distant future. Similarly then, there is no reason to suppose that an actual entity's prehension of God's aim for it will exhaust its prehension of God. Whitehead does recognise this implicitly[34], indeed his doctrine of peace (for instance) would seem to demand it. But just as it is wrong to identify prehension of the initial aim with the primordial nature, so it is wrong to identify this other prehension wholly with the consequent.

2 Divine Concrescence

Having considered God's relationship to the offering of initial aims, it now behoves us to focus upon more general problems concerned with the divine concrescence. Two questions present themselves.

(i) Is God one eternally concrescing actual entity, or is he a personally ordered series of actual entities?

In order to see the importance of this question it is only necessary to recall the way in which actual occasions become causes: when they complete their concrescence, and only then, are they able to become 'public fact' and influence other occasions; only when they attain to satisfaction and cease to be 'entities' and become 'objects' can they be involved in causation. Whitehead's understanding seems to be that God was an eternally concrescing entity, and he never faced the problems which this poses for divine causation - how can God objectify himself and offer an aim at all if he never attains satisfaction and becomes 'public fact'?

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34. Process, p 524.

In Process Whitehead implies that the consequent nature introduces some sort of becoming into God, but does not state that God is in any way temporal. There seems to be succession in God of some kind, but we have to wait until Adventures for the grudging assertion that "the everlasting nature of God.... in another sense is temporal".[35] It is not clear whether this represents a development in his thought,or what it means for the doctrine of Process.[36]

Whitehead distinguishes, as we noted earlier, two types of process.[37] The process external to occasions is what we ordinarily call time. From this point of view the occasions are temporally atomic, indivisible but not unextended; but the temporal extension happens, so to speak, all at once as an indivisible unit. This does not prevent Whitehead from offering an elaborate account and analysis of the process which is internal to occasions.[38] While the occasion becomes 'all at once', it seems clear that some phases of becoming presupposes others. A critical difference between internal and external process is that an occasion is related to other occasions only at its initiation (as prehender) and consummation (as datum for prehension) - an occasion's inner process of becoming is irrelevant to its observable relations. For every perspective other than its own, the occasion is either not at all, or is completed. Internal process has no efficacy for other occasions except indirectly through the satisfaction in which it results. God's causal efficacy for the world is like that of a completed occasion,

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35. P 208.
36. Cf Hartshorne, "Whitehead's idea of God" in ed Schlipp, pp 541f.
37. See our pp 131 ff.
38. E.g. Process, pp 321 ff.

and not like the phases of a single occasion. So how is God to be a cause if he is always in concrescence?

The same problem may be couched in different terms, with reference to God's satisfaction. In all other occasions satisfaction is not attained except as the completion of the entity. If God is a single entity who will never perish, how can he know satisfaction? The problem exercises several commentators[39] and is given a most thorough treatment by both Cobb and Christian. Their conclusions differ and provide good examples of two contrasting options before us.

Christian notes that satisfaction is a unified feeling.[40] God's satisfaction would be a unification of primordial and consequent natures. How can this unified feeling be possible for God as he is always concrescing? Christian proposes that we conceive God's satisfaction as a single continuous feeling without temporal origination and without ceasing. Its data, at any given time, are the entire multiplicity of eternal objects and all the occasions which have so far concresced. The subjective form of this feeling is derived uniformly, though not exclusively, from God's timeless and unchanging subjective aim. So God's satisfaction would be a continuous feeling with a constant subjective form and changing data (or rather, with more data being continually added). But how can God's satisfaction be fully determinate as to its data, for in satisfaction all indeterminateness has "evaporated",[41] and the relation of the subject to every other entity is entirely determinate? Thus whereas occasions

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39. E.G. Emmett, Organism, p xxxii ff; Thompson, Philosophy, pp 75-83; Hartshorne, in ed Kline,p 23.
40. Interpretation, p 294.
41. Process, p 71.

perish but do not change,[42] God changes but does not perish. Christian says that God's prehension of every item in the universe, relative to any finite standpoint, is fully determinative. God's satisfaction though, is always incomplete in two senses: it always includes appetition for unrealised possibilities (but this is surely true of all occasions), and new data are ever being prehended 'into' the satisfaction. But God's prehensions of occasions and eternal objects are at all times fully determinate, and therefore satisfaction is 'complete'. How then, asks Christian, might such satisfaction be the final phase of God's concrescence? His answer has two parts. First, in God's case alone, objectification does not require perishing.[43] Whitehead's statement that an entity 'ceases' on attaining 'coherence' admits of two possible interpretations. Either, that only 'becoming' applies to God, while 'ceases' applies to all occasions; or that God's consequent nature is made up of particular instances of becoming, each of which begins with God's prehension of an occasion and ceases with the absorption of this data into satisfaction.[44] Second, God still achieves 'telos' by having as many satisfactions as there are actual occasions.

Christian has seen a very real problem, and gives a thoughtful answer, though some will judge that it bears the marks of desperation. The first alternative seems to tally with Whitehead's saying that God does not perish, but to go against the grain of his thought on satisfaction. The second is a strange suggestion when examined closely, for it says that there are as many satisfactions as there are prehensions. If a satisfaction is a unified feeling of prehensions, what is there

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42. Cf Leclerc, Metaphysics, p 80.
43. Thompson, Philosophy, pp 78ff, discusses this point.
44. Process, p 38.

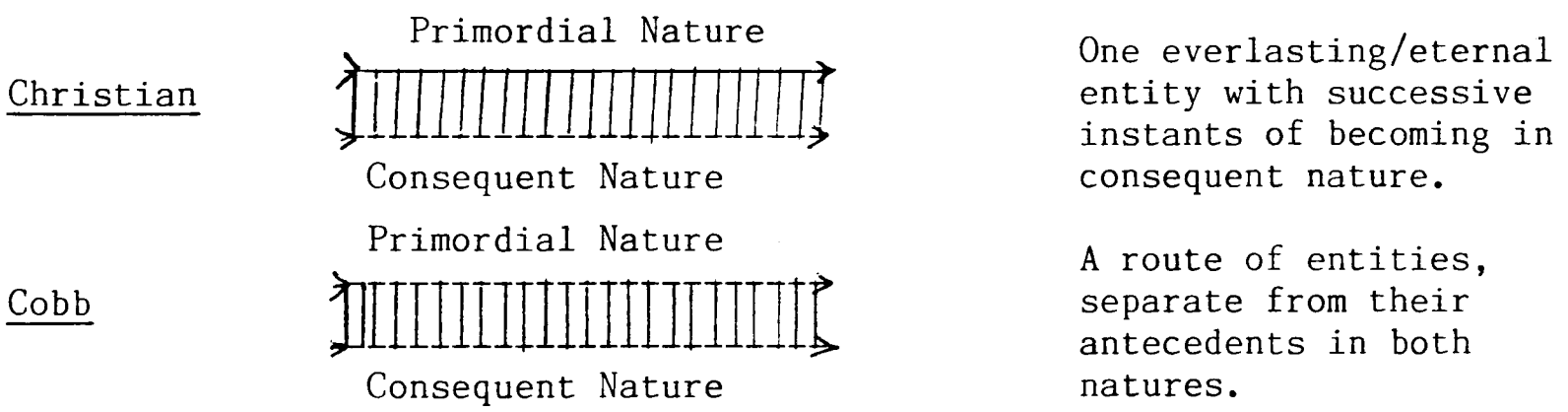
now left to unify? Other occasions achieve satisfaction by integrating their feelings of many different entities - occasions, God, and eternal objects. If God's satisfactions are in a 'one-to-one' ratio with the number of occasions prehended, then God's satisfactions must be qualitatively and quantitatively different. Indeed, by Whitehead's own canons, they seem sure to be less 'rich' in contrast.

Christian's position makes God more different than ever. And in the suggestion that units of becoming may be separated in the consequent nature alone, he may be suspected of tearing God in two. But his answer has one clear advantage over Cobb's which we come to in a moment, and it is one which may have implications for our discussion in part 4 of this chapter. It is this: in maintaining that God does not perish (even though he may have'instances' of becoming in his consequent nature) he assures considerable continuity in the divine becoming, so that personal identity is not the same problem it is with the temporal occasions.

Cobb also noted that Whitehead is quick to speak of God's satisfaction. He thinks that Whitehead's talk of God's satisfaction, and of his causal efficacy, is more akin to his thought on living persons than single occasions, though Whitehead himself seems not to hint at this. There are two closely related characteristics of living persons which Whitehead would certainly wish to deny with respect to God: the lack of complete self-identity through time, and the loss of what is past. Cobb suggests that we will give a more coherent account of God within Whitehead's framework if we picture him as a living person, i.e. as a routing of entities rather than as a single entity - though in God's case his prehension of his own past would be perfect so that his self-identity is complete and nothing is

lost in his experience. This is not such a bold unfounded assertion as it might sound, for Whitehead has already provided for the perfection of God's prehensions of other actual entities: he is the only entity who does not 'abstract' from the fullness of a prehended occasion.

Has Cobb succeeded in making God less unique and more coherent? We must express reservations about the enterprise and the results. Certainly his explantion of God as a routing of actual occasions must have something to commend it, and it might prove more fruitful than Christian's effort. To conceive God as a single entity who is yet capable of objectification requires a good deal of distinction between God and the actual occasions. But we might be suspicious of Cobb's God who makes himself anew every tenth of a second or so, and yet remains eternally the same. The problem of personal identity is now writ large pertaining to God. A diagram makes a comparison of detail between Cobb and Christian easier.



A solution, we must accept, will follow broadly along these lines. Cobb keeps the natures more firmly together, or at least more obviously of a piece. Christian thinks of them becoming in different ways, but at least (amid the flux of temporal experience - phases of becoming) he has 'preserved' God's identity from atomism. It is now almost as if God has a 'self' which is apart from its experiences and which

endures through them: the Primordial nature being the continuing self, and the consequent nature being the experiences, the units of becoming.

A further advantage of Christian's suggestion seems to be that an 'organising self' preserves more of the transcendence of God. A self which is more than either pole (not quite what Christian suggests, but close to the idea of synergism which we hint at elsewhere) preserves God's transcendence over both the possibilities and his experiences of the world.[45]

One finds oneself wishing that it ought to be possible to state that God is both an actual entity and a route of such entities. But while Whitehead's use of language and systematic concepts is often somewhat loose, he makes no provision for such an elastic use of language in this matter. Indeed, such a concession would fundamentally alter his claim to describe reality as it actually is. This problem will recur. If Christian keeps to Whitehead's wishes of preserving God as an actual entity (assuming that Whitehead did wish it and that this problem never occurred to him), then he does so at the cost of establishing for God a 'substantial self'. But any solution seems to require some amendment of Whitehead. We will not here arbitrate between the possibilities: both have advantages and disadvantages, while the hint we have given as an alternative would require major reconstruction, the bounds of which are not readily determinable. Nevertheless, it seems to the present writer that a satisfactory solution is not impossible. If it were our whole study would cease: for the causation of God is at stake, and such a fundamental

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45. Christian has some helpful passages on God's transcendence: Interpretation, pp 371-5, 378-80.

incoherence would prevent us from proceeding further. Such an extreme position does not seem necessary, despite the seriousness of the problem.

(ii) Does God prehend the actual occasions <u>throughout</u> their concrescence? For Whitehead the preservation of value in God was of great religious importance. Indeed, sometimes he expresses this preservation in such a way as to contradict the doctrines he has formally worked out. Specifically, he sometimes talks as if the living immediacy of occasions is preserved in God.[46] John Cobb draws his readers' attention to this ambiguity,[47] and goes on to note that the more normal assumption would be that God only prehends occasions as they perish: occasions prehend God as they begin their concrescence, God prehends them as they finish, or rather when they have finished. Even when we accept that God's prehension would be more all-encompassing of the various elements in the satisfaction of occasions than would those same occasions when they prehended their predecessors, there is still no way in which the subjective immediacy of those occasions could be prehended.

It may well be that, by definition, it is impossible for God or anyone else to prehend another entity in its <u>subjective</u> immediacy, in the way it experiences itself. Yet something like it has been part of the Judeao-Christian tradition about God, and something like it may have been in Whitehead's own mind. Cobb admits that if Whitehead really did mean us to interpret these hints in such a way "considerable speculative development would be required to explain it".

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46. "The world is felt in unison of immediacy", <u>Process</u>, p 524; cf pp 527, 530 ff.
47. <u>Natural</u>, pp 162f.

In particular God would need to be made an exception to the principle that contemporaries do not prehend each other. "It may be argued", Cobb continues

> that if human occasions of experience prehend God, and they do, they must prehend him as contemporary with all other occasions. This might mean, then that God also prehends temporal occasions in their contemporaneity, and therefore the immediacy of every becoming occasion. If so, then this immediacy would be retained forever in God's consequent nature. 48

Two comments should be made on the substance of Cobb's suggestion, and another on the fact that it is made at all! Firstly, with regard to the substance of what Cobb says, there is an unclear use of the concept of contemporaneity, and to some extent that of immediacy. When Whitehead uses the term contemporary (as in 'contemporary occasions do not prehend each other') he is pointing up the fact that occasions do not prehend each other in concrescence, but only at their initiation and close. This is a quite different, more technical, sense of the word than that used by Cobb in the quotation given above. Furthermore, the preceding discussion under part 2(i) of this chapter might be said to be an examination of the problems involved in asserting how temporal occasions prehend God who is their contemporary, given that it is only possible to prehend that which is in some sense determinate. The occasions prehend God as determinate yet contemporary (his concrescence has reached a pause if not a stop perhaps), yet Cobb suggests that God prehends the occasions as indeterminate and contemporary. Cobb himself footnotes that this suggestion loses some force in view of the possibility of God being a series of entities rather than one entity, but even without this proposal it remains problematic. Moreover, to suggest that God

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48. Natural, pp 163.

prehends the occasions as they concresce may well be to suggest that he prehends them in some sort of 'immediacy', but it may well be inappropriate to think of that as subjective 'immediacy'. This may well be a matter of nit-picking vocabulary, but it is an interesting one nevertheless. For instance, does the traditional affirmation that God knows us 'better than we know ourselves' necessarily mean that God prehends us in our subjective immediacy?

The second comment on the substance of what Cobb has to say is a simple critical judgement as to its reliability. It seems to me that when Whitehead spoke of God 'feeling' the world's immediacy, he spoke of the peculiar vividness of God's prehensions. Having said that it must be admitted that this seems another case of less than precise expression on Whitehead's part.

Finally, that Cobb makes this suggestion at all (and while he seems open-minded enough, he seems to want it to be right) is a point worthy of note. For if it is correct, we must ask again where this leaves the coherence of the system as a whole, for considerable reworking would seem necessary. This sort of comment is a hazard of Whiteheadian scholarship in which the present writer finds valuable precedent for the instances where he has done something similar!

3 Is God correctly conceived as an actual entity?

This question has already arisen tacitly in much of our discussion in parts 1 and 2 of this chapter. We have asked, e.g., whether God has a subjective aim, and if so, for what? whether God and other actual entities influence other entities by their aims for

them in similar ways? Is God an entity at all, or rather a series of them, a 'living person'? Is God unique in that he can prehend entities as they concresce? Whitehead seeks to describe all actually existing things, including God, under the same categories and principles: the attempt is one of the cornerstones of his cosmology. The question we address in this part can be asked from two different perspectives. From that of the temporal occasions it is phrased, 'has Whitehead succeeded in conceiving a God who can indeed be accounted for in the same way as all other actualities?, and from the side of God it is phrased, 'if this is so, is it a proper way to proceed - is it desirable that God should be so described - as an actual entity'? We first examine the former phrasing. We have already begun to answer it in the previous sections, but another major area of concern must be dealt with; again we must examine the way in which the eternal objects are ordered.

In Religion God is seen as envisaging all the possibilities, but Whitehead does not seem to see this envisagement as fundamentally different from that possible to other occasions. Cobb sees a problem of coherence again in noting that in Process Whitehead makes a more radical differentiation between the way God prehends the eternal objects and the way in which the actual occasions do.[49] Saying that the eternal objects 'subsist' in God's primordial nature, Whitehead seems virtually to deny the eternal objects any status apart from God's envisagement of them, though he is clear that God does not create them.[50] So God's relation to the eternal seems different from all other actual occasions' relation to them - is this a sign of incoherence, a calling in of God to save the system akin to that which Whitehead has condemned in others,[51] asks Cobb. Two issues emerge:

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49. Process, p 73.
50. Process, p 392.
51. Ibid., pp 78, 219, 289, etc.

a does God render the objects effective for the occasions in a way radically different from that in which temporal occasions make them effective for each other? b Does God envisage the objects in a way for which the conceptual prehensions of occasions can provide no analogy?

The problem is that God seems to be the sole ground of the initial aim (a question with which we have already dealt) and of the relevant possibilities of novelty.[52] Whitehead notes that God so orders the objects that prehension of one suggests prehension of another, and also says that prehension of a novel object is a hybrid prehension of God: in these two statements,Cobb sees a solution.

He submits[53] that while antecedent occasions function causally only in the initial phase of the novel occasion, God is made to function in a subsequent phase by 'conceptual reversion'. And further, this, if it was another hybrid prehension of God, ought to issue in another conceptual reversion - and so on, into vicious regress. But in this analysis Cobb seems to have forgotten the provisional character of the category of conceptual reversion, so that his 'new' explanation looks very close to Whitehead's. Here there is just one hybrid prehension of God, including the feeling of God's aim for the new occasion. This aim includes not only the ideal for the occasion, but alternative modes of self-actualisation in their graded relevance to the ideal.[54] Hence no hybrid prehension of God is required in subsequent phases. This is a much more sensible account: the 'monads-with-windows'open to the outside world and the totality of data

52. Cobb, Natural, p 199.
53. Ibid., p 200.
54. Cobb thus echoes our own distinction between ideal and initial aim.

floods in, all at once; thus subsequent phases are stages of process-ing the data, rather than opening up for new data. Although the new occasion may not actualise itself according to God's ideal aim for it, it will not include any possibility not provided as having some relevance for it in the hybrid prehension of God. The occasion prehends its antecedents including God; in prehending the occasions it will prehend certain eternal objects, and in prehending God it prehends the whole range of possibilities for it given its actual world. The subjective form of God's envisagement of the graded possibilities will be that of appetition for the ideal possibility. All this having been prehended in the early phase, there is no place for secondary conceptual origination.

But Cobb seems once again to have gone to great lengths to make God more like other actual entities, only to hold out for his uniqueness again. He wants to see God as not the only entity to provide novelty. Again, two comments are in order. a If Cobb means that the eternal objects are ordered to some extent by antecedent occasions, then Whitehead has already made provision for this. The antecedent occasion objectified by eternal objects is prehended as a 'lure for feeling', as the objective lure. But Cobb admits that[55] while occasions order eternal objects, there is a vast difference between this order and God's ordering, if only because God orders them all. b Can antecedent occasions really help provide 'novelty'? It would seem that, by definition, a novel eternal object is one which has not yet ingressed into an occasion in any way.[56] This novelty must needs come from God. Indeed, even if the Category of Conceptual Reversion were not abolished, it is difficult to see how God would still not be

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55. Natural, p 210; cp Process, p 281, and Christian, Interpretation, pp 168f.

56. Our wording here is significant. "In any way" - sometimes an eternal object is present though not actualised.

the source of novelty.

Cobb proceeds to the other major problem - does God envisage the eternal objects in a way for which the conceptual experience of actual occasions can provide no analogy? As far as the ontological principle is concerned, eternal objects cannot be effective for the occasions except by the decision of some occasion. This apparently means that the conceptual feelings of an actual entity always derive from its physical/hybrid feelings. An eternal object not given for the new actual occasion in some other actual occasion cannot enter the new occasion. But God is an exception to this: for him all eternal objects are effective without the mediation of any other entities. Either, says Cobb, the ontological principle has no application here, or the decision to which the effectiveness of the eternal objects is to be attributed is God's primordial decision. He rightly opts for the latter and then asks whether occasions can have conceptual prehensions not derived from their physical prehensions, analogously to God. He sees no reason to insist on an absolute distinction between the occasion and God at this point. He says, for instance,that human occasions may well be able to conceive possibilities directly, i.e. without the mediation of God.

Such a position is intolerable. Firstly, such a direct mental prehension by an occasion would be a violation of the ontological principle - "Nothing floats in from nowhere" - where would the occasion prehend the eternal object 'from', as it were? Cobb misconstrues the special relationship which God enjoys to the eternal objects, they 'subsist' in his primordial nature, though he does not create them,[57]

57. Process, pp 73, 392.

and no analogous relationship pertains to the actual occasions. It is part of the definition of divinity as Whitehead renders it. The reason this divine 'speciality' causes no problem is the vital difference between God and the occasions that Cobb does not bring into play, i.e. that God originates not physically (as do the actual occasions) but conceptually. This is what enables him to directly prehend eternal objects, and for him to be their 'where', so to speak. Whitehead sometimes writes so as to almost equate the primordial nature with the valuation of the objects,[58] thus identifying the primordial nature and the eternal objects in such a way that no other actual entity could have a similar relation to the objects. Finally, it must be said that if the eternal objects are available by other means than hybrid prehensions of God or antecedents, not only does this violate Whitehead's oft-repeated dependence of the conceptual on the physical in the actual occasions (who originate physically), but it also may mean that once again we have made God redundant. If the limits of the future occasion are set by the past; if Cobb wants to say that the initial aim can come from the antecedents; and if novelty can come into the process without God's intervention, then the necessity of God is undermined. Even so, there is still one function of God which remains to show the impossibility of the above position - he must still order the eternal objects (the occasions' orderings are incomplete and relative), for without this ordering they are "relatively non-existent",[59] comprising the "barren, inefficient disjunction of abstract potentialities". It is this fact that means that an attempt to 'get direct' to the objects is futile, for they are only available as envisaged by God.[60]

We are now in a position to answer the second phrasing of our

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58. Process, pp 46f; against Cobb also,see Religion, p 148.
59. Process, p 46.
60. All this notwithstanding the 'miniature' grading of possibility in the objective lure.

original question - is it desirable to conceive of God as an actual entity? We have seen how the most general modes of description apply fairly usefully in describing the divine nature, though at the same time other considerations which Whitehead sets out insist that we conceive God as a truly unique actual entity. In some instances, God becomes a 'mirror image' of the occasions, as in the matter of his 'origination'. In the matter of the initial aim it is possible to say that the <u>form</u> of God's offering the aim and the graded possibilities is the same as when the occasions objectify themselves for each other, though the substance of this objectification of God is very different.

"God is an actual entity, and so is the most trivial puff of existence in far-off empty space".[61] Such statements may seem calculated to offend, and certainly cause some grave reservations about the desirability of conceiving God as 'just another actual entity'. But to couch the issue so is to misconceive it. The term 'actual entity' is a blanket term to describe every entity which is actual. In one sense to call God an actual entity is to call him an actual thing or person. Neither should we be too concerned that Whitehead thinks that the same categories and principles can be used to describe God as even a 'puff of existence'. Within those actually existing entities called 'actual entities' there is an infinite variety of existing things, which yet can be described by the broadest possible terms. Perhaps the notion is not so far from some sort of 'realm of being'? Perhaps, though Whitehead would surely not have said so, God is 'eminently an actual entity'. The concept does seem a far cry from such notions as God as 'Being-itself', for God is conceived of as <u>an</u> actuality. Yet the panentheism which so many of Whitehead's advocates espouse, together with the idea of God who truly 'undergirds' all actuality, may narrow

61. <u>Process</u>, p 28.

such a gulf.

4 Are actual occasions free?

Whitehead's account of divine action rests upon a theory of God luring, or persuading, the actual occasions to actualise the ideal possibility for their situation. Crucial to it therefore is the notion of creaturely freedom, which has figured so prominently also in our previous chapters and which will come in for further study in later chapters. We must examine the freedom of actual occasions and in particular a critique which raises the question of whether such freedom exists at all. How does a concrescence display freedom? William Christian indicates three ways.[62]

First, he says, an actual occasion exercises creative freedom in the concrete actualisation of its aim. Within the internal process a sort of physical self-causation goes on, by which the occasion builds up the structure of its own feelings, by the process of progressive integration the occasion becomes a concrete actuality. "Thus the initial stage of the aim is rooted in the nature of God and its completion depends on the self-causation of the subject-superject".[63] Second, the occasion 'specifies' its initial aim. Christian says that the occasion must decide what the ideal means for its own context.[64] This seems to imply a generality in aim on God's part, no specific appetition. We have already treated this topic. It is true that Whitehead talks about 'modification' as a process affecting the aim,[65]

62. Interpretation, pp 312 ff.
63. Process, p 373.
64. Interpretation, p 315.
65. Process, p 342.

of reducing incoherence to coherence, of 'defining' an ideal.[66] But it seems that such language refers not to specifying a general aim (which Christian's interpretation may imply is at all general possibilities), but rather choosing between alternative possibilities, or modifying a specific ideal possibility. Crucial to Pols' critique is that this notion of modifying or choosing may not be without its problems. Third, the occasion exercises freedom in the autonomy of subjective form of the prehension of the initial aim. The subjective form is affected by the totality of the occasion. Since the occasion is novel,so is the subjective form. There is never bare conformity, the subjective form reflects the creative self-causation of the new concrescence. So the initial aim will not have the same form as God's conceptual feeling. The problem is this: the subjective aim controls all the prehensions and their subjective forms. How can the subjective form of the prehension of the initial aim be conditioned by the subject when no prior unity of the subject exists? Whitehead remarks, cryptically, that "self-determination is always imaginative in its origin".[67] The difficulty arises through thinking of the initial aim as though it were genetically prior to other feelings. "In putting forward a notion of priority different from logical priority and also different from priority in physical time, Whitehead has to appeal to our immediate intuitions. But the intelligibility of this notion is a larger problem".[68] We must now turn to the work of Pols, and to what is perhaps the most penetrating and sinister critique of Whitehead.

Edward Pols noted the importance of the notions of self-causation

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66. Ibid., p 228.
67. Ibid., p 374.
68. Christian, Interpretation, p 314. He offers no further comment on the subject.

and subjective aim: both are identified with final causation.[69] Process provides some warrant for equating these terms with the factor 'freedom'. In concrescence, Pols comments, 'succession' seems only to occur at the physical pole, and yet somehow it seems to 'infect' the mental pole. He quotes from Process: "Every actual entity is 'in time' so far as its physical pole is concerned, and 'out of time' so far as its mental pole is concerned".[70] How, Pols wonders, if the mental pole is 'out of time', can the subjective aim be modified - for this seems to imply a succession in the mental pole? Whitehead also indicates that the subjective aim controls the integration of the two poles.[71]

The question of successiveness within the occasions must receive more detailed attention. The division of the occasion in concrescence is termed 'genetic' division; the division of a completed/satisfied occasion is called co-ordinate division.[72] Time is atomic in that it grows by arrests or durations that are not in time, and it is a continuum in that it is the togetherness of such durations taken in their divisibility - its atomic character belongs to its genesis, its character as continuum belongs to its coordinate division.

The subjective form is the source of novelty in an actual entity, in that it is that by which there is transformation of a datum into an element in a feeling.[73] But the subjective form of a single feeling, and the relation between the subjective forms, are dependant on the subjective aim,[74] i.e. the mental pole dominates the concrescence.[75]

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69. Process, pp 338f, 320, 339, 159, 340, 339, 423.
70. Ibid., p 380.
71. Ibid., p 165.
72. Ibid., pp 433-6.
73. Ibid., pp 356f, 249.
74. Ibid., pp 420, 359.
75. Ibid., p 108.

Yet the definition of the subjective aim is 'the subject feeling a proposition with the subjective form of realising it in that concrescence'. Pols' problem concerns the exact status of the subjective aim,a problem which involves the antithesis of an indivisible mental pole,[76] and a development or process thought of as self-creation. It could be said that the problem arises in three assertions: a that the lure of God (the initial subjective aim) is not always taken;[77] this in turn implies that b the subjective aim is modified; yet c the mental pole is indivisible.

Pols feels towards a solution of this problem which states that the indivisibility of the subjective aim means that it must always be a feeling which concerns the whole of the concrescence. This allows some sort of modification in the mental pole. But Pols does make an equation between the modification of the aim and the divisibility of the mental pole which we may wish to question. To say that the mental pole is 'out of time' is not so much to bar successiveness from it as to say that its data (the possibilities and God's primordial valuation) transcend time and are not temporally conditioned in the same way as is the physical pole and its data.[78] Neither does it follow from the statement that the mental pole is indivisible that there is no modification in it, merely that it is not possible to 'disect' that modification - it is a continuous movement which comprises one 'atomic' duration. But once Pols grudgingly concedes the possibility of modification he tries to explain how the subjective aim can be modified - a much more difficult question.

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76. The "subjective aim does not share in this ((genetic)) divisibility.... ..the mental pole determines the subjective forms....and is inseparable from the total res vera". Ibid., p 108 (cf p 380). Yet many passages insist on the subjective aim and modification, e.g. pp 342f, 135.

77. Ibid., p 97 (this implies that Pols agrees with us on the specificity of the initial aim.)

78. Pols, Metaphysics, p 124. Johnson, Reality, p 44, seems to agree with it.

He points to the occasion as 'subject-superject'.[79] The occasion is subject with reference to its own private feelings, and superject when considered as a result of the process. Pols uses this joint designation of the occasion to illustrate the two ways of understanding the self-causation of actual occasions. Firstly, self-causation might be the reaction upon one another of all the determinate components of the entity (the data). Whitehead does say that an actual entity is what it becomes and is the total of its feeling. By an actual entity we mean the sum of its components - ideal and actual. If the freedom of occasions is not properly established, it becomes the function of two perfectly determinate elements: the actual world exercising efficient causation, and God's valuation of possibility. Secondly, self-causation might mean more than the interaction of components.[80] It might be an active power indeterminative as to its exercise, capable of choosing arbitrarily among the data and contributing to the way in which they are felt.[81] It is Pols' contention that these two understandings of actual occasions lie side by side in Whitehead's thought.

The former interpretation might be counter to Whitehead's express intentions, he goes on, yet it seems to fit: Whitehead himself seems to have a preference for superject. If important aspects of his thought contradict his intentions we may need to resort to this interpretation.[82] "The question is whether this reaction of the unity of the whole need be more than the reaction of determinate components in order to satisfy the rest of Whitehead's doctrine (except the doctrine of freedom); and whether there is any sense in which this

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79. Metaphysics, p 112.
80. Ibid., pp 113f.
81. Ibid., p 114.
82. Pols also states this problem in terms of immanent and transcendent decision: Ibid., pp 118 ff.

reaction could be beyond the determination of components".[83]

But Pols has made a basic error. He assumes that if the two above interpretations (subject and superject) are found together in Process then one must triumph over the other: he assumes that they are mutually exclusive. This is a fundamental misunderstanding. They are indeed found together, and must always be kept together. From the 'outside' the occasion is indeed a superject - it is what it is because of its components. But this is the occasion described, in Whitehead's terms, as 'public fact'. There is also the occasion from the 'inside', as 'private fact' - where it determine itself from its data, as a free subject. There is no 'battle' between these two pictures, on the contrary they are interdependant. This sort of position is no stranger to philosophy or theology, and it should not have taken Pols by surprise.[84]

At each step there seems to have been a weak link in Pols' argument, yet his critique gathers momentum. He asks whether the concept of creativity can afford a way out of the determinism which may now beckon. In Science Whitehead speaks of an 'underlying substantial activity' expressing itself in individual embodiments (in Process this becomes something like creativity and the primordial nature). Science calls the actual entities 'modes' of this substantial activity. What does this mean? Again Pols gives us a stark choice.

> a The activity in one of its individualised modes has merely the character given by its envisagements, as well as the character of its already completed individualised modes. b The activity in one of its individualised modes exhibits a character that is not derivable either from the character of the envisagements or from the character of the completed individualised modes. 85

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83. Ibid., p 124.

84. There are ready comparisons to free agents in philosophy, and to God's agency paradoxically identified with human agency in theology.

85. Metaphysics, p 129.

a approximates to occasion as superject, b to occasion as subject. Pols sees nothing in Science which offers positive evidence for b. But in Process, creativity could be thought of as the source of self-causation beyond the determination of components, because it would only express the fact that a self-creation beyond the determination of components is the root fact of reality. But does this notion of self-creation yield a plausible, or useful, concept of the self?

Creativity is without character of its own,[86] and on its own is "boundless, abstract, possibility":[87] God is required to produce anything. Divorced from God, creativity is just 'mere activity'; it means that some indeterminate creature must always emerge, and that the universe is never complete. "It does not designate any active power exercised by the subject as such", says Pols. So a new occasion comes ultimately either from God or from an arbitrary appearance of a certain togetherness of eternal objects. Pols finds a comparison to this in Satre's ex nihilo creation of each moment of our conscious life (in Transcendence of the Ego): perfect, empty, freedom. A free, truly subjective actual entity must, according to Pols, a be internally related to its 'conditions', and b become successively internally related to other elements, i.e. it must develop; and c exhibit an active power related externally to elements that are relevant to its future but may or may not enter into it.

Pols summarises his two objections. First, because of Whitehead's epochal time, the indivisibility of the mental pole seems to mean the non-development of the subjective aim. We have already rebuffed this point. Second, and Pols considers (rightly) this to be a more pressing

86. Ibid., pp 46f; Process, p 47.
87. Process, p 336.

objection, how is the subjective aim modified? Either it is the interaction of determinate components, or it is a free self-modification. He believes that the latter is ruled out by the doctrine of creativity, though in fact he has only established that that doctrine as it stands does not support this interpretation directly: rather a different thing. He proceeds to make a case for the ontological ultimacy of the eternal objects over the actual occasions.

> Our main point against the doctrine of freedom, then, appears to be that the actual entities alleged to possess freedom lack a genuine entitative character: the sense in which they exist is derivative from the sense in which essences, or abstract entities, or eternal objects, exist. And not the least reason for this charge is that the actual entities are capable only derivatively of standing in external relations. 88

It would be difficult to proceed with our thesis were Pols' argument found compelling. John Cobb, in an article specifically answering Pols, only answers half the critique. He tackles the question of 'succession', without talking of the actual entity as a subject determined by its data. But Cobb may provide a clue: he seems to indicate (or at least, his words are open to this interpretation) the possibility of us using the concept of synergism.[89] Thus the actual occasion is always more than the sum of its parts.[90]

What are we to say of Pols' arguments? Firstly, to say that an interpretation satisfies all Whitehead's doctrines except the doctrine of freedom, and that therefore it is acceptable, is ludicrous. Whitehead's doctrine of freedom, causa sui, lies close to the heart of the system as he conceived it. If we decide that this doctrine of freedom is not well served by some other doctrines, then we must

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88. Metaphysics, p 190.

89. "Freedom in Whitehead's Philosophy: A Response to Edward Pols", Southern Journal of Philosophy 7/4, Winter 1969/70, pp 409-413.

90. Pols correctly remarks that the concept of human freedom poses further problems for Whitehead's thought than does the freedom of the occasion.

perhaps (to satisfy his overall intent) alter elsewhere.

Secondly, while there are errors in his argument at several points, his final case for querying the freedom of actual entities may be strong. If so, then it is based on the difficulty of understanding how the actual occasion is able to modify its subjective aim. For Pols, the issue is located in the problem of an occasion being able to choose to modify the aim at all; he questions the freedom of the occasion in the most fundamental sense. Whitehead is clear in his assertions of the freedom of the occasions,[91] and if he is unclear as to where this freedom finds its origin then he is surely not alone among writers. Perhaps Pols is wrong in assuming that creativity does not guarantee the occasions' freedom: perhaps the doctrine of creativity is in part an assertion of that freedom. But I consider there is a more important doubt about the freedom of the occasions. It is not 'how is the occasion able to choose at all'?, but 'granted that each occasion is free, on what basis does each new unity of becoming choose between its plethora of alternatives'? By what criteria does the subject modify its subjective aim, and from where do those criteria derive?[92] The only way in which Whitehead seems to approach a satisfactory answer is when he suggests some sort of inherited criteria. "The defining characteristic of a living person is some definite type of hybrid prehensions transmitted from occasion to occasion of its existence".[93] "We - as enduring objects with personal order - objectify the occasions of our own past with peculiar completeness in our immediate present".[94] While such thoughts go

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91. e.g. Process, pp 41f expresses the free/determined tension.
92. See Christian, Interpretation, pp 307 ff
93. Process, p 163.
94. Ibid., p 244.

some way to explaining the continuity between occasions, they do little to account for that which does the deciding: the above quotations seem to indicate that which is decided upon, objects instead of subjects. For self-causation to be more than an interaction of determinate components, we might well require something like the traditional doctrine of the enduring self, i.e. something to which experiences happen, and which in turn integrates those experiences. Pols has led us back to familiar territory! There seem to be three alternatives.

With Pols we could deny the freedom of actual occasions and state that in a Whiteheadian system all is determined. Such a conclusion is unnecessary for reasons which have been outlined above. A second possibility is to declare how 'all things run into mystery' and leave the matter untouched. This is unsatisfactory in the long run. A third option might speak to a number of the misgivings we have articulated about Whitehead's thought. Perhaps we require a self who is more than the total of his experiences or feelings. It could be expressed either by being ready to speak of God somehow conferring this selfhood upon the occasions so that this selfhood may then receive aims and data. This would have to be carefully worked out in order to avoid divine determinism. Perhaps the self and the initial aim could be linked somehow so that a self has some sort of inherent aim for its realisation. Indeed, something like this may now be the case in the system, in which case we must ask: what prehends the initial aim, and what decides to deviate from it or accept it? The atomicity which Whitehead holds to be so basic would still be there with some such arrangement.[95] Or there may be another, more radical way, to which we were given a clue earlier in our discussion of God.[96] A self

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95. Ibid., p 53.

96. We are aware of the 'fallacy of misplaced concreteness' (Science, p 51). Johnson, Reality, p 44, seems in agreement with our point.

is more than its feelings, though it would not be anything without them, as in a synergistic whole where the whole is more than the sum of its parts yet would not exist at all if those parts were taken away. How would that 'extra' be defined? where would it come from? would all of the rest of the system need overhauling?

Pols draws an interesting comparison between Whitehead's actual entities and Leibniz's monads.[97] The difference between them is that monads can describe something as complex as a man, while actual entities refer to an electro-magnetic occasion. Perhaps we must redefine an actual entity so that it is more like a monad? (Pols notes the paradox[98] that while the system is called the Philosophy of Organism, an organism cannot illustrate its basic unit). A human being might be thought of as in process of becoming. Like God, he would not be actual without the concrete becoming. But the occasions of becoming might be 'coupled' to a self who is not wholly defined by this occasion or that. Thus we would have a self who is able to prehend the initial subjective aim with subjective form, and which does not involve us in chicken-egg regress, and also gives a self which is not the total of its prehensions though the self is nothing without them. This may parallel the way in which Christian led us to suggest an inter-relation of God's primordial and consequent natures earlier.

However, the primary purpose of this chapter is not to launch a full-scale and comprehensive critique of Whitehead, nor (more importantly here) to indulge in extensive reconstruction. Our purpose is to understand what we can of Whitehead in order to test the use to which

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97. Metaphysics, vi f.
98. Ibid., p 6f; cf Emmett, Organism, pp 184 ff.

others put his thought. If the aspect of his thought which has just been reviewed is considered to be finally incoherent, or any problems intractable, that will obviously put heavy qualifiers upon any conclusions reached in the forthcoming chapters. On the other hand readers may feel that none of these points are conclusive, none seem to demand the total abandoning or dismantling of the Whiteheadian edifice, that solutions are possible even if not here fully laid out. In either case we must proceed, recognising that the very constructions and criticisms we have offered may create as many problems elsewhere in the system as the original problems at issue.

CHAPTER SIX

A FIRST POSSIBLE INTERPRETATION - OGDEN AND WILLIAMS

Following the discussions of the previous two chapters, it should now be becoming clear how and where a Whiteheadian approach might be able to address the general questions raised in the first three chapters. But it should also be clear that there remains a certain amount of room for manoeuvre within the Whiteheadian orientation, and more so within the broader movement known as Process Theology which takes its impetus at least partially from Whitehead. In this chapter and the next we will examine more closely the work of four such Process Theologians. While there will be certain differences between them it will be seen that, broadly speaking, the first two considered offer less adequate proposals for the questions at issue than do the latter two, who embody a more promising approach. In the forefront of our minds in this examination are the general theological issues raised in chapter three, and the more specific points made about the concept of action in the first chapter. In chapter seven, to conclude our examination, we will address ourselves to the reasons for the divergences between the four with more vigour than is appropriate as we proceed.

It is a fairly common objection to Process thought that the God-concept there presented yields too passive a notion of God.[1] At the outset two comments seem in order with regard to this point. Firstly that, properly considered, God is no more active or passive in Whitehead's system than any other actual entity. This we have

1. Colin Gunton, "Process Theology's Concept of God - An outline and assessment", Expository Times, July 1973, pp 292 ff.

already touched upon in a previous chapter, when we described how it is in the nature of an efficient cause to be in the past and therefore not active in the sense of retaining subjective immediacy. In order to become a cause, as it were, an actual entity must objectify itself for another concrescence. Then the 'cause' is at the mercy of the new occasion - i.e. it never completely determines it, but is brought into prehensive unity with other factors including the freedom of the entity in question. In a sense then, God is passive in this framework - but so is every other efficient cause, by definition.

Secondly, might it be construed that God's aim be considered so general in its provision, that an impression of passivity is given? If we might put it thus, is God's aim active? Allow an illustration: Q is an actual occasion, and God offers to Q the real possibilities for its actualisation - we might say that God 'shows' Q that c, d, e, f, g, h, i, and j, are available to it. We might say further that c-g are possibilities directly inherent in the past of Q (its 'actual world'), while h-j are truly novel. There is a critical difference between God 'saying' to Q "these are your options, take your pick", and either "these are your options, and d, f, h, and j are progressively better than the others", or "these are your options, j is the best". If the first were true then we might indeed feel justified in asking whether there is any real difference between a God who aims at all things in general and nothing in particular, or who does everything in general and nothing in particular.[2] Clearly, unless divine action be conceived as the intention to present all

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2. Again, see Colin Gunton, Being and Becoming, OUP 1978, pp 50f. Discussion of Gunton's work, which is in any case mainly on Hartshorne, is out of the question here.

possibilities to the occasion the first will not do: within the terms used earlier it would mean that God acts only in basic acts, but never in complex acts because his intention never reaches beyond this immediate contact with the occasions. This point should be borne in mind when we examine Ogden. For God's aim to be 'active', for complex creaturely acts to be identified as 'acts of God', God must have more or less specific intention for those creaturely actions.

1 Schubert Ogden

It is unfortunate that the two best known 'Process' essays on this subject both subscribe to the weaker of the two positions. Perhaps the most influential of all is Ogden's essay in his collection called The Reality of God.[3] The sixth chapter in the book addresses our question more or less straight on.[4] He begins by asserting that theologians should resist the temptation to ask if God acts, but rather should define what it means to say that he does so. His task then, is to clarify the meaning of a stock theological 'chestnut', not to dispute its possibility. At the outset Ogden sets his discussion in the context of the debate about 'myth' to which Bultmann made such an important contribution.

Ogden follows Bultmann in distinguishing between myth and analogy[5], and indicates that we must see God's action in analogy to

3. SCM (1967); henceforth, Reality.
4. "What sense does it make to say 'God acts in history'?", pp 164-187.
5. Ogden has, more recently, become unhappy with 'analogical' discourse. See The Point of Christology, Sarum Lectures 1981, (SCM 1982) chapter 7; henceforth , Point. See also an unpublished paper Ogden read at the Centre for Process Studies in Claremont, in March 1980, entitled "The Experience of God".

human action. He concedes that we normally see human action as a specific word or deed conveyed through the instrumentality of the body by which the self undertakes to fulfil certain purposes. But Ogden thinks that Hartshorne and Heidegger have offered a more fundamental account of 'action', as the process whereby the self as such is constituted.

> Behind all its public acts of word and deed there are the self's own private purposes or projects, which are themselves matters of action or decision. Indeed, it is only because the self first acts to constitute itself, to respond to its world, and to decide its own inner being that it 'acts' at all in the ordinary meaning of the word; all its outer acts of word and deed are but ways of expressing and implementing the inner decisions whereby it constitutes itself as a self. 6

A self may constitute itself in one of two ways, says Ogden, either as open/responsive, or closed/unresponsive to the influences of the outside world. God, as "pure unbounded love", is an 'open' self. So

> The primary meaning of God's action is the act whereby, in each new present, he constitutes himself as God by participating fully and completely in the world of his creatures, thereby laying the ground for the next stage of the creative process. 7

Thus, the most illuminating analogy for God's relation to the world is not that of one man acting upon another, but rather the action of mind on brain or mind on body. God is related to the whole creation in a similarly 'intimate' way. To affirm him as Creator means not only that the world is generally dependant upon him, but that every present moment derives from him.

Ogden has performed here a little theological sleight-of-hand which is in danger of becoming counter-productive. He has subtly shifted the meaning of 'act' from an external expression to an internal

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6. Reality, p 177.
7. Ibid., p 177.

decision of the whole person. We have moved away from everyday usage, though this new concept is claimed to be more 'fundamental'. But he now has difficulty in giving any content to the claim that God's action occurs <u>within</u> history. The new concept so 'internalises' action that Ogden has to assure us at length that while it 'transcends' history, (especially in God's case, though to some extent in ours too) it makes history possible. Ogden thinks it still possible to say that God's action is in at least two senses historical.[8] Firstly because to some extent all creatures are God's act, i.e. they are grounded in God, for without him they would never come to be. It may be that this sense of God's action represents a sort of 'general providence', while the second sense is more akin to 'special providence'. Secondly because man is unique on earth as the 'creature of meaning', he alone is able to understand his existence and express its meaning symbolically in word or deed, and so also be 'divine spokesman'. Insofar as he represents the gift and demand signified by God's transcendent action as Creator and Redeemer he represents (or re-presents) not only his own understanding but the reality of God's action itself. In that case we can say that man's action <u>is</u> God's action.

> just as, in our case, our outer acts of word and deed may be said to be ours just because or insofar as they give (or are understood to give) expression to the inner actions whereby we constitute our existence as selves. 9

Some of our outer acts are, says Ogden, <u>our</u> acts in a way that others are not. Certain of our actions will give peculiarly apt expression to what we are, they are our actions in this special sense. And by analogy a similar statement can be made about God's actions.

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8. <u>Ibid.</u>, pp 179f.
9. <u>Ibid.</u>, p 181.

> Although every creature .... is in one sense his act, certain creaturely happenings may be said to be his act in another and quite special sense. Wherever or insofar as an event in history manifests God's characteristic action as Creator and Redeemer, it actually is his act in a sense in which other historical events are not. 10

He goes on, revealingly, to say that

> Any event, whether intended by anyone as symbolic or not, can become such an act of God insofar as it is received by someone as a symbol of God's creative and redemptive action. Because man is distinctively the creature of meaning, there is no event he experiences that cannot become for him such a symbol. 11

Ogden's account of divine action is unsatisfactory. Before offering the most serious criticism we must make two preliminary sets of remarks.

(i) Ogden's internalising of action should not go without criticism. He seems to subscribe to some sort of residual dualism, with an inner self, and an outer self which exemplifies the inner, makes it manifest. One's proper 'self' may surely 'contribute' to one's actions without this internalisation? The psychosomatic unity of the subject is unnecessarily complicated by these two types of action: perhaps Ryle would have again spoken of the 'ghost in the machine'! What I do in the world constitutes myself,and there is a reciprocity between one's 'enduring character' and the actions and events one is involved in. Furthermore, one cannot help feeling that if Ogden had kept closer to the Process conception of 'action' he may have avoided this muddle. God's action is for him fundamentally internal therefore not interpersonal, or relational. Such a notion goes against the grain of our normal intuition on the nature of action. He is forced to show how this 'non-historical action' can be made manifest in history: God constitutes himself in such a way that every moment is possible, and some moments are transparent to his character. But in Whiteheadian theory the internal decision of an occasion (or the actual

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10. Ibid., p 182.
11. Ibid., p 183.

entity God) to become, to act, is an action reaching for a satisfaction from whence the occasion will be prehended by other occasions. That is to say that the 'act' is an internal decision seeking to exert external influence, and the two facets may not be separated.

(ii) We might also add a few words on a less important topic, though nevertheless one which figures in our overall concern. While we ask, with Ogden, of God's action in history, we defined history earlier to include certain natural events as they impinged upon human lives. Thus we will be attempting to set out a theory of divine action which can render some sort of explanation of God's action in the natural world. Ogden's eloquent passages on man as the 'creature of meaning' and the bearer of God's action seem to indicate that he may be considered more of an existentialist than a process theologian in this regard. There is little indication of God acting in nature to reveal and redeem: nature is not presented as a suitable vehicle. This criticism may be thought harsh, on the grounds that Ogden does not directly address this issue. Yet his anthropomorphic approach seems to militate against a more favourable position. Later on we will try to defend a Process view of God's 'special' action in nature.

The first of our two preliminary comments, the question of externality issuing from, and expressing, internality brings us close to the key issue. The problem is in Ogden's explanation, or rather lack of explanation, of the way in which any act, any something which God is or does, relates to an event or action in the world which we might claim is his. He omits to explain the relationship between these two components - either because he thinks the relationship is immaterial or non-existent: whichever, it is a most serious flaw in his argument.

External action implies, by its very nature, a certain specificity of intention and execution, i.e. the ability to affect the intention formed. There is no discussion of these crucial aspects in Ogden's account. Our outer acts express our character, but we intend those acts to be as they are, or more or less as they are. If our actions are <u>despite</u> our intentions, or if we refer to events which 'just happen' around us, the sense in which these actions or events 'reveal' us is very much in question, and largely coincidental. We cannot take the credit for something which we did not intend. For an act in the world to express God's character he must intend it to be the event which it is. Ogden is far from explicit here, but from hints which he gives the impression is given that sometimes,by pure coincidence, an event will fortuitously express God's character. But God seems to have no particular intention for that event. Either Ogden could be interpreting Whitehead in much the same way as we saw Christian did, with God offering a general aim to the creatures, or else Ogden has for some reason not used this Whiteheadian resource: to this we shall return.

Even if we accept the notion of action as self-constitution, our external acts are distinguishable by separate and specific intents. So (i) when I buckle my shoe, I intend to do so, and (ii) when I give generously to famine relief something of my character may be expressed through that realised intention. Indeed, buckling my shoe must always be relatively unenlightening as a guide to my character. I may perform the action from habit, with little or no consciously willed intention at all. If a donation to feed the hungry is also largely a habitual reaching for purse or cheque-book, then that act too has less significance as a pointer to the sort of person I am now. It is true that certain unconscious deeds may be quite revealing (revealing that

I am a 'creature of habit' and may once have been generous), but we may assume of God, I think with a certain amount of safety, that his character is constant and that he is supremely aware of his own motives and intentions. God's outer actions must also have specific intent. His action as ground of every moment speaks something of his personality. But to say that in a particular event (for instance the Christ-event) his character is decisively shown demands an intent on God's part for that particular event, and possibly also an intent that we come to see the event in that light. Ogden leaves us with the uncomfortable feeling that what is important in his 'acts of God' is not what God intends for an event, but what we see in it - "because .... they give (or are understood to give) expression" to our real character.[12] Of course, both matter, but Ogden seems only to have one of the components in any prominence.

This interpretation is reinforced by a passage which we have already quoted: "Any event ... can become such an act of God insofar as it is received by someone as a symbol of God's creative and redemptive action".[13] For Ogden the specialness of a special act is "entirely a function of someone other than the person whose special act it is", whereas "for an event to be a special act of God, the specialness of it would have to be partially a function of God".[14] Thus for Ogden all the talk is of the subjective recognition of God's act, and his account is appallingly thin on the objective side of things, of what God does to have an act so recognised. To some extent of course this position is dictated to Ogden by his presuppositions. We will leave until the next chapter a consideration of whether his use of Process categories might have been different. But certainly

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12. Ibid., p 181: stress marks mine. Cp M. Wiles, "Religious Authority and Divine Action", reprinted in Working Papers in Doctrine (SCM 1976), p 141.

13. Ibid., p 183. stress marks mine.

14. David Ray Griffin, "Schubert Ogden's Christology and the Possibilities of Process Philosophy" in Process Philosophy and Christian Faith, ed Brown et al, pp 353f.

it seems that Bultmann makes his mark at this point. Because of the transcendence of God, Ogden considers that it would be'mythological' to refer to God's actions in terms appropriate to objects available to ordinary sense perception. The difficulty arises in that when we are not able to speak of God in the categories of space and time we are unable to predicate of God something confined to one space and/or time - instead all predications must apply equally to all times and spaces. Thus God's act is always uniform in the extreme, and there seems to be no room for any 'specialness' on his side. Indeed Ogden can say that "there is not the slightest evidence that God has acted in Christ in any way different from the way in which he primordially acts in every other event".[15]

This being so we see how vacuous is one of Ogden's 'catch-phrases'. He speaks of particular worldly events "re-presenting"[16] God's redemptive purpose, or of Jesus "decisively" or "definitively re-presenting"[17] it. But he is unable to explain how God can "re-present" anything, only how we might 'receive' or interpret wordly events to mean this.

Process thought, certainly in its Whiteheadian form (with which Ogden is at least familiar) provides for specific intent on God's part. He constitutes himself in such a way that he will be objectified in every novel occasion by his wish for its particular circumstance. God does not (as Ogden) constitute himself so as only to set limits for an occasion's concrescence, either by restricting choice ("here are c-j, take your pick") - which we have seen to be a potentially dangerous statement, and one which also seems to disregard the way in which the past sets its own limits - or by setting the 'rules'.[18]

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15. Griffin quotes Ogden in making a similar point, p 349.
16. e.g. Reality, p 181.
17. e.g. Christ Without Myth (Collins 1962), pp 188 ff; henceforth, Christ.
18. Hartshorne, Ogden's mentor, speaks in both these ways see Man's Vision of God(Archon 1964 pp 173, 227, 265, 291, e.g.

The actual occasion may perchance actualise the best possibility (j), which happens to express God's redeeming purpose. But that could not make it God's act, for action implies intention, and God did not intend (j) in any meaningful way for the occasion. As we have indicated, if God were to say to our hypothetical occasion "here are your possibilities, j is the best", and the subjective form of the occasion's prehension of God's offering is that of appetition for j, then if j is actualised God's intent is actualised, i.e.it is God's act.

Some will object that there may be more than one optimum option in any given situation: f,h, and j may be as good as each other, indeed people often feel that two or three courses of action are equally good possibilities for them. We will leave aside the question of whether or not God, possessing vision which sees the truly long-term effects of all our actions, and with finer powers of distinction, sees different possibilities to be equally attractive or whether he can always distinguish one which is the 'best'. Neither will we tarry to examine at length the fact that in acting we have to choose one thing or the other, so that God too would have to choose to do one thing perhaps, to intend one outcome. For even if we grant a small plurality of 'bests' such an argument may not be invoked to save Ogden, because nothing in his essay even suggests a degree of specificity of intent on God's part, or the need for it. If Ogden takes this for granted, and his sin is omission rather than commission, it is no more easily excused: its omission would be a grave miscalculation, for it is an omission of a concept's central feature.

It may be noted that the analysis thus offered in The Reality of God is to some extent prefigured in Christ without Myth, and echoed more recently in The Point of Christology. Christ Without Myth is at one and the same time in support of, and a critique of, Bultmann's demythologising campaign. This is not the place to discuss the validity of his interpretation of Bultmann, what is important for us is what that interpretation is, for he adopts it as his own.

For Bultmann, and Ogden, the New Testament is highly 'mythological', for it 'objectifies' the transcendent. As he explains Bultmann in The Reality of God,[19]

> By this he means that the statements in which theology has usually spoken of God and his action in history have the same 'objectifying' character as the statements of empirical science....The result is that God and his action are represented as though God were but one more secondary cause in the chain of secondary causes and his action but one more action alongside those of other causal agents.

Myth fails to make clear that God's redemptive action fulfils or consummates all action.[20] The old notion of miracle is incomprehensible to us today who understand nature and history as a closed continuum of 'lawful occurrence'.[21]

But Ogden feels that Bultmann did not carry his celebrated de-mythologising campaign to its logical conclusion. Bultmann "subjects God's action as the Redeemer to the objectifying categories of space and time and thus mythologises it".[22] By insisting on the uniqueness and necessity of Christ, Bultmann stops short of Ogden's demand. The New Testament, Ogden argues, bases its message of salvation not on Christ alone, but rather on the primordial love of God which Jesus shows or represents.[23] It is not that in Christ salvation becomes possible, but that in Christ it becomes manifest.[24] What happens in

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19. Reality, pp 166f; cp Christ, pp 28-31.
20. Reality, p 168.
21. Christ, pp 37, 59.
22. Reality, p 173.
23. See Christ, pp 144, 164.
24. Ibid., p 167.

Jesus is the manifestation of what God is always doing.[25]

The particulars of Ogden's Christology are not our current concern. Instead we note his assertion that God works in that same way in Jesus as everywhere else, with no suggestion (indeed, just the opposite) of a specific 'Jesus-goal' in the mind of God, so to speak. Jesus is a particular manifestation of God's very general action, and there is no hint that God had either any purposes for Jesus before he became this manifestation, or any means of achieving such purposes. Jesus might have been an accidental manifestation of the love of God, in which event God played no part which brought about any particular actualisation.

According to the theory of Whitehead's outlined in the previous two chapters it is only true to say that God's intent is always the same for different events in the strictly formal sense - its content is always different, or particular. Perhaps Ogden would think such a specific intention or aim to be a mythical construct, making God look more like one cause among others. But in Whitehead's terms he is just this, albeit a cause of more pervasive influence, and not one which 'interrupts' the causal network.

We may speculate on how Ogden would have interpreted Whiteheadian problems mentioned in chapter five. For instance, does this lack of particularity in the initial aim indicate that he imagines that only the primordial nature is involved in the aim-giving (for only in reaction with the consequent nature, we decided, could the aims be particular and relevant)? While Ogden speaks of God 'responding' to

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25. Ogden makes this point repeatedly: see e.g., his "The Significance of Bultmann for Contemporary Theology" in ed. Charles W. Kegley, The Theology of Rudolf Bultmann (SCM, 1966), pp 120-3.

the world, he nowhere indicates what that might mean. Would Ogden agree with Christian that God wills all possibilities equally without preference? We begin to see the theological relevance of some of the philosophical points discussed in the last chapter.

Ogden's essay leaves the impression of a divine passivity, and no clear sense of what an act of God in history or nature might involve. Any satisfactory articulation of 'act of God' must reckon on explicating what God has done as his contribution to make that act what it was. If we wish to speak of a special act of God, something of that 'specialness' must be attributed to God: Ogden is unable to resolve this issue.

This critique to some extent presupposes that it is appropriate to judge Ogden by 'Whiteheadian' standards, or as a Whiteheadian interpreter. In the context of this thesis, which is written from such a perspective,that may be justifiable - but a qualification must be put on the procedure. As we will make clear in the following chapter Ogden draws his 'Process' resources more from Hartshorne than Whitehead. In the light of what we say later it may be best to state at this point that it is possible to take Ogden to task for insufficient use of the resources at his disposal, notably those specific concepts and ideas developed by Whitehead which are examined in chapters four and five.[26]

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26. It has been our intention in this study to treat Whitehead and not of Hartshorne. Such a method may be somewhat artificial considering the way in which their thought is mingled in those theologians of the 'Process' school. However, while there are competent studies comparing the two men, e.g. Two Process Philosophers: Hartshorne's Encounter with Whitehead, ed Lewis S. Ford (AAR Studies in Religion, 1973), to attempt to study both in this thesis seemed to broaden the subject matter hopelessly.

2 Daniel Day Williams

Probably as well known as Ogden's essay is Daniel Day Williams' contribution to the Hartshorne Festschrift, Process and Divinity.[27] Williams' treatment is more overtly Whiteheadian than Ogden's - even though the volume was presented to Hartshorne, and that Williams' other work often seems 'Whitehead-free'![28] He writes that "The problem of God's action involves the meaning of action, of cause and effect, of power and structure, of law and chance".[29] He notes that all actual entities are causa sui: 'final causation' refers to the way in which actual entities pursue an internal aim in freedom; 'efficient causation' is when one actual entity prehends another, and that other enters into the prehender's experience as cause.[30]

Willaims lists five general characteristics of Whitehead's doctrine of God's action.[31] i The notion of God as sole cause of any event, irrespective of other causes, is rejected. ii The mode of God's action is categorically determined by the metaphysical order constituted by his primordial nature, which he does not (cannot) violate. "This means that God acts upon other things by objectifying his being for them so that he can be prehended by them. God acts by being felt by his creatures...."[32] and so enters into the constitution of their successive experience. iii The creatures also enter into the constitution of God's experience as he prehends them. They become causes in successive phases of his experience. iv

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27. "How does God act? An essay in Whitehead's metaphysics". The volume is edited by W.L. Reese and E. Freeman (Open Court, 1964); henceforth, Divinity.
28. I think particularly of The Spirit and The Forms of Love (Lib Con Theol, (1968); henceforth Spirit.
29. Ibid., p 162.
30. Ibid., p 168.
31. Ibid., pp 171f.
32. Ibid., p 170.

Causality is complex, with many variable components. To speak of God's causality at all implies analogy from the causality of creatures. v Divine action must not, though, be identical to creatures' action: there are differences rooted in God's own metaphysical status.

The language of Whitehead was, says Williams, 'improveable' in that he too often spoke of the primordial and consequent natures as separate beings. We have already, in a previous chapter, made this point - but Williams by no means clears up the ambiguity. He still speaks of God acting 'in' this nature or that, and deals with the natures separately, in turn. The superjective nature is ignored. We will see in the ensuing discussion that Williams does not thereby avoid the pitfalls into which he felt that Whitehead had fallen: he amends Whitehead a little, but not enough.

How does God act in his primordial nature, he asks?

> The most obvious point is that he acts by presenting to the creatures the unity, the richness, and the limits of possibility as ordered by his vision. That is to say that God acts in his primordial gift of structure to the world by 'not acting' - he acts by being. 33

God is the order upon which everything else existing must draw if it is to be at all. It is, of course, a somewhat remarkable use of language to suggest that God acts by "not acting", and a critic may be forgiven for objecting that this is indeed a rather passive account. Certainly, there is no hint of a specific aim or intention on God's part. All that is offered is the "unity, richness and limits of possibility", or in the terms of our earlier example, c-j. The lack of specificity at this point is in part produced by the separation of the two natures which Williams implements.

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33. Ibid., p 171.

He goes on to claim that "divine persuasion enters here".[34] The primordial nature now stands before each occasion's decision, but does not itself determine that decision. It has only set the limits of possibility and thus made an actuality possible. But physical law is not a cause, except as it becomes an order prehended by an actual entity.[35] Clearly, Williams sees the primordial nature giving initial aims as merely a structure - providing the world's dynamic scaffolding. Indeed, it would be difficult to say much more, for the primordial nature would require the consequent nature's 'feedback' to affect the aims for specificity of aim, and Williams seems to allow no such provision. But it is not clear how persuasion can enter here at all. Physical law cannot persuade; it cannot even 'compel' in the same way that the laws of our land compel us, for it is a different type of law. Further, would not persuasion require persuasion to one thing (or things) in particular? - at least some degree of specificity would be needed. The initial data given by God to all actual entities includes all real possibilities, i.e. including complete opposites. Williams does not hint at a specific aim, or divine appetition for it. The nearest he comes to it is in recording that the primordial nature is a conceptual valuation, a description of Whitehead's which seems to imply a hierarchy of preference.[36] But the assertion lies undeveloped in Williams' accounts. He goes on to show that the action of the primordial nature is God as the Principle of Concretion, which he says is the offering of the 'initial aim'[37] - by which he must mean, all the possibilities for any given occasion.

So how does Williams account for God's action 'in' his

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34. Ibid., p 172.
35. Ibid., p 172.
36. We turn here to Relevance, p 366. Below we give a fuller account of the argument of this essay.
37. Divinity, p 175.

consequent nature? This nature is God as concretely related to the world as he receives the world's events into his experience in his own way. This Williams calls the divine passivity, as if comparing it to a previously mentioned divine activity. In fact he is comparing two types of passivity. Here we have passivity as receptivity, a valid enough attribute of God, especially within the Process frame of reference; previously we had had passivity as a sort of divine 'laissez-faire', God not willing anything in particular, an unacceptable passivity. In the consequent nature, says Williams, God is not only structure but conscious active and passive being. Williams laments Whitehead's lack of elucidation here, and quotes that most tantalising of suggestions, the "love of God flooding back into the world".[38] Williams senses that the implication is that we must consider God as an efficient cause in the world in some sense. Yet again his formulation seems extremely 'passive':

> The consequent nature acts by being prehended, felt by the creatures. This means not only the primordial structure but the concrete being of God in his relation to the world is communicated to the creatures. 39

It would be easy, in making this criticism, to be misunderstood. Within the bounds of Whitehead's system it is true that all 'causes' can only 'act' insofar as they are prehended. A cause is necessarily object, not subject, and therefore to some extent passive. But this can be expressed in two ways, actively or passively. Actively expressed, we can say that an actual entity chooses to objectify itself in a certain way to will a certain effect: thus here we may speak of an entity's intention for other entities. Passively, an actual entity would 'mind its business', so to speak, and then be prehended at satisfaction. The emphasis is very different, and directs our

38. Ibid., p 175; Process, p 522.
39. Divinity, pp 175f.

attention to different components of process. For God to actualise an intention for a particular occasion, we must be able to speak in the more active sense - otherwise all God's actions become 'basic' actions rather than 'complex' ones. That is not to say that such an active assertion should not be made in tandem with the more passive, 'private', description. But here we have only one side, and it is the passive one. Williams' specific references to Whitehead seem to bear out this impression. The phrase about the love of God flooding back into the world may seem to point to a more 'active' idea, but Williams fails to give an adequate exegesis of this phrase which would tip the balance on the rest of the essay.

What we prehend in prehending the consequent nature is how God prehends us and our world. This is a necessary prehension for us to consider, but (i) it cannot be spoken of as a prehension of the consequent nature alone (an occasion prehends the whole entity, not one pole - see chapters four and five once more), and (ii) this is not what the main Christian tradition has meant by God's action in the world. It perhaps comes nearest to what Whitehead called 'Peace', which is certainly related to God's action in some way, but is best seen as the occasion's sense of finding himself aligned with the divine purpose and preserved in the continuing whole.[40] As a doctrine of God's action it is once more passive.

Williams comes closest to ascribing particular effects to God at the close of this essay. In doing so he leaves himself revealingly exposed in his notion of the initial aim.

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40. See Cobb and Griffin, Introductory, p125.

> So far as the primordial nature is concerned, it acts only by being presented to the creatures as the integrity of the order of possibility by virtue of which there can be a world. No specific action is completely determined by the primordial order, it only sets limits to what any action may be....The consequent nature acts by being concretely apprehended in feeling in such a way that God's specific response to the world becomes a constitutive function in the world. Here there is specific divine causality..... There is no demand here to factor out what God is adding to the stream of events apart from those events. But there is the assignment of specific functions to God's causality. These include the presentation to the creatures of a supremely adequate centre of feeling through which the meaning of every occasion is received into and transformed by the divine experience, and this is concretely known by the creatures in such a way as to qualify their experience. 41

The reader may be forgiven, I feel, if Williams seems to have taken a leaf from Whitehead's book and been poetically, gloriously obscure in describing the consequent nature. Certainly, we seem to look in vain for divine intentions for specific occasions, seeking to actualise particular aims. True, "God's specific response" may sound at first promising: but the nature of his "constitutive function in the world" is not at all clear. The closing sentence seems to place this 'specific divine causation' much more nearly with the doctrine of peace than we would at first have expected.

In "Deity, Monarchy and Metaphysics", published some three years earlier,[42] Williams treats the action of God in a slightly different context - that of an essay on Whitehead's metaphysical critique of the western theological tradition. The essay is a very interesting one, to be sure, in its exploration of this general theme, the modelling of God on the Eastern Despot. Furthermore, he seems to link the two natures of God more closely together, and also hints at the need for further development of Whitehead - though the hint does not seem to be taken up.

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41. Divinity, pp 178f.
42. In Relevance.

Williams says that it is in the interpretation of God as Principle of Concretion that Whitehead proposes a doctrine of God's action on the world,[43] seeming to indicate that he sees this as the most important element in any treatment of the issue. Here is a limitation upon creativity, so that a definite outcome may emerge "from a situation otherwise riddled with ambiguity".[44] The Absolute Monarch has not reappeared in this Principle in another guise, for Williams can say that he is "not certain that Whitehead ever intended the doctrine of the Principle of Concretion to mean any more than that God is the ultimate structure which makes the unity of the world and of each creature possible at all".[45] Our impression of passivity is confirmed.

But Williams admits that the action of God on the world is complex and involves both poles of his being. Unfortunately, he is unwilling to tie these poles very firmly together. He says that the consequent nature might at first appear passive. But, he goes on, it is too simple to say that this nature is constituted solely by the world's action on God, for Whitehead describes it as"the weaving of God's physical feelings upon his primordial concepts".[46] In God the world's action receives its final unity, with immediacy retained, and transformed by God's wisdom. The consequent nature is effective as experienced by the creatures in two ways:[47] firstly, through the mutual immanence of all occasions the creatures have some experience (however dim) of God's consequent nature as the felt union of immediacy of the world, without loss or obstruction. All that can be

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43. Relevance, p 365.
44. Process, p 523.
45. Relevance, p 366. See our note 67.
46. Process, p 524.
47. Relevance, pp 367f.

saved is saved, the wreckage is used, and so the creatures' feelings are transformed through a participation in the transformation which takes place in God. This is the same point as he makes in the other essay. And he goes on to talk of a certain reciprocity: God's love "flooding back into the world", again, as the second mode of the consequent nature's action. In his other account he combines these two 'modes' of the consequent nature, but here he speaks of his mode as 'specific' divine action, enabling Whitehead to call it 'particular providence'. It is no clearer as to what Williams has in mind by this "flooding back" than Whitehead.

He says that "the divine activity is interpreted by Whitehead as the holding before the creature of the ultimate possibility of transmutation of present evil into some real good".[48] What can this mean? Is it a reference to the transmutation of evil in God of which an occasion becomes aware, and therefore takes comfort? This is a distinct possibility, and (as it were) a 'passive' one: the stress is placed on the occasion's perception of God and not on God's 'working on' the evil. But Williams may be getting at the possibility of overcoming evil through the following of God's lure in the actual world: thus the reality of evil is not denied "but only its finality as resisting all transformation into good".[49]

Two things, however, militate against this more favourable interpretation, and indeed against the whole of Williams' construct:
i He seems to give us little warrant for believing him to hold that God offers any specific lure to the occasions, and only a specific lure would give sound reason to hope for the overcoming of very

48. Relevance, p 367.
49. Ibid., p 368.

specific evil; ii Neither does he seem to hold that the consequent nature reacts upon the primordial nature in such a way as to influence its role as lure provider.[50] Within the scope of Whitehead's system God can only be felt as superject, not primordial or consequent. This is not to say that only the initial aim is felt by an occasion - obviously the sort of feelings which Williams associates with the two natures are part of the prehensions, but he cleaves the two natures apart.

Perhaps the one notion which Williams uses which promises some sort of divine appetition and specific desire is his mention of the primordial nature experienced as "conceptual valuation".[51] But, though this would seem to imply some sort of differentiation by God, it is not enough to rescue Williams. It may just refer to the grading of relevance for an occasion, in which case there is no element of divine appetition involved. We are not told clearly what 'conceptual valuation' involves. On the other hand, if it does indicate some sort of divine preference, then its role in the total theory is grossly underplayed by Williams. We can only assume that it is of negligible importance to him, whereas it ought to occupy a central position.

We must note one further pervasive ambiguity in Williams' thought which manifests itself in this earlier essay. Williams there recalls Whitehead's abhorrence of divine coercion. But Williams suspects that Whitehead has substituted a God who is too weak in place of the traditional omnipotent deity.

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50. Spirit, p 129 certainly speaks of God's seeking out individuals, but it is an emphasis notably absent from these essays.

51. Relevance, p 366.

> We may ask if Whitehead has replaced the Arbitrary Monarch with a Constitutional Monarch, who to be sure is unlimited in his power to establish the general constitutional conditions for the world's action; but who after having made the initial address to the cosmic parliament, only waits to receive reports as to what his subjects do, and who then is able to see all the concrete acts of the subjects as having an ultimate unity in his divine perspective. My question concerns the divine initiative in history and the way in which it is exercised. Does God only listen or does he speak? 52

This section is significant for two reasons. First of all it confirms the negative interpretation of Williams which we have put forward. God 'sets the rules' and then waits for the 'reports', with an initial address'. By his own admission, Williams sees no divine initiative in such an account. Whitehead's God may be fairly described as a 'Constitutional Monarch', but not nearly such a colourless one as Williams describes. Setting the conditions, he urges each one of his subjects to respond to his 'rule' in particular ways according to their circumstance, for their own good and the commonwealth. He not only makes a speech, but condescends to implore and persuade-in this way can his 'initiative' be understood in each new moment. The second reason for this passage's significance lies in the conclusions which Williams draws from it: he judges that Whitehead has underestimated the disclosure of the divine initiative in religious experience, and he criticises Whitehead for not allowing sufficiently for coercive elements in the whole of reality, including God. Whitehead has, he thinks, over-reacted against the old divine monarch, and so his account of the relation between God and the world is partially inadequate.[53]

In God's Grace and Man's Hope,[54] published in 1949, Williams was already hinting at the possibility of his conclusion. He notes the

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52. Relevance, p 370
53. Ibid., p 371.
54. Harper, 1949; henceforth Grace.

"educative value of coercion"[55] and that coercion is not in itself evil.[56] Perhaps these hints at coercion are the more remarkable when compared with his insistence that "It is the very mark of love to allow power to the objects of love".[57]. This is the theme taken up again and again in The Spirit and the Forms of Love almost twenty years later. True love always allows the loved one to be free,[58] and God does not overide human wills in drawing their free response.[59] Yet again in this later book the ambiguity is present. Coercion is allowable in relationship if it is 'for the sake of the other' - it must be coercion which leaves the other more free to respond.[60] It is an instrument of love, but to be so must win freedom for the other.[61]

We might well ask what sort of coercion Williams can have had in mind, that does everything that is claimed for it. Does it mean simply that God insists that we be free? If Williams means much more, if he means for instance that God imposes a particular outcome on events in certain circumstances, then Williams certainly stands at odds both with the mainline of 'Process' thinkers, and irrevocably disjoined from Whitehead's framework.[62]

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55. Grace, p 36.
56. Ibid., p 88.
57. Ibid., p 72.
58. Spirit, pp 118 ff, 126.
59. Ibid., pp 162 ff, 165, 172.
61. Ibid., pp 127, 137, 164f, 168f.
62. It is part of the Process critique of traditional theism's doctrine that the positing of all power in one actuality renders all other actuality totally impotent. Indeed, in process categories, to be actual is to be in some degree potent. If God has all power, strictly speaking, no other creature has power at all. Thus Process Theism sees God as having all power that it is possible for one actuality to have within a plurality of actualities, for "nothing whatever, not even God, can wholly determine the being of something else". Ogden, Faith and Freedom (Christian Journals 1979), p 76. Williams himself seems to recognise this - the power of God "is not that of absolute omnipotence to do anything. It is the power to do everything that the loving ground of all being can do to express and to communicate and fulfil the society of living beings....."(Spirit, p 137). If Williams were found to be positing a direct coercion on God's part then this would go right against one of the process orientation's central tenets. And incidentally, it would substantially weaken the Process theodicy which we will examine in the final chapter.

If we seek more explicit passages on what this coercion might mean then we draw a blank. As I suggested earlier, the hints scattered through his works, and the programme demanded in "Deity, Monarchy and Metaphysics", are never fully fleshed out. What can we pick up from the passing references? The most illuminating sentences are probably found in God's Grace and Man's Hope:

> Certainly it is true that God exercises coercive power. We cannot escape that fact when we look at the way in which the structures of life coerce us, smash our plans, seize us in the grip of their inevitabilities. God is not identical with those structuresbut his wrath is in them and they are related to the ultimate structure of value which is in his own being. 63

'Structures' could denote two things: it could refer to the structure provided for the world's becoming by God as Principle of Concretion; or it could refer to the structures of our societies (in the broad Whiteheadian meaning). Which is it to be?

Lewis Ford is correct to a point when he says that the structures of reality are not coercive as such.[64] Coercion is properly "any restriction upon the range of real possibility which would otherwise be available".[65] If Williams is seeking to say that God coerces by imposing structures upon the world, then it must be said that this is a strained use of 'coercion'. In such a case God would merely be allowing, within his established framework, the real possibilities of the past to bear their due issue.[66] He would still be unable to limit the range of possibilities inherent in the past, and Whitehead would say that he is 'obliged' to offer, or offers automatically, all real novel possibilities.

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63. Grace, p 132; cf also Divinity, p 178.
64. The Lure of God, (Fortress 1978), p 17; henceforth Lure.
65. Ibid., p 18.
66. A common theme of Hartshorne's, that God mediates the past for occasions, and sets limits within which they become.

To be limited/coerced by the structure of society may be judged a similarly strained use of the term. Either way, it is odd to suggest that when these structures "smash" us, that this is God working: The weight of the past, of the environment, of our peers, perhaps. Neither is it clear how God's wrath might be present in such structures except in a rather oblique sense. They have been built up by a complex of free decisions for which God has no direct responsibility - the relation of those structures to God's values may be one of total contradiction. God's coercion through such structures is not easily intelligible. Furthermore, Williams seems not to take seriously enough the whole thrust of Whitehead's system in which all actualities are causa sui, and neither the past nor God are fully determinative.[67]

Williams' eloquent depreciation of Whitehead's constitutional monarch shows (as far as a thorough-going Whiteheadian view is concerned) a fatal lack of nerve, or (worse) lack of understanding of a pillar of the system. Williams is certainly entitled to the former of these two options, though he would wish to characterise it in a different way. What is at issue is not his right to disagree even on such a fundamental point, but his showing no signs of realising the importance of the concept in the whole, and of habilitating his own

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67. For a discussion of coercion and Whitehead see Ford's Lure, pp 17 ff, and his comments on p 43 with reference to J. Gerald Janzen's "Modes of Power and the Divine Relativity", in Encounter 36/4, Autumn 1975. Janzen argues that a process God may coerce, though only in his mediating of the past to occasions, thus restricting the future. As Ford comments, God is not thereby adding any restrictions to those already present in the past events.

Within Whitehead's system it seems that only corpuscular societies may exert coercive force and then only on other such societies - see David Griffin, Christology, p 187, e.g. It must be admitted though that this whole area receives too scant a treatment by Whitehead and his interpreters in general. Coercive power may be "secondary" and "derivative" (Griffin), but may we really speak of a society being coerced and not its constituent members?

Perhaps there is a sense in which God 'coerces' us through the world's structures, though it strains our use of language: if we do not act 'with the grain' of the universe, we run into difficulties. God could threaten us by drawing our attention to the inevitable outcome of our own actions. It may be that 'constrain' is a rather better word for this than 'coerce'.

For further comments on the subject see Griffin's theodicy, Power, pp 281f.

understanding with that whole, for much of the system now requires redrafting. Whitehead's God acts just as all other entities act - they too only 'suggest'. It is true that in practice certain physical events, where the mental pole is underdeveloped, do tend just to repeat themselves as if the past were coercing the present due to a lack of receptivity to the novel. But we should note two things. Firstly, God wants (intends) an ordered (i.e. repetitious) world at certain levels in order that 'higher' forms may develop. Secondly, God is luring some such repetitions to 'higher' things. Within this system though, Whitehead seems to have radically redefined, perhaps even abandoned, the normal notion of coercion. If Williams' critique is valid, he shows no sign of realising how far-reaching it might prove to be.

Neither Ogden nor Williams offer an acceptable theory of how God acts in the world, responsively and with initiative and particular intention. Both lack any serious attempt on these issues, and so both give an overwhelmingly passive impression.

3 A Parallel Approach From Outside Process Theology

In this final section we will 'dovetail' our Process thinkers into the general theological scene, and so show that the problems highlighted in their accounts are mirrored in less overtly 'metaphysical' discussions. It will be recalled that a major complaint against Ogden and Williams was that they attempted to speak of God's act without reference to any specific intention on God's part for those events which became recognised as his acts. This, we held, was a major fault: it is not possible to speak of action without also speaking of a purpose to

realise a more or less specific aim. We also indicated how this Process view may have arisen from a partiuclar interpretation of Whitehead, or even a repudiation of certain resources available to Process thought, either conscious or unconscious. In this section we will review a major contribution from the USA, and in so doing we will see the same problems emerge without any question of 'correct' or 'incorrect' interpretation of Whitehead.

Gordon Kaufman notes the centrality of an Agent-God in the biblical tradition.[68] He notes the difficulty of conceiving this now that both nature and history are assumed to be explicable by intramundane powers and events.[69] He therefore sees three alternatives: either we assent to the proposition that 'God is dead'; or God must be reconceived in such a way that he is not thought of as Agent; or we must reconsider the notion of 'act' in order that we may predicate action of God.[70] Such a reconceptualisation would have to be "to some extent continuous with ordinary usage".[71] It is this latter course which Kaufman chooses to follow. The language we use must link with both contemporary and biblical usage.

> God himself can be viewed as Agent, one who has intention and purposes that he realises in and through creation; thus his creative, providential, and redemptive activity can be rendered intelligible in fairly straightforward terms, reasonably continuous with biblical language. 72

So how will Kaufman conceive an act?

An act, he say, is "something done or performed, a deed; it is a particular and generally a specific event brought about by an agent".[73]

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68. "On the Meaning of 'Act of God'", reprinted in God the Problem, (Harvard 1972), pp 119 ff; henceforth, Problem.
69. Ibid., pp 122f.
70. Ibid., pp 124f.
71. Ibid., p 125.
72. Ibid. pp 125f.
73. Ibid., pp 125f.

It has a certain unity, though it may be short or long in duration, and need not be completed all at once, but must have some unity and specificity. "It is not mere activity, but activity bound together and given a distinct order and structure by the intention of an agent to realise a goal".[74] This intention is not merely a teleological urge implicit in the structure of something (as in Aristotle), but a deliberately entertained goal.

Acts, he goes on, may be broken down into 'sub-acts'. For example, constructing a bench is an act, while the hammering, sawing, measuring, and the like are sub-acts. Indeed, we might wish to say that hammering one nail home is a sub-act, or even that striking a nail is a sub-act. But there is a limit to such reductions: sub-acts must be considered atomic. We could not regard each inch travelled by the hammer toward the nail as a sub-act. To be regarded as such, the movement must realise some posited objective, however slight or unimpressive, such as striking a nail. We would need also to indicate an 'upper limit' on the act. Building a house might be an act, or even building a new town. He says that several individuals might participate in one act, as in an Act of Congress. It is not the degree of complexity involved in an event which makes us conclude that it is an act: what we need to see in an act is that the constitutent events are ordered and controlled by some definite end posited at the outset (though, presumably, it may be modified). Thus, the 'rise of science' could not be considered an act: it exceeds the 'upper limit'.

An 'act of God' must be what it is because God 'did it', not something that simply happens. This is worthy of applause, if Kaufman can extrapolate it adequately. It is characteristic of an 'act'/event to emerge from past events and to be followed by succeeding ones. Events emerge from contexts.

74. Ibid., p 126.

If the historian or scientist cannot at once locate a cause, he cannot then posit a supernatural intervention. He must continue to look. None of this rules out genuine freedom at the human level, or indeterminacy at the atomic level. But such freedom and indeterminacy always occur within contexts too. So the phrase 'act of God' is problematic, apparently pointing to a cause in the divine will rather than in surrounding events. It may not only be difficult to believe in such an event - it is literally inconceivable given the way we have come to structure our experience of the world.

So how does Kaufman proceed? He first recalls two points: i that acts (master acts) may be broken down into sub-acts; ii that "an act is a deliberate ordering of behaviour toward the realisation of a previously posited end".[75] He goes on to say that the usual interpretation of relatively restricted events (e.g. the Red Sea crossing, the Virgin Birth) as particular acts of God is too simple because it overlooks the significance of the relation of the simple acts (sub-acts) to the master act.

So the expression 'act of God' should be used primarily to designate the master act of God, not the limited events which might at first attract our attention. This master act is the whole course of history. He quotes biblical sources in support of this position.[76] He rightly says that this conception of God's action does not encounter so many of the modern presuppositions 'head-on', for here God's act is not a new event which "rips inexplicably into the fabric of experience....Rather, here God's act is viewed as the source of precisely that overarching order itself".[77]

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75. Problem, p 136.
76. Ibid., p 137.
77. ibid., pp 137f.

So, Kaufman then feels bound to ask, is the 'ordinary' meaning of 'act of God' (referring to particular events) redundant, or has it been so watered down as to be irrelevant? He avoids this negative conclusion thus: i because of our experience and knowledge of the continuity of events we can focus on particular events only within the context of the whole; ii The 'particular' events can now be seen, not as capricious impulses on God's part, but as functions of and subordinate steps towards God's ultimate goal.[78] He lists the major sub-acts: evolution, and Heilsgeschichte, climaxing in Jesus.[79] It is, he suggests, only on the cross that there is a one-to-one correspondence between divine and human activity.[80] For not every event is a sub-act of God: only those events which move creation forward a further step toward the realisation of God's purpose.[81] He admits the austerity of his doctrine.[82]

If Kaufman's formulation is a triumph, then it must be considered a Pyrrhic victory.

There are many ambiguities and problems in Kaufman's account - some of which are picked out for us by David R.Mason in a penetrating critique offered from a Process viewpoint.[83] He spotlights such questions as whether Kaufman takes an act to be equivalent to an event; whether an act is considered determinate and unified by virtue of its completion or the purpose of its agent; that sometimes Kaufman uses language in peculiar ways, as when he speaks of an Act of Congress; that while we are told that an event needs a 'before' and an 'after', this does not seem to apply to God's master act. Mason analyses 'event' from a

78. Ibid., pp 142f.
79. Ibid., p 143.
80. Inid., p 149.
81. Ibid., p 144.
82. Ibid., pp 146f seems to show an internal inconsistency in relation to God's care for individuals.
83. "Can we speculate on how God acts"?, Journal of Religion, Jan. '77, pp 16 ff.

Whiteheadian perspective, noting that an event is an agent in that it both decides for its own aim, and that it acts on other events with the intention that they conform. "Thus an event is an agent that acts both for itself and in other events".[84]

Mason makes some sound points as he continues, but he seems to miss what is perhaps the most crucial criticism that Kaufman calls down upon himself. There is a more fundamental problem in the relation of sub-acts to master act than the epistemological one to which Mason points,[85] and again the missing component is intentionality. When a builder builds a house, he intends to do so. When God 'builds' the history of the cosmos, he intends it - his master act. But what exactly does this intention entail, how general is it - does intention for the master act also imply 'sub-intention' for the sub-acts?

The builder's house will not get built unless he intends to lay foundations, erect walls, place floors and ceilings, put on a roof, fit out the interior. The builder must intend each step of the way as well as the whole (even if he 'sub-contracts' the smaller parts), and he must have the wherewithal to execute his intentions. This question of the sub-acts, and in the analogy of sub-contractors, is vital for exposing Kaufman's weaknesses. Perhaps a further analogy, one more readily complex, might be more helpful.

We may posit a man who intends to build a hospital, or create a university, but who leaves the drawing up of plans for the details to others. Surely this hospital is his act, even though his intention is highly generalised? At first sight this analogy might seem more satisfactory, but its real usefulness is more questionable. While

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84. Ibid., p 30.

85. i.e. it is said that we recognise the sub-act because it is part of the master act, and yet the master act itself is not complete, and will not be until the end of histor

it is true that the one who 'intends' the hospital may not intend every roof tile, still the building is left in the hands of those whom he either trusts or who are responsible to him: the project will proceed within certain parameters. If complete freedom is allowed to the planners and builders he uses then all we can really say is that the benefactor 'funds' a hospital, or more precisely, that he intends a hospital - but not this hospital nor even (and this is the crux) a good hospital, or one with any particular character. If he does have particular characteristics in mind then the master must share his vision with his 'sub-actors' and keep in touch with them throughout the proceedings: there is the sharing of intent, and the reciprocity of contact. All the while there is a rapport between the sub-contractors and the benefactor which is lacking in Kaufman's account of God's relationship to the world, and in particular from his account of God's action.[86] Despite Kaufman's rejoinder it is difficult to see how God's intention can be very different from some sort of Aristotelian teleological notion, with the intention 'built in'.

Kaufman's God seems unable to intend for 'sub-acts', so we are left wondering how those events which are sub-acts differ from those which are not (for he admits that not every event furthers God's plan) in terms of God's intention for it and action upon it. This God seems to rely on coincidence. He intends the world, but it is difficult to come to any idea of how he intends to execute his intention. Does it just happen that way, or does God intend each of the sub-acts, or is it 'built in' from the outset? The latter seems not to be the case, and if

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86. In Kaufman's analogy success depends on both 'master act' and 'sub-act' being attributable to the one agent. However, if our hospital builder takes little interest in details there may be a sense in which the hospital (master act) is his act but no real sense in which the nurses' quarters (sub-act) are his act.

it were it would jeopardise human freedom; the second suggestion would need some sort of mechanism to effect intentions in the closed continuum of cause and effect; the former would expose a God who relies completely on coincidence, who 'crosses his fingers and hopes for the best'.

In another essay Kaufman gives the impression that God's power is more evocative than coercive,[87] implying in that context that God's intentions may be resisted, requiring constantly changing divine contingency plans. But his talk of God's "leading" seems set on a slender base. Frankly, it seems that Kaufman lays himself open to the charge of being a modern 'deist'.[88] God is utterly transcendent, setting the world off on course at creation and then standing back to let it run. Perhaps the kindest thing which can be said about him is that he uses the language of action rather more loosely than is usual. We might have to allow this shift if there proves to be no better way, but it is a desperate move and a last resort, sacrificing something central to the tradition. It is a move, we will see, which is unnecessary. But Ogden and Williams may run the risk of falling under the same charge. It is certainly true that their God is more active - in allowing every new moment to come to be, in prehending the world through the consequent nature - but it is the activity and involvement of the monarch who speaks to the parliament and then waits for reports, who is 'in at the outset' but then seems to let things run. This God is only active in perpetuating the process, not actively guiding it with specific intention - a Deist Deity who 'oils the works' more often than most such gods, but little else may be said in its favour. The caricature makes the point, and warns of 'Process Deism'!

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87. "God and Evil", reprinted in God the Problem, pp 171 ff; this reference, p 198.

88. I use this term in the 'popular' sense, to refer to the God who is 'up there' and who makes the world like some clockwork mechanism and then allows it to run with minimum interference.

Throughout this chapter we have been keen to underline what we perceive as common faults. The notion of action must involve that of specific intention for specific outcomes; and Whiteheadians may, if they choose, affirm this. Ogden and Williams seem not to do so, or at least, not to give it its proper prominence in their work. Allied to this is that there must be something in an 'act of God' which is specially God's, which marks it off from other events which we observe. As Kaufman says, an act of God would not have been the same if God was not in some way its Agent. Because of a lack of specific intention, Ogden and Williams are also unable to meet this criterion. This failure is a Process version of a not uncommon failing. The less overtly 'cosmological' approach of Kaufman also seems bound to fail because it does not, cannot, affirm this special relation of God to his individual acts. It may also be significant that both Ogden and Kaufman set about a fairly drastic redefinition of action, away from ordinary usage, in their desperation. All those reviewed are at least determined though not to violate that understanding of the causal continuum which is an ineluctable part of our understanding of the world.

The biblical theologians of two or three decades ago told us that the bible insisted on the primacy of God's action. They drew up the Heilsgeschichte. But they failed to recover a true approximation to the biblical picture (I say 'approximation' to concede that we are doomed to revise the biblical accounts in some way): they had compiled a list of events in which God was specially active, leaving much of the bible, and the ensuing history, to more mundane explanation. But the bible in fact seems to hold that God is specially related to every event, not just to some here and there. The challenge issued to

us is therefore the one which has emerged through this thesis - to frame a theory of how God is specially and specifically related to every event, while some express his character and further his purpose and some do not. This must involve, to preserve our integrity as 'moderns', a staying within the 'seamless robe of cause and effect', while at the same time using the concept of action in such a way that all its necessary components find a place - a use more or less continuous with our ordinary usage.[89] Though we established earlier that this task seemed possible in a Whiteheadian framework, none of the Process Theologians so far reviewed have succeeded. But our search is not over.

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89. I do not wish to become embroiled in the question of whether the concept of 'action' is used strictly literally of God (as in Ian T. Ramsey, Models for Divine Activity (SCM 1973), p 61) or more or less analogically. Certainly Whitehead's whole system is founded upon a basic analogy from human experience, so that his language about God is analogical. A very good discussion of this problem and the question of religious language in general vis-a-vis Whitehead is found in Risk and Rhetoric in Religion by Lyman T. Lundeen (Fortress 1972). See especially pp 13-17, 35f, 97-102. 261-263.

CHAPTER SEVEN

A SECOND POSSIBLE INTERPRETATION - COBB AND GRIFFIN

In this chapter we will examine the work of the Claremont theologians John B. Cobb Jr and David Ray Griffin. We will see that, despite certain imperfections, their thoughts on divine action are more adequate than those previously reviewed. As in the case of Ogden, Cobb and Griffin discuss the problem largely in the context of Christology, so that that area will dictate many of the illustrations used.

It is as well to note early on the special relationship which exists between Cobb and Griffin. Both teach at the same institution, and they are close friends and colleagues. Griffin was at one time Cobb's pupil, and they have co-authored an introduction to Process Theology.[1] Obviously then, their working relationship is close and it would be unusual if this were not mirrored in some way in their writing and thought.

1 John Cobb

Cobb's output is voluminous,[2] and there are many places in which he discusses (directly or indirectly) our problem. We will have to confine our study to the most significant sources. Much of his Christian Natural Theology, and what he says in it with regard to God's action, has already

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1. Process Theology: an introductory exposition.
2. See the bibliography in John Cobb's Theology in Process, ed T.T. Altizer and David Ray Griffin (Westminster 1977) pp 193 ff.

been treated in our earlier discussions of Whitehead's interpreters, so that we will not pay specific attention to that book here. Instead, our three main sources will be God and the World,[3] "A Whiteheadian Christology",[4] and his full-scale Christology Christ in a Pluralistic Age.[5] After Christian Natural Theology Cobb writes in less philosophical (or rather in less technically Whiteheadian), more theological terms,as will be clear from the ensuing account.

To preface Cobb's treatment of divine activity we might note a significant feature of Cobb's thought which appears in some Process thinkers and recurs throughout Cobb and Griffin. Cobb pleads that we must "allow what appeared in Jesus to give meaning and content to the Reality we thereby name".[6] This is an important theological strand in the argument which follows. We have already seen some of the philosophical arguments for the initial aim and its persuasive force. Here, though, we have the nearest we get to an argument from revelation. Jesus, and not any alien metaphysical concept, must dominate our doctrine of God.

He maintains this 'theological' function of Jesus in his more recent Christology:

> If it is in Jesus that we perceive what God's immanence is and does, then it is from Jesus that we should learn what God is like. We can and must reverse the long history of retaining ideas of God uncongenial to what is apparent in Jesus....There are ontological questions about God that cannot be decided by studying Jesus. But the way that God relates to the world should be visible in Jesus. If so, then God is not one who forces and compels but one who lures and persuades. 7

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3. (Westminster 1969), henceforth World.
4. In Process Philosophy and Christian Thought, ed D. Brown, R.E. James Jr, and G. Reeves (Bobbs-Merrill 1971). Henceforth, Thought.
5. (Westminster 1975), henceforth Pluralistic.
6. World, p 37. He goes on (p38) to quote Bonhoeffer with approval that "God allows himself to be edged out of the world and on to the cross. God is weak and powerless in the world".
7. Pluralistic, p 168. Griffin echoes the point (Process Christology, Westminster 1973 pp 164, 223). So does Pittenger, more poignantly (Christology Reconsidered, SCM 1970, p 108).

While this admission might be welcome from those who fear that, for Process thinkers, metaphysical considerations take precedence over any sort of 'revelation' in Scripture or the 'Christ-event', it must be said that Cobb's avowal needs close scrutiny. It seems convenient, for instance, that that reality which Jesus witnesses to requires so little amendment to Whiteheadian structures. Whitehead himself was fond of talking about the "Galilean vision" seen in Jesus,[8] yet this "vision" was very idealistic and perhaps bore no close relationship to the Jesus of the New Testament. Cobb may be perpetuating this 'reading in' of Process categories into traditional theological concepts and Scripture itself. The question of balance between the Process 'system' and scriptural imperatives will recur in our final chapter.

In God and the World Cobb wishes to speak of God as the "One who Calls", and this designation refers directly to God as Agent.[9] Thus Cobb puts some emphasis on the future into which we are called, and its relation to the present.[10] So Cobb argues first that it is possible to identify a "Call forward" as a distinctive element in our experience;[11] and then that we might say that there is a 'something' which calls:[12] and finally that the 'something' is God.[13]

Cobb sees this 'call forward' in various aspects of experience: in the "call to expose our received and established convictions to evernew criticism and evidence", in "the power of disinterested concern for other

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8. Process, pp 519-521 (quoted in World, p 39). Wolfhart Pannenberg, who offers an excellent critique of Cobb's work in John Cobb's Theology in Process with an essay entitled "A Liberal Logos Christology", makes a similar point to this. He questions the notion of love found in Whitehead (p 135), contrasts Whitehead's expression "kingdom of Heaven" with its New Testament equivalent (pp 138f), and considers that Cobb's thought relies too heavily on Whitehead's (p 138).

9. The account of the 'call' is reminiscent of Heidegger's account of 'Conscience as Call': Being and Time (SCM, 1962), pp 317 ff.

10. World is where Cobb first makes this emphasis. Pannenberg questions the ontological status of the future in a Whiteheadian framework, "A Liberal Logos Christology", pp 136f.

11. World, pp 46-49.

12. Ibid., pp 50-56.

13. Ibid., pp 57 ff.

persons", in pyschologists' recent tendency "to postulate some tendency to growth" and a "pressure toward fuller and fuller Being" (Maslow).[14] Cobb implicitly anticipates suggestions that such an inner upward impulse may be culturally conditioned or projected by the individual by going on to claim that it is possible to demonstrate that there is something which calls. The ideal which entices us is perceived as 'given' and coming from beyond the self.[15] The process is often unconscious, not necessarily intellectual or even voluntary. Clearly this second stage of the argument would arouse more debate than the first. Whitehead is introduced at this stage as explaining "the immediately relevant possibility we confront consciously and unconsciously in each moment calling us forward".[16] Thus Cobb clearly identifies the call forward with the initial aim. The final step is to identify this something which calls with God. He writes "My own view.... is that what calls us forward has the unity and actuality as well as the worthiness of worship and commitment which warrants our use of the word 'God'".[17]

Within the Process understanding of the initial aim, this argument begins to sound like an argument from Providence to God, or even an argument for the existence of God from a universal human experience of his working in their lives. As such, the weight which the theory of the initial aim is asked to bear in such an argument is illuminating, and perhaps points to its fundamental position in the whole system. As it stands, no doubt, this form of the argument may be exposed to searching questions - about the Call, its content and source. The argument 'from below' is, however, more convincing when

14. Ibid., p 47, pp 48-9.
15. Ibid., p 51.
16. Ibid., p 54.
17. Ibid., p 57.

linked with the metaphysical argument 'from above' which explicates God's relationship to the world and adumbrates the theory of the initial aim in that context. In God and the World Cobb goes on to do that in the following chapter. That Cobb should start with this notion does suggest that he is more likely to present us with an 'active' account of divine action.

Cobb asserts that the Call is given to the whole of nature, not only to man,[18] but"Just what this experience will be can never be described in general, for it is always radically individual, suited only to that person in that time and place".[19] This particularity of the call at once distances Cobb from Ogden and Williams: for each event in the world, God has particular intention. Yet in a way reminiscent of Ogden, Cobb states how we understand God's relation to specific events - "by the way God constitutes himself he calls us to be what we can be and are not".[20] But Cobb goes on to say that God constitutes himself so as to provide every novel occasion with an initial aim in relation to which it becomes. We may again be a little worried at the seemingly passive nature of the divine 'influence': "God influences the becoming occasion by being what he is".[21] But it will become clear that while Cobb and Ogden sometimes agree verbally, or terminologically, they mean something rather different when they speak of God's self-constitution. It may be characterised as the difference between a 'private' and a 'public' self-constitution, between internal and external acts.

Also in God and the World Cobb discusses the power of God.[22] Power is too often understood as if measured by the incapacity to

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18. Ibid., p 53.
19. Ibid., p 55. What Whitehead missed says Cobb, is that the Call is often 'terrible' to receive. (p 56).
20. Ibid., p 81.
21. Ibid., p 82.
22. Ibid., pp 87-90.

resist on the part of that on which it is wielded, he complains. Divine omnipotence is thus often taken to imply that if God is all powerful, nothing else has any power. Even if this were coherent, it would slander God's moral character by blaming him unequivocally for all evil. But, in fact, it is not a coherent notion at all, for it ends up depriving God of real power: where there is no competing power, omnipotence means little, and if God is all-powerful then there is no competition.[23] The power that 'counts' is the power to influence the exercise of power by others. The use of force is a last resort which shows one's total powerlessness in all ways that matter; only persuasion is power capable of worthwhile result. Threat may still play some part here, but it is at most a subordinate role.The omnipotence of God should not mean that he has a monopoly, but that he exercises the optimum persuasive power in relation to whatever is.

From God and the World we may list four pertinent points. i Cobb states the epistemological significance of Jesus, and ii explains clearly the notion of power he sees 'revealed' in Jesus; both of these points must receive some qualification by a reservation which applies especially to i, i.e. iii that Cobb may too quickly read Whiteheadian content into traditional terms and concepts, a move the more difficult to detect because of the equivalence, prima facie, of terminology - in this he shares the habit of many process theologians, and perhaps the hazard of all contemporary theology per se! Finally, iv he gives a clear statement of the divine action in the form of God as the One who Calls.

In "A Whiteheadian Christology" Cobb sought to outline his approach

23. See our pp37f,especially MacMurray quotation at note 96.

to the classical Christological problem. The 'classical' approach tried to express Jesus' distinctiveness in terms of substances - but substances (says Cobb) are spatial concepts, and two or more cannot occupy the same space.[24] Thus for God to be active and present in Jesus would mean that some aspect of what would otherwise have been the human Jesus was replaced by God. Jesus' "I" was thought of as divine, not human.[25] We might judge that Cobb is guilty of caricature or distortion, misunderstanding or anachronism. That is to say that Cobb anachronistically reads back the modern-day concept of 'substance' (with its static and spatial overtones, implying a mutual exclusivity of substances) into classical theological texts. It will not do to label 'substance' as purely spatial or physical and then suggest that we have exhausted, or even summarised, its meaning, its use and its limitations.[26]

In Whitehead's conceptuality, says Cobb, any difficulty with the notion of substance is overcome:

> Let us consider the mode of presence of one actual entity in another. For convenience we can take as our example two successive occasions of human experience, A and B. A is present in B. This does not mean, of course, that B is less an independent entity than was A. A has also in its moment of immediacy incorporated past entities within itself without sacrifice of its unique and self-determining identity. The presence of A in B does not conflict with the subjective unity and actuality of B. No aspect of B's own being is displaced by A's presence....A is genuinely... present in B, and B would not be what it is apart from this presence..... B does not first exist and then incorporate A; rather this incorporation is constitutive of B's coming into existence. 27

God is prehended by all occasions, and the mode of presence of one occasion in another is as prehended datum. So if God is present in all occasions, what is distinctive about Jesus (and we may say, with regard

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24. Thought, p 384.
25. Ibid., p 384.
26. See J. Macquarrie, "The Chalcedonian Definition", Expository Times, Vol.91 No.3.(December 1979), pp 68-72. See also J.N.D. Kelly,Early Christian Doctrines, (A & C Black, 1968 4th edition, p 114).The concepts of 'substance','Nature', etc. are discussed at length in G.C.Stead,Divine Substance (OUP,1977),G.L.Prestige, God and Patristic Thought(SPCK 1952), R.V. Sellers, The Council of Chalcedon (SPCK, 1961).
27. Thought, p 384.

to our interest, special acts of God in general)? As we shall see, Cobb answers this question in a subtly different way in "A Whiteheadian Christology" from Christ in a Pluralistic Age.

Though the derivation of the initial aim from God is common to all occasions, diversity is introduced in three ways.

> First, God's aim for each occasion differs. In this sense God's presence in every occasion is concretely unique and there is no specifiable limit to the diversity of aims or to the importance of what is distinctive in particular cases. Second, the prehensive objectification of God need not be restricted to the initial aim. Third, the degree to which God's aim for an occasion is realised in that occasion's self-actualisation differs. 28

Here, in vivid contrast to the writing of Ogden and Williams, we see a clear statement of specificity of aim.

In Christ in a Pluralistic Age Cobb attempts a full-scale Christology of a comprehensive scope. All through human life and nature, there is a process of creative transformation at work in which "our imagination and life orientation can be transformed by lucidity of vision and openness to what we see".[29] Christ is not a part of that process, he asserts, Christ is that process. "Christ transforms the world by persuading it to relevant novelty".[30] This process of creative transformation is traced in the history of art, and theology.

Cobb's argument crucially depends on his interrelation of 'Christ', 'Jesus' and 'Logos'. "In Christian Tradition", he writes, "the transcendent reality that in its incarnate form is named Christ

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28. Thought, pp 387f. Griffin develops the first and third points.
29. Pluralistic, p 21.
30. Ibid., p 186.

is called the Logos". He goes on,

> The Logos is the cosmic principle of order, the ground of meaning, and the source of purpose. Whitehead has called this transcendent source of the aim at the new the principle of concretion, the principle of limitation, the organ of novelty, the lure of feeling, the eternal urge of desire, the divine Eros, and God in his Primordial Nature. 31

Thus the Logos is the transcendent divine urge for creative transformation; Christ is the name given to <u>any</u> incarnation of this creative transformation in the world; and Jesus is Christ insofar as he is an exemplary and perhaps unique incarnation of the Logos. The term 'Christ' then, does not refer to Jesus as such, but to Jesus in a particular way, that is as an incarnation of the divine. Though this Logos is in a sense changeless, this does not preclude specificity of initial aim.

> The Logos in its transcendence is timeless and infinite, but in its incarnation or immanence it is always a specific force for just that creative transformation which is possible and optimal in each situation....Similarly it is not every not yet, but a particular not yet that embodies itself in imaginative anticipation....The Logos is, therefore, not simply the sum of random purposes, anticipations, and novelties of experience. It is the ordered givenness of relevant potentiality. 32
> Those possibilities are ordered in relevance to the particularity of each situation. 33

Cobb goes on, "To whatever extent the new aim is successful, to that extent there is creative transformation, This creative transformation is Christ. Christ is thus the immanence or incarnation of the Logos in the world...."[34] In this way Cobb is able to speak of God's actualisation of particular intentions in the world: wherever his intention is actualised, we would say, that is God's act, or as Cobb would say (more obliquely perhaps), there is creative transformation.

Two points must be made immediately in criticism of Cobb's

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31. <u>Ibid.</u>, p 71.
32. <u>Ibid.</u>, pp 72, 75.
33. <u>Ibid.</u>, p 87.
34. <u>Ibid.</u>, p 76.

position. Firstly, it does seem that Cobb has used the terms 'Logos' and 'Christ' in a rather arbitrary way. Again he may be guilty of reading Whiteheadian content into traditional terminology. While Cobb's argument demonstrates the importance of the principle of creative transformation, his identification of this principle with the Logos may be too readily made. He may be suspected of seeking theological respectability by using theologically respectable terms, even if he does so in a quite new way.[35] Similarly, his use of 'Christ' bears no particularly close relationship to the scriptural and historical understanding of the term.

Secondly, Cobb plays down the possibility of divine action through nature, even though he shows himself able to envisage the Logos as immanent in all things as "their fundamental impulse toward actualisation".[36] He may underestimate nature's capacity to actualise novelty, though this actualisation would not be realised independently of God. He has allowed insufficiently for God's offering to natural events an aim at relevant novelty rather than simple reenactment. In the next chapter we shall attempt to carve out a theory of God's special acts in nature by recourse to the notion that God can provide relevant and appropriate lures to natural events, which are nevertheless novel: Cobb seems unwilling to concede such a possibility. Indeed his formulation here has another unfavourable implication for theodicy (also a subject of our next chapter). If God's aim for natural events is reenactment then he is left responsible for whatever happens, including natural evil. He writes that "In simple events ((the Logos)) is the centre or principle in terms of which the event is actualised, and in these instances there is little between the

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35. Pannenberg makes a similar point about Cobb's 'Logos', op cit pp 134f.
36. Pluralistic, p 76.

divine impulses and the final actualisation....the aim in each moment is at little more than repetition...." [37]

Despite these two reservations, it is already clear that Cobb offers a more satisfactory account of divine action than we found in our previous two process theologians. A closer look at Cobb's account of God's greatest 'special act' will further open up our understanding of his position. We must look to more of the details of his Christology.

Cobb conceives Jesus' uniqueness in terms of the unique structure of his existence. He outlines the possibility of different 'structures of existence' for humans.[38] The term 'man' refers to creatures with certain common traits, but often very different psychic lives. Existentialism, says Cobb, is in error in projecting the structure of existence common in modern western culture on to all mankind. This is a rather dangerous generalisation, of course, for it is not clear that existentialists do claim that there is a static and universal structure of human existence - indeed many of them would contest this.

For Cobb Jesus was 'fully human', that is, he shared in certain common and elementary ways with all men. This means that the occasions constituting Jesus as a living person were not in any sense the actual entities we call God. On the other hand, that does not mean that God's presence in Jesus did not play a structural role in

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37. Ibid., p 76. A third difficulty may be the way that Christ, as creative transformation, is both an element in the process and the process itself.

38. This is the subject of The Structure of Christian Existence, Lutterworth 1968.

the occasions constituting his personal life which it has played nowhere else. Jesus' humanity (as represented by past actual occasions) and divinity are objectively present in the subject Jesus at any given moment: the unified subject in his immediacy is simply 'Jesus', with his structure of existence constituted in some sense by God.

In the "Axial" period in Israel man came to know himself as an "I" who was no longer fundamentally a part of a species or tribe; he was an "I" who bore responsibility for his own decisions. This prophetic "I" was formed in relation to the divine "I", and the prophet was actually aware of the tension between his "I" and God's. The "I" of Jesus, says Cobb, rather than standing over against God, identified its authority with God.[39] The "I" of Jesus neither merged with the divine, nor was it replaced by the divine: it retained its autonomous existence but in such a way as to identify its perceptions with God's own.

B may prehend A so that the source of the eternal objects involved (God) is of no importance - in general, this is the usual mode of human prehension of God. But B may prehend A so that it is very important for B's subjective form that it is A which is prehended. Or again, both the specific content and its source may be important to B.[40]

In general, men embody the first mode. The initial aim is derived from God, but (though it is vital) that it comes from God plays a small part in the subjective form of the prehender. But for some, that God is the source of their urge plays a crucial role in their experience. For the prophets the dual importance of source

39. Thought, pp 391 ff.
40. Ibid., p 392.

and content functioned. But Cobb here thinks that Jesus' sensing of the source of the aim was most keenly felt. Jesus' prehension of God was not experienced by Jesus as information about God, but as God's presence in him. This prehension of God constituted in Jesus the centre from which everything else in his psychic life was integrated so that, at least in some decisive moments of his life, he perceived the world (his own past and future, his emotions and reason) in terms of God's presence in him. The "I" of Jesus was constituted by his prehension of God, and thus Jesus' structure of existence is (so far as we know) unique.[41]

In Christ in a Pluralistic Age also Cobb seeks to explicate Jesus' relation to God in terms of the structure of his existence. It is rather interesting that, while this account is substantially the same as in the earlier essay, he seems to have developed certain points and dropped others. For instance, the notion of incarnation is more prominent now, though this may be explained by the differing approach of the new book. The most significant difference concerns a point which he laboured in the essay. In the earlier work he distinguishes sharply between the content of the aim and the source. In the earlier essay Cobb plays down the importance of prehending the specificity of the aim, laying stress on more general components of the data.[42] The source of Jesus' aim, or rather his appreciation of the source and identification with it, is the truly important thing. But we have already seen that for an act to be considered God's act he must have specific aim for it, and that that aim must be actualised to a large extent. So that the content of the aim does matter if we wish to claim that Jesus is an

41. Ibid., p 393.
42. Ibid., p 393.

act of God, and the actualisation of that aim matters also. While the recognition of the source of the aim should not be considered insignificant (it increases the chance of the aim being actualised in most cases), the specific outcome is nevertheless vital. Cobb has shown that he has the conceptual apparatus for making this statement, indeed its not that he refuses to make it in "A Whiteheadian Christology" - instead he refuses to give it its proper prominence. In Christ in a Pluralistic Age the position has changed so that content and source are given more equal prominence.[43]

"In the fullest incarnation of the Logos" says Cobb, "its presence must constitute not only a necessary aspect of existence but the self as such".[44] This is how he begins his later effort to show the distinction between the Logos' presence in Jesus compared to its presence in all events. "In Jesus there was a distinctive incarnation because his very selfhood was constituted by the Logos".[45]

The fleeting experience of the Christian life is the one recorded by St Paul, the experience of the presence of Christ co-constituting his "I". The "I" is still commonly constituted by conformation to the past so that new possibilities presented by the Logos are still experienced as challenging from without, being felt to some extent as help and to some extent as threat. Even when a person conforms to the Logos to a considerable degree, the Logos is

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43. Griffin's intervening critique may have been a factor (Christology, pp 227 ff). In speaking of the content of the aim in the essay it may be helpful to note that Cobb seems to have a rather propositional idea of the aim's content here, one might almost say a Verbal idea of it. This is reinforced by his distinguishing Jesus' prehension as not primarily containing information (pp 393 ff). The whole verbal model is shown also in the use of the metaphor of calling in God and the World. Perhaps this explains why Cobb does not seek God's action in nature; his approach may be too anthropomorphic.

44. Pluralistic, p 138.

45. Ibid., p 139.

still felt as a force other than the self.[46]

For Jesus (in the language of the earlier essay), his prehension of God constituted his "I"; or (in the language of Christ in a Pluralistic Age) the logos shared in constituting his selfhood, that is, the Logos is identical with the centre or principle by which other elements in experience were ordered. Cobb then, has moved, with many other Christologies of more recent times, away from an account centred on the self-consciousness of Jesus. But if anything, he has moved from a more 'existential' account to a more 'ontological' one.

Cobb can still use the language of divine self-constitution: we know "in naming the Logos Christ, that the divine has constituted itself toward the world once and for all as love".[47] This he refers to as an act of God.

Cobb has told us that the initial aim differs according to individuals and their circumstances. This allows us to speak of God's intention, and therefore (subject to that intention's actualisation) of his action. Thus we are able, not only to proclaim Jesus as a special act of God, but to understand how that act relates to God himself - how God has played an active and indispensable part in making that event what it was.[48]

The very real epistemological question has been pointed out

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46. This tension, and the relation between prophetic and Christian existence,is treated extensively in The Structure of Christian Existence, chs 9 & 10.

47. Pluralistic, p 85.

48. We may be left wondering whether we can push the question of specificity of aim a stage further and ask whether Jesus received only 'lures to be fully human' or a unique lure 'to be Christ': such a question would find echoes in much liberal Christology of a non-Process kind. Christ': such a question would find echoes in much liberal Christology of a non-Process kind. Pittenger, e.g., would favour the former; Cobb seems to come down for the latter.(Thought, p 397; Pluralistic, p 172).

by Lewis Ford - how can we know the inner psychic structure of anyone else, let alone a man who lived two thousand years ago?[49] Cobb can merely say that the attribution of such a structure to Jesus seems appropriate to the style and content of his teaching, and to the identification of his own ministry with the work of God.[50] All this is not to say that the structure of Jesus' existence here assumed stays constant. Substantialists would be commited to such a view while he is not, says Cobb. Those in whom new structures appear commonly live much of their lives in the old structure from which the new emerges. We may assume that Jesus' distinctive structure did not characterise his infancy or all his sleeping and waking states.[51]

Ford's critique though, would prove a 'thorn in the flesh' for any Christological approach which sought to assert something 'objectively' about Jesus. But it seems to hit the early Cobb particularly hard because of all the stress on Jesus' awareness of the source of the aim, or in more theological terms, his Messianic self-consciousness. Pannenberg suggests that Cobb concentrate more on the 'history' of Jesus and less on his (conscious) teaching.[52] There seems to be a shift in his thought in Christ in a Pluralistic Age, as we have mentioned, in that Cobb speaks less of Jesus' self-awareness and authority, though these elements are not totally lacking. The position of Griffin seems to make a further shift: he speaks more of the church's or evangelists' picture of Jesus than of Jesus' own understanding of himself. Again this further shift is perhaps

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49. Lure, p 67.
50. Pluralistic, p 141.
51. Ibid., pp 141f; Cobb cites the wilderness, temptations, Gethsemane, and the cry of dereliction, to further underline his point.
52. "A Liberal Logos Christology", p 142.

characteristic of more recent Christology.[53]

Cobb is at pains to show that this full incarnation of the Logos does not destroy Jesus' humanity - just the contrary in fact. Jesus represents the ideal of humanity;[54] his humanity is not depersonalised but enriched and completed.[55] Neither do we need to play down the divine initiative: God has the initiative in every occasion through the offering of the initial aim.[56] Cobb goes to some length in attempting to show that his formulation capture the intentions of the early fathers and their creeds,[57] seeing himself as offering the perfect compromise between the Antiochene and Alexandrian schools.[58] However, we might wonder if this is really the case, especially bearing in mind Cobb's disdainful suggestion that Chalcedon has tended to be interpreted in an Alexandrian, not to mention Apollinarian sense. Yet Griffin reminds us that for Whitehead, the person is the psyche[59] not the total human organism. This causes some concern then, for it looks more as if Cobb himself offers an Apollinarian Christology in which the Logos constitutes Jesus' psyche, and the 'flesh' is human. However, these remarks on Cobb's Christological position takes us far beyond the legitimate concerns of this study. It is time to summarise our judgement on Cobb's work.

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53. Cobb admits that we have no a priori basis for deciding whether others have participated in Jesus' structure. So far as we know Jesus is unique; this distinctiveness may be termed Christ; Christ is the incarnation of the Logos. Cobb, unlike Ogden, seems to believe it necessary for us to be able to say in principle that such a distinctive incarnation is possible, and that it alone will substantiate claims about Jesus as the Christ.

54. Thought, p 396; cf Pittenger, The Word Incarnate (Nisbet 1959) pp 128 ff,167f,189,284,285

55. Pluralistic, p 172.

56. Ibid., p 172. cf Peter Hamilton in Thought, p 372, and in his Living God and the Modern World (Boston 1967), where he talks of the continuing divine initiative through the initial aim as 'prevenient'; by significant contrast, Ogden snubs the attribution of initiative to God, in Thought, pp 113f.

57. Pluralistic chs 9 & 10.

58. Ibid., pp 163 ff.

59. Christology, p 228.

Such a judgement may be given concisely. Despite reservations over certain developments in Cobb's position, certain emphases which seem to require redress, certain flawed steps in the argument as it develops, there can be no doubt that his position as a whole i vindicates the sort of interpretations offered of Whitehead by the present writer in chapters four and five, and the criticism given of the writers in chapter six, and ii provides, as such, a more satisfactory resource for the construction of a doctrine of God's action in the world - which will be pursued positively in the next chapter. Again, to welcome Cobb's contribution is not to welcome it uncritically, nor to ignore some basic and wide-ranging weaknesses. Pannenberg's critique exposes these extremely successfully, as Cobb himself acknowledges.[60] For our purposes, however, Cobb can be cautiously hailed as offering a fruitful interpretation of Whitehead's thought. His pupil, friend and colleague, David Griffin, develops this line of approach still further.

2 David Griffin

In an essay written as early as 1967,[61] Griffin urges us to focus our attention on Ogden's Christology, and specifically, he bids us consider the 'objective' side of that Christology - i.e. how Jesus is God's decisive act. Like us, in our previous chapter, he notes Ogden's two senses of 'act' - an expression of the instrumentality of the body, or the act of self-constitution. In Ogden's view, writes

60. "Response to Pannenberg", John Cobb's Theology in Process, p 185.
61. "Schubert Ogden's Christology and the Possibilities of Process Philosophy", first published in The Christian Scholar, reprinted in Thought, pp 347-361.

Griffin, any event has the possibility of becoming a special act of God since every event expresses God's being and action.

For Ogden, a person's special act is one which reveals or represents his inner being to another person. The emphasis tends to be placed on the reception of the act by another. In Griffin's usage of 'special act' the emphasis is on the causal relation between the inner being of the person and the nature of the outer act. Rather than 'reveal', 'express' is felt to capture the proper meaning more fully. Ogden implies an equation between a special act and a revelation, Griffin implies a distinction. For Griffin a special act is only potentially revelatory. A revelation has both subjective and objective aspects, the 'special act' being the objective pole.

He goes on: "The point I am making is that for him ((Ogden)) the 'specialness' of the special act is entirely a function of someone other than the person whose special act it is".[62] He gives an example. Jones is a generally unselfish person. In the car park he allows someone to take the last space, and an onlooker concludes from this that Jones is unselfish. However, supposing he only allows the last space to another because his engine stalled? The deduction of the onlooker may still be right, insofar as he has reached a truthful conclusion; but he would not be right insofar as he deduced it from this event. For an action to be our 'special action' it requires more than (a) it is thought to be so by someone else, and (b) the trait attributed to us describes us fairly accurately. Its most essential point is that it really does express our inner being

62. Thought, p 353.

more than most of our actions do. "For an event to be a special act of God, the specialness of it would have to be partially a function of God...."[63]

He deals with the whole subject in rather more detail in his Process Christology.[64] The context of the reconstruction there attempted is the inadequacy of the twentieth century's leading approaches. He seeks, in the critiques which occupy the first half of the book, to illustrate the problem of making the idea of Jesus as God's self-revelation intelligible. Barth is not considered, on the ground that he held such an article of faith was not intelligible - it cannot be brought into harmony with our other thought. But Tillich, H. Richard Niebuhr and Bultmann are weighed in the balance and found wanting, as is the ancestor of so much modern theology, Schleiermacher. Griffin's rejection of Schleiermacher is the more interesting in the light of their final approximation.[65]

According to Griffin's own assessment, his position is closest to Schleiermacher's. For him, God was formally present in Jesus as in all men, that is, insofar as all feel absolute dependence. To ascribe to Christ an all-powerful God-consciousness is to attribute an existence of God in him. But God is present objectively, that is, not personally but as apprehended. "God is incarnate in that his causal influence is felt".[66] This God-consciousness is the source of all Jesus' activity. Yet Schleiermacher fails to preserve

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63. Ibid., p 354.

64. Westminster, 1973; henceforth Christology.

65. A criticism of Tillich may also have application to Ogden: "Unless there was something about Jesus himself, independantly of my receiving him as God's revelation that makes it appropriate that I have experienced him as revelatory, the basis for my continuing to be a Christian is undercut. If it is totally my subjective response that constitutes Jesus as a 'revelation of God' then all events are equally qualified to serve as the 'objective' side of revelations of deity" (p 42; cf Thought, pp 352 ff; also Pittenger, Christology Reconsidered, p 145).

66. Ibid., p 122.

the full humanity of Jesus. Sin, says Schleiermacher, is inevitable. But Jesus is somehow not prone to the same 'contextual' influences which afflict and tempt us. Not only did Jesus not sin, he could not have sinned. He avoids Pelagianism only at the cost of Docetism, comments Griffin. The problem with Scheiermacher, as Griffin sees it, is that there is only one variable in his Christological account. The way God is present in Jesus is equated with the strength of the God-consciousness, and that in turn with sinlessness: all Christologies seek to affirm some sort of perfection of Jesus, and Schleiermacher seeks to do this in terms of perfect sinlessness. With only one variable, it is driven for all it is worth - sinlessness becoming the impossibility of sin. It is an all too tempting step for Schleiermacher to take to cement his Christology. But life is easier, says Griffin, if we have two variables in our account. Schleiermacher has only the mode of divine presence; we need also to speak of the content of that presence. Like the major theological tradition, Schleiermacher made no attempt to discriminate between God's essence and his causality: if this were done, then one could say that some of the acts of God's actuality better express his essence than others.[67]

Griffin considers it imperative that an adequate Christology say how God is present in Jesus, and it needs to distinguish between Jesus and others in terms of the content of the objective presence. All this must be done without 'special acts' breaking the chain of causation.[68]

Discussing the application of Whitehead's thought to these

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67. Ibid., p 133, cf p 183.

68. Here he echoes a concern which we expressed in our second chapter.

problems, Griffin gives us clear statements of the specificity of the ideal aim as part of the initial datum.

> ....the occasion has the power either to actualise the highest aim presented by God, or to choose some other aim which is a real possibility for it....the occasion has, within the datum of its prehension of God, a gradation of possibilities. At the top (one could say) is the ideal aim toward which God is luring it. But these are also lesser possibilities associated with it, and one of these can be chosen in its process of self-creation. The occasion finally decides its own ideal of itself toward which it aims....The initial aim given to man by God contains a hierarchy of possibilities....Man can reject the highest aim toward which God is luring him in favour of a slightly lower one; he can even choose a much lower one. 69

Griffin adds his voice to the demand that God's power must be conceived as persuasive rather than coercive, but his argument follows different lines from Cobb's. Within Whitehead's framework, he explains, coercive power is the kind that one corpuscular society has over another - such as the power that one body has over another when an arm is twisted. That is a secondary derivative type of power presupposing persuasion, the primary type of power exerted by one actual occasion upon another. The arm cells are persuaded by the brain to exert the twisting action. God is an actual entity, or a succession of actual entities, so his power is persuasive. He never completely determines an event external to himself.[70]

The most appropriate analogy, for Griffin as for Ogden, for the elucidation of God's action is the human self. The mind gives 'initial aims' to the brain's cells; the mind is the monarch of the monarchial society which is a human being, but it is no tyrant. A person's acts in the primary sense are the psyche's acts of

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69. Ibid., p 175, cf p 216.
70. Ibid., p 187, cf p 208.

self-constitution in each moment. These include responses to all impulses from the body and its own past, and contain decisions for the future. Bodily acts are acts of the person in a secondary sense - they are that person's insofar as they result from the aims for his body which are elements of his acts of self-constitution. Every act in the primary sense is structurally the same. "The mind's action in relation to the body is formally always the same".[71] But when speaking of secondary type actions there is obviously great diversity. Some external actions reflect character or purpose more than others.[72]

In the earlier essay Griffin formally listed two considerations necessary for our contemplation in regard to special acts.[73] Now they have expanded to three, though the 'new' one in the list was always implicit in the other essay. We need to bear in mind: i The type of action. Actions have varying contents, and the content of some is more suited to expressing character than others. ii Intentionality. Intention must be expressed in such an act - "For an external act to be a 'special act' of a person it must follow causally from an intention (an aim for his body) which reflects the person's basic character and purpose".[74] iii Actualisation. The action must conform to the aim for it to a high degree.

Jones is again called in to illustrate by giving up the last parking space. In terms of the above threefold analysis: i It is an act suitable to show his character (unlike the tying of his shoelaces).

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71. Ibid., p 210.
72. For Griffin, 'purpose'=basic subjective aim, and 'character'=fundamental attitude towards others (one's characteristic form of response to them) (p 211).
73. Thought, p 355.
74. Christology, p 213.

ii He must intend to leave the space from a kind motive and clear intention, that is, not because he fears a puncture from tacks which lie in his path. iii He must press the brake pedal and actualise his aim, not allow his foot to slip on to the accelerator and crash in to the would-be beneficiary of his generosity.

By analogy, God's acts in the primary sense are those by which he responds to the world, receiving its experiences and making decisions for the next stage of the creative advance. These decisions are initial aims. "Hence,God's acts in the primary sense are formally all the same".[75] He acts by constituting himself in each moment. He acts in the world in each moment by being what he is. To speak of his special acts will not involve saying he has acted in a different way structurally and so 'interrupted' the causal chain.

Some of his secondary acts, being particularly expressive of his character, are special acts. i The events which receive such an aim will have to be appropriate for such a purpose. ii The events must occur in relation to a particular aim given by God. The content of God's aim for each occasion differs, but it is always for the best possible outcome. iii This aim, intention, must be actualised to a considerable degree for it to be God's act. A human act cannot be called God's act unless the subjective aim corresponds closely with his initial aim.

> This means that sinful acts are by definition not acts of God to the same degree as obedient acts; the crucifixion of a proclaimer of God's will is not God's act to the degree that the proclamation itself was. 76

Griffin then relates this to Jesus. Jesus did not just

75. Ibid., p 214.
76. Ibid., p 216. See our comment below, pp 275f.

actualise possibilities open to all men - his specialness would then have been rooted in his own decisions. Jesus' specialness can be understood as rooted first in God's aims for him, the content of which were different from the aims for all others. The aims for Jesus were unique in a special sense, in that they were in especially close relationship to God's eternal subjective aim for the world. Griffin points out that without the stress on the varying content of divine aims a process Christology becomes Pelagian in character, with too great a stress on human response.[77]

This exposition of Griffin is surely sufficient to show that here we have again a more satisfactory theory of divine action, for Griffin speaks of specific intention with even more urgency than Cobb. But before we pass to a consideration of why Cobb and Griffin should offer such different accounts to Ogden and Williams, certain points needs to be made about Griffin's position.

It will be instructive to characterise Griffin's own Christological position more clearly, by comparison with both Schleiermacher and Cobb. Griffin writes:

> Besides its lack of necessity and meaning, the doctrine that God is subjectively present in Jesus necessarily involves an ontological difference between Jesus and other men, and thereby denies his full humanity....Schleiermacher provided the first step in this reconstruction by conceiving God's presence in Jesus as objective, as it is in all men. Jesus differed from others only in the degree to which this objective presence of God in him dominated his being. But I have argued that an adequate Christology would also need to distinguish between Jesus and other men in terms of the content of this objective presence, as well as the degree. 78

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77. Ford notes these points in an approving way: "The Possibilities for Process Christology", Encounter 1974, 35.4, pp 285f. He goes on to make a further observation which may have application beyond Christology to all 'special acts': "Complete human response to the divine prompting, then, is a necessary but not sufficient condition for a 'Christ-event'".

78. Christology, pp 143f.

Even though Griffin goes on to suggest that this objective presence 'constitutes' the very selfhood of Jesus,[79] Griffin's emphasis is very different from Cobb's. Cobb seems to have a 'subjective' presence, Griffin is adamant that God is 'objectively' present,[80] and as such believes himself an 'heir' of Schleiermacher. Thus Griffin can admit that his Christology is somewhat 'Ebionite' in character, while we were able to ask whether Cobb's was not in fact Apollinarian.[81]

There are occasions, especially in the earlier essay, when Griffin speaks of the special act showing not purpose but 'inner being', or character. Were this tendency dominant it might indicate again a passivity on the part of God, for it would still be possible to claim that God's 'inner being' is shown without any mention of divine intention. It is probably that the relative infrequency in the later work of this sort of expression is explained not by a shift in Griffin's thought, but by the differing functions of the works. The early essay is designed as a critique of Ogden, and so many of Ogden's terms and concepts are bound to appear in Griffin's own statements. It is interesting to note that in the later book Griffin talks of someone revealing their character without the intention to do so: a politician uncovers his 'true' self for a moment at a political rally. The point of Griffin telling the story[82] is to

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79. Ibid., pp 145, 227.

80. For Cobb, the actual occasions which constitute every 'now' of Jesus are, as it were, jointly the work of human and divine impulses - the Logos plays such a crucial role. For Griffin, with his particular stress on the initial aim and its particular contents, there is inevitably more of a line drawn between God and man, so that Jesus is a man who performs the will of God.

81. Ogden dismisses Griffin's Christology as "the legacy of the kind of 'consciousness-Christology' which, ever since Schleiermacher, has been read into rather than out of the New Testament". (Quotation from an unpublished review of Griffin's Christology) Ford, op cit., gives an interesting discussion of Griffin's position. In fact it may be asked whether Griffin's interpretation of Schleiermacher is not unsound. For Schleiermacher talks of the God-consciousness of Jesus as divinely 'planted' - The Christian Faith, (T & T Clark, 1928) p 400.

82. Christology, pp 221f.

criticise Ogden for not seeing the difference between a special act (intended) and a revelatory act (not necessarily so); a special act requires something on behalf of the agent, a revelation requires something on behalf of the receiver.[83] But if we press this illustration further we might again see the primacy of intention, or if you will, of 'deepest' intention. The politician appeared a good man until he allowed his guard to slip. He intended to deceive, but when the mask was down his true intention became visible. He intended to deceive because of his other intention to win at any price. If at some basic level we are constituted (and our characters or inner beings are formed) by our actions, then a vital component of that self-constitution is our intention, purpose, or in Whiteheadian terms, our subjective aim. This is truly Whiteheadian, for the actual occasion has all its feelings integrated by its subjective aim.

This leads us to make another point, namely that Griffin seems to have accepted far too readily Ogden's bifurcation of action. We are indeed constituted by our actions, but this is not merely in any internal, private sense. We are what we are through our interaction with other people and things. The actions which constitute us are those which, though they might have initiated privately, are quite public.[84] This is in fact also the position which seems to emerge from Whitehead's general orientation. The occasion is integrated by his (private) aim, but he is always 'on the way' to being public, always seeking to be an object for the continuing process. Thus all the talk of primary and secondary type actions, or internal and external actions, could prove misleading: the two types are inseparable when properly conceived. It is possible that this problem can arise

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83. While the first point seem sensible, the second may be less obviously so.

84. See our pp 215f

at all because of the rather uncomfortable dualism between mind and body which Process thought seems to offer in practice. It is slightly paradoxical that Whitehead thought himself to be 'solving' the mind/body problem with his theory of actual occasions which are at once mental and physical by definition. Yet, as Griffin indicates, man is a monarchial society with the psyche or mind as the monarch. One wonders how integral, and how reciprocal, is the relationship between mind and body in such a scheme.[85]

However, looked at another way, the distinction Griffin makes between primary and secondary actions may be thought of as paralleling the distinction we made much earlier between basic or simple actions and complex ones. What would need to be shown then, and this is quite possible, is how these actions might be described differently while remaining a single act.

With the emphasis made on God's acts being formally all the same, we need to keep stressing also the varying content. A special act requires not only a special response but also a special lure. Griffin meets this criterion and highlights the unique lure offered to Jesus.[86] But this brings us to another disagreement: he seems to think that for the event to be God's act the subjective aim of the creature must coincide with the divine intention.[87] But this is not what biblical writers, the Christian tradition, or careful reasoning, would have us believe. Cyrus was seen as God's instrument, but does that mean that he needs to have seen himself as such? It would appear that his motive is inaccessible to us. Did he liberate the Jews from political, humanitarian, or religious motives? Does it matter? What does seem fairly clear is that, in the language of

85. Christology, p 208.
86. Ibid., p 218.
87. Ibid., p 216.

Whitehead but expressing the tradition of the bible, God lured Cyrus to free the Jews and (though he probably did not realise the source of this aim, and though his own motive may have been different) this he did. Further discussion of this topic must be delayed until the next chaper.

But a further, linked, criticism may be offered. The crucifixion, says Griffin, cannot show forth God's character as much as the direct proclamation of God does.[88] Yet, despite Griffin's "cannot", the cross has been the central symbol of Christianity for two millennia. He presumes it is against God's will. Let us grant that assumption (though doubtless we could find someone to argue the point easily enough) and see where it leads. If we place the crucifixion of Jesus in the context of his whole ministry, in the possibility of his leaving Jerusalem right up to the moment of his arrest, or of his capitulating in front of Pilate, and in some way or other defusing the situation and avoiding death, we see then that the cross could have been avoided, at least temporarily. But Jesus took no such action: perhaps seeing it as the natural end to his ministry, or perhaps as some sort of eschatological 'trigger'. Pannenberg, we have already noted, takes Cobb to task for paying too much attention to Jesus' words and not enough to his 'history' and suffering, and it may be a fair comment here too. Jesus did not just proclaim a message with his words but in his whole life, as he incarnated God's purposes. Thus the 'being prepared to go to death' showed the extent of his commitment to the message he embodied: it showed (revealed) the extent of God's love far more than any sermon or parable. We can pursue this by speculating as to what the aims offered to the

88. Ibid., p 216.

characters in the crucifixion story might have been. The ideal aim for Jesus, early in his ministry, might have put death very low among the heirarchy of possibilities. Yet there came a time when the best of a number of bad choices was the cross: to run away would have left a discredited, undermined, message about God and his Kingship. The aim to Pilate might have been not to wash his hands and be a spineless official, if so Pilate took an 'easier' option. Does this mean that the cross is not God's act, or that it does not reveal him? The cross seems to be a divine act in the patient way in which it was accepted, not in that it was specifically willed in the long-term. God's act was in "being prepared to die". This does not leave us with the very divine passivity which we eschewed earlier, for this is a different type of passivity. There we criticised a passivity which exhibited no intention, which was entirely neutral; here the passivity is a definite, specific intention to suffer, to be "done to", as it were, and this is a definite act. It is the "being crucified", not the "crucifying", which is God's act. Clearly the implications of this point reverberate beyond Christology to all of God's special acts, though again we must not confuse this sort of point with another traditional assertion about the providence of God that he works through evil (i.e. events always against his will) in order to bring good.

Throughout the work, Griffin seems keen to 'do justice' to the Neo-Orthodox concern to show Jesus as the ultimate revelation of God. Yet this desire of his leads him into an awkward position. He applies his analysis of action to God.[89] Every event is to some extent God's act, he says, "But specially suited for this ((i.e. to

89. Ibid., pp 215f.

express God's nature)) are those words and deeds of a human being through which he expresses a vision of reality".[90] Thus, like Cobb and Ogden too before him, he seems to see God's special acts as primarily if not exclusively located in human actions. We have already indicated our desire to broaden this base somewhat. What is a matter of concern to the present writer is that Griffin, like the others, seems not to see the possibilities of asserting God's actions through the natural world. But this is how Griffin meets the Neo-Orthodox concern for revelation, for in every special act, he says, "a new vision of reality is expressed".[91] This seems an extraordinarily constricting statement. Unless there are countless new visions, the number of special acts of God is greatly limited. While we may wish to say, for instance, that such an act of God is a "disclosure situation" (Ramsey) in which something is revealed about God or reality in general, to suggest that this must always be a "new vision of reality" seems absurd.

Griffin falls into the same trap as Cobb occasionally in his use of traditional terminology. He says, for example, that God's "personal attributes" are eternal and unchanging. In the language of the Old Testament, he says, God "changeth not".[92] Yet this is not the language of the Old Testament, except insofar as it is the language of the AV translation. Once it is modernised to say, God "does not change" it sounds much less pious however, and does not cloak the idea with the same respectability. And he can say that "To use the language of the Nicene Creed, it is strictly (("it" is the "eternal character" of God manifested in his actions)) 'homoousion' with the Father' (where 'Father' is taken to mean that

90. Ibid., pp 215.
91. Ibid., p 216.
92. Ibid., p 214.

cluster of attributes defining God's metaphysical uniqueness), i.e. it is part of the eternal essence of God".[93] To be sure this is the language of the Nicene Creed, but Griffin gives his own intepretation of its meaning.[94]

These criticisms notwithstanding, Griffin like Cobb offers a fruitful interpretation of Whitehead's thought, upon which we will seek to build in the next chapter. But a further task must first be tended to.

3 Chapters Six and Seven: Concluding Postscript

Three tasks remain in our brief final section: to comment briefly on the differences between Cobb and Griffin; to draw out, in a sentence or two, two different interpretations of similar expressions, which have emerged in these two chapters; and, most important, to speculate as to the reason for the markedly different accounts of Ogden and Williams on the one hand, and Cobb and Griffin on the other.

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93. Ibid., p 214.

94. In closing, it may be appropriate to add a more positive Christological suggestion, though it takes us strictly beyond the scope of our interest. Jesus' self is constituted by prehension of the Logos. This enables us to talk of Jesus experiencing as/for God in some sense. Can we reverse the relation and somehow speak of God suffering on the cross? Jesus constitutes himself by prehension of God, and so experiences the world to some extent as God does. Jesus prehends far more intimately than other humans do and surely this peculiar intimacy has a certain mutuality. We could put it something like this: God constituted himself in each moment so that his prehension of Jesus 'coconstitutes' his 'I' in some way; God empathetically feels with all his creatures but because of the unique reciprocity in this relationship he is able to 'feel with' Jesus in a unique way; and he objectifies himself in each moment for Jesus' prehension of him as if for his own future. This tentative and embryonic suggestion needs to be more fully and critically worked out.

The difference we note between Cobb and Griffin is one of emphasis. Griffin concentrates on the category of revelation. For Cobb, who learnt his theology in times dominated by Neo-Orthodoxy, revelation can still sound like an area safe from all rational investigation and which excludes natural theology. If this is the 'historical' reason for the differing stress, there may also be a personal one. Cobb is a Methodist, and so might be expected to accent the experience of the believer rather than the 'objective' side of belief; for Griffin, a Disciple of Christ, this 'objective' side is more significant.[95]

This slight difference in perspective actually accounts for many of the small contrasts in the work of the two.

We noted earlier that while both pairs of the theologians often used similar expressions, they meant different things by them. We are thinking here of such phrases as "God acts by being". For Ogden and Williams this seems to mean that God is devoid of any particular intention, while for Cobb and Griffin (interpreting Whitehead correctly) God acts "by being" in that to be actual is to act specifically. An occasion 'becomes' and in so doing becomes a specific datum for another becoming, often acting as some sort of lure for that process. This is the correct way to understand "God acts by being": it is not at all devoid of activity or intention, and may perhaps be better expressed in the phrase "God acts by becoming for another".

So then, why did Ogden and Williams not use the notion of a specific aim? Griffin rounds off his essay on Ogden's Christology by asking this question of Ogden. He feels that his reliance on Heidegger may

95. There is no documentary record of this and I make these observations after a conversation with Griffin and with his approval. This said, the picture given of the 'Disciples' in Cross' Dictionary does not obviously support this interpretation.

be the reason, and he reflects the sort of view of existentialism we have already had cause to question. He suggests that in Heidegger there is no conception that persons formed by different histories have different possibilities open to them. He also reckons that the influential Romans I and II holds all men equally responsible for not actualising authentic existence: this militates against thinking that God presents different possibilities to different men. We might venture to add that it may well be that Ogden has just interpreted Whitehead along similar lines to Christian. All of these points may be factors in explaining Ogden's failure to capitalise on Whitehead's resources, but I consider them alone to be insufficient explanation. Williams would hardly be accounted for convincingly by such answers, as he has clearly not been influenced by Heidegger or Bultmann in the same way.

Williams learnt and matured his theology at Chicago, where he came under the influence of two men, Hartshorne and Wieman. The Empirical School of Wieman spoke of a vague causal efficiency on God's part, but could not affirm more because of their strict empiricism. We can see such caution reflected in Williams' writing.[96] He was greatly influenced by Hartshorne, and it is significant that Hartshorne wrote hardly anything about the initial aim. Seeking to redress the balance in theology, he was more concerned to express God as being affected by the world, rather than vice-versa. The Chicago School focused attention on the consequent nature of God. Hartshorne always seems to use the term 'initial aim' in inverted commas, indicating that the term is not his.

Hartshorne says that God acts by establishing the 'golden mean'

96. e.g. the final page of his essay in Process and Divinity.

of freedom[97] and by setting limits within which the world becomes. He is more concerned to show God's passivity (indeed, passibility) rather than to speak of his activity.[98] Any talk of God's 'will' or 'plan' seems shrouded in ambiguity.[99] All these elements are found in Ogden and Williams.[100]

If Williams' theological family tree is traceable back into Chicago's Hartshornian Process and Empirical Theology, is there also some evidence that Ogden too belongs in such a genealogy, but that Cobb somehow escapes?

Ogden was far more decisively influenced by Hartshorne than was Cobb. Both men studied Hartshorne, but Cobb heard (in his time at Chicago) both the empirical Wieman and the metaphysical Hartshorne claiming to expound Whitehead aright. Cobb seems to have gone back to Whitehead to see for himself, and he was helped in this task by Bernard Loomer, who worked almost exclusively on Whitehead at that time. Indeed, it is true to say that one of Loomer's rare published essays [101] seems to prefigure many of the interests which Cobb later took up. We do not mean to say that Williams and Ogden do not, as it were, know their Whitehead; just to say that at a formative stage Cobb shook off other influences and returned to Whitehead, so that Whitehead's contribution is more prominent in his work.

If Ogden is aware of a specific initial aim, then he certainly has not used it systematically. This may be so to some extent simply

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97. Charles Hartshorne, Man's Vision of God, (Archon 1964), p 291; The Divine Relativity (YUP 1964), pp 135 ff, 138, 141f.

98. Man's Vision of God, pp 127, 173, 227, 282, 291, 297; The Divine Relativity,pp xvii, 50f.

99. Man's Vision of God, pp 283, 291; The Divine Relativity, pp xvii, 127f.

100. Lewis Ford ("The Possibilities for Process Christology", pp 284f) notes that Hartshorne's theory of divine action is too "general" to account for specific Christological aims; he goes on to contrast Hartshorne's "the only acts of God we can identify (in spite of the lawyers) are the laws of nature"(A Natural Theology For Our Time, p 102),with Whitehead's "initial aim".

101. "Christian Faith and Process Philosophy" in Thought, pp 70-98.

because of his theological task. Ogden and Pittenger speak of Jesus responding to an ideal for human life in general. Pittenger says that Jesus actualised this aim, Ogden says that it is not possible to know whether he did or not. He does not wish to speak of Jesus exemplifying an aim to the highest degree, he wishes to say that Jesus re-presents God's initial aim for human life as a primordial possibility; he posits no causal relation between Jesus and God, so he does not need to speak of Jesus' initial aim.

It seems probable then that Ogden and Williams did not use all the Whiteheadian resources available to them because of the influence of Hartshorne upon them: in Williams' case, Wieman seems to have militated against such a move; in Ogden's, it is possible that Heidegger or Bultmann (with his fear of talking mythologically of God's action)closed down the options available. Whatever the underlying reasons, their theology is the poorer for it. Cobb and Griffin give a much more satisfactory account of God's action than Ogden and Williams. They secure the specificity of the initial aim, thus allowing us to talk of God's intention and therefore of his action. We can see how closely related are the ideas of these two men. In the final chapter an attempt will be made to draw all threads together with some positive proposals on applying these ideas in Christian Doctrine.

CHAPTER EIGHT

SOME APPLICATIONS IN CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE

The stated purpose of this thesis is to test the adequacy of Whitehead's thought as a suitable vehicle for the expression of the Christian conviction concerning God's action in history. To this end we have explored what is involved in making any assertions concerning 'action' or 'history'; we have recognised theological considerations; we have examined Whitehead's thought; and we have shown that a particular interpretation of Whitehead is both correct and meets many of the criteria which might be invoked to test the adequacy of statements of God's action in history. The task before us in this chapter is to develop the position so far reached, to show just how it meets the varying standards imposed on such discourse throughout the thesis, and to indicate its worth by showing how it applies to the doctrine of miracle and the problem of evil. In both cases, we will find, a qualified approval is given to the account so yielded.

1 Miracle

We must begin with some repetition, in the form of recollection of conclusions already reached. Any understanding of miracle will have to remember what we learnt of 'action'. An action of God requires some fairly specific intention on his part for the actual outcome of any given event. An agent, including God, can perform a more complex act through another 'agent' - without impinging on that agent's freedom. Indeed, say Process metaphysicians, we do this

nearly all the time. When I lift up my tea-cup, or spill the milk, I am 'employing' other agents even in such a comparatively simple action. But the more agents I employ, and the more free-will each such agent possesses, the more fraught with risk of failure my action becomes. All action may imply the risk of failure to completely realise intention. All action is capable of different descriptions depending on our interest or point of view. Thus my arm knocks the jug, and I spill the milk; government officials negotiate the EEC terms, and Mrs. Thatcher gains a famous victory; Moses leads the children of Israel from Egypt, and God redeems his people from bondage. My 'basic' action is in moving my arm; spilling the milk is a more complete description. Mrs. Thatcher's basic act was in articulating her intention to her officials. God's basic act was in 'calling' or 'inspiring' Moses. By the logic of this position, God can succeed in calling Moses - whether or not he succeeds in that depends on himself alone. But Moses must respond to set the complex act into motion. God cannot guarantee Moses' answer.

Some points have emerged in several different guises in our study. In our examination of history we found that to do history properly, the historian must seek 'immanent' causes within the historical continuum for any event which he seeks to record. This means that he must trace back the cause of an event to the 'agency' of human beings or natural forces. But note that he is often unable to go beyond such a point. Moses led the Israelites from Egypt: but why - at divine instigation? The wind arose at just that moment - but why? The cancer healed without medication - but why did it do so? The historian will have to posit 'internal' causes as best he can by recourse to his own experience. But he can never simply

substitute God when such a 'natural' cause is missing. He must work within the 'seamless robe' of history, and if God's action is to be distinguished there it must be so at its source, as it were, i.e. God's basic action on things and people - 'inside' them, so to speak. It is the Whiteheadian's assertion that a full and proper understanding of history demands recognition of God's part in it.

Just as our study of action urged us to view God's action as primarily 'basic', on the 'inside' of things, with his using 'agents' to complete his purpose just as we do with our bodies and other people and things - so our study of history also encouraged us not to look for God's action in place of 'normal' causes in the historical continuum, but in the 'inspiring' or 'moving' of such normal causes. And so these conclusions are borne out on theological grounds too. The impossibility of defining 'miracle' in terms of 'violation of natural law', and the cluster of problems associated with any talk of God's intervening in the ordinary causal sequence (rather than from 'within' it), also point towards a theory which locates God's action in and through other intra-mundane causes. God's relationship should be considered formally the same to every event, and yet some are 'his' in a way which others clearly are not. The cumulative case for this sort of model must be considered impressive.

We also saw that there is a real need to assert the independence of nature from God - and the need for this will be seen even more clearly when we discuss theodicy. Nature should be independent and yet - if our concept of miracle is to have any resemblance to the traditional notion - God must still have a 'lever' for action within it.

When we examined Whitehead, one of our major purposes was to show that it is possible to speak in Whiteheadian terms of God having specific intent for all human and natural situations. We saw how God's relationship to events was formally always the same, i.e. God is specifically and specially related to all events by his provision of the initial aim. We went on to consider two lines of interpretation, one of which was preferable to the other as a vehicle for expressing God's activity, and altogether more satisfactory. One of the reasons for this was that while both pictured this universal formal relation, one enabled differentiation of content of aim within that relation, so giving substance to affirmations of God's intention and action.

Given all this, then, what can we say for the doctrine of 'miracle'? God <u>acts</u> in every event, according to the Whiteheadian model advocated in the previous chapter. There is an important sense in which nothing would happen at all without God's (basic) action. He gives each occasion its initial aim, which is the best outcome for that occasion given its situation. When that ideal aim is actualised by an occasion, then God's intention is actualised in the world - the consequence is his <u>act</u>.

But clearly, to identify any wordly event as an act of God is not necessarily to identify a miracle. God's initial aim to me at this moment is doubtless designed that I might express myself lucidly and without error. Yet even if I were to succeed in this task, we should not normally call it a miracle! God's initial aim to Noah might well have been to build an ark: but the construction of such a vessel was itself no miracle. The tradition seems to talk of God's acts, yet does not always mean to call them miracles.

There is a middle case, provided by our ordinary usage of language which gives a clue as to the distinctive meaning of 'miracle'. People sometimes talk of the 'miracle of life', and they often refer in so talking to the conception and growth of a human being in its mother's body. We all know what caused this conception, and we understand many of the forces at work in the foetal growth and development. Science has located DNA, and other substances and processes, which help describe the process more fully. And yet we still do not understand it completely, and it still strikes us as 'wonderful' and 'awesome'; and yet it is received by parents with gratitude as a great gift. This is a totally natural event - what could be more natural? - but it seems somehow awesome, marvellous, and evokes gratitude. Mary Hesse draws attention to a similar phenomenon.[1] We say 'his recovery was a miracle', yet usually we do not intend any reference to providential activity. Rather we point to an event which is remarkable, unpredictable, coincidental, and (usually) desirable.

This type of talking points us to several features which are normally implied by the appellation'miracle'. But one further feature must be alluded to,as it is the most important of all. A miracle is God's act and when Christians talk of miracles they must mean many of the above things, but most of all they testify to God as the source of this extraordinary and wonderful event.

A miracle, then, is something out of the ordinary - and made so by God's intention. Normally such an event will be 'irregular', 'abnormal', 'distinctive' (to use terms from chapter three) if it is to be called a miracle. Yet this irregularity is not to be located

1. "Miracles and the Laws of Nature" in Miracles, ed C.F.D. Moule (Mowbray 1965), p 35.

in any fracture of 'natural law'. The 'extraordinariness' comes through a combination of other factors. The event is particularly appropriate for the receiving individual or group at the moment of its occurrence, given his/her/their situation. It somehow meets their need, and does so with extraordinary timing. Furthermore, the event is received as some sort of 'revelation', i.e. it speaks to the receivers of God's character, and his purpose for them. In Farmer's words, it brings an awareness of God's absolute demand upon them, and his absolute succour for them.

All this is, I realise, fairly unexceptional. But it must be pursued in conjunction with one of the other continuing insistences of this thesis. For all these 'subjective' elements in the recipients' perception to be valid, God must be the cause of that event in its particularity, and their 'interpretation' of that event must be 'correct'. Unless this is asserted, 'God's action' is evacuated of clear meaning, and the motive behind the traditional affirmation must be set aside. Two examples will aid clarification of the position proposed.

The Israelites, so Scripture has it[2], were delivered by YHWH at the Red Sea (or Reed Sea) just as the Egyptian army looked set to end their escape from slavery. There are many possible explanations for this story. It is possible, of course, that no refugees from Egypt ever went close to such a sea, let alone had a strange and marvellous deliverance there. What seems more probable is that a story of a dramatic escape at such a place has 'grown in the telling' as one generation handed down the story to the next, in celebration of

2. Exodus 14 vv 5-31.

salvation. Despite the historical difficulties with the account I want to use it as an example, if for no other reason than its undoubted popularity amongst other writers on this topic. Let us assume that a group of slave refugees (later called Israelites) did indeed cross a dried up sea bed only to turn and watch their pursuers drown in the returning waters. How is this event a miracle?

Firstly we note the reception of this event by the Israelites. It reveals, for them, the character of the God who always seeks to liberate men and women from the bondage of oppression: God the Redeemer. It is experienced as an event <u>for them</u>, i.e. specifically brought about for their aid. Nothing else explains for them the 'miraculous' timing of the happening: they got through, their oppressors did not. The event is unusual also, unusual in the extreme. Scholars now tell us that winds and tides do indeed behave in this way in that part of the world, though not very often. The Israelites may have known this, they may not. Whatever their knowledge of tidal events (non-existent, or informed) the event was extraordinary. The event comes to them in such a way as to confront them with God's 'absolute succour' (their utter, ultimate safety in his hands, so to speak) and 'absolute demand' (that such a God who does this seeks their love and their lives in return).

Are the Israelites deluded? Did God really save them? Did he <u>do</u> anything at the Red Sea?

All of reality (wind and water, men and women) are comprised of occasions of experience. Each occasion becomes and perishes, and each occasion commences its becoming as it takes an impulse from God.

This impulse is its initial aim, and it is the aim at the best possible outcome given the particular occasion's particular situation. The occasion is free to adopt this ideal aim, to modify it or reject it completely. The ideal aim of any given occasion will always be a real possibility for it. This means that God never 'asks' (as it were) an occasion of water to do something which is inappropriate for it. God works within the bounds of nature.[3]

God offers 'lures', ideal aims, to each and every actual occasion. To occasions of wind and water. These aims are appropriate, but may be unusual. In certain circumstances God may lure wind and water to combine in such a way as to create a natural but unusual effect in which the sea drains its bed in the estuary. And then the lure may change and the water flood back - or perhaps such a drainage may only ever be temporary in duration. God also lures human beings: lures the Israelites to the scene of the miracle in time to take advantage of the conditions; and he lured them to a proper understanding of what had happened. (God may have lured the Egyptians too, though not necessarily to their deaths. This sort of conceptuality can claim the deliverance to be an act of God, in that the escape of the Israelites was intended without passing judgement on whether God might have lured the pursuers to have stayed put on the shore, a lure which they might have ignored so caught up were they in the chase).

If some such theory as this can be put forward then the scriptural account of the Red Sea deliverance can again be credible for us, as it was for the Israelites of old. But note its essential components: specific intention on God's part, actualised in a 'natural'

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3. Austin Farrer, in A Science of God?, has similar thoughts: "He does not impose an order against the grain of things; he makes them follow their own bent and work out the world by being themselves". (p 76).

sequence of events, and understood as salvific. Further, God's lure (as the word implies) is not irresistable. Wind and water may be stubborn; nature has a true independence. Without God it can do nothing; but it need do no particular thing at God's behest. To go back on this may be to topple into Pantheism.[4]

It is possible to see now why we made a point of objecting to Cobb's wording in the last chapter. In 'simple' events, said Cobb, "there is little difference between the divine impulses and the final actualisation. In the events that make up ordinary physical objects, the aim in each moment is at little more than repetition or reenactment of what has been in the immediate past".[5] For Cobb, nature seems to 'do as it is told' by God with no leeway for divergence. This contravenes Whitehead's thinking at at least two points. Firstly, the causa sui nature of each actual occasion is called into doubt if they are more or less usually determined by any external source. The point which Cobb makes here is especially vulnerable to Pols' critique, in terms of divine determination of events. Causa sui is vital to Whitehead, for without it nature becomes almost a divine mode. If nature has no independence from God then how is it to be distinguished from him? How does man gain freedom in such a situation, emerging from nature as he does? This was the concern of those writers who wished to speak of a necessary 'Deistic' element in our view of nature.

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4. David Griffin would actually have us believe that God cannot affect an aggregate - societies without a dominating individual, such as a body of water: "Creation out of Chaos and the Problem of Evil" in Encountering Evil ed. Stephen T. Davis (T & T Clark, 1981), p 113 (henceforth "Creation out of Chaos"). Thus we may be guilty of the fallacy of misplaced concreteness. Two things may be offered in our defence. i While God may not be able to lure the aggregate as aggregate, presumably he is able to lure the individual members of the aggregate - though, admittedly, without a coordinating centre the task would be much more difficult; ii we might refer to the way Dale Porter justifies his case (which we reviewed in chapter II) by saying that, firstly, because all events which form the cluster have almost identical antecedent world and relevant futures, their aims are practically unified though theoretically distinct, and secondly,that Whitehead himself uses complex events as illustrations.

5. John B. Cobb Jr, Pluralistic, p 76.

The second major objection to such talk resides in its implications for Theodicy. Although the whole area receives more adequate treatment in the next section of this chapter, it is as well to note this particular point here. If God's aim is always (more or less) followed in natural, or 'simple' events then all such natural events must be regarded as his 'acts', i.e. expressing his intention. Such a view is easier to maintain in the face of some facts than others. Earthquakes can be rationalised, as necessary for the planet's crust: they are only 'accidentally'evil. The child's brain tumour is more difficult to explain.

The alternative to Cobb's position is to adopt that one implied in our account above of the Red Sea deliverance, or in our second example below. In such an account nature is truly causa sui, and independent of God. Without him it does nothing: but it need do no particular thing at his behest. God must 'persuade' nature to conform to his ideal aim for it, but there is always the real possibility that nature will not so conform. Of course, God's aims for nature may be generally of a piece, but Cobb's statement of repetition is too strong. Nature can achieve the really novel, the miraculous, at God's prompting. If this account is thought to make nature too pliable, too responsive, then Farrer's 'stubborn nature' would still be preferable to Cobb's 'repeating God's aims' - better nature be unresponsive than totally obedient from the aspect of theodicy. The Red Sea may still be made sense of, even here, as an 'act of God', though its sense is more restricted. God knows or predicts a future natural coincidence of forces and lures Israel to take advantage of them by being there at just the right moment. We shall return to discuss some of the remaining problems with our position after examining a second example.

Farmer refers to an example of a mysterious healing quite against the doctors' prognosis.[6] As we saw, he talks in panpsychist terms of God's suggestion to natural events, but (unlike Cobb) this takes him into a 'whatever happens is God's will' conclusion. If nature is bound to follow God's suggestion or impulse, then whatever results(death or life, disease or health) in any given case, it must do so because God wills it. This example clearly shows the dangers of such a position.

The position which we attempted to outline would try to make sense of this example in the following way. God lures all actual occasions in a relevant, appropriate and novel way. When a mother learns that her baby cannot, so far as medical science is able to say, possibly recover from sickness, she turns to prayer. The child is healed. Farmer could have chosen countless examples, the same in every detail but one - in most others the child dies. For Farmer, both are acts of God. For us only the former is so in an unambiguous way. God so lures the body defence systems, or the offending disease (in whatever form it might be) so as to bring about a wholly 'natural' and yet 'miraculous' event - provided that his lure is responded to. No 'laws' are broken. A 'natural' explanation is possible, or would be if our interpretive tools were adequate; the healing is traced to the correct functioning of bodies or medication. In the second case, of non-recovery, the lures will often have gone unheeded. I say "will often have gone" because we need to qualify our account carefully. This sort of explanation may express something of the means of divine action, but it provides no window into God's gracious will: that remains as inscrutable in this account as in any traditional one. We cannot know whether God lures always to life and health, though

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6. The World and God, pp 122f.

presumably he usually does so.

Such a disclaimer anticipates a possible objection to our account. It might be claimed that we move too easily between two different accounts of a miraculous event, confusing our issues. In one (the Red Sea) the event is characterised as miraculous by an unusual lure of God; in the other (the healing) the event may be characterised by a special creaturely response to God's 'ordinary' lure to heal. We have tried to indicate that we cannot have such a certain insight into God's aims - they may not be quite as we think. Moreover, in terms of this objection, a 'miracle' must be seen as characterised by both a special divine lure and a special creaturely response. The meaning of special lure is not merely 'particular', though this of course it is. 'Special' in this context means 'unusual', out of the ordinary, and salvific.

We might further be asked why there are not more such 'miracles', if indeed they are possible at all. In part, what we have said above again applies here. It should not be assumed that God's intention is universally the same: the healing of death may sometimes be his object. But the complexity of events also needs to be considered seriously in this connection. Complex actions are those involving more 'agents', more occasions. Personal illustrations make the point well: I intend to give to charity; I intend to reconcile two members of my congregation; I intend to unify my political party; I intend world peace. At each new example more 'agents' enter, the act becomes increasingly complex, and therefore intention becomes more difficult to actualise. The more complex the 'miracle', the more difficult for God to actualise his intent.

We have already said that as this complexity increases, the more human agents involved, the more risky the enterprise becomes. With greater freedom, the chance of God's lure being flaunted deliberately enters, and the outcome is that much more unpredictable. Does this imply that with 'natural' occasions things are much easier for God? It does not, but the resistance is of a different kind. With freedom so much less in evidence, God's aims are generally much less 'ambitious'. It is not, I think, too helpful to indulge in speculation about the exact extent of God's actualising his aim in nature. Yet we might wish to say, with Austin Farrer, that natural events "stand in the way of the swift or economical advance of the Creative Purpose by their sheer bruteness, and by the uncontrolled randomness of their collisions with others like them".[7] This, of course gives a very different 'feel' to our account than Cobb gives to his, however unwittingly on his behalf. Nature's lack of freedom, lack of responsiveness, lack of developed 'mental pole', does not aid God in securing dull repetition, but stands in the way of creative novelty.[8]

One more serious problem with our account needs to be raised before we can conclude our treatment of miracle. The account of Process Theology in general, and the account which we have offered based on such a conceptuality, relies on some doctrine of 'panpsychism', i.e. the notion that all occasions in the universe rely on some sort of psychic experience. Three relevant questions proffer themselves: Is this doctrine defensible? Is it necessary and integral to the

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7. A Science of God?, p 104.

8. Another possible issue, which we will not discuss, is particularly relevant in the example of healing - i.e. the human faith element in the miraculous, often important in Scripture. Farmer seems to say that we must expect, or even request a miracle.(pp 122f).

Whiteheadian system? Is it essential to the account which we have put forward?

The most obvious difficulty of any panpsychism is its verification. In our third chapter we criticised Farmer somewhat for adumbrating a form of panpsychism without the conceptuality required to make it fully plausible. Language such as he uses seems more poetic than coherent. Whitehead seems to provide a model for reality which is panpsychist, with a much more thoroughly worked-out conceptuality. Every occasion is called an 'occasion of experience', and each occasion has a physical and mental pole. Scientific opinion seems somewhat divided on the question. "A responsiveness analogous to a rudimentary mental life exists far down the scale of living beings", writes Ian Barbour.[9] He goes on to say that most biologists attribute sentience, or elementary mental life, to insects; and some to cells and plants.[10] Fully mental events are a product of the evolutionary process, and therefore a clue to the nature of that process, Barbour asserts.[11] "By definition", he goes on "metaphysical categories cannot evolve, since they are formulated to be applicable to all events .... the continuity of the levels of reality is a basic metaphysical assumption".[12]

But A.R. Peacocke takes issue with a panpsychist interpretation of reality. He argues persuasively that human mental activity must be considered 'emergent' and 'non-reducible'. Yet Peacocke, while denying that "matter is already, in some vestigial sense, 'mental'",[13] compliments Process Theologians with the "proper desire to emphasise

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9. Issues in Science and Religion, p 8.
10. Ibid., p 341.
11. Ibid., p 344.
12. Ibid., p 344.
13. Creation and the World of Science, p 126.

that matter has the potential, at the appropriate level of complexity in the evolutionary process, of displaying mental activity".[14] Such a 'compliment', and the ensuing refusal to ascribe to all actual occasions a 'mental pole',[15] may (I believe) help our discussion by showing that two different uses of the word 'mental' are being used here by Peacocke, and many others.

Process Thought does not ascribe consciousness to all actuality, and sometimes writers sound ready to talk of 'emergent' qualities in nature even if metaphysical categories apply universally.[16] Perhaps if these categories apply universally, they do not apply univocally. At this point we may be able to answer all three questions posed above. Panpsychism may be defensible in the following form, which I will expound briefly in Whiteheadian terms in order to show how a Whiteheadian interpretation still stands - and it is only in this form that such a 'panpsychism' is necessary to the account of divine action and miracle offered above.

All reality has a 'pole' or aspect which can be understood by analogy with mental life in human beings. This mental pole expresses analogically the causa sui nature of all actuality, and its plasticity/openness to novelty. Independent, 'brute', nevertheless all reality is 'open' to a novel divine lure. In higher organisms this 'formal mentality' more and more approximates the proper mental life which is its analogue. This 'proper' mentality may be something new and genuinely emergent, yet it is still possible to employ 'mentality' as a formal metaphysical concept which is universally applicable.

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14. Ibid., p 125.
15. Ibid., p 127.
16. e.g. Griffin's Theodicy, pp 288f, though he says that these 'higher level' occasions are not ontologically unique - but they experience at a higher level.

Panpsychism is therefore a form of symbolic discourse, a metaphor.[17] Granted that, in such things as atoms, "'mental' aspects are vanishingly small",[18] we may decide that the description of all actuality in terms of mental activity becomes so attenuated that to label it 'panpsychism' or 'psychicalism' becomes of dubious usefulness. What we call this phenomenon seems though to be relatively unimportant (though 'psychicalism', particularly, may give the wrong impression). What is important is that it enables us to bear witness to an important feature of reality, though we do so not in a literal but metaphorical way.

Finally in this part, I wish to move away from 'miracle' as such and consider the working of God through human agents. Most 'miracles' will, by the nature of the case, be reports of 'natural' events, not human. But in our last chapter we raised the problem concerning God's special acts (i.e. salvific and revelatory action conveying the absolute demand and succour of God to the recipients) through men and women - the example given was the OT interpretation of Cyrus.[19] The problem applies to all God's action through humans, not just to the 'magnalia dei'. We raised the moral problems of whether God uses beings even though they do not intend to be used. Our only comment then was that, traditionally, it has been answered in the affirmative. This affirmation needs to be briefly defended lest we secure 'independence' for nature while seeming to forfeit human freedom against a charge of divine manipulation.

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17. Ogden, in his Sarum Lectures, argues that to be internally related to other actuality is to be actual, and this is the truth for which Panpsychism gropes.
18. Barbour, Issues, p 346.
19. e.g. Isaiah 44 v 28.

> The cases where God does not deal with men by direct communication are less easy - would it be consonant with God's frankness to 'get' Hitler to hold back his divisions at Boulogne? About this let me say for the moment only that it concerns God's frankness not man's freedom. Hitler was perfectly free to let his panzers press on, even if he decided otherwise, and even if his wrong decision issued from his own vanity and pride. We may demand that God should not make use of our weakness to acheive his ends, though I am not sure how far we are entitled to make this demand: but we cannot complain that we were unfree, when the choices we make through pride turn out to frustrate the plans we in pride set up in opposition to God's will. 20

Here Lucas puts the main issues into focus very nicely: the cardinal concern is the preservation of freedom, for if that is maintained complaints are made from a weak position - so long as Hitler freely decided to hold back his tanks, so long as Cyrus freely decided to liberate the Jews. It is true that when we use human analogies to talk about such operations it often appears that one party is manipulating another. But manipulation is not something easily ascribed to God, and in such cases it is often the human nature of the analogy which is misleading. Consider two examples.

(i) A trade union official has a grudge against the owner of a small company, and determines to put him out of business. He seizes on a minor workers' grievance, and by exploiting the latent discontent and creating new dissatisfaction in a recessionary climate, manages to engineer an all-out strike. By being himself the chief negotiator he is 'difficult' in meetings with management, and then reports these meetings to the workforce with heavy bias. They freely decide not to return to work. The factory closes. Nobody's freedom has been breached, but much manipulation has gone on. Similar methods, characterised by deception and malice, would clearly not be worthy of God. But God, being God, would hardly seek to actualise such aims anyway. He may indeed use our latent grievances, but only for his

20. J.R. Lucas, "Providence" in Freedom and Grace, pp 28f.

(and therefore, our) good purpose - a purpose which we admit to trusting, implicitly, when we call him 'God'. So much depends on the end in view, as becomes apparent in our second example.

(ii) My country's government is slow to react to the Brandt Commission's report on development and aid to the Third World. I might believe that poor countries ought to be aided without looking to any 'return' for the money, but my government does not. Suppose that I persuade my government that it is in their own interest to give aid, and thus achieve my aim? Must I then face indictment for manipulation? Surely only clear opponents would use such a term, because of its pejorative connotation. When freedom is retained and when the purpose is good (as God's is by definition) charges of manipulation appear very weak.

Awareness, or lack of it, of God's intention (aim) is a question which process theologians address directly. Awareness is not essential, yet it increases the likelihood of conformation to the intention of God.

We may try to claim that even if God's intention and the 'agent's' intention do not coincide, then the agent's intention must still be 'good'. Does our OT example depend on Cyrus' motives being humanitarian and not simply political? We can usefully consider this question in the light of another well-known OT example - the story of Joseph.[21] Can this spiteful act really be <u>God's</u> act as the bible says - though both the brothers and Cyrus may have had intentions different from God's, <u>or</u> - more likely - different <u>motives</u>. A crucial difference may be that Cyrus' action (of liberation) is immediately and

21. Genesis 37-50. This story's uncertain historical status does not detract from its usefulness as an example.

unambiguously morally beneficial in itself, while the brothers' action is not so clearly so. Having said that, we make two qualifiers : a to say that an action is not itself good does not mean that it cannot yield good, and b to interpret the brothers' behaviour as wholely bad may be to ignore the concept of judgement - Joseph must have been an unbearable little brother! Perhaps we need to distinguish between biblical (and modern) affirmations on moral and theological grounds - maybe by the 'God' which they reveal.[22] If one proposed that Cyrus should be re-interpreted in the same way that the Joseph story often is, one would be forgetting that it was presumably God's will that the Jews be liberated, but that it may not have been God's will that Joseph should be dealt with so harshly in that story. When we say that God 'used' Cyrus we are saying that God has lured him, through his own needs and wants (and possibly, foibles) to perform his own gracious will. In much the same way, though less personally, God 'used' wind and water at the Red Sea through their own capabilities.

How God 'used' Joseph is more problematic. Contrary to many traditional writers we have endeavoured to say that not all acts express the providential activity of God, in the sense of revealing his character and purpose. But all events are potentially providential, i.e. God may express his love and further his purpose in any situation, even in one so apparently hopeless as where a young lad is sold into slavery by his own brothers. While we can never know for sure that God did not intend Joseph to be sold, it seems more likely that the story should be seen as an illustration of how God works to bring good out of evil which results from his previous lure being rejected. Perhaps Joseph's story is an example of the 'cross-resurrection' motif that testifies to God's ceaseless redeeming work. But here we spill over into the second major problem of this chapter.

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22. Again a qualification, by further reference to the inscrutability of God's will.

2 Theodicy

Any theological statement of God's relationship to the world must prove itself capable of giving a satisfactory account of the problem of evil. For many, perhaps most, theologies theodicy has proved highly problematic. In this section I want to outline Process Theology's distinctive approach to the subject. We shall find that it almost succeeds, but has an unfinished air to it. We shall endeavour to supply the required finishing touch.

Theologians have usually tried to solve the problem of evil by variously juggling with three key components: the omnipotence of God, the omni-beneficence of God, and the reality of evil. Nearly all theodicies end up denying or qualifying at least one of these notions so that: God is not all-powerful, else he would prevent evil; or God is not all-good, else he would want to prevent evil and (being omnipotent) would be able to do so; or evil is not really real, but only apparent - perhaps serving some good cause. It is not always made explicit which of the three is being rejected.[23]

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23. Two examples may be given. (a) For Peter Geach, in his Providence and Evil (CUP 1977), no creature can compete with God in terms of power - not even unsuccessfully. "Nobody can deceive God or circumvent him or frustrate him; and there is no question of God's trying to do anything and failing". (p5) Indeed the problem of evil is wrongly located when put in terms of God's omnipotence (p30). The problem of human sin arises because God wills other wills into being, and seeks to produce virtue. "We may think this too high a price to pay; but are we in our sloth and cowardice the best judges?"(p 66) This somewhat unsympathetic rhetoric is a sign of things to come. The problem of animal pain is only a problem to our anthropomorphic sentiment: "One virtue....that God cannot share with his creatures is the virtue of sympathy with physical suffering". (pp 79f) This seems extremely harsh, and he is no more gentle with regard to human suffering. The problem is not why is there any pain and suffering, but why is it apparently so unfairly distributed? God does not inflict suffering on the innocent - for all deserve to suffer. Thus whereas evil may be necessary to build character or virtue, Geach also seems to talk of it in terms of just deserts. The status of evil in such an account is ambiguous: virtue-producing evil is not really evil perhaps, because it works for good; but retributive evil seems very real, and to be God's own will. Geach comes desperately close to denying God's goodness, though he would doubtless contest the fact.

(b) A very eloquent account of what amounts to a denial of the reality of evil is afforded by Vernon White's thesis, to which we have already referred on several occasions(The Concept of Special Divine Action). White discusses the model of God as artist (p 65). The symphony which is the world includes within itself discords which serve to enrich the harmony. Yet no master musician allows discords to slip into his 'magnum opus' by accident: they are put there deliberately. (The model is not ideal, a symphony being planned or scored out in advance with

(continued overleaf)

The cornerstones of a Process theodicy are (i) the conceptuality of occasions and the divine lure, which we have explored in this thesis, and more specifically, (ii) the redefinition of omnipotence offered (arising in part from Whitehead's critique of theological tradition). The best, and fairest way to examine Process theodicy and its relation to the major theme of our study, is to look at a concrete example of it.

23,(contd) every discord carefully placed). Events, says White, are not in themselves evil,only in their effect on human life. An earthquake, e.g., is only evil if it results in human injury. But even then such evil events must be referred to a wider context of meaning. Then we see that the status of evil crumbles when seen from the widest perspective. "Evil only exists in a certain configuration of events which can always be seen from a different perspective, and as such may never have an ultimate hold on reality. Only some such view truly guards against an ultimate dualism". (p 134) White conceives God's omnipotence and omniscience in very traditional terms. He argues, nevertheless, for real freedom and contingency in the world. God's perspective is eternal and he has envisaged all free responses from eternity, and woven them together with other events - providentially from the beginning (pp 138 ff). But such talk, pressed hard, struggles to account for real freedom. God foresees all that happens, and "places" (p 188) it from the beginning in a prepared context,so weaving it into his purpose for each individual. But how could this be done when these same 'contexts' into which God weaves events and decisions are themselves the result of free events and decisions? There seems no way in which God can 'locate' any person where God wants him without tampering with some freedom somewhere. Thus it is not clear how Judas' rebellion (p 189) was 'placed' before time in a given context: it only arose because of its context in the first place. It presupposes its placing, as do all free acts. We have so far outlined two elements in White's position, both of which seem inadequate: his assertion that all evil is not evil when viewed in a wide enough context, and his attempt to combine freedom with omnipotence seems ill-judged. But there is another important feature to his theodicy: he tries to show that evil events are not just potentially good, and that for those not actually their victims - but that they are intrinsically good, even for each victim. Evil is not a means, but an end. Our sensibilities might shy away from such an attempt and examination of White's idea proves our sensibilities right. (cf pp 187f) White eventually has to evoke resurrection to deal with the case of a comatose. But even then (pp 201f: cf p 193, pp 187f) we might wonder if the God of Love brings death and bereavement in this fashion.

David Griffin has written the only full-scale Process treatment, and his book is the natural candidate for scrutiny.[24]

Griffin's work is ambitious and comprehensive. He sets before us a formal statement of the problem of evil structured in eight premises:

> 1. God is a perfect reality (Definition). 2. A perfect reality is an omnipotent being (By definition). 3. An omnipotent being could unilaterally bring about an actual world without any genuine evil (By definition). 4. A perfect reality is a morally perfect being (By definition). 5. A morally perfect being would want to bring about an actual world without any genuine evil (By definition) 6. If there is genuine evil in the world, then there is no God (logical conclusions from 1 through 5). 7. There is genuine evil in the world (Factual statement). 8. Therefore, there is no God (logical Conclusion from 6 and 7). 25

To 'solve' the problem of evil, Griffin claims, one or more of these premises must be denied.

After reviewing biblical and Greek sources he goes on to examine eleven different theodicies from Augustine through Aquinas and Calvin to Hick. We cannot concern ourselves here with the details of his interpretations and expositions, we must turn our attention particularly to his concluding constructive chapters.

Within the 'system' evil arises because the creatures do not always conform themselves to God's aim for them. The deviation from the ideal aim may be great or small, relatively harmless or devastating in its effect. God's aim is at harmony of the whole, and intensity of experience for each actual occasion. The criteria of good and evil might therefore be called aesthetic. The opposition of harmony and intensity are discord and triviality - and these terms cover all evils. Discord is the 'clash' of competing occasions, triviality is the

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24. God, Power and Evil: a Process Theodicy, henceforth Theodicy.
25. Ibid., p 9.

occasion's actualising of less intensity than was ideal. Triviality, especially, is comparative.[26]

One mark of the 'traditional' position is that God is the actual or potential controller of all things (Griffin's use of 'traditional' is sometimes too broad to be really helpful). In most theologies up to and including the Reformation, this 'control' has been vigorously defended and human freedom depreciated as a consequence. With this point we do not demur. But Griffin notes that more recently, and occasionally in the 'hard-line' theologies too, there have been hints at a different approach. 'Hard-liners' (the term is mine) end up denying that evil is genuinely evil - and usually the freedom of human beings also. This, protests Griffin, is against the grain of our common intuition: the reality of evil must be affirmed.

This is one of the major points of Griffin's critique of previous theodicy, and with it I align the position I myself will develop. To deny the evil-ness of evil - disease, natural disaster, human sin, is to mock its victims and to show complacency. As Farrer says, "Some evils, indeed, are evils in appearance only; evils in our eyes, not in the eyes of God. But to pretend that all evils are merely apparent is the cruellest and most revolting of paradoxes".[27]

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26. Whitehead's famous example is of the hog: for a hog, its own behaviour is appropriate, and is properly (perhaps fully) intense; but if a man behaves like a hog he is foregoing intensity in favour of greater triviality of experience. This Whiteheadian position has been criticised for yielding an amoral God - one who wills the beautiful but not the good (E.H. Madden and P.H. Hare, Evil and the Concept of God (Thomas 1968) pp 123f). But such a critique makes a vital and fallacious assumption (see Griffin's Theodicy, pp 301f). It assumes that aesthetic and moral goodness are distinguishable in Whitehead. Madden and Hare speak of intensity and triviality, but do not speak of the other polarity of harmony and discord: hence their false presumption. They assume that pain is not considered evil in such a framework, yet it is a prime example of discord - of competing systems, or malfunction. For Whitehead, beauty and goodness are properly inseparable.

27. Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited (Collins 1962), p 16.

Theologians have, says Griffin, insisted that premises 2 and 3 of his formal statement be retained in order to preserve the worshipfulness of God. This consensus on omnipotence still holds today, Griffin thinks, because of cultural conditioning and because 'anti-theists' are unwilling to allow modification in a weak argument of theists which might endanger their (the 'anti-theists'') attack.[28] But there is another reason, what Griffin calls the "omnipotence fallacy". He means by this that the traditional notion of omnipotence, i.e. having all power, is in fact a fallacious and inconceivable notion. "To exert power is always to exert power over something",[29] that is, over something else with some power of its own.

This critique is a common one, and the reader may recall encountering it in our study of Cobb. Here we may abstract from Griffin's work and explore the view more generally. To be actual at all, according to Process metaphysics, is to be an instance of creative synthesis. Actualities create themselves and contribute to each other. Nothing, not even God, can wholly determine the being of something else, because the actual entity must be to some extent self-created. So the greatest possible power is not 'all the power there is', but 'all the power which it is possible for one being to have consonant with the existence of other beings'. Power, by nature, is social: there is power only if there is a division of power.

Griffin writes in this connection: "However, if there is an actual world, and an actual world by metaphysical necessity contains a multiplicity of beings with power, then it is impossible for any one being to have a monopoly of power".[30] The possibility of genuine evil

28. Theodicy, pp 258 ff.
29. Ibid., p 265.
30. Ibid., p 268.

is necessary, given the meaning of 'world' as containing self-determining beings.

So far, we might say, so good. But Griffin wishes to push us further: if this doctrine remains a contingent matter then problems may follow.[31] (i) God could surely violate contingent human freedom occasionally to prevent particularly horrible evils; (ii) Could not God have created beings "just like us" only predetermined to do the right? (iii) A confining of this freedom to human beings still leaves the problem of 'natural' evil. Thus Griffin maintains that the possibility of genuine evil is rooted in the metaphysical (i.e. necessary) characteristics of the world. As Whitehead said, "The categories governing the determination of things are the reason why there should be evil".[32]

It is just at this point that the argument begins to founder in an ominous way. Whitehead, Griffin admits, was ambiguous on this point. Griffin, like Whitehead, and like all other process theologians, rejects the doctrine of creation ex nihilo. In chapter four we stated some reservations on this course of action. The fear of Whiteheadians is that a God who created ex nihilo would have total control at least potentially over his creation, and would have many fewer 'excuses' for the fact of evil. The freedom of the world is therefore guaranteed by asserting the aboriginal independence of worldly stuff. Griffin argues that key ideas for theodicy come in pairs: either one accepts that God created ex nihilo, and that there are no metaphysical principles beyond his control; or one accepts 'creation from chaos', and that certain necessary principles are indeed beyond his

31. Ibid., pp 271f.
32. Process, p 341.

control.[33]

Griffin professes to follow Hartshorne in 'reforming' Whitehead on this point. For Hartshorne, metaphysical necessities belong to the eternal essence of God, and are therefore unalterable. Whitehead had suggested that metaphysical principles are the result of a "primordial decision" by God. Griffin goes so far as to say that his whole theodicy depends on this point.[34]

In Whitehead, God's primordial nature is a "decision",[35] which in ordering the eternal possibilities establishes the metaphysical principles.[36] Griffin considers that this is not demanded by any principle in Whitehead's philosophy, and is in fact in tension with some key parts. Firstly, he says, to view the primordial nature as a decision is problematic. For Whitehead, decision "constitutes the very meaning of actuality".[37] But the primordial nature is not itself an actual entity, even if Whitehead sometimes talks as if it is. The primordial nature is an abstraction, and it therefore cannot make a decision. Secondly, the notion of metaphysical principles rooted in decision is undercut by the distinction between cosmological generalities (which are true for a particular cosmic epoch) and metaphysical principles (which are true for all epochs). Whitehead does indeed speak of a contrast between 'arbitrary' laws, such as space and time, and "ones so general that we cannot conceive any alternatives".[38] Griffin thus challenges Whitehead's right to say that these 'necessary' principles can be grounded in a decision, which implies that they might have been otherwise. Thirdly, Whitehead says that

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33. Griffin is prepared to say that, in some ways, 'creation from chaos' may be called creation ex nihilo, but he carefully distinguishes his own position from the normal meaning of the term: "Creation out of chaos", p 179, n1.
34. Theodicy, p 298.
35. Process, pp 73, 75.
36. Ibid., pp 64, 522.
37. Ibid., p 68.
38. Ibid., p 441.

the primordial nature "presupposes the general metaphysical character of creative advance, of which it is the primordial exemplification".[39]

While the redefinition of omnipotence which Process theology claims to offer has some force, it may not 'carry the show' as Griffin assumes. Neither does the ruling out of ex nihilo achieve all that is hoped for. Indeed, Griffin leaves the problem of evil as intractable as ever.

Griffin's complaints about the problems which would follow if the qualification of God's omnipotence was merely contingent may prove misconceived. Firstly, God could not violate 'willy-nilly' in order to prevent specific evils, even if God is held to be the potential omni-controller. As we found in our chapter three, such a God would totally undermine the purpose of his limiting his freedom if he were to act in such a way even once. Secondly, it seems rather ridiculous to propose that God - omni-controller or not - could create beings "just like us" yet assured always of doing right. If beings are made "just like us" then they are made to be free, and if they are truly free then there can be no assurance about what they will always do.[40] Thirdly, as we have argued elsewhere taking our cue from the process conceptuality, freedom and independence must be assigned to all creation, and not just to the human level. Griffin, in including these points in the position he seeks to discredit, is committing the same 'sin' for which he earlier castigated the'anti-theists'-

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39. Process, p 522.

40. This is notwithstanding Hick's overgenerous concessions to Mackie and Flew (Evil and the God of Love, pp 303 ff). On this point Hick himself and Farrer (Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited, pp 63 ff) are illuminating.

they do not wish to fight against anything other than the weakest of possible opponents, and refuse modifications which strengthen the opposition.[41] And so the argument begins to totter.

The fear of ex nihilo is equally groundless. Griffin does not take the proper doctrine of creation sufficiently seriously. In a sense, he is criticising not creation but emanation. If God is to create an 'actual world', to use the Whiteheadian term, then he creates something which is beyond his control by definition. Ex nihilo is no guarantor of absolute control. The God who is love creates something distinct from himself, free from domination. This is not so merely by 'moral' argument, but by definition. In this regard we see how the doctrine of power is closely related to that of creation. Process thinkers put forward two arguments for divine persuasion: one is moral, the other metaphysical. Certainly there are two supporting arguments. God's power is loving power, and love is "patient....and does not insist upon its own way".[42] God, 'morally', wants to create that which is free, which exists for itself. But if God is to create something else apart from himself (here, perhaps, is where Griffin is not alone in confusing creation and emanation), then to be apart from himself it must be self-determining. If not, then its identity becomes an appendage of God - a divine mode or function. This is the problem with so much 'traditional' thought: Griffin rightly shows in his chapter on Spinoza that determinism becomes (or at least tends towards, we might say) pantheism.

This same point shows the weakness in many other contemporary

41. Madden and Hare (cited n. 27) are examples of this crude tactic.
42. I Corinthians 13 vv 4-5.

doctrines of God's self-limitation.[43] It is not that God first creates a world and then decides to limit himself to respect its freedom, as if he could have chosen not to. Rather, God decides to create a world which is truly 'other' than him, and therefore free, and in doing that has by definition limited himself. Griffin may wish to call this a principle beyond God's control, though perhaps it is more a case of what he elsewhere dismisses as "purely logical truths".[44] For a being to create an actual world, a world which is not just some function of his own being but something 'other' than him, and for him then to dominate and determine that world is not a logical possibility.

The Process theologians may come back with the charge: even if ex nihilo does not imply total actual or potential control, it must imply that God can exist without the world, for ex nihilo implies a beginning in time. The ideas that God could exist without a world or that he could not exist without a world may prove misleading half-truths. Ex nihilo need not imply a beginning in time: as Griffin himself hints at one point,[45] there is nothing to prevent us thinking that God creates the world from nothing but that he has always done so. We might suggest that ex nihilo be understood by analogy with the Patristic doctrine of 'eternal generation'. There never was a time when God was without a world, for he has ever created ex nihilo. The sense in which God is said to 'need' a world could be clarified simply along these lines: for God to be God (i.e. the one whom we call Creator, Love, and to whom we give our worship), then he must create and love something. Trinitarian manouvres attempting to show that God loves himself seem more and more unconvincing to us now: for the love in

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43. e.g. Hick, who highlights this aspect in his "An Irenaean Theodicy" in Encountering Evil.
44. "Creation out of chaos and the problem of evil", p 104.
45. Theodicy, p 241.

question is not self-love, of which this trinitarian love always seems to be a form. Genuine love loves the other while respecting the other's freedom and otherness, and God is God by eternally creating and loving a world. Without such an eternal creating the One whom we call God might be something, but he would not be the One whom we call God.[46]

Yet Christian theology has usually sought to speak of God's creation as a free act, brought about by God's free decision. Thus the primordial being decides to create (eternally) by his free act; it is because of this decision that he is God. Obviously, this echoes Whitehead's own talk of God's primordial nature being a decision which in turn established the metaphysical principles. By our reading, God's decision to create eternally is a decision to limit himself by being subject to the logic of what it means to create some 'other'. Yet it is this point, of God's being subject to some prior metaphysical necessity, which Griffin says his whole theodicy depends upon. In fact, despite the redefinition of omnipotence and the disavowal of ex nihilo, all Griffin succeeds in doing is recasting the old problematic questions rather than answering them with any finality.

The disavowal of ex nihilo, for instance, does not remove the question "why did God create the world like this given his massive, total power"? It comes back now in another form. "How can God justify his luring of the world into its degree of complexity given all the suffering and evil which is that complexity's concomitant"? Griffin's answer often seems to fall back on a form of metaphysical

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46. On this question of whether God 'needs' the world, see O'Donnell Trinity and Temporality, pp 133, 200. See also our chapter III

evil - it had to be this way because of the necessary correlation between value and power, suffering and enjoyment, freedom and the opportunity for evil.[47] Yet these answers are no more satisfying than is Hick's claim that the world 'had to be this way' because of its purpose as a soul-making environment. Indeed, scrutinised closely, these positions may not be so far apart. For Griffin, as for Whitehead, unnecessary triviality is an evil, so that God had to lure his creation to ever more complexity and intensity. But this assertion begs the question which traditional theodicies have to encounter - is the world worth the evil that must come with it? Griffin gives the impression that once he has disposed of ex nihilo and embraced 'creation from chaos' he has made a shift in 'kind' which immediately vitiates much opposition. In fact, the difference between the two positions may only be one of 'degree'. The pre-existent stuff in chaos has (according to his own necessary correlations) only the most marginal power. Any further power is 'bestowed' by God in his repeated luring to greater intensity. Presumably God could withold a lure, or all lures,and allow creation to return to chaos? If creatures are created free, God may not withdraw their power without robbing them of meaningful actuality. Elsewhere Griffin seems able to speak of God having the power to "call off the evolutionary advance".[48] Thus God has to choose between a level of triviality with a minimum of evil, or a more complex and intense world with the possibility (and probability?) of more evil. The choice for God is real. Griffin has no doubt that God has, so to speak, made the right choice: he is convinced that our lives, and the life of our world is worthwhile.[49] We may wish to agree with Griffin, though mindful of the fact that we do so from our cosy, western living rooms. But that judgement in no way rests upon Griffin's theodicy in particular or on Whitehead's

47. "Creation out of chaos....", p 106.
48. Ibid., p 108.
49. Ibid., p 135, cf Theodicy, pp 292 ff, 308 ff.

approach.

All this implies that we disagree with Griffin's renunciations of Whitehead's apparent meaning in talking of metaphysical and cosmological generalities. For myself, I doubt whether Whitehead's work will bear the strain of such critical examination - ambiguity is rife. We must agree that the primordial nature is only an abstraction from God, but this is not an adequate basis for refuting the assertion that the metaphysical principles result from a primordial decision. It is still possible to conceive God as a unitive actual entity, the primordial actual entity, making a primordial decision. The nature in question is an aspect of God's being, but because this function is located for convenience 'in' this nature does not mean that such ascription of function is invalid. Whitehead ascribes freedom to the mental pole, but we do not say 'therefore freedom does not exist because that pole is an abstraction'.

Griffin's other arguments are more searching, but not finally conclusive. It must be admitted that the exact meaning of God's consequent nature is somewhat problematic in a situation 'before the world'. The consequent nature is comprised of physical prehensions. Two things may be said: (1) we have been careful not to suggest that ex nihilo implies that there was a time when the world was not. An 'eternal' ex nihilo would mean that there had always been a consequent nature. And (ii) if for example, atoms in our world have mental poles so underdeveloped as to be practically non-existent, might not the primordial actual entity which made Whitehead's decision be considered by reverse analogy? Whitehead insists that God 'originates' conceptually, while all other entities 'originate' physically.

Other questions raise themselves. Why should the fact that metaphysical necessities are part of God's eternal essence (as Griffin urges) mean that they are, *per se*, beyond his control? (Could they not be part of his 'defining essence' by decision?) Does the fact that such necessities are "so general that we cannot conceive any alternatives" mean that there are none?

God is responsible for evil in this account, only insofar as he lures a world into such an existence where the experience of evil is acute. But God is justified because the enterprise is worth the evil, the risk is worth taking. The question "why did God create free beings"? has become "why did God bring forth creatures with a high degree of freedom"? and the answer is that no value is possible without its correlative freedom. No particular suffering is necessary, but the possibility of some suffering is necessary. Such an insight in modern theology is commonplace enough: no individual evil is necessary, all particulars are contingent; only the possibility, the risk, is necessary.

Notwithstanding the criticisms which we have made of Griffin's particular version of process theodicy, it is clear that the process approach may have some useful resources for theodicy. With the redefinition of omnipotence we found ourselves in great sympathy, though we traced it back not to "metaphysical necessities" beyond God's control, but to the very nature of creation itself and its logic. The conceptuality of the ideal aim also offers a God ceaselessly and lovingly involved in his creation and yet exposes the risk inherent in it by allowing wrong choices to enter at all levels, and so introduce the evils which are all too evident - those described in Whitehead's language as 'trivial' and 'discordant'. Another resource

is available, however, on which Griffin only begins to draw. For Whitehead describes God as both the "fellow-sufferer who understands" and the one who "loses nothing that can be saved".[50]

The"fellow-sufferer" motif enters Griffin's theodicy at its very end, when asking, in effect, whether the 'risk' was worth taking. The risk, says Griffin, is a risk for God too - and he suffers with us in our world. The "loses nothing than can be saved" motif figures in the idea of the transmutation of evil. All wordly evil is transmuted in God's nature.[51] However, this "overcoming evil with good" brings little comfort, for it is simply the truism that God in prehending our suffering and the world's evil is able to adjust his future aims for good in the world accordingly - to take it into account and to continue to strive for the good of all, in other words. It is a truism because it merely states the obvious (the same may be said of good, bad and indifferent) and because, like most truisms, it is of little consequence - especially here to the victims of evil.[52] At this point process theodicy fails the existential test of theodicy by failing to provide hope. It is my contention that these last two motifs may be used on a broader canvass and so enhance the theodicy otherwise given.

It has been asked whether a God who could not guarantee the outcome of his world is morally defensible for creating it at all.[53] In the light of what we have said about God's power, 'guarantees' are clearly out of the question. It is inappropriate to ask if God can

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50. Process, pp 532, 525.
51. Theodicy,pp 302 ff.
52. Whitehead (Process, p 531) sounds more convincing than Griffin here as he speaks of sorrow and pain turning into triumph through the sense of worth beyond self - "This is the notion of redemption through suffering which haunts the world". Even this, allied as it is with his doctrine of Peace, is no final solution to the problem of an individual's experience of evil. It is but one part of an incomplete answer. One problem is also that Whitehead with his atomism speaks impersonally of individual occasions' redemption.
53. Vernon White, The Concept of Special Divine Action, pp 192f.

guarantee the course of a free world. Nevertheless, the question might make us ask another, more relevant one: given that God cannot guarantee the outcome, is he justified in creating a world which for many is utterly cruel and horrible, without any guarantee of himself - i.e. that he will always seek to alleviate their suffering (and not just suffering in general)? This 'always' implies an eschatological dimension, just as it also emphasises the ceaseless striving of God for each individual.

One of our main criticisms of Process theology is that it does not use the full resources open to it for Christian theology. If we "allow what appeared in Jesus to give meaning and content to the Reality we thereby name" (Cobb) then we must more fully match our theologising with this occasional protestation. Christian theology should be Christ-based theology.

In his Evil and the God of Love John Hick criticises those 'teleological theodicies' which have stated that evil is a necessary risk for God in his creation, but have not supplemented this insight with its distinctively Christian ('revealed') complement.[54] A parallel case may be made against the Process theologians. Hick points to thinkers who use NT resources to show that God does not just abandon us to his risky universe but suffers with us in it. This statement requires to be made much more central in any Process theodicy; that it has not become so is the more remarkable in that Griffin's 'natural' resource can call God the "fellow-sufferer who understands". To incorporate this in one's theodicy in a position of prominence can

54. Evil and the God of Love, ch XI.

recognise that the cross shows not only God's powerlessness,[55] but also his suffering in and with his creation. Griffin uses this element only marginally, yet it can play a central role.[56]

But there is not only the "fellow-sufferer who understands", there is the "tenderness which loses nothing that can be saved". There is not only the cross, but its obverse, and theodicy ignores this vital element too at its peril. The pattern revealed in Jesus, we might say, is that crucifixions are not mere risks of the creative process, but occasions for God to suffer with his world and opportunities for him to bring good out of them beyond our imagining. Neither is the cross followed by a merely general improvement, or someone else's resurrection. 'Transmutation' allows for the bringing of good from evil, but often only someone else's good from your evil. Vicarious suffering has an honoured place in Christian thought, but it is not the whole story.

In the utter reliability and graciousness of the ideal aim we have a counterpart to Paul's statement that God works through all things for the good.[57] This is not to say that all evil has a purpose or will bear fruit. Far from this seems to be the case,[58] though Hick and White seems to insist on it in defence of God. Hick should be sharply criticised for not allowing the notion of surd into his theodicy for without it evil is not truly real. Not all evil though is pointless and irredeemable, for God brings good out of all sorts of evil. But despite his efforts, free creatures often make their own suffering surd. Not all evil can be bent to the service

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55. Earlier we listed the moral and metaphysical arguments for the persuasive power of God. There is a powerful theological argument with the cross at its heart. Cobb hints at it in God and the World.

56. O'Donnell, (Trinity and Temporality, pp 202f) recognises this.

57. Romans 8 v 28.

58. See Farrer, Love Almighty and Ills Umlimited, pp 166f.

of good.[59]

But the principle of God's ceaseless work through us for good needs to be extended to another level - one taken for granted in most theodicies, but usually discounted from Process theodicy because of the nature of the argument and then considered an optional extra.[60] If God is a God who saves all that can be saved, who always and everywhere never ceases to try to bring good from evil, and who creates eternally from nothing, then an adequate theodicy cries out for an eschatological dimension. Thus perhaps, God is only morally defensible for creating this world if he always works to bring good for each individual from each individual circumstance, where 'always' takes on an eternal connotation. God's love and infinite resourcefulness promises the eternal striving to bring good from evil.[61] Such a 'resurrection' is not in any way a 'compensation' for evil, for there can be none. It is rather an expression of God's ceaseless activity to bring good from evil as guaranteed by his nature, and thus making all evil and all its victims capable of redemption. Perhaps Griffin cannot keep resurrection as an optional extra and also hope to provide a finally satisfying answer to the problem posed in theodicy.

3 Final Conclusion

In this thesis it has not been our purpose to offer a full and definitive critique of Whitehead's cosmology. Instead we have attempted to test his thought as a vehicle for a particular Christian

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59. Whitehead recognises this fact, Process, p 373.

60. Griffin, Theodicy, Appendix, pp 311 ff. Whitehead thinks that the question of immortality is an open one, to be decided upon suitable (not philosophical) evidence (Religion, p 111).

61. There may be a link between our suggestion here and that offered tentatively in our chapter three.

doctrine, or cluster of doctrines: in addressing the subject of action we have been led into the field of miracle, Christology, and theodicy in particular. At the outset we sought to establish some basic ground rules for any talk of God's action in history by teasing out what was involved in making statements about 'action' and 'history'. We concluded that it was possible to speak, with care, of both God's action, and his action in history.

Theologically, we have continually moved between speaking of God's action in general, and the more specific cases of miracle and Christology. It has been our contention, as made explicit in this chapter, that miracle is but another form of God's more 'normal' action - but being truly distinctive and unusual in character, of remarkable timing and appropriateness. The thinkers whose thought we examined in chapters six and seven assumed that Christology could similarly be treated as a special instance of this more general action.

While we have been careful to point out certain weaknesses in Whitehead's thought as we came to see them, we have not offered a fully exhaustive critique. We <u>assume</u> the general viability of his system for the purposes of our study. Neither did we try to gather up all 'loose ends' of interpretive problems encountered - instead we offered more tentative resolutions, or indications of the possibility of resolution.

Over certain aspects of Whitehead's thought, and certain aspects of 'orthodox' Process theology we have placed large question marks. But nevertheless we have seen that, given the restraints placed upon talk of God's <u>action</u> and the historical context of that

action, the Whiteheadian conceptuality of ideal aims is a fruitful resource for understanding the action of God in the world. It enables us to conceive of God's relation to the world in such a way that it is possible to think of his general and specific providences, of miracle, and it also could provide a suitable component in a satisfactory theodicy.

Even if the 'philosophy of organism' as a whole were found to be untenable by our reader, the notion of God's lure and all-pervasive presence in action and sustenance may still prove strong.[62] Indeed, some will no doubt (due to a reticence to base theology on any philosophical system too closely,[63] or fearing Whitehead's philosophical and scientific aura already too dated) wish to jettison the cosmology as a whole. Against that it may be said that the usefulness of this particular aspect of the system for explicating a fundamental of Christian theology may in turn commend the system as a whole to us to some extent. Such a discussion is beyond our scope here. However, there is no doubt that Whitehead's own critique of the theological tradition which must have played some part in his cosmology's construction will continue to require our careful attention. That alone should mean that his concerns, with the answer that his system embodies, will continue to stimulate and enrich Christian theology.

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62. We must be careful, however, lest we espouse ideas but not the conceptuality which makes them plausible (cp our comments on Farmer, p 114).

63. At the same time we recognise the force of Whitehead's claim that all thought implies a metaphysic; Process, pp 4f.

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