Providence and Pantheism

Abstract: This paper argues that a strong thesis of divine providence, whereby God is understood as in complete control of all things, entails pantheism, the thesis that the universe is not ontologically distinct from God. In normal discourse we distinguish a plan from, on the one hand, the state of affairs which realises that plan – its execution or expression – and, on the other hand, the person or group whose plan it is. However, with respect to an omnipotent God who displays complete providence neither of these two distinctions holds. We cannot separate person from plan, or plan from world, and in consequence neither can we separate person from world. Ergo pantheism. Accordingly, the argument of this paper comes in two parts maintaining, first the impossibility of distinguishing between God's plan and its execution and, second, the impossibility of distinguishing God himself from his plan.

The protestant theologian Huldreich Zwingli (1484–1531) is famous for having maintained the strongest possible thesis of divine providence. According to Zwingli the universe displays "providence in all things," such that "nothing happens by chance or at random" and even human wickedness and damnation take place in accordance with the sovereign plan of God. (Zwingli, 1983, 158, 182) "Nothing," he insists, "is done or achieved which is not done and achieved by the immediate care and power of the Deity." (Zwingli, 1983, 218) More than just a point about who sets the world's design or destiny, Zwingli is making a claim about the origin of the power which brings that fate to pass, for it is his thesis that everything in creation obtains its nature, being and activity from God who is "the only real cause of all things," such that "those nearer things which we call causes, are not properly causes, but the agents and instruments with which the eternal mind works, and in which it manifests itself to be enjoyed." (Zwingli, 1983, 157-8) "Secondary causes are not properly called causes" we are told. (Zwingli, 1983, 138) But if Zwingli is famous for thus denying secondary causes, he is perhaps infamous for further supposing that such all-inclusive government or superintendence entails pantheism, for he regards it as a direct consequence of God's comprehensive providence that everything which exists "is in Him and through Him and a part of Him." (Zwingli, 1983, 143) The argument is simple enough, and notable for the way in which it prefigures Spinoza. Zwingli argues that as the sole origin of all existence and power, God must be thought of as unlimited or infinite, from which fact it follows immediately that he is unitary and all-encompassing.

> "Now since the infinite, as a fact, is so-called just because it is infinite in essence and existence, it is clear that outside of this infinite there can be no existence. For whatever such you grant, where this outside existence is, there the infinite will not be, and, therefore, it will not be infinite. Since, therefore, there is but one infinite, nothing can exist outside of it. And from this it follows that whatever is, is in it, nay, what is and exists comes from it, and since it does not come from it in the sense that its being and existence is different from its own, it is certain that as far as being and existence are concerned, there is nothing which is not of the Deity. For it is the being of all things." (Zwingli, 1983, 143)

Commentators have tended to dismiss Zwingli's pantheistic stance as some sort of regrettable over-exaggeration, and to be a little embarrassed also by the way in which he supports it, not just with the Biblical endorsement of Moses and St. Paul, but also by reference to the classical (pagan) authority of Pythagoras, Pliny and – especially – Seneca. But perhaps Zwingli was wiser than his critics allow, perhaps pantheism does indeed follow from providence.

This paper argues that divine providence, the stance that the universe falls under God's sovereign guidance and control, entails pantheism, the thesis that the universe is not ontologically distinct from God. I shall not say too much about providence except to make clear that I am talking here only about a *strong* conception of providence, one whereby God is in complete control of all things. Strong providence in itself must appear as a plausible thesis for the believer. Firstly, it seems a natural consequence of God's concern, omniscience and omnipotence. If he wishes well for the universe, is fully cognisant of its current state, and fully able to bring about what he desires, would he not do so? Secondly, the doctrine is a spiritually attractive one. In the darkest or most uncertain of times, it is a consolation to know that there is a plan, that everything is under control and that in the end all things will work out for the best. Thirdly, the doctrine has no shortage of biblical warrant. Scripture tells us that God is sovereign over the universe as a whole as well as, more specifically, the weather, the birth and death of living things, the affairs of nations, the destiny of individuals, social status, the direction of the human heart, and the safety of his followers. (*Psalm* 103:19; *Matthew* 5:45; *Matthew* 10:29; *Psalm* 66:7; *Galatians* 1:15; *Luke* 1:52; *Exodus* 9:12; *Psalm* 4:8) The main impetus to resist an assertion of providence understood as strongly as this comes from a fear that it would undermine human freedom, where such freedom is understood as incompatible with determinism. This is not a concern to be dismissed lightly, but I would argue that in the end the notion of counter-causal liberty yields an incoherent approach to agency. Thus, given its basic plausibility, and putting worries about freedom to one side, for the purposes of this paper I shall *assume* the truth of strong providence and go on to consider its implications.

Turning to the second term of my thesis, since it is far more interesting to discuss *issues* than *definitions*, I propose to carry but lightly the term 'pantheism,' for not only would the argument I advance be acceptable to some who would prefer to call themselves 'panentheists' or even to a few who would regard themselves as some kind of 'theist,' but not everyone who would describe themselves as a 'pantheist' would necessarily accept it. The point is that all theories of divinity worth their salt pay regard to both the immanence and the transcendence of God, but these may be of many different kinds, such that really everything depends on the specific details of the theory in question. If some understandings of immanence naturalise God, other divinise nature, exposing the infinite latent within the finite. But to offer at least a working definition, the particular question that I want to ask here is whether or not a belief in complete divine providence is compatible with regarding the universe as ontologically distinct from God, or to put the matter in a slightly different way, whether or not the intrinsic being of God 'includes' that of the universe.

The argument that I wish to advance is a straightforward one. A strong thesis of divine providence maintains that God has a plan for the entire universe, that everything occurs precisely as he wills it.[1] And in normal discourse we would distinguish a plan from, on the one hand, the state of affairs which realises that plan – its execution or expression – and, on the other hand, the person or group whose plan it is. The economic strategy was sensible enough, we might say, but sadly the government of the day made an utter mess of its implementation. However, with respect to an omnipotent God who displays complete providence neither of these two distinctions really work. We cannot separate person from plan, or plan from world, and in consequence neither can we separate person from world. Ergo pantheism. To say that we cannot make these separations is not to assert that these terms just mean the same, but simply to point out that in the case of God these different concepts pick out the very same thing. The distinction is solely a conceptual one. My thesis is thus logically similar to that made by Spinoza when he asserts that his one substance, God or nature, may be understood either as creative cause (*natura naturans*) or as passive effect (*natura naturata*). (Spinoza, 1994, p.104) In line with the structure of this argument, my defence of it comes in two parts as I maintain, first, the impossibility of distinguishing between God's plan and its execution and, second, the impossibility of distinguishing God himself from his plan.

1. The impossibility of distinguishing God's plan and its execution

[1] I take as equivalent here talk of God's 'plan' and talk of his 'will' – for God makes no plans which he does not will into being, nor does he will anything except in accordance with his perfect planning, i.e. without logic or purpose. Insofar as God's will is a part or aspect of his person or being, the equivalence here is precisely that which I defend in the second half of this paper.

I argue first that it is impossible to distinguish God's plan and its execution. With respect to human activity we can and do separate project or intention, and outcome. Something may occur planned or unplanned, either by design or by accident, while a plan may be successfully realised or somehow thwarted and unfulfilled. But with God's plans, matters are quite different. The two expressions 'what God wills to exist or plans to happen' and 'what does in fact exist or happen' not only designate the same set of objects and events, but necessarily do so. That is to say, neither can become uncoupled from the other, not even in part.

The impossibility that anything might occur without God's willing it is simply the thesis of strong providence which I have assumed in this paper. To maintain that everything falls under God's sovereign direction and control is precisely to exclude chance or irrationality from the universe, to say that nothing can happen unless expressly planned or willed by God.

The converse impossibility is just as easy to see. Providence is more than just the wishes, hopes or desires of God, and hence there is absolutely no chance that God might plan or will or intend something and that thing fail to happen, for God is *omnipotent* and, in consequence, *necessarily* whatever he intends must happen. This is so clearly the case that we may wonder as to the very meaning of saying that God *as omnipotent* makes plans or has a will; for (it might be suggested) we only distinguish between a plan and its execution if there is a chance that these two might not coincide — that things might not go as designed. With all human endeavour this is the case. We might will something, but the rest of the world decline to go along with that plan or refuse to play ball with us. But of course, that can never be the case with God, in which case the familiar distinction extended to God loses its significance and becomes empty. Introducing the notion of omnipotence raises all sorts of questions (such as whether it might be relinquished, or simply not exercised, or whether it entails omnificence), and so it worth noting that the concept is brought in here for heuristic reasons only. Our argument assumes strong providence, which states that everything which happens is in accordance with God's will, and the reference to divine omnipotence serves to remind us that this alignment is not merely *fortuitous* — God is not *lucky* that everything goes his way. But if there is just no possibility that plan and result could ever differ, they must be regarded as one thing rather than two.

The commonly made distinction between what God directly *wills* and what he merely *permits* does not affect the reasoning behind this argument, for if something which could have been prevented is knowingly allowed, as a result it becomes part of the design; it is there because the omnipotent being wishes it to be there. Otherwise it would be prevented.

To consider another potential challenge, Thomists will likely qualify the claim that God's plan must necessarily come into effect by distinguishing between his *antecedent will* (what is intended in principle, prior to consideration of all the particular facts), which may be frustrated, and his *consequent will* (what is intended given all the particular facts of the situation), which never is. (Aquinas, 1920, question 19, article 6) This distinction need not be understood as implying that God *changes his plans* in response to what human beings do, for what we want in principle, or what we would want were things otherwise, is still genuinely part of our will, but since providence pertains solely to what *actually* happens, the only sense of will that needs to be taken into account with respect to this argument is God's consequential will, which is not hindered in any way.

It is useful here to consider Hegel who, rather than think about God's omnipotence, has a very different way of making essentially the same point that there is no separating the divine plan and its implementation. In the culminating sections of his Logic he argues that it is impossible to distinguish between God's belief and his desire, between the theoretical and the practical aspects of the divine mind. (Hegel, 1969, pp.775-844; Hegel, 1975, §§223-244) The standard way to differentiate between belief and desire is in terms of their different 'directions of fit' and to suppose that while the goal of belief is to conform to reality the goal of desire is that reality conform to it. But, as Hegel saw, with respect to God, this usual 'direction of fit' answer fails in its work of distinguishing between belief and desire, for perfect knowledge and perfect desire both map onto reality exactly. Whatever is, is known and whatever is desired, is. Hegel's own solution to this paradox needs not detain us. It is enough to see is that the failure to distinguish between the divine plan and its outcome is just one further illustration of this more general dilemma that Hegel identifies, for God's plan or will pertains to the practical aspect of his nature, but its actualisation (as something in the world which therefore may be known to be the case) belongs to the theoretical or cognitive side. If we cannot distinguish between what God wants and what he knows, we cannot distinguish between his plans and their implementation.

1. With the argument now presented, I move on to consider three objections which might be made to the conclusion. In the first place it might be complained that the analysis which I am advancing is vitiated by a confusion between God's *plan* and the person whose plan it is, namely *God*, for (it might be said) the necessity of its implementation attaches to the latter not the former. Were any finite agent such as you or I to adopt the same plan as God, to will the same outcome, such intentions would certainly remain unrealised – unless God stepped into help us, of course. The plan itself is quite separate from its implementation, we might insist, and it is simply the fact that the plan in question is *God's* which makes it look as though they are necessarily connected. This

objection may be put to one side for the moment, for its failing is that it hinges on drawing a sharp distinction between God and his plan, but that distinction – as we shall see in the second half of this paper – is not tenable.

2. Instead we may think about two further objections. In the second place, it might well be complained that things can be different or distinct without being separable,[2] and hence that we should not allow the necessary coincidence of divine plan and realization to blind us to their great and obvious differences. For example, it might be urged that plan and execution belong to fundamentally different metaphysical categories. Specifically, it might be said, a plan is something mental or ideal or notional. It belongs to the realm of meaning and concepts and, as such, it is the kind of thing that could be wise, foolish, generous, heartless, brazen, subtle, or whatever. By contrast, its execution belongs to the concrete world of things and events. It takes place in the realm of being and, accordingly, no such intentional descriptions apply to it. It just *is or occurs*. In short, this objection urges, we cannot make sense of 'a plan' without appealing to the metaphysics of dualism. But if we assume that plans and volitions are essentially mental, and that mental things are fundamentally different from the physical world and its events which embody or actualise such plans, then naturally any pantheist suggestion that plans cannot be distinguished from their realization will seem badly awry.

Appealing as it does to a traditional metaphysics this objection will undoubtedly seem attractive to many people, but I want to argue that it is in fact fundamentally mistaken. The underlying idea here is that if we describe any state of the world as meaningful or significant or rationally assessible that is only because we suppose that there is some further 'mental' entity, some purpose or intention, lying behind it of which it is the embodiment. As illustrated by Putnam's famous example of the ant which, despite the complex of lines that it has left in the sand, fails to draw a picture of Winston Churchill because it had no such intention, (Putnam, 1981, 1) it is natural enough to suppose that meaning is thus conveyed by mind. But as tempting as it may be, this intuition is problematic, for surely our very plans, purposes or intentions themselves display meaning and logic, and if an existent can only become meaningful if it is brought about by some antecedent intention or meaning, then it would seem that we are forced to posit a further thought behind the thought – indeed that we are launched on an infinite regress of meanings that only exist because they are inherited by their antecedents. This is immensely unattractive, of course, and instead one may be tempted to say that a mental plan can have its own *internal* significance or logic. But the postulation of magic mental entities which explain but (fortuitously) do not themselves need

[2] Think, for example, of form and matter, term and relation, or substance and property.

explaining looks like mere assertion with nothing more going for it than the fact that it avoids the problem at hand and, moreover, there is nothing that can be said of such ideal entities that cannot be said the same of their expressions. Instead we should perhaps take a more straightforward approach and argue that if something appears meaningful or purposive, if it can be treated as significant or deliberate, then it is so. If something displays discernible rationality or direction, why not allow that that is its own intrinsic possession? In which case a set of actions 'on the ground' can have its own design without necessitating the postulation of some additional mental scheme behind it. Indeed, it might be thought that we *must* take this line of argument, for if things in themselves lack meaning or purpose, then simply postulating a prior mental copy of them from which they are said to result will do nothing to make good that deficiency. The critic seems to think that meaning and purpose make no sense without dualism. But in fact, dualism explains nothing here. All it offers us is a *reduplication* of our puzzle. To say that something is meaningful or planned is not to claim that there is some further item lying behind it, its 'meaning' or 'plan,' but rather to say something about *the item itself*.

3. Against my proposal that there is no need to distinguish between plan and execution a third objection which might be made is that if we refuse to separate a plan and its implementation we would be unable to say that things happen *because* of the plan.[3] We tend think of the relation between a plan and its implementation as a *causal* or *explanatory* one. The plan is the cause, or at least one part of the cause, of what happens. But the key thing about a causal relation, Hume tells us, is that cause and effect are *separate.* You can conceive of one without the other. If that is the case, then if a plan is to explain its outcome, it must be something distinct from it.

Sticking to the thesis of this paper that the divine plan and its implementation are *not* separate, there are two different ways in which we might respond to this objection. If we stick firmly to a Humean understanding of causation, we could infer that the relation between plan and implementation is not strictly a causal one. The design or intention may well give us the reason why things are the way they are, but reasons are not the same thing as causes. Alternatively, we might suppose that Hume was just wrong about causality. Perhaps his insistence on the separability of cause and effect simply reflects back to him the contrived and distorting atomism of his own theory of sensation, rather than any deeper truth about causality itself.

[3] The objection here is structurally the same as that which can be raised against behaviourism: that if mental states are reduced to patterns of behaviour, it becomes impossible to appeal to mental states in order to explain behaviour.

At this point it may be useful to take up a new angle on this discussion. It might be suggested that at bottom this dispute is all about *teleology*, for to be planned is to be built in regular fashion for some goal or purpose. In which case the key issue in contention here – whether the occurrence of something planned presupposes the occurrence of some prior plan – seems to be the contrast between immanent or natural teleology and external or imposed teleology. If we follow modern thought in rejecting immanent teleology, this will force us to think of a plan as something separate from the world, some external which directs and shapes it. To the modern mind, mere things can have no purpose. That can only come from some further intention of plan which brings them about.

The ultimate extirpation of final causes that took place in the modern era is often presented as a kind of the victory of naturalism over the theistic world-view, efficient causality usurping the place of divine teleology. There is some irony in telling the story this way, for it might be argued that modern scientific naturalism did no more than reap the final reward of a move made centuries earlier by theism itself, when it abandoned the intrinsic purposes that Aristotle supposed to reside naturally within things and argued instead that purpose must be added to creation by a separate controlling thought, viz God's. In denying the possibility of intrinsic purpose the orthodox theistic approach set in place the underlying metaphysics of naturalism which went on to undermine it.

Most philosophers have thought that it is necessary to choose between Aristotle's view that things are naturally purposive and the view shared equally by theism and scientific naturalism that purpose can only come from some external thinking agent, but reconciliation may in fact be possible. Arguably this is what we find in pantheism, which seeks to embrace both positions. Purpose is natural to the world and it does not need any external injection of directedness from outside. But it is true also that goal-direction requires intelligence or living agency, that mere things lack purpose. Yet to the pantheist these two positions are compatible for the world is taken to be identical to the intelligent living God. The Aristotelian and the theistic/naturalistic view have each grasped one half of the true picture.[4]

2. The impossibility of distinguishing between God and his plan

I move now to the second limb of my case and argue that, just as we cannot distinguish between the divine plan and its execution, neither can we really distinguish between the plan and the person whose plan it is. To know the plan is to know the person.

[4] By way of an aside, I might add that as an Absolute Idealist I am attracted to Hegel's version of this compromise, in particular. Purpose does indeed come only *from thought*, but it is nonetheless naturally *intrinsic* to things, because in their essence they *are* just thought.

The idea behind this claim is not original and was perhaps first expressed as a clearly distinct thesis by the nineteenth century American idealist, Josiah Royce. If we reflect upon our immediate psychological experience, Royce argued, we note that while it certainly informs us *that* we exist, it fails to tell us *what* or *who* we are. There is no simple act of perceiving our own self. We receive no given datum of unitary personhood. All that we ever meet with is a disconnected mass of impulses and feelings. (Royce, 1899*,* 2:287) From this fact Royce draws the even more disturbing conclusion that, in truth, we are not born with any self-unity, but instead that this is something gradually acquired. More specifically, it is something *made* through our own moral effort. It is by our adoption of values, of ideals, or as Royce terms it a 'life-plan,' that we become persons. 'Adopt' is not quite the right word, however, for to Royce's way of thinking the self does not *have* a plan. Rather, it *is* a plan. "The term 'person'… can mean only the moral individual, i.e. the individual viewed as meaning or aiming towards an ideal" he says. (Royce, 1898*,* 292) "An individual is a being that adequately expresses a purpose." (Royce, 1906*,* 93) Overturning traditional metaphysical pictures, Royce maintains that our unique individuality is not the function of some metaphysical entity like a soul, but of the unique moral task, purpose or work which we give to ourselves. As one commentator has put it, "for Royce an individual says who he is by describing his purposes and causes, what he intends to do in his life." (Rawls, 1972*,* § 63) We tend to think that a person is prior to any plan they might have, that they *originate* and *explain* the plan. But perhaps the truth is the other way around. Perhaps the plan is prior to the person and it explains them. If we seek the explanation or ground of a person's words and deeds, we look to their guiding ideas. The 'life-plan' or 'plan of action' is the active principle behind everything which they do and which constitutes the life of that person. It is where their unity comes from. The forward-looking aspect of Royce's conception should not be left un-noted. A person, on this way of thinking, is not so much a present reality as a future ideal to be striven for. A person truly is that which he or she is striving to become. It might be felt that there is something disconcertingly 'heroic' about this definition, a championing of 'the single-minded individual of vision and destiny.' What (we might ask) about the person whose life drifts and lacks any clear direction? Are they not really a person? Royce suggests not, although he allows that not all plans have to be grand and impressive, or integrated under one overarching purpose, or ones that we can properly understand and articulate to ourselves. "A self is a life living according to a plan, which, of course may be extremely ill-known to the self… But so far as there is no plan whatever… one is not a self." (1914, Berkeley lectures. Quoted in Kegley, 2009, 59-60) Another more recent philosopher to explore this linkage was Bernard Williams, who famously analyses personal integrity in terms of principles and life-projects or other similar 'identity-conferring commitments' which are

constitutive of our very identity as unique individuals. (Williams, 1973) To be forced to abandon one's deepest plans is to do violence to one's very identity.

Of course, there are analyses of what it means to be a person quite different from that offered by Royce, but his approach has the unique merit of being able to capture the sense in which a self is essentially something active and teleological, rather than some sort of static or mechanical object. A self is not some metaphysical substance which happens to have a history, but a conscious self-interpreting life whose identity is essentially narrative in form. Our very existence is created by the story we tell ourselves about where we have *come from* and where we are *going to* or *aiming a*t. (Taylor 1989) To the objection that, while this notion of personal identity may apply well enough to finite selves, it has no application to the infinite — especially if we suppose that God exists timelessly — it may justly be replied that divine personhood, even if only analogous to our own, can hardly leave out what is most essential to our sense of being a self, and that we certainly want to regard God as a living and purposive *agency*, rather than some static and directionless *thing*.

Applying this notion of a person as a plan to the divine case before us, there is one important complication and qualification to note. A person may be a plan, and God may have a plan for the created universe, but we cannot from those facts alone simply equate God's personhood with his providential plan for creation. For there may be *more* to God's plans than his plans for creation. And thus there may be more to God than simply the physical universe. A person may be constituted by their aims and plans, but we must not assume that God's infinite and perfect plans and purposes are exhausted by whatever he intends for the created universe, and so he may be larger than the universe.

While for this reason we should draw a distinction between God and the world, it should be recognised that this is a part-whole contrast, for we cannot isolate two distinct and separable items here. As God's plan for creation falls within God's plan overall, if that be something larger, so the universe falls within God, even if God is larger than the universe. If one's primary concern is with whether or not anything in the world is distinct from God one might well call the position 'pantheism,' if one is more concerned with the issue of whether there is anything in God that is distinct from the world one might prefer the term 'Panentheism.' Care is needed here, however. One might express this result by saying that the universe is one part of God, but this claim is somewhat misleading in the sense that part of a person's plan is not really part of that person. There may be more to God than his plan for the created universe, but he is *wholly present* in his plan for the universe and thus wholly present in the universe. As is appreciated with the notion of divine omnipresence, God's being fully present in one place is no obstacle to his being fully present in

others also. Running the universe may be easy for him, and he may well have other interests, but he is fully interested in the universe, he does not have (as it were) 'half an eye' on the job.

1. As with the first argument, I move to consider objections which might be raised against this new conclusion. To start with it might be said that this proposal is all well and good, but surely it is clear from all that Royce says that the plan which makes for a person is a plan which they have for *their own life*, the plan according to which *that life* is lived. However, in the parallel theological case which we are considering God's plan is a plan for *something else*, namely his creation, that is to say, a plan *for events outside those of his own life.*

The correct response to make to this objection is that it begs the question at issue, for it assumes that the creation is distinct from God, which is precisely the point at issue. If we take seriously this way of understanding a person, we cannot then judge it or correct it by reference to some alternative definition of what it is to be a person. If a person is to be identified by that which they aim at or care for then this suggestion must be followed through, even if it turns out that their identity lies in things more typically taken to lie 'outside' them. Nor is this so strange. Hegel and the British Idealists argued that we can find our proper selves only insofar we identify with the wider social whole to which we belong. And more recently Mark Johnston, in his book *Surviving Death,* suggests that a good person is one who can truly *identify* with all of humanity, and in so directing the locus of his being in line with this concern, after his physical death he may continue to live in the "onward rush of humanity." (Johnston, 2010) If the selfish person lives in their plans for themselves, the good person lives in their plans for others, and while the former can last no further than the span of our physical organism the later may stretch as far forward in time as may our imagination and our sympathy. There is no need to deny the apparent difference between plans for your own life and plan for other people or things, but it is possible that the difference may be simply that, *apparent*. If your personhood is identified by that which you care for, wherever that seems to lie, then we may discover that our personhood is rather different from what we first thought it was.

2. To consider a second concern, against the suggestion we should identify a person and their plan it might further be objected that we tend to think of a person as a particular concrete individual that acts, whereas a plan is an abstract scheme – a general rule or pattern – which while it may be *followed*, does not in itself *bring about* anything. This objection has a certain degree of immediate and intuitive appeal, but the more we think it through the weaker it becomes. It attempts to construe plans (unlike people) as both abstract and impotent, but neither charge holds water.

In the first place there is no necessity for a plan to be abstract or general, for it could be every bit as unique and particular as we take a person to be, and in the case of God's plan we have good reason to think that this is indeed the case. The confusion here arises from the fact that with human agents no plan ever perfectly expresses its creator. Thus I might look at a project or intention and ask, 'Is this Alex's or Sam's plan? There are bits here that are typical of Alex, but other bits that seem more like Sam.' Insofar as we think of a plan in itself as distinct from the person whose plan it is, we imagine that one and the same plan might be proposed by several different agents. But this is only possible if the plan imperfectly expresses their individuality, and we may well suppose that no such indeterminacy occurs respecting the divine plan. It is a perfect communication of him whose plan it is. We may assume that God's plan for creation is no general blueprint but a perfect expression of his own perfect individuality. The plan is as unique and individual as he is.

The further idea, that a plan is impotent and lacks the agency of a person, is no more well-founded than the first. Generally when a person acts we explain what is happening by reference to what someone is try to do – their object or plan – not simply by reference to *them.* And in the same way, according to the strong thesis of providence which has been adopted in this essay, we say everything which happens in creation does so as a result of the divine plan; the logic and purpose of the scheme explain precisely why everything is or occurs as it does. The critic may complain that a plan does not itself act, or decide, or create in the same way that a person does. A plan is impotent, they might say, for it is the *person* who brings things about *in accordance with* a plan, rather than the *plan itself* that is efficacious. We know this, it might be argued, because plan and action can come apart; that is to say it is possible (if undesirable) for people to act spontaneously or without a plan. Yet on further reflection it is possible to question that assertion, for it could be replied that the very essence of action, as opposed to mere events or mere behaviour, is precisely that it is done deliberately for a reason, and hence what comes about without any plan or intention whatsoever is not the action of a person at all. No doubt there is much that remains unclear when we explain events by reference to the plan by which they occur, but neither should we pretend here to an understanding of the metaphysics of causation that we do not really possess. For in reality we have no better understanding of how a *person* might bring about some event than of how a *plan* might do so.

Reviewing the argument as a whole, the critic may say I am reducing God to his plan and God's plan to its result. But while I have certainly argued that in neither case can a distinction be made, it must be remembered that equations are not reductions. It would be perfectly possible to respond to such a critic that really I am assimilating the result to the plan, and equating the plan with

the person. In point of fact, however, I would be disinclined to accept either construal of my argument, for my case is rather that these distinctions are merely conceptual differences on our part, which reflect no real difference ‘on the ground.’

REFERENCES

Aquinas, St. Thomas (1920) *The Summa Theologiæ of St. Thomas Aquinas*, Second and Revised Edition, London: Burns Oates and Washbourne.

Hegel, G. W. F. (1969) *Hegel's Science of Logic* (translated by A. V. Miller), London: George Allen and Unwin. First published 1812–16.

Hegel, G. W. F. (1975) *Hegel's Logic: Part One of the Encylopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences* (translated by W. Wallace), Oxford: Clarendon Press. First published 1817.

Johnston, Mark (2010) *Surviving Death*, Princeton: Princeton University Press

Kegley, Jacquelyn Ann K. (2009) *Josiah Royce in Focus,* Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Putnam, Hilary (1981) *Reason, Truth and History,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Rawls, John (1972) *A Theory of Justice,* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Royce, Josiah (1898) *The Conception of God* New York: Macmillan.

— (1906) *The Conception of Immortality*, London: Archibald Constable. First published 1899.

— (1899-1901) *The World and the Individual,* New York: Macmillan. Two volumes.

Spinoza, Benedict de (1994) *A Spinoza Reader, the Ethics and other works*, edited by Edwin Curley, Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Taylor, Charles (1989) *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Williams, Bernard (and J.J.C.Smart) (1973) *Utilitarianism: For and Against,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Zwingli, Huldreich (1983) *Sermon on the Providence of God,* in *Zwingli On Providence and other essays,* edited by S.M.Jackson and W.J.Hinke, Durham, North Carolina: The Labyrinth Press, pp.128-234. First published 1530.