SEVENTH EDITION

PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION

AN ANTHOLOGY

MICHAEL REA | LOUIS POJMAN

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Dedicated to the memory of Louis A. and Helen Pojman and to the memory of Robert E. Rea

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Preface

Welcome to the seventh edition of *Philosophy of Religion: An Anthology*. This volume, originally edited by the late Louis Pojman, has been in print for more than twenty-five years, and it has enjoyed wide use throughout the profession. The purpose of the volume is to provide an accessible and engaging introduction to some of the most important ideas, topics, and figures in contemporary philosophy of religion. It is exciting to have once again the opportunity to revise and update the text, breathing fresh air into several sections of the work while at the same time retaining what has consistently proven useful to a wide variety of instructors and students over the life of the anthology.

The present edition takes further steps in the direction of diversifying the perspectives represented in the volume. The first subsection, entitled "Concepts of God and the Ultimate," has been expanded with two new selections that focus on concepts central to the Hindu and Mahayana Buddhist religious traditions. Two new readings by Grace Jantzen help to bring a feminist perspective to the sections on the problem of evil and religious experience. There is a brand new subsection entitled "The Nature of Faith," with readings by Richard Swinburne, Lara Buchak, and Daniel Howard-Snyder. The section on the problem of evil has also been expanded. In addition to Grace Jantzen's essay, I have added a classic science-fiction story by Ursula K. LeGuin to the "Historical and Literary Perspectives" subsection, essays by J. L. Schellenberg and Michael J. Murray to provide greater coverage of the problem of divine hiddenness, and an essay by Daniel Howard-Snyder on the so-called skeptical theist response to the problem of evil. There are also new readings by Evan Fales, Linda Zagzebski, and Lynne Rudder Baker in the sections on religious experience, faith and reason, and death and immortality (respectively).

Those familiar with earlier editions will also notice that the volume has been substantially reorganized, reflecting a shift in pedagogy. Whereas earlier editions treated religion and science, religious experience, and miracles as independent

topics, the present edition, in recognition of the strong interconnections among these topics, treats them together under the heading "Religion and Experience." The new subheadings in this section make explicit the fact that mystical experience and perception of God are the primary focus of the readings usually grouped under the generic label "religious experience," and that the epistemology of *testimony* is centrally at issue in the subsection on miracles. Also, as previously mentioned, the section on faith and reason now includes a subsection on the nature of faith; and the section on the problem of evil now explicitly covers the topic of divine hiddenness as well. Finally, there have been several minor alterations to most of the sections—a few older papers have been either removed or replaced by newer or more "classic" material.

Despite the changes, much has remained the same. The same format of general introductions followed by individual classic and contemporary readings has been continued, and the same topics are still treated: traditional arguments for the existence of God, religious experience, the problem of evil, the attributes of God, death and immortality, faith and reason, religion and science, and religious pluralism. In some cases, more difficult readings have been replaced by simpler ones. There are also individual introductions to each reading. Some of the general introductions have been modified or updated, but here too I have tried to preserve as much as possible of what was already good and useful, making, for the most part, only very modest changes for the sake of clarity or accuracy.

This book has been used successfully in both undergraduate and graduate courses. It functions well as a stand-alone text, or may be profitably accompanied by a single-author introductory textbook, such as my own *Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion*, co-authored with Michael Murray and published by Cambridge University Press (2008).

I am grateful to the anonymous reviewers who offered advice that led to the various changes in the present edition of the text, and to Joann Kozyrev and Ian Lague at Cengage Learning for helpful advice and support at each of the various stages of this project. I am also grateful to Bob Hartman, who proofread portions of the manuscript for me, and to Kathryn Pogin and Meg Schmitt for valuable assistance in finding some of the readings that have been incorporated in the present edition. Thanks are also due to Stacey Dong and Meg Schmitt for help in clearing the permissions.

I have left Lou Pojman's original dedication of the volume intact, but also added one of my own, in honor of the memory of my father. Finally, I want to close with words of gratitude to my friends Darci (Cadis) Bradbury, Megan (Cadis) Hudzinski, Robert Timm, Tracy Peck, Kevin McClure, Mark Rodriguez, and Marc Bellaart; to my sister, Cheryl Marzano; to my children, Aaron, Kristina, Gretchen, Matthias, and Penelope Rea; and to my wife, Chris. All of these people have, in one way or another, influenced my thinking about the issues treated in this book, inspired me to want to learn how to make those issues more accessible to others, or both.

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PART I

The Concept of God

XENOPHANES (c. 570–c. 478 B.C.E.) SAID THAT "men create the gods in their own image." He said this in no small part because the gods worshipped by his ancient Greek contemporaries were remarkably humanlike. They took human form, entered into human relationships, suffered from human vices and other imperfections, had very human desires, and so on. Similarly, Sigmund Freud (1858–1939) thought that we (Western monotheists) create God in the image of our fathers. In his view, belief in God was the result of projecting upon the heavens our need for a father figure who will serve as our protector and guarantor of justice, just as our earthly fathers did in our childhoods. On his view, the Western monotheistic concept of God is primarily just a reflection of our own ideals about fatherhood.

Views like these do not sit well with religious believers. We prefer to think that our concept of deity comes from divine revelation or from sober philosophical reflection. It should not just be a reflection of our ideals and anthropocentric biases. But the experiences and texts that human beings treat as divine revelation differ widely in their representations of God or the gods. Philosophical intuitions vary widely as well. It is a challenge to sort through the competing voices, and the challenge is made all the more difficult by the fact that, in sorting them out, we know that we must take care to avoid falling into the trap of crafting the divine in our own image and likeness.

One way—maybe the best way—to avoid falling into that trap is to devote some effort to thinking through some of the different "models" for thinking about the divine that are suggested by the sacred texts and religious traditions of the world and by our own philosophical intuitions. We probably cannot avoid relying on some driving model (thinking of God as our heavenly father, say) in our theorizing about God, but at least we can make ourselves aware that we are doing so, and we can recognize some of the limits and alternatives to the model(s) we have chosen. In Part I.A., we consider a few different models of deity with just this aim in mind.

In Part I.B., we turn to a discussion of specific divine attributes. Although there are various models with which we might fruitfully work in our thinking

about divinity, contemporary philosophy of religion has mostly been occupied with the *perfect-being* model of God. As we shall see in Part I.A., working with this model means taking as our starting point the idea that God is perfect and allowing that idea to play the dominant role in shaping our decisions about which attributes to ascribe to God. Philosophers working with this model generally agree that God, if God exists, is at least omniscient (all-knowing), omnipotent (all-powerful), and omnibenevolent (perfectly good). Indeed, *theism* is typically defined as the view that there exists a being with those three attributes. *Classical theism*, however, goes a few steps further, adding to theism the claim that God is immutable (not subject to change), impassible (not subject to passion), simple (lacking parts), timeless (not subject to the flow of time), and in no way dependent on other things. Because theism and classical theism have taken center stage in contemporary philosophy of religion, our treatment of divine attributes focuses on controversies associated with attributes drawn from these lists.

I.A. CONCEPTS OF GOD AND THE ULTIMATE

Introduction

IN THE JEWISH AND CHRISTIAN SCRIPTURES, we are given a variety of models for structuring our thinking about God. Some are clearly metaphorical or analogical, others not. God is represented as a shepherd, as our heavenly father, and as the stern employer of the parable of the talents. God is a farmer sowing seed or tending to a vineyard, a mighty warrior going before his nation in battle, and our companion in paradise. God is a winged protector under whose pinions we can take shelter, and a perfect being for whom nothing is impossible and compared with whom nobody is good. God is a righteous judge who will dutifully, even if grudgingly, respond to the persistent pestering of a neighbor, and the "Ancient of Days," seated on a throne of fire. The Upanishads identify God as the invisible "Spirit behind the eyes and ears" who fills the (demi)gods with wonder. Philosophical reflection has identified God as the uncaused cause, the ground of all being, and the ordering principle of the universe.

Theorizing about God in a systematic way involves decisions about which of these models to prioritize and which to de-emphasize, especially when conflicts arise. Would a loving father *really* behave like a stern employer toward his beloved child? Perhaps, yes; but there are lines to be drawn, and questions to be raised about whether God would be *more* like the loving father in some particular instance or more like the stern employer. We must also make decisions about which aspects of our models to take seriously and which not. Does God really have wings or any sort of body at all? Is God really a spirit somehow located "behind" our eyes and ears? Of course not, we think; but then what shall we make of the long tradition in the West that associates *maleness* with God? Is there something more correct about referring to God as "father" rather than "mother"? We must furthermore make decisions about how to interpret our models. Suppose we endorse the claim that God is, for us, a loving heavenly

parent. What exactly does it *mean* to be a loving parent? Could one be a loving parent and withhold one's presence from one's child? Suppose we say that God is perfect. What exactly does perfection involve? Can one be perfect and be subject to the flow of time? Can a perfect being be subject to passion or change? All of these decisions will be contentious; all are fodder for philosophical debate.

We begin here with selections from several ancient Greek philosophers: Xenophanes (mentioned at the beginning of this introduction), Aristotle (384–322 B.C.E.), the Stoic philosopher Cleanthes of Assos (c. 330–c. 230 B.C.E.), and Diogenes Laertius (third century, C.E.), who is reporting on the thought of Zeno of Citium (334–262 B.C.E.), the founder of Stoicism. Together, these thinkers lay out some of the most important ancient Greek philosophical conceptions of deity. For Xenophanes, as we have seen, the gods are merely human constructs. For Aristotle, God plays an explanatory role: the first cause of all things, the "unmoved mover" whose motion serves as the ultimate explanation of the motion of everything else. For the Stoics, God is best thought of as the "soul" of the world. On their view, the soul of a *body* is its ordering principle: The activity of the soul is the ultimate explanation for the ordered and coordinated behavior of all of the body's parts. As the Stoics see it, the divine *logos*, or "reason," plays precisely the same role in the universe. The "Hymn of Cleanthes," which is included among the selections from ancient Greek philosophers, reflects some of these ideas.

The ancient Greek views just mentioned came to underlie some of the most important developments in medieval philosophical theology. But since the time of Anselm of Canterbury (1033–1109), a different but related idea about God has dominated Western philosophical theology (in the Christian tradition, anyway). That idea is the *perfect-being* model of God. *Perfect-being theology*, described more fully in this section's essay by Thomas V. Morris, is a method of theorizing about God wherein one takes as a starting point the idea that God is perfect and then relies on intuitions about perfection to reach conclusions about what God is like. Of course, there is nothing in the enterprise of perfect-being theology that would preclude using (say) scripture to arrive at truths about God. So the method is not *purely* philosophical. But part of what it means to allow our idea of perfection to structure our thinking about God is to allow it to color our interpretation of scripture, even as we also allow scripture to inform our understanding of the nature of perfection.

Earlier, we noted that the medieval philosopher-theologians endorsed what is now called *classical theism*—a view according to which God is not subject to change, passion, time, decomposition, or dependence. Classical theism is perhaps best seen as what one gets when one does perfect-being theology under the influence of ancient Greek philosophical notions about perfection. Indeed, when people speak of the "God of the philosophers," it is often the God of classical theism that they have in mind. One important question, however, is whether the so-called God of the philosophers has any real claim to being *the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob*, or *God, the Father of Jesus*, or *God, the object of our ultimate concern*.

Some critics of classical theism are more or less content to work within the framework of perfect-being theology but argue that scriptural representations of

God need to be given a lot more weight than (Greek-influenced) philosophical intuitions in informing our understanding of perfection. The proponents of *open theism* are among those who support this way of thinking. As Clark Pinnock notes in the third reading of this section, the God of open theism is temporal, subject to change and passion, responsive to creation, and endowed with less than fully detailed foreknowledge of what will happen as events in time unfold. There is no suggestion that this view involves thinking of God as less than perfect, however; rather, the idea is simply that classical theism embodies inadequate assumptions about what it would mean for God to be a perfect person.

Not everyone, however, is content to theorize about God in the way that the perfect-being theologians do. For some philosophers and (surprisingly) many theologians, humans simply are not equipped to build true theories about what God is like. Although there are many perspectives from which one might raise this concern, one common idea is that the main obstacle to our theoretical efforts is *divine transcendence*. To say that God is transcendent is to say that God is so different from us as to be largely—maybe even almost entirely—beyond human categories of thought. Thus, in the eyes of many contemporary theologians, although we can perhaps structure our thinking about God with various metaphors and models, we need to abandon the illusion that some particular model will help us to "get everything right" about God.

For Sallie McFague, writing in this section's fourth essay, this is a freeing thought: We are free to explore the usefulness for our time and circumstances of a variety of different models for thinking about God, some of which are themselves ways of "imagining and expressing divine transcendence and immanence." (The term *immanence* refers to the idea that God is somehow *in* the world.) One such model—harking back to the ancient Stoics—involves the idea of the world as God's body.

Paul Tillich is another theologian who maintains that divine transcendence pushes much of our thought about God into the realm of "mere" metaphor and modeling. As Tillich argues in this section's fifth essay, God is, first and foremost, our "ultimate concern." As such, God is beyond *everything* in the world—even beyond the category of existence. This might seem to suggest that, on Tillich's view, God simply does not exist. But to say that would be misleading. Tillich writes in a tradition that is deeply skeptical of the idea that God can be nonmetaphorically classified in terms of human categories. Most people share this concern with respect to overtly anthropomorphic categories—like *father* or *mighty warrior*. But some, including Tillich, insist that even the classification *being* is one that God must be seen as transcending. For Tillich, God is the "ground of being" or, indeed, "being-itself." What exactly this might mean is, of course, a serious and difficult question. But, according to Tillich, one consequence of it is that, apart from the bare "unsymbolic" claim that God is "being-itself," nothing more can be said about God that is not symbolic or metaphorical.

There may be real virtue in trying to avoid both anthropomorphism and undue reliance on philosophical intuition in developing our conception of deity. Still, one concern that might be raised against views like Tillich's is that the concept of God that one arrives at by way of his methods still looks very much like

just another "God of the philosophers", rather than a God before whom we might dance and sing and fall to our knees in worship (to echo some memorable imagery from the twentieth-century German philosopher, Martin Heidegger). On a related note, one might worry that Tillich's way of understanding God undermines much of what is important in religious *practice*—perhaps most centrally, the *love of God*. Although Martin Buber's essay in this section was published eight years before the appearance of Tillich's *Systematic Theology*, Buber raises a similar concern about understandings of God that, like Tillich's, emphasize divine transcendence. Focusing on the work of the German-Jewish philosopher Hermann Cohen, Buber notes the tension within Cohen's thought between thinking of God as, on the one hand, "beyond existence" (as Tillich does) and, on the other hand, as one whom we can love.

With the final two essays in this section we turn our attention toward two Eastern religious traditions—Hinduism and (Mahayana) Buddhism. In "The Vedic-Upanisadic Conception of God," Sushanta Sen examines whether the conception of deity in the Vedas, the sacred scriptures of Hinduism, more closely resembles Western monotheism or some form of polytheism. Sen makes the case that in the Upanishadic portion of the Vedas, in any case, the relevant conception of deity is monotheistic. In the course of doing so, Sen explains Upanishadic ideas about the attributes of God and about the status of "minor" divinities. The article also explores God's transcendence and God's relationship to creation.

In contrast to the other essays in this section, Christopher Ives's "Emptiness: Soteriology and Ethics in Mahayana Buddhism" does not articulate a conception of any sort of god, but presents for our consideration instead the Buddhist conception of a nondivine "Ultimate." Mahayana Buddhism is the greater of the two main traditions within Buddhism (the lesser being Theravada Buddhism). As Ives traces out the history, the Buddha himself rejected the idea of an eternal, independent self (which, as Sen notes, is effectively identified with God in Hinduism). But Nagarjuna, one of the most important philosophers within the Mahayana tradition, urged taking the further step of denying the independent reality of the so-called *dharmas*, the various mental and physical factors that give rise to the ever-changing processes that we (mistakenly) identify with the self. As Ives understands it, this doctrine effectively implies that *nothing* has a "self" (where "having a self" presumably means having some independent reality), and so everything is *empty* in just the sense that nothing has independent existence in and of itself.

Ives emphasizes that Emptiness "is not a religious ultimate in the sense of a transcendent Being or eternal Oneness." But in reading Ives's account of Emptiness together with Tillich's essay, it is interesting to note that much of what Ives says about Emptiness directly mirrors what Tillich says about God. Emptiness is beyond all distinctions; it is beyond even the distinction between being and nonbeing; it gives rise to all things; and it is the ground of all being. There are differences too, of course; but the similarities are indeed striking.

I.A.1

Selections from Ancient Greek Philosophers

XENOPHANES (Fragments)

[1] Homer and Hesiod ascribed to the gods whatever is infamy and reproach among men: theft and adultery and deceiving each other.

[2] Mortals suppose that the gods are born and have clothes and voices and shapes like their own.

[3] But if oxen, horses, and lions had hands or could paint with their hands and fashion works as men do, horses would paint horse-like images of gods and oxen ox-like ones, and each would fashion bodies like their own.

[4] The Ethiopians consider the gods flat-nosed and black; the Thracians blue-eyed and red-haired.

[5] There is one god, among gods and men the greatest, not at all like mortals in body or mind.

[6] He sees as a whole, thinks as a whole, and hears as a whole.

[7] But without toil he moves everything by the thought of his mind.

[8] He always remains in the same place, not moving at all, nor is it fitting for him to change his position at different times.

[9] Everything comes from earth and returns to earth in the end.

[10] No man knows or ever will know the truth about the gods and about everything I speak of: for even if one chanced to say the complete truth, yet oneself knows it not; but seeming is wrought over all things.

[11] Not from the beginning have the gods revealed all things to mortals, but by long seeking men find what is better.

ARISTOTLE (SELECTIONS FROM *METAPHYSICS* 12.3, 6–7, AND 9)

3. [. . .]

There are three kinds of substances, (a) One kind is matter, which is a *this* in appearance, for what exists by contact and not by organic unity is matter and an underlying subject; (b) another is nature, which is a *this*, and it is that to which something changes, and a possession; and (c) a third is the composite of the two, which is an individual, as for example Socrates or Callias.

In some cases, that which is a *this* does not exist apart from the composite substance.

[. . .]

6. Since three kinds of substances were named, two of them physical and one immovable, we should discuss the latter, in view of the fact that there must be some eternal substance which is immovable. For substances are the first of all things, and if they are all destructible, all things are destructible. But it is impossible for motion either to be generated or to be destroyed; for it always existed. The same applies to time; for if there is no time, neither

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Xenophanes fragments reprinted from Forest Baird and Walter Kaufmann, eds., *Philosophic Classics: Vol. I: Ancient Philosophy*, 2nd Edition, © 1997, p. 16. Reprinted by permission of Pearson Education, Inc., Upper Saddle River, NJ. Aristotle selections reprinted from *Aristotle's Metaphysics*, translated with glossary and introduction by Hippocrates G. Apostle (Peripatetic Press 1979). Reprinted by permission of Peripatetic Press. The Hymn of Cleanthes is reprinted from James Adams, *The Vitality of Platonism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1911). Selections from Diogenes *Lives* are reprinted from Diogenes Laertius, *Lives and Opinions of Eminent Philosophers*, trans. C. D. Younge (London: Bohn, 1853).

can there be a *before* and an *after* in time. And so motion, too, is continuous in the same manner as time is; for either motion and time are the same, or time is an *attribute* of motion. But motion cannot be continuous except with respect to place, and of this motion, only the one which is circular.

Moreover, if there is a thing which can move other things or can act upon them but which will not *actually* do so, then there will be no motion; for that which has a potency may not be *actualizing* it. So there is no gain even if we posit eternal substances, like those who posit the Forms, unless there is in them a principle which can cause a change. But even such a principle is not enough (nor is any substance other than the Forms), for, if this principle will not be in activity, there will be no motion. Moreover, if the substance of such a principle is a potency, still this is not enough even if this principle is in activity, for motion will not be eternal; for that which exists potentially may not be existing [*actually*]. Hence, there must be a principle of such a kind that its *substance* is *actuality*. Moreover, such substances must be without matter; for they must be eternal, if indeed something else is also eternal. They must exist, then, as *actualities*.

Yet there is a *difficulty*; for it seems that whatever exists in *actuality* also has the potency for it, but that whatever has a potency need not *actualize* it, and so potency seems to be prior to *actuality*. But if this is so, nothing will exist; for something may have the potency to be and still not be. And indeed, the same impossibility follows from the statements of the theologians who generate the universe from Night, or of the physicists who say that all things were together. For how will anything be moved if no cause exists in *actuality*? Matter itself will certainly not move itself, but carpentry will move it; and neither the menses nor the earth will move themselves, but the seeds will act on the earth and the semen on the menses.

This is why some thinkers, like Leucippus and Plato, posit eternal activity; for they say that motion is eternal. But they do not state why this exists nor which it is, nor yet its manner or the cause of it. For nothing is moved at random, but there must always be something, just as it is at present with physical bodies which are moved in one way by nature but in another by force or by the intellect or by something else. Then again, which of them is first? For this makes a great difference. Plato cannot even state what it is that he sometimes considers to be the principle, that is, that which moves itself; for, as he himself says, the soul came after, and it is generated at the same time as the universe.

Now to regard potency as prior to *actuality* is in one sense right and in another sense not right; and we have already stated how this is so. That *actuality* is prior is confirmed by Anaxagoras (for *Intelligence* according to him exists in *actuality*), by Empedocles (who posits *Friendship* and *Strife*), and by others, such as Leucippus, who say that motion always exists. If so, then *Chaos* or *Night* did not exist for an infinite time, but the same things existed always, whether passing through cycles or in some other way, if indeed *actuality* is prior to potency. So if the same things always take place in cycles, there must be something, say A, which always remains and is in activity in the same way. But if there is to be generation and destruction, there must be something else, say B, which is always in activity now in one way and now in another. So it is necessary for it to be active in one way according to itself and in another according to something else; then the latter is either still another thing, say C, or the first thing. Surely, it must be the first thing; for otherwise C would still be its own cause and the cause of B. So it is better to say that it is the first, for it is this that is the cause of being in activity always in the same way, and it is something else that is the cause of being in activity in another way; and so it is evident that that which is always active in distinct ways requires two causes. And, in fact, it is in this way that motions take place. So why should we seek other principles?

7. Since the account given in this manner is possible, and if it were not, the universe would have been generated from *Night* or from the *togetherness of all things* or from nonbeing, the *difficulties* may be regarded as solved, and so there is something which is always moved with an unceasing motion, which is circular; and this is clear not only by arguments but also from the facts. So, the first heaven must be eternal; and further, there is also

something which this moves. And since that which is moved and is a mover is thus an intermediate, there is something which causes motion without being moved, and this is eternal, a substance, and an *actuality*. And this is the way in which the object of desire or the intelligible object moves, namely, without itself being moved. Of these, the primary objects are the same; for the object of *desire* is that which *appears* to be noble, and the primary object of wish is that which *is* noble. We desire because it seems rather than it seems because we desire; and thinking is the starting-point. Now the intellect is moved by the intelligible, and things which are intelligible in virtue of themselves are in one of the two columns of opposites; and of these, substances are primary, and of substances, that which is simple and in *actuality* is primary. Oneness is not the same as the simple; for "one" signifies a measure, but "simple" signifies the manner in which something exists. Moreover, both the noble and that which is chosen for its own sake are in the same column of opposites; and that which is primary is always the best, or by analogy so.

That the final cause exists in immovable things is clear by distinguishing the two meanings of "final cause." For the final cause may be (a) for some thing or (b) that for the sake of which, and of these the one may exist but the other may not; and it [the final cause] causes motion as something which is loved, and that which is moved moves the others. If, then, something is moved, it can be otherwise than as it is; so even if the primary locomotion exists as an *actuality,* still that which is moved qua being moved can be otherwise with respect to place, even if not with respect to its *substance*. And since there is some mover which causes motion but is itself immovable and exists as *actuality*, this can in no way be otherwise than as it is. Now of all changes locomotion is primary, and of locomotions the circular is primary; and it is this motion which the immovable mover causes. This mover, then, exists of necessity; and if so, then nobly, and as such, it is a first principle. For "necessity" has the following senses: (a) by force, which is contrary to a thing's tendency, (b) that without which the good is impossible, and (c) that which cannot be otherwise but exists without qualification.

Such, then, is the principle upon which depends the heaven and nature. And its *activity* is like the best which we can have but for a little while. For it exists in this manner eternally (which is impossible for us), since its *actuality* is also pleasure. And it is because of this [activity] that being awake, sensing, and thinking are most pleasant, and hopes and memories are pleasant because of these. Now thinking according to itself is of the best according to itself, and thinking in the highest degree is of that which is best in the highest degree. Thus, in partaking of the intelligible, it is of Himself that the Intellect is thinking; for by apprehending and thinking it is He Himself who becomes intelligible, and so the Intellect and its intelligible object are the same. For that which is capable of receiving the intelligible object and the *substance* is the intellect, and the latter is in *actuality* by possessing the intelligible object; so that the possession of the intelligible is more divine than the potency of receiving it, and the contemplation of it is the most pleasant and the best. If, then, the manner of God's existence is as good as ours sometimes is, but eternally, then this is marvelous, and if it is better, this is still more marvelous; and it is the latter. And life belongs to God, for the *actuality* of the intellect is life, and He is *actuality*; and His *actuality* is in virtue of itself a life which is the best and is eternal. We say that God is a living being which is eternal and the best; so life and continuous duration and eternity belong to God, for this is God.

Those who believe, as the Pythagoreans and Speusippus do, that the most noble and the best are not in the principle, because the principles of plants and of animals are also causes but nobility and completeness are in what comes from them, do not think rightly. For the seed comes from other things which are prior and complete, and that which is first is not the seed but the complete thing. One might say, for example, that prior to the seed is the man, not the man who comes from this seed but the man from whom this seed comes.

It is evident from what has been said that there exists a substance which is eternal and immovable

and separate from sensible things. It has also been shown that this substance cannot have any magnitude but is without parts and indivisible. For it causes motion for an infinite time, but no finite thing has infinite potency. Since every magnitude is either infinite or finite, this substance cannot have a finite magnitude because of what we said, and it cannot be infinite in view of the fact that there exists no infinite magnitude at all. Moreover, it cannot be affected or altered; for all the other motions are posterior to locomotion. It is clear, then, why these facts are so.

[. . .]

9. Certain problems arise with regard to The Intellect [God]; for He seems to be the most divine of things manifest to us, yet there are certain difficulties as to how He can exist as such. For if He is not thinking of anything, why the veneration of Him? He is like a man who sleeps. And if He is thinking, but what decides this thinking is something else (for the *substance* of that which decides thinking is not thinking, but a potency), then He cannot be the best substance. For it is because of [the act of] thinking that honor belongs to Him. Moreover, whether His *substance* is intellect or thinking, of what does He think? Either He thinks of Himself or of something else; and if something else, then either always of the same thing or sometimes of one thing and sometimes of another. But does it make any difference or not whether He is thinking of that which is noble rather than of any chance thing? Would it not be absurd to be *thinking* of certain things? Clearly, then, He is thinking of that which is most divine and most honorable, and He is not changing; for change would be for the worse, and this change would then be a motion.

First, then, if He were not thinking but a potency, it is reasonable that the continuity of His thinking would be fatiguing Him. Moreover, it is clear that something else would be more honorable than The Intellect, namely, the object of thought; for to think or thinking may belong even to that which thinks of the worst objects, so that if this is to be avoided (for there are even things which it is better not to see than to see), Thinking would not be the best of things. It is of Himself, then, that The Intellect is thinking, if He is the most excellent of things, and so Thinking is the thinking of Thinking.

But it appears that *knowledge* and sensation and opinion and *thought* are always of other objects, and only incidentally of themselves. Moreover, if thinking and being thought are distinct, in virtue of which of these does goodness belong to The Intellect? For to be thinking and to be an object of thought are not the same. Or is it not that in some cases *knowledge* and its object are the same? In the productive sciences, this object is the *substance* or the essence but without the matter, in the theoretical sciences it is the formula and the thought. Accordingly, since the intellect and the object of thought are not distinct in things which have no matter, the two will be the same, and so both thought and the object of thought will be one.

Further, there remains the problem whether the object of Thinking is composite; for if so, Thinking would be changing in passing from one part of the whole to another part. Is it not the case that what has no matter is indivisible, like the human intellect, or even that which is thinking of a composite object in an interval of time? For it does not possess goodness in this part or in that part but possesses the highest good in the whole, though it is distinct from it. It is in this manner that Thinking is the thinking of Himself through all eternity.

CLEANTHES OF ASSOS

(HYMN TO ZEUS)

O God most glorious, called by many a name,
Nature's great King, through endless years the same;
Omnipotence, who by thy just decree
Controllest all, hail, Zeus, for unto thee
Behooves thy creatures in all lands to call.
We are thy children, we alone, of all
On earth's broad ways that wander to and fro,
Bearing thine image whereso'er we go.

Wherefore with songs of praise thy power
I will forth show
Lo! yonder Heaven, that round the earth
is wheeled,
Follows thy guidance, still to thee doth
yield
Glad homage; thine unconquerable hand
Such flaming minister, the levin brand,
Wieldeth, a sword two-edged, whose
deathless might
Pulsates through all that Nature brings to
light;
Vehicle of the universal Word, that flows
Through all, and in the light celestial
glows
Of stars both great and small. A King of
Kings
Through ceaseless ages, God, whose
purpose brings
To birth, whate'er on land or in the sea
Is wrought, or in high heaven's
immensity;
Save what the sinner works infatuate.
Nay, but thou knowest to make crooked
straight:
Chaos to thee in order: in thine eyes
The unloved is lovely, who didst
harmonize
Things evil with things good, that there
should be
One Word through all things
everlastingly.
One Word—whose voice alas! the wicked
spurn;
Insatiate for the good their spirits yearn:
Yet seeing see not, neither hearing hear
God's universal law, which those revere,
By reason guided, happiness who win.
The rest, unreasoning, diverse shapes of sin
Self-prompted follow: for an idle name
Vainly they wrestle in the lists of fame:
Others inordinately riches woo,
Or dissolute, the joys of flesh pursue.
Now here, now there they wander,
fruitless still,
Forever seeking good and finding ill.
Zeus the all-bountiful, whom darkness
shrouds,
Whose lightning lightens in the
thunderclouds;
Thy children save from error's deadly
away:
Turn thou the darkness from their souls
sway:
Vouchsafe that unto knowledge they
attain;
For thou by knowledge art made strong to
reign
O'er all, and all things rulest righteously.
So by thee honoured, we will honour
thee,
Praising thy works continually with songs,
As mortals should; nor higher meed
belongs
E'en to the gods, than justly to adore
The universal law for evermore.

ZENO OF CITIUM (SELECTIONS FROM DIOGENES LAERTIUS'S *LIVES AND OPINIONS OF EMINENT PHILOSOPHERS*)

They think that there are two general principles in the universe, the active and the passive. That the passive is matter, an existence without any distinctive quality. That the active is the reason which exists in the passive, that is to say, God. . . . [T]hat he, being eternal, and existing throughout all matter, makes everything. . . . But they say that principles and elements differ from one another. And Zeno, the Cittiaean, lays down this doctrine in his treatise on Essence. . . . [T]hat the one had no generation or beginning, and will have no end; but that the elements may be destroyed by the operation of fire. Also that the elements are bodies, but principles have no bodies and no forms, and elements too have forms.

[. . .]

They also teach that God is unity, and that he is called Mind, and Fate, and Jupiter, and by many other names besides. And that, as he was in the beginning by himself, he turned into water the whole substance which pervaded the air; and as the seed is contained in the produce, so too, he being the seminal principle of the world, remained behind in moisture, making matter fit to be employed by himself in the production of those things which were to come after; and then, first of all, he made the four elements, fire, water, air, and earth. And Zeno speaks of these in his treatise on the Universe. . . .

Now an element is that out of which at first all things which are are produced, and into which all things are resolved at last. And the four elements are all equally an essence without any distinctive quality, namely, matter; but fire is the hot, water the moist, air the cold, and earth the dry—though this last quality is also common to the air. The fire is the highest, and that is called aether, in which first of all the sphere was generated in which the fixed stars are set, then that in which the planets resolve; after that the air, then the water; and the sediment as it were of all is the earth, which is placed in the centre of the rest.

They also speak of the world in a threefold sense; at one time meaning God himself, whom they call a being of a certain quality, having for his peculiar manifestation universal substance, a being imperishable, and who never had any generation, being the maker of the arrangement and order that we see; and who, after certain periods of time, absorbs all substance in himself, and then re-produces it from himself. And this arrangement of the stars they call the world, and so the third sense is one composed of both the preceding ones. And the world is a thing which is peculiarly of such and such a quality consisting of universal substance . . . being a system compounded of heaven and earth, and all the creatures which exist in them; or it may be called a system compounded of Gods and men, and of the things created on their account. And the heaven is the most remote circumference of the world, in which all the Divine Nature is situated.

Again, the world is inhabited and regulated according to intellect and providence . . . since mind penetrates into every part of the world, just as the soul pervades us; but it is in a greater degree in some parts, and in a less degree in others. For instance, it penetrates as a habit, as, for instance, into the bones and sinews; and into some it penetrates as the mind does, for instance, into the dominant principle. And thus the whole world, being a living thing, endowed with a soul and with reason, has the aether as its dominant principle. . . .

[. . .]

They also say that God is an animal immortal, rational, perfect, and intellectual in his happiness, unsusceptible of any kind of evil, having a foreknowledge of the world and of all that is in the world; however, that he has not the figure of a man; and that he is the creator of the universe, and as it were, the Father of all things in common, and that a portion of him pervades everything, which is called by different names according to its powers; for they call him Δία [Dia] as being the person (δί ὅν) everything is, and Ζῆνα [Zaena], inasmuch as he is the cause of life, (τοῦ Ζῆν), or because he pervades life. And Ἀθηνα [Athena], with reference to the extension of his dominant power over the aether (εἰς αἰθέρα). And Ἥρα [Hera], on account of his extension through the air (εἰς ἀέρα). And Ἥφαιστος [Hephaestos], on account of his pervading fire, which is the chief instrument of art; and Ποσειδών, [Poseidon], as pervading moisture, and Δημήτηρ [Demeter], as pervading the earth (Γῆ). And in the same way, regarding some other of his peculiar attributes, they have given him other names.

The substance of God is asserted by Zeno to be the universal world, and the heaven. . . .

I.A.2

The Concept of God

THOMAS V. MORRIS

Thomas V. Morris (1952–) was professor of philosophy at the University of Notre Dame until the late 1990s, when he left to found the Morris Institute for Human Values. He is best known for his work in philosophical theology. In the present chapter, excerpted from his book Our Idea of God, *Morris explains and defends the method of* perfect-being theology.

In the fifth century B.C., the Greek poet Pindar posed the question "What is God?" and presented the answer "Everything." Whatever its intellectual merits, given the time and place of its utterance, this answer considered by Pindar was clearly not a very discriminating response. Nor was it a claim that would be accepted by many traditional religious believers.

The view which seems to have been expressed so succinctly by Pindar, the belief that God is everything or, as it is more typically stated, the belief that everything is God, is usually called *pantheism*. Most religious people, at least most people within the more advanced religious traditions of the world, have used the word 'God' and its correlates in other languages not to refer in this way to everything in general, but rather to refer only to something in particular, something quite ultimate, a being on whom we and our world depend. This is the religious view known as *theism*, the belief in a God distinct from all other things. Any belief that there are two or more such beings independent of one another, and each properly considered divine, is a brand of *polytheism*. The belief that there is only one ultimate divine being, the conviction proclaimed in one way or another by Judaism, Christianity and Islam, is called *monotheism*.

Throughout human history, there have been many different conceptions of the divine. And this fact in itself poses us a problem. The problem is not just how we can arrive at our own idea of God. The problem is how we can arrive at the best idea of God, a conception worthy of our greatest energies, intellectual and otherwise.

THE PROBLEM OF METHOD

When we reflect on ultimate religious issues, what precise concept of deity will we be employing? And how can this be decided? With this latter question, we confront the premier problem of method in philosophical theology. Is there some single method for arriving at an idea of God? And if so, then why are there so many differences among people as to how we should describe the divine? Are there rather many different rival methods for arriving at a basic conception of deity? And if there are, which method is to be preferred? How is this issue to be decided? Is there a way of rationally choosing a best method for thinking about God? Before we can hope to make any real progress in our attempt to think about God, we must confront this barrage of questions and seek to

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determine whether they can be answered with any significant degree of confidence.

In every science, the issue of method is of great importance. For without a reliable method of discovery or testing, we can never be confident of our ability to attain reliable beliefs, and thus knowledge, in any such area, where we are moving beyond the bounds of immediate experience. Individual sciences have begun to flourish only as their practitioners have come to agree on the appropriateness and basic trustworthiness of particular methods for dealing with their most fundamental problems. And in so far as theology, in its own unique way, purports to be, in effect, a science of God and things divine, it too must face and grapple with the issue of method if it is to flourish.

Intelligent and rational disagreement of any kind presupposes some level of agreement or shared understanding. A disagreement, for instance, over who is currently the best tennis player in the world will typically presuppose at least some basic agreement over what the game of tennis is, and thus over what sort of people are to count as tennis players. Theists and atheists disagree over whether there is a God. Christians and non-Christians often disagree over whether the story of Jesus is a true story of God living among us as a human being. In order for these disagreements to be intelligent and rational, the theist and the atheist must both have in mind some single idea of God, and so must the Christian and his non-Christian interlocutor. Otherwise, one party would not be denying what the other party is affirming. If they were not operating, at least at some level, with the same idea of God, however rough-edged or vague, their specific disagreements could not even be formulated We can think of the theist as believing that some particular idea of God is successfully reality-depicting. Along the same lines, we can think of the atheist who is in disagreement with him as believing that *the same idea of God* fails to be truly reality-depicting.

When a Christian and a non-Christian disagree over whether the story of Jesus presents God to us in a true and particularly distinctive way, their disagreement can occur over the basic issue of whether there is a God at all. Or it can occur as a disagreement between theists—the one believing that God once took human form and came to dwell among us as Jesus, the other asserting that the God who exists did no such thing. This disagreement over Jesus could not take place as an intelligent conflict of belief without some shared understanding of the basic idea of God. And where is this idea to come from? Exactly what idea is it to be?

The theist proposes; his opponent denies. The Christian proposes; his opponent denies. As a general rule, he who proposes must explain. It is his responsibility to articulate clearly what exactly the proposal is. It is thus up to the theist, and up to the Christian, to explain what exactly is meant by the word "God." But of course it is presumably in the interests of all parties to such religious disputes that the best idea of God which can be formulated be the one which is introduced for discussion. And so we need to ask what procedure or method for articulating an idea of God will best provide for this sort of result.

The problem of method in philosophical theology is posed by the fact that there are, in principle, many possible methods for arriving at, or articulating, an idea of God. One possible way of proceeding, for example, would be to attempt to consult all the purported revelations claimed by different religious traditions throughout human history, and draw from them a composite portrait of the divine. This possible method for arriving at a determinate conception of God can be referred to as the method of *universal revelational theology*. It is a procedure which has seemed attractive to many sincere inquiring people, and even to some ecumenically minded Christians, but it is a method with at least one fundamental flaw. Many of the purported revelations of God to be found throughout human history conflict. They offer incompatible accounts of the divine. How are we supposed to separate the sheep from the goats, the wheat from the chaff? The simple, apparently open-minded method of *universal revelational theology* does not itself provide us with a criterion of selection. It is not sufficiently discriminating, however ecumenically attractive it initially might appear to some people.

What is needed is a touchstone for theological acceptability, a standard, a measuring stick, a reliable guide for constructing our idea of God, a criterion which will help us avoid inconsistency. And of course, Christians have traditionally taken the Bible to provide exactly this.[1] Some Christian theologians have gone on to insist that the Bible provides us with our only fully reliable source of knowledge about God. In line with this, they sometimes go on to the extreme of recommending a distinct method for articulating a basic conception of deity which we can call, quite simply, *purely biblical theology*.[2] The guiding principle of this method is that we should go to the Bible, and only to the Bible, for our idea of God.

One problem for purely biblical theology is that, despite some theologians' claims to follow its strictures, it is not clear that anyone can manage to do so if they are seeking a philosophically adequate conception of the divine. The rule definitive of this method, as I understand it here, is that we should think or say about God only what is explicitly said about him in the Bible, or in addition what is strictly, logically implied by what the Bible manifestly contains. The reason why no philosopher or theologian seeking a philosophically adequate conception of God can manage finally to adhere to this rule is that, in our capacity of asking philosophical questions about the nature of God, we inevitably ask questions the biblical documents were not designed to answer.

The Bible is not a textbook of philosophical theology. Its texts on God are thus neither as complete nor as specific as the philosophical theologian needs in order to be able to answer fully his conceptual, or philosophical, questions.

Are these philosophical questions then illegitimate from a biblical standpoint? I see no reason to think so at all. From the fact that the biblical documents, written as they were to deal with burning practical questions of the greatest personal significance, do not address all the possible philosophical questions which can also, in their own way, be of the greatest intellectual significance, it does not follow at all that these more theoretical questions are illegitimate, or that they are unimportant. They can be quite important for the constructing of any comprehensive Christian world-view, and answers to them can help us to understand more deeply the biblical answers to more immediately practical questions. It can even be argued that it is incumbent upon any intelligent person who finds himself asking philosophical questions about matters of religious belief to do whatever it is in his power to do in order to find answers to them. Otherwise, such a person may be blocked from responding to God as a believer in the full integrity of his personality. It is never incumbent upon a Christian to eschew the quest for understanding, even when it leads him beyond the letter of the commitments of the Bible.

The challenge for the Christian philosopher or theologian should not be that of confining what he says about God to what the Bible has already said, but rather it should be that of constructing a philosophical theology which is thoroughly consonant with the biblical portrayal of God. What should be sought are not just philosophical ideas which happen to be logically consistent, or minimally compatible, with the biblical materials, but rather ideas which are deeply attuned to the biblical revelation, and thus consonant with the whole tenor of the Bible.

But if we are to build on the ideas of the Bible, we need a further method. We need a biblically based theology which is not as restrictive as the method of purely biblical theology. We need a method for drawing from, elaborating upon, and augmenting the content of the biblical materials in a way that will allow us to address any important philosophical issues concerning the nature of God which were not given fully developed answers by the biblical authors.

Some philosophers have suggested that the central idea of the Bible is its presentation of God as our creator, and as the creator of our world. It has also been said that the most central characterization of God in the Bible is its portrayal of him as the creator of all. In connection with these claims, we need to consider a method for thinking about deity which we can call *creation theology*. This method for articulating a conception of God centers around the claim that God is to be understood

as the ultimate creator of every reality which exists distinct from himself. The precise method to be employed in connection with this claim is then explanatory in nature.

In this method for articulating a concept of God, it is said that, in order to explain the existence and nature of our universe, we must postulate the existence of a cause whose nature and activity would be sufficient for the production of such an astounding effect as the entire physical cosmos, with all its denizens, must be considered to be. Thus, according to the method of creation theology, the concept of God is properly taken to be the concept of a being who can serve the theoretical role of such an explanation.

As a way of thinking about God, creation theology has much to recommend it. First, as we have suggested, it has strong revelational backing. And second, it has seemed to many people to be an eminently rational method of thought. Indeed, it seems to consist in a procedure of postulational reasoning which, as used in the natural sciences, has proved its value time and again as a method of intellectual discovery: to explain the existence, occurrence or behavior of *A* we postulate the existence, occurrence or behavior of *B*; we postulate only what is strictly required for explaining *A*, and by so doing we quite often arrive at what is later confirmed as the truth. This method of thinking thus often appeals to people who consider themselves to be of a tough-minded, hard-nosed, scientific mindset. Even philosophers dubious of any claims to revelation, and thus disinclined to grant any special philosophical significance to the Bible as a source of ideas can find themselves strongly attracted to this basic method for articulating a concept of divinity. It seems to be a procedure which rationally can stand on its own.

But as a sole, independent method for articulating a conception of God, creation theology looks frustratingly incomplete. The idea of God arising exclusively out of this sort of explanatory reasoning inevitably has a rather minimal content which is both religiously and philosophically unsatisfying. Any being whose creative activity could explain adequately the existence of our universe would presumably have to be extraordinarily powerful and knowledgeable. But exactly how much power and knowledge should we think of him as enjoying? Creation theology will direct us to conceive of God as having enough power to create this cosmos. It will license us to ascribe to God at least this much power. But the problem is that a great many theists have wanted to ascribe to God the power to have created other sorts of universes instead, universes with more objects or with different kinds of objects. The belief is that he did not exhaust his power in his creation of this universe. Can creation theology authorize such a belief? It is hard to see how. And even if it could, it seems beyond the range of its method to specify exactly how much superabundant power God has.

And what of God's character? Is there enough evidence in the existence and nature of the universe to warrant fully the postulation of the idea of God as a morally perfect creator? In view of all the evil in the world—the pain, suffering and injustice—it would seem not. At least, it would be extremely difficult if possible at all to arrive at such an idea from nothing more than an explanatory extrapolation from our world. And yet this is something most theists would endorse as a central component in their idea of God.

There are two simple ways to augment creation theology in order to attempt to alleviate these inadequacies. First, for those who are suspicious of claims to revelation and who thus want to employ this sort of method on its own, it is possible to see creation theology as only the initial impetus to, and a mere partial application of, a broader *comprehensive explanatory theology*, a method which would take as its data to be explained not only the existence and basic nature of our universe, but also all those occurrences in human history deemed to be of religious significance: apparent miracles, signs of providential intent, and various sorts of religious experience. An explanatory method which casts its net more broadly in this way can be expected to arrive at a correspondingly more finely specified final explanation or explanatory postulation.

Although this broadening of method would probably result in some improvement, it is a bit

difficult to see how it would help in resolving the specific questions which have been raised. Some idea of divine character in relation to humans could be hypothesized, but the result would probably still fall far short of the extreme claims theists, and in particular Christian theists, have thought it important to make for God. And there is no evident way at all that this broadening could deal with the problem of specifying the full degree of power enjoyed by God. So a good deal of incompleteness would still remain.

We should not forget, however, that we introduced the method of creation theology as a biblically based idea. As the psalmist wrote, "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament proclaims his handiwork" (Ps 19:1). If it, or even its broader relative, is thought of as a method for augmenting the descriptions of God already to be found in the Bible, it matters somewhat less what this method, operating under its own steam, can produce. Its results are automatically viewed as augmented by what the Bible already contains, and when it comes to questions about the character of God, that augmentation is considerable. For the God of the Bible is "righteous and upright" (Deut 32:4), "gracious and compassionate, slow to anger, abounding in lovingkindness" (Joel 2:13); "all his works are truth, and his ways justice" (Dan 4:37); "great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised" (Ps 48:1).

But questions still remain unanswered. Even a biblically based creation theology, or a broader, biblically based comprehensive explanatory theology, seem to leave certain central and relevant philosophical questions about the nature of God unanswered. How do we specify the precise scope of God's power and knowledge, the full strength of his character, the mode of his being or the nature of his reality? The Bible clearly points us in a certain direction, toward an exalted, ultimate conception of God. It just does not address all our relevant philosophical questions. Both creation theology and comprehensive explanatory theology offer us help in that regard. But they too, for all their value, seem to stop short of providing sufficient guidance for dealing with all our legitimate questions about the grandeur of deity. So the issue naturally arises: Is there a method which is both revelational and rational, compatible with both the insights of the Bible and sound explanatory methods, which will offer, in principle, a complete philosophical perspective on God, and thus will result in the best conception of God we can attain? An idea stated quite succinctly by Saint Anselm, archbishop of Canterbury (A.D. 1033–1109), can be taken to have provided us with at least the elements of just that sort of method, if properly understood and developed.

PERFECT BEING THEOLOGY

According to Anselm, God is to be thought of most fundamentally as "that than which no greater can be conceived."[3] Most contemporary philosophers have taken Anselm's basic idea here to be best interpreted to mean that God is to be thought of as *the greatest possible being*, an individual exhibiting *maximal perfection*. This core conception of deity is both very general and at the same time highly focused. It does not explicitly give us many specifics concerning God, hence its generality. But it provides a single focus for all our reflections about divinity, one point of light to guide all our thinking about the nature of God. The idea of God as the greatest possible being is not itself a full-blown conception of deity; rather, it is more like the main element in a recipe for cooking up our idea of God in detail. This core idea, along with an accompanying method for its development, will be what constitutes Anselm's most distinctive contribution to religious thinking, the philosophical procedure known as *perfect being theology*.

The ideas to be found in perfect being theology are not altogether original with Anselm. The conception of God as unsurpassably great is clearly itself a central biblical idea. But what Anselm provided was a precise philosophical statement of that idea and an examination of some of its implications. It was thus Anselm who pioneered the clarification and use of this biblically based and philosophically attuned method of thinking about God.

We can characterize the core of perfect being theology as the thesis that:

> (G) God is a being with the greatest possible array of compossible great-making properties.

Clearly, the terms in this thesis require some elucidation. A *great-making property* is any property, or attribute, or characteristic, or quality which it is intrinsically good to have, any property which endows its bearer with some measure of value, or greatness, or metaphysical stature, regardless of external circumstances. The key idea here is of course that of *intrinsic goodness*. By contrast, *extrinsic goodness* has to do with value determined by external relations or outward circumstances. For example, if there is a sniper on the roof of my office building prepared to shoot anyone who leaves during the next hour, then the property of staying inside this building for more than an hour is a good property or attribute for me to have. But its value clearly depends entirely on external circumstances.

Very often, when we say of something that it is good, what we mean is that it is extrinsically good. Some nutritionists and physicians tell us nowadays that the habit of eating oatmeal for breakfast almost every morning is a good thing. But this surely has nothing to do with the intrinsic experience or event of eating oatmeal. Eating oatmeal regularly is *good* only because it is *good for* maintaining low blood cholesterol. And maintaining low blood cholesterol is in turn a good thing because it is good for avoiding heart trouble and maintaining general good health. It will help us to get a precise philosophical grasp of extrinsic goodness and its relation to intrinsic goodness if we symbolize the conditions under which claims to goodness hold true.

When it is said of some object, or property, *A*, that *A* is extrinsically good, what is really meant is that having *A* or standing in some particular relation to *A* is good for standing in some distinct relation *R* to some object or state of affairs *B*, something extrinsic or external to *A*. To say that *A* is *good for* this is to say that standing in the right relation to *A* is conducive to, or productive of, this further relation. But then we will in this way think of *A* as good or a good only if we also think of standing in *R* to *B* as itself a good thing. And if we here again have in mind extrinsic goodness, then standing in *R* to *B* must in turn be good for standing in some further relation *R1* to some object *C*. That's just what extrinsic goodness requires, as we have seen. Let "*P*" name the property of standing in relation *R* to object *B*, and "*P1*" name the property of standing in *R1* to *C*. In the realm of extrinsic goodness, *P* will be thought of as good in so far as, and only in so far as, it leads to *P1*. But this will make no sense unless *P1* is itself judged a good thing. And if this judgment is again one of extrinsic goodness, then *P1* must be good in virtue of leading to some further relation *R2* to some object *C*, the property of standing in which we can denote as "*P2*."

What we are now in position to see is something very interesting. Some modern philosophers with world views very different from Anselm's have thought that all goodness is extrinsic, and thus that there is nothing which is intrinsically good. If this were true, then perfect being theology could not even get off the ground, for there would be no great-making properties to attribute to God. But could all goodness be extrinsic goodness? It seems highly problematic to think so, for supposing this to be true lands us in a perplexing dilemma. If all goodness is extrinsic goodness, then *P* cannot be good unless it leads to *P1*, which cannot be good unless it in turn leads to some value-endowing *P2*, which itself cannot be good or a source of value unless it leads to some value-endowing *P3*, and so forth. At some point, either we arrive at a value-endowing *Pn* which is identical with some earlier *Pn-m*, in which case we are faced with a perplexing circularity of explanation, or else there never arises such an identity, in which case we are faced with what philosophers call an "infinite regress" of explanations. But to be posed with the prospect that all ascriptions of goodness are either circular or infinitely complex is to be posed with an unsatisfying dilemma.

The other possibility, the alternative envisioned by Anselm and many theists, is that some things are intrinsically good, good in themselves, and thus are proper ultimate stopping points in explanations of goodness. That is to say, the recognition of

something as an intrinsic good can be an appropriate terminus, or endpoint, to any explanation of value. Thus, a conception of value which countenances intrinsic as well as extrinsic values would seem to be more intellectually or rationally satisfying than one endorsing only extrinsic value. And it is just such a broader conception of value which Anselm's understanding of God requires.

So a great-making property is to be thought of as a property it is intrinsically good to have. And the core thesis of perfect being theology, proposition (G), ascribes to God the greatest possible array of *compossible* great-making properties. An array or collection of properties is compossible just in case it is possible that they all be had by the same individual at the same time, or all together. A simple example of a pair of noncompossible properties would be the property of being married and the property of being a bachelor. Knowledge and benevolence, on the other hand, are compossible properties. If God is thought of as having the greatest possible array of compossible great-making properties, we are thinking of God's nature as consisting in a cluster of properties intrinsically good to have, properties which can all be exemplified together, and which are such that their additive value, as a group, is unsurpassable by any other possible array of great-making properties. And if God is being thought of singularly as *the* greatest possible being, he is thought to be the sole possessor of such an array of properties. He is being thought of as being so great that no other, independent being could possibly rival him in greatness. With this, we arrive at the supreme conception of perfection, and moreover at the greatest possible idea that a human being could ever entertain. For what idea could possibly be greater than the idea of a unique, greatest possible being, necessarily without peer?

But we are still at a level of high abstraction and generality here. We are in need of more specifics. We have at this point only the core of a detailed conception of deity. To begin to fill out this conception of the divine, to employ the full method of perfect being theology, we need to begin to consult our value intuitions. What properties can we intuitively recognize as great-making properties, and what clusters of properties can be seen likewise to correspond to a high value, or an exalted metaphysical stature? It is part of the method of perfect being theology for us to consult our intuitions on these matters. It is one of the assumptions of this method that there will be at least widespread agreement among people who are rightly positioned and well disposed concerning at least many such intuitions.

Now, it should be pointed out that by the word "intuition" we do not necessarily mean to denote here some mysterious faculty for information gathering. Nor do we refer to anything which is an infallible guide to truth. Intuition is much more commonplace than that. Someone intuitively judges a proposition or claim to be true just in case, on merely considering the proposition, or the content of the claim, it appears true to him, and that appearance does not derive entirely from either perceptual belief-forming mechanisms (such as sight, hearing or smell) or from mere definitional conventions (from our human decisions) to use a word to have a certain meaning, as could be the case in the proposition: *The sentence "A triangle is a closed plane figure with three straight sides" expresses a truth*. Simply put, an intuitively formed belief seems to be a sort of naturally formed belief, a belief whose acceptance does not derive entirely from linguistic definition, evidence, testimony, memory, inference or sense experience. Our intuitions are among our most basic judgments about the world around us. We intuitively judge that $2 + 2 = 4$, that nothing could be colored without being extended, that the basic properties of matter are the same in different regions of the universe, that there are some fundamental principles of logical reasoning which are reliable, and that it is wrong to torture innocent people for no reason. And these are just a few examples. We could not even begin to use logic, mathematics or scientific method without an intuitive judgment that their most basic assumptions, propositions and principles are true. Some critics ask why we should trust such intuitions, or any intuitions at all. But to ask why anyone should ever rely on intuition is like asking why anyone should ever believe what seems to him to be true.

The point, however, should be made that not all intuitions are equal. It seems that there are degrees of intuitive support a proposition can have—some intuitions are just stronger than others. And some are reliable, whereas others are not. Most practitioners of perfect being theology take our intuitions about matters of value, as they do most other intuitions, to be innocent until proven guilty, or reliable until proven deceptive. The alternative is a form of skepticism with few attractions.

In order to elaborate an Anselmian idea of God, all practitioners of perfect being theology consult their value intuitions about what basic properties are great-making properties. Beginning with one of the least controversial candidates for the status of great-making property, we can represent schematically the development of a conception of a perfect being which I think would accord in one way or another with the intuitions of most of those who employ this method. In one representative example of an ascending order of discovery concerning the various aspects of his greatness in metaphysical stature, God can be conceived of in this way as:

(1) conscious (a minded being capable of and engaged in states of thought and awareness),

(2) a conscious free agent (a being capable of free action),

(3) a thoroughly benevolent, conscious agent,

(4) a thoroughly benevolent conscious agent with significant knowledge,

(5) a thoroughly benevolent conscious agent with significant knowledge and power,

(6) a thoroughly benevolent conscious agent with unlimited knowledge and power, who is the creative source of all else,

(7) a thoroughly benevolent conscious agent with unlimited knowledge and power who is the necessarily existent, ontologically independent creative source of all else.

And with this, we have arrived at what, with all its implications, is the highest conception of all, the conception of a unique, maximally perfect, or greatest possible, being. It is some such cumulative development of intuitions concerning intrinsic goodness, great-making properties, and the comparative greatness of different arrays of such properties that every practitioner of perfect being theology must undertake.

This representative list of seven stages of development in the elaboration of an Anselmian conception of God was constructed quite simply. First, it is agreed by many people that a being capable of conscious awareness is of greater intrinsic value or metaphysical stature than a thing with no such capacity, a rock for example. But then, it would be even greater not to be just a passive perceiver of things, or a conscious being confined to its own thoughts, but rather to be a conscious being capable of acting out its values and intentions into the world. And if to be an agent is good in itself, then to be an agent whose agency is thoroughly characterized by morally good or benevolent intentions is even better. Likewise, it is better for such an agent to have significant knowledge and power than to be extremely limited in these respects; and, finally, it would seem to be greater still to suffer no limits in these areas. Ultimately, a being unlimited in power and knowledge who was the source of all other beings would seem to be superior to one who, for all his excellence, was just one among other independent beings. And, at the limit of our conceptions, it would seem to be the greatest possible status to be such a being, exalted in all other respects, whose foothold in reality was so firm that it is impossible that the being not exist. Each level in our schematic ascent thus represents a development in our conception of greatness appropriate for the greatest possible being, which is God.

QUESTIONS AND REFINEMENTS: THE ULTIMATE METHOD

Do all practitioners of perfect being theology agree at every point concerning what God is like? Any look at the history of philosophical theology, or at the current literature on our idea of God, will show

that the answer is no.[4] No method for thinking about God is a fully mechanical procedure, capable of turning out precisely the same results regardless of who employs it. There is plenty of room for disagreement among those who conceptualize God in Anselm's way, as we shall have occasion to see in later chapters.

Some philosophers think of God as timelessly eternal, an individual existing outside the bounds of time as well as space. Others conceive of God as an everlasting individual, existing throughout the entirety of time. Their disagreement can sometimes be seen to be a dispute over which of these alternate relations to time would be a more perfect form of existence. Value intuitions here and elsewhere can differ, as can intuitions over what is or is not possible. Our intuitions thus have *defeasible epistemic status*. The epistemic status of a belief or judgment is its status with respect to the goal of knowledge (in Greek, *episteme*). A belief has positive epistemic status, we can say, in case the person with the belief is justified in holding it, given the goal of attaining knowledge. But the status of a belief is defeasible in case it is possible that it be undermined or overturned. To say that our intuitions are defeasible is thus to say that, whatever positive degree of warrant or support they supply for a judgment or belief, they are in principle, and often in practice, correctable. They are not, to emphasize the point made earlier, infallible.

Our construction of an Anselmian conception of God is fueled by our value intuitions and by our modal intuitions—our intuitions concerning what is possible and impossible. But because intuitions are correctable, and because our intuitions are typically not comprehensive, that is to say, because we do not typically have intuitions clearly leading us on every issue relevant to attaining a full conception of deity which might arise, the method of perfect being theology is not in principle cut off from creative interaction with other methods for conceiving of God. And, in fact, I think it is best seen as the primary method for integrating all other plausible methods for thinking of God.

Let us first consider for a moment the fact that we do not have any reason to believe that we human beings have a comprehensive capacity for generating all the intuitions which might be needed for recognizing all the great-making properties that ought to enter into our idea of God. We thus might miss some important divine attributes if we rely upon perfect being theology and our value intuitions alone for our idea of deity. Now, some such attributes could conceivably be supplied by the method of creation theology, or the broader comprehensive explanatory theology. Consider for example the property of being powerful. Some people claim to have no value intuitions that support the judgment that this is a great-making property. They may feel that the property of being powerful is in itself, or intrinsically, value-neutral and that it can take on extrinsic value only as a function of what kind of being has the property, and how the power in question is used. If people with these judgments about power were to think about God using only the method of perfect being theology, they would have difficulty arriving at any satisfactory judgment concerning the resources and scope for divine agency. But it is a basic postulation of creation theology that God is to be thought of as having great power. The only difficulty for creation theology might be in specifying the precise extent of that power, as we have seen. But at this point, once we have granted that God has great power, the perspective of perfect being theology can kick in and specify that God's power will have no limits that imply imperfection or inferiority. His power will be viewed as being as exalted as possible. In some such way, it could be possible for perfect being theology to be supplemented by creation theology, which would then in turn be supplemented by Anselmian thinking. In this way a dynamic interaction of the two methods could be possible.

But it is also possible that our intuitions fail to settle some question about the nature of God, and the property in question is not such that it would have to be postulated as a characteristic of the divine by either creation theology or comprehensive explanatory theology. It is quite plausible to think that if there were any such divine attributes that would be important for us to know of, and yet which are such as to slip through the net of our

intuitions and of our explanatory needs, God would reveal them to us. The goodness of God conceptualized by perfect being theology would seem to guarantee that. Thus, it behooves us to be open to consulting the apparent data of revelation available to us.

But even more importantly, the intuitions we do have, and the explanatory postulations we do make might not all be trustworthy. They might thus need to be corrected at the bar of special revelation. Consider as an example one particular case having to do with value intuitions. In recent years, Nicholas Wolterstorff has pointed out that many Christians, unduly influenced by ancient Stoic thought, have supposed it to be a perfection to be absolutely undisturbed by any passion or emotion whatsoever. Accordingly, they have characterized God as *impassible*, incapable of perturbation by any emotion or passion. Wolterstorff argues that this is out of step with the biblical portrayal of God as a suffering God.[5] The upshot of his argument is that some classical theological intuitions about impassibility must be corrected by the content of the biblical revelation. As the nature of Wolterstorff's case makes clear, it is possible for our value intuitions to be skewed or distorted by a dominant or powerful philosophical tradition. Any well-attested data from revelation should be allowed to overturn, or correct, contrary value intuitions such as these.

So the method of perfect being theology needs a revelational control. But it's also true that perfect being theology itself can act as an interpretive constraint on how we read the Bible. For example, from earliest times biblical commentators have assured us that when in the Old Testament the Bible speaks of "the hand of God" or "the mouth of God," we are not to suppose that God has, literally, bodily parts such as hands and a mouth. Why? Because it is more perfect not to be by nature limited to such a form of indirect agency as that of having to work by means of hands and speak by means of a mouth. The dynamic of interactions among the plausible methods for thinking about God is thus a complex matter. Each method can provide its own input data for our conception of God, and can offer constraints on the data to be gained from the other methods. For Christians, creation theology, comprehensive explanatory theology, and perfect being theology are to be endorsed in so far as they capture leading ideas or directions of thought to be found in the Bible, and provide for a philosophical extension of these ideas. Perfect being theology, capturing as it does the most majestic conception of God imaginable, rightly provides a leading method for our thinking and a touchstone for our employment and integration of the procedures of all the other plausible methods for thinking about the nature of God. In its intuitive and integrative force, I think, it is without parallel and thus properly establishes for us priorities in our conceiving of God. God is to be thought of as a being without any limitations that imply imperfection or inferiority. God is to be thought of as the greatest possible being. And he is to be conceived as the greatest possible creative source of being.

Creation theology and perfect being theology pick up on different strands of biblical thinking, strands of thought that are deeply intertwined throughout the whole history of Judeo-Christian thought. They can also be thought of as echoes of Platonism, in the case of perfect being theology, with its stress on value, and Aristotelianism, in the case of creation theology, with its emphasis on causation. Both the concern with value and the concern with causation are enduring and legitimate preoccupations within the enterprises of general philosophical reflection and theology inquiry. It is my suggestion that not only do these concerns complement one another in our thinking about God, but that, properly understood, the methods to which they give rise not only interact in a natural way, but finally coincide in their ultimate results. It can be argued that anyone who begins with creation theology and endorses a few simple and independently plausible metaphysical theses, widely endorsed by theists of all kinds throughout the centuries, will find himself with the conclusion that stands as the core of perfect being theology.[6] Simply put, if God is conceived of as, necessarily, the ultimate cause of every other being, and we endorse some principle to the effect that no effect can equal or exceed its ultimate cause in plenitude

of being, or metaphysical stature, or intrinsic value, then it will follow that this creator God is the greatest possible being. That is to say, starting with creation theology can plausibly be thought to result in the endorsement of the fundamental tenet of perfect being theology, the full explication of which will require the use of its attendant method. And I think it is also quite plausible to hold that a reasonable development of perfect being theology will result in an endorsement of the core thesis of creation theology, the claim that God is the creator of anything which might exist distinct from himself. For as we have already seen while working through a representative seven-step development of the Anselmian idea of God, if we imagined any existing universe as existing wholly independent of God, as depending in no way on God for its existence and activity, it would seem that the conception of God with which we were operating was not that of a greatest possible being after all. For, surely, a being would have greater value, or greater metaphysical stature, if it was an absolute source of existence, such that nothing else could exist without deriving its reality from this being. Thus, in order for God truly to be thought of as the greatest possible being, he would also have to be thought of as what we can call an "absolute creator." Such, I think, is the link from perfect being theology to creation theology.

And once the practitioner of perfect being theology has arrived at this point, it stands to reason that he will find the method of creation theology to be important for filling out that conception of God as absolute creator. Thus, when it comes to the two distinctively philosophical methods for conceiving of God used by Christians and others through the centuries more than any other procedure, it seems reasonable to think that, regardless of which one might seem initially most attractive as a procedure, a theist will end up also endorsing the core claim and employing the procedures distinctive of the other method as well. There is something intellectually satisfying about this. For perfect being theology focuses on the intrinsic properties of God, whereas creation theology emphasizes the actual and potential relations holding between God and all else possible. They both seek, in their own ways, to explicate one important facet or another of metaphysical ultimacy, the intent they both have in common. Thus, they both can function in our attempt to articulate a philosophically adequate, as well as a biblically responsible, concept of God.

NOTES

1. For an argument supporting the appropriateness of this, see William Charlton, *Philosophy and Christian Belief* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1988).
2. This sort of suggestion can be found in the work of the evangelical theologian J. I. Packer. See, for example, "What Do You Mean When You Say God?" *Christianity Today*, September 19, 1986, pp. 27–31.
3. See S. N. Deane, trans., *St. Anselm: Basic Writings*, 2d ed. (LaSalle, Ill.: Open Court Publishing Company, 1968). More recently available is M. J. Charlesworth, trans., *St. Anselm's Proslogion* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1979). Objections that can be raised against the Anselmian perspective are discussed at some length in Thomas V. Morris, *Anselmian Explorations* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1987), especially in chapter one. This perspective is further developed and defended in George Schlesinger, *New Perspectives on Old-Time Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988).
4. For more on this, see the editorial introduction to Thomas V. Morris, ed., *The Concept of God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987).
5. Nicholas Wolterstorff, "Suffering Love," in *Philosophy and the Christian Faith,* ed. Thomas V. Morris (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), pp. 196–237.
6. For an argument to this effect, see Thomas V. Morris, "A Theistic Proof of Perfection," *Sophia* 26 (July 1987): 31–35.

I.A.3

The Openness of God—Systematic Theology

CLARK H. PINNOCK

Clark H. Pinnock (1937–2010) was professor emeritus of systematic theology at McMaster Divinity School in Canada. His most important recent work focused on the development and advocacy of open theism*, a view that stands in contrast to* classical theism *and maintains that God is, among other things, temporal, subject to change and passion, and limited in his knowledge of the future. In this selection, Pinnock presents a variety of systematic theological considerations that speak in favor of this way of thinking about God.*

The concept of God is the most important topic in theology—and the most mysterious. Dealing with it makes one aware of the limitations of our finite understanding. We are not starting from scratch, though, or operating only from the light of human wisdom, but are reflecting on those perfections that must be ascribed to the divine Being on the basis of God's own self-disclosure in Jesus Christ. On the basis of revelation we strive for a biblically and conceptually sound understanding of God and of the package of divine properties that contribute to a coherent understanding. Each attribute needs to be explained coherently and the attributes together shown to be compatible with one another and with the vision of God as a whole. I believe that unless the portrait of God is compelling, the credibility of belief in God is bound to decline.

In Christian theology we are not dealing with just any old concept of God, but with the surprising God and Father of our Lord Jesus. This is a God who does not remain at a safe distance, worrying about his own honor, but one who bares his holy arm and rescues humankind through sharing their distress and affliction. We are not dealing with an unapproachable deity but with God who has a human face and who is not indifferent to us but is deeply involved with us in our need.

Doctrines are important because they express the truth-claims of religion both for insiders and outsiders. They try faithfully to state what we believe and to describe the realities that underlie these commitments in a timely way. Doctrines explore the cognitive substance of the Christian message. A doctrine of God seeks to distill in conceptual form what we know about God through revelation, truth that bears ultimate significance for humanity.

No doctrine can be more important than the doctrine of God. It is the principal doctrine in any theology, because apart from it the vision of faith cannot be stated. The whole creation is grounded in God, and the flow of history is the sphere of the outworking of his purposes. The doctrine is of more than academic interest; it is also of great missiological and practical importance. How can we commend belief unless we have formed a convincing conception of God for ourselves? Modern atheism has resulted in part from distortions that were

From *The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God*, by Clark H. Pinnock, Richard Rice, et al.

allowed to enter the doctrine of God from the direction of philosophy. We cannot believe if we have conceptualized God in existentially repugnant ways. It makes a difference whether God is portrayed as genuinely related to human life or as standing aloof from it and indifferent to human needs. On the other hand, formulating this doctrine in a way that shows the relevance of belief in God has great apologetic value as people learn that God shares in their sorrows and is touched by the feelings of their infirmities.

Humility is essential when thinking about such lofty matters. What the apostle said about our knowing "only in part" is very apt and his exclamation rings true: "O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!" (Rom 11:33 NRSV). In theology, as in the Christian life generally, we are pilgrims traveling en route to God's kingdom. Some things are too high for us, and we can always learn more in conversation with others. Nevertheless, we hope to get a little closer to the truth by our efforts; if we reach a dead end, we will not be too proud to retrace our steps and try a different path. We insist on distinguishing between the Bible and our attempts to interpret it, and we believe that God always has more light to shed on his Word than we have received.

BASIC MODELS

Interpretation is a human activity in which we distinguish between the primary biblical data and any presuppositions and interests we bring to the task. In theology, as in science, we also make use of models. Models help us to deal with complex subjects like Christology, ecclesiology, salvation and so forth. We face a great variety of data needing interpretation and are compelled to choose an angle of approach to them. In the case of the doctrine of God, we all have a basic portrait of God's identity in our minds when we search the Scriptures, and this model influences our exposition. What a great difference it makes, for example, whether we think of God as a stern judge, a loving parent or an indulgent grandfather. In theology we experiment with plausible angles of vision and try them out.

Two models of God in particular are the most influential that people commonly carry around in their minds. We may think of God primarily as an aloof monarch, removed from the contingencies of the world, un-changeable in every aspect of being, as an all-determining and irresistible power, aware of everything that will ever happen and never taking risks. Or we may understand God as a caring parent with qualities of love and responsiveness, generosity and sensitivity, openness and vulnerability, a person (rather than a metaphysical principle) who experiences the world, responds to what happens, relates to us and interacts dynamically with humans. These correspond to ... differences ... between the God of Greek philosophy and the God of the Bible. God is sovereign in both models, but the mode of his sovereignty differs.

In [*The Openness of God*] we are advancing the second, or the open, view of God. Our understanding of the Scriptures leads us to depict God, the sovereign Creator, as voluntarily bringing into existence a world with significantly free personal agents in it, agents who can respond positively to God or reject his plans for them. In line with the decision to make this kind of world, God rules in such a way as to uphold the created structures and, because he gives liberty to his creatures, is happy to accept the future as open, not closed, and a relationship with the world that is dynamic, not static. We believe that the Bible presents an open view of God as living and active, involved in history, relating to us and changing in relation to us. We see the universe as a context in which there are real choices, alternatives and surprises. God's openness means that God is open to the changing realities of history, that God cares about us and lets what we do impact him. Our lives make a difference to God—they are truly significant. God is delighted when we trust him and saddened when we rebel against him. God made us significant creatures and treats us as such. We are significant to God and the apple of his eye (Ps 17:8).

We hope to persuade people both inside and outside the church to regard God in this fashion,

because we believe it is more biblical and meaningful to do so. Some critics may speak of "a battle of the gods," as if we were advocating a God other than the God of historic Christianity. What we are really doing is conducting a competition between models of God. We are trying to understand the God of Christian revelation better. I realize that reconsidering one's model of God may be a delicate issue for some readers. It may feel as if, when a familiar way of thinking about God is questioned, God himself is lost or has become distant. But the experience of reconceptualizing can be positive. After the initial anxiety of rethinking, one will find God again in a fresh way around the next bend in the reflective road. Rather than worry about *our* discomfort, perhaps we should be concerned about *God's* reputation. Does it not concern us that God's name is often dishonored because of poor theologies of God? How can we expect Christians to delight in God or outsiders to seek God if we portray God in biblically flawed, rationally suspect and existentially repugnant ways? We cannot expect it.

SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

Many contemporary Christians will not be surprised by the model we call the openness of God or free will theism. They already enjoy a vital personal relationship with God and experience God as dynamically responding to them. Few doubt that what they do in life has an impact on God and calls forth appropriate responses from God. The problem actually lies more in systematic theology than it does in religious experience. For some reason, when we do theology we lose sight of the openness of God that we experience. There is resistance to conceptualizing it, even though it is existentially familiar.

This is because of tradition. The history of doctrine has seen a tilt toward divine transcendence over against God's immanence. Theology emphasized one set of divine properties to the neglect of another and disturbed the delicate balance between them. Though God is both transcendent and immanent, theology has tended to be one-sided. In Isaiah we hear the balance as God says: "I dwell in the high and holy place, *and* also with him who is of a contrite and humble spirit" (Is 57:15 RSV). Though acknowledging the truth of divine immanence, theologians usually place the preponderance of their emphasis on God's transcendence. They prefer to speak more of God's power than of weakness, more of God's eternity than of temporality, and more of God's immutability than of loving changeableness in relation to us. This represents a theological distortion that must be corrected, without being overcorrected. I hope the reader will not see my position as an overreaction; it is not my intention.

It is important to recognize that God (according to the Bible) is both transcendent (that is, self-sufficient, the Creator of the world, ontologically other than creation, sovereign and eternal) and at the same time immanent (that is, present to the world, active within history, involved, relational and temporal). Combining the two, we say that God is so transcendent that he creates room for others to exist and maintains a relationship with them, that God is so powerful as to be able to stoop down and humble himself, that God is so stable and secure as to be able to risk suffering and change. Theology must strive to do greater justice to the two truths and hold them in proper balance. God must not be situated in our thinking so far away that he becomes irrelevant to human life or so near that he becomes dependent on the world, not by volition but necessarily.

Traditional theology has been biased in the direction of transcendence as the result of undue philosophical influences. Greek thinking located the ultimate and the perfect in the realm of the immutable and absolutely transcendent. This led early theologians (given that the biblical God is also transcendent) to experiment with equating the God of revelation with the Greek ideal of deity. However, a price had to be paid in terms of faithfulness to Scripture and relevance to human life. A striking example of this is the way they distorted the divine self-ascription "I AM WHO I AM" (Ex 3:14). This text, which points to the living God of the exodus, was transmuted into a principle of metaphysical

immutability, as the dynamic "I AM" of the Hebrew text became the impersonal "being who is" of the Greek Septuagint (LXX), enabling theologians like Philo and Origen to link a changeless Greek deity with the God who acts in history. What God is saying to Moses in this verse is not "I exist" or even "I will be present." God is saying that he will be a faithful God for his people. This is an example of the way in which the image of God as defined on the horizon of Greek thinking threatened to replace the image of the living God of the biblical revelation in theology. The God of promise who acts in history tended to be replaced by a metaphysical statement about abstract being.

No one should criticize the fathers for trying to integrate current philosophical beliefs and biblical insights. If God is the God of the universe and if truth is one, theologians should try to integrate all of the truth that they know from any quarter. But it is essential to integrate the various insights in such a way that the biblical message is not negated or compromised. In the integration the insights of revelation must be normative and not swept aside.

Fortunately the tilt toward transcendence in traditional dogmatics was not always extreme. Christians did not consistently lose sight of the dynamic portrait of God in the Scriptures. It was present in hymns, sermons and liturgies, which tend to be more conservative in relation to biblical language. It was even present in theology, particularly in dealing with a subject like the incarnation. When contemplating this mystery, the same theologians would often admit that in becoming flesh the logos underwent change, because of God's desire to be gracious to humanity. The doctrine of the incarnation requires nuanced thinking about God's immutability, and this was not lost upon the fathers. Nevertheless, the one-sided stress on God's transcendence (on God turned away from us, not toward us) would continue to distort Catholic and Protestant theology to the present time.

My task here is to correct this imbalance in the handling of the transcendence and immanence of God. This requires allowing Scripture to challenge tradition and not permitting theology to be Hellenic where that would be unbiblical. While open to everything that is good in Greek thinking, we must discard what is not good. We cannot allow undue loyalty to traditional paradigms and esteemed theologians to prevent needed revision of the doctrine of God for today.

Modern culture can actually assist us in this task because the contemporary horizon is more congenial to dynamic thinking about God than is the Greek portrait. Today it is easier to invite people to find fulfillment in a dynamic, personal God than it would be to ask them to find it in a deity who is immutable and self-enclosed. Modern thinking has more room for a God who is personal (even tripersonal) than it does for a God as absolute substance. We ought to be grateful for those features of modern culture which make it easier to recover the biblical witness.

Let me attempt now to correct the imbalance in theology's handling of transcendence and immanence by expounding on the relevant divine perfections. In doing so, I will take care not to engage in overcorrection or to reverse the tilt, this time in the direction of immanence, as liberal theology has customarily done. Let us seek a way to revise classical theism in a dynamic direction without falling into process theology.

THE TRINITY

The doctrine of the Trinity is the centerpiece of Christian theism. The church has always confessed that the God who created all things is one and many (not an undifferentiated simple unity) and embodies a relational fullness and richness of being in himself. Given the fact that Father and Son are persons and that the Spirit is spoken of in personal terms in the Scriptures, it is appropriate to speak of God as a community of persons rather than as modes of being.

This doctrine is relevant to the openness of God because the social trinity is an open and dynamic structure. It does not portray God as a solitary, domineering individual but as the essence of loving community. When presented as a solitary potentate, God appears as the enemy of human

freedom and atheism flourishes, but when seen as social trinity, God is the ultimate in community, mutuality and sharing. The doctrine enables us to break with substantialist assumptions about God being a "thing" and puts the idea of three relationally interconnected persons in its place. The Trinity points to a relational ontology in which God is more like a dynamic event than a simple substance and is essentially relational, ecstatic and alive. God exists as diverse persons united in a communion of love and freedom. God is the perfection of love and communion, the very antithesis of self-sufficiency.

The Trinity lets us say simultaneously two very important things about God—that God is (on the one hand) self-sufficient in fullness and (on the other hand) open to the world in overflowing love. It sheds light on God's genuine delight in creatures as social beings themselves and on why he would invite them to share the richness of the divine fellowship as his friends. His love for us is not the benevolence of a distant king but like the tender love of a nursing mother (Is 49:15).

The trinitarian model seems superior to process theism in this matter of the divine openness. It lets us criticize classical theism without moving in that direction. Process thinking does not have a patent on the dynamic, relational and temporal nature of God. The triune God (unlike God in process theism) does not need the world to make up for a love and mutuality lacking in his nature. The Trinity allows the church to confess that God is both self-sufficient and loving at the same time. The problem in process theology seems to be the fact that it requires us to view the world as necessary to God, with the implication that God is not free in creation but necessarily tied to a world. The Trinity, being an event of relationship, can be open to the world by choice and can work toward the mutuality in history already present in God's being.

The Trinity depicts a relational God who is ontologically other and a dynamic world that has real value. As internally social and self-sufficient, God does not need the world but creates it out of the abundance of his rich inner life. This makes God free to create and respond to the world, free to be gracious and take the initiative where necessary. Gregory Boyd writes:

> Only if God is antecedently actual, relational, and self-sufficient in relation to the world can God be free enough to do what scripture proclaims that God did in fact do in Jesus Christ. Only a God who is internally social within Godself can perform the more than necessary feat of opening up this sociality to what is fundamentally other than Godself. Only a God who is socially and self-sufficiently triune as lover, beloved, and loving can take the radical and completely unprovoked initiative to take on within this One's self the full nature of a non-divine self in order to effect wholeness in the whole of the non-divine creation.

THE CREATION

The triune God is the Creator of the world out of nothing. This means that God does not simply influence preexisting matter but that everything depends on God for its existence. Belief in creation captures an essential dimension of the theistic worldview because it posits the world as the creation of God, as having its origin in God. Each being owes its existence to God, whose own being is independent of any world, making any relationship with the world voluntary, not necessitated. It also implies that God has the power to intervene in the world, interrupting (if need be) the normal causal sequences.

However, contrary to the opinions of some, this act of creation does not entail that God controls and determines everything. God is free to make such creatures as he wills and has chosen to make some with the capacity for choice. God has given them a relative and derived autonomy. As H. P. Owen puts it, "God can create such beings as he wills; and has chosen to make some creatures with the capacity for free choice."

Being socially triune, God has made a world with freedom, in which loving relationships can flourish. It is an ecosystem capable of echoing back

the triune life of God. We may think of humanity as the created image of God's social nature, enacting on the finite level the relational movements that occur eternally in God. This must be why in the beginning God said the creation was "good"—because it brings such pleasure to God in this respect As triune, God would be self-sufficient without creating any world, but as triune, God delights in a world in which he can interact with creatures for whom his love can overflow. God does not need a world in the sense of having a deficiency in his nature but wants one that delights his heart and pleases him.

This helps to explain why God made human beings—because they are able to respond to God and to hear his Word. Their lives, like God's own life, are dynamic and oriented toward fulfillment in the coming kingdom. God wanted a world where personal relations and loving communion could occur. It would be a world not wholly determined but one peopled with creaturely free agents. Without having to do so metaphysically, God seeks fellowship with us, out of grace and overflowing love. Sovereign and free, God chooses to be involved with us.[1] He does not remain in splendid isolation but enters into relationship with his creatures. In the incarnation God stoops down, shares our lives and involves himself in our joys and sorrows. God chooses to express his deity not in the mode of aloofness, independency and total control but in creating free beings on the finite level and entering lovingly into their lives.[2]

Thus God has created a world that in a creaturely way reflects the goodness that characterizes God's own experience as triune. At great cost, God is leading the world forward to the place where it will reflect more perfectly the goodness that God himself enjoys. God does all this without having to do it, without being compelled by anything outside of himself. God's bliss cannot be increased, but it can express itself in the world. The creation is an occasion for the expression of God's experience outside of God. In the spirit of the ancient image of the ecstatic dance of the triune God, we can say that the purpose of creation is to express this same delightful movement on the level of the creature, ever summoning new partners to the dance. Beyond metaphysical necessity, God creates a nondivine world with real significance and accepts the risks of entering into a relationship with it. The aim was to create an echo in space and time of the communion that God experiences in eternity, a reflection on the creaturely level of the loving movement within God. The decision gave God the possibility of reflecting on himself in the created other and of enjoying the delight of real interaction. It should be plain why the creation is so dear to God's heart.

TRANSCENDENCE AND IMMANENCE

In relation to the world, God the Creator is both transcendent and immanent. There are many polarities in theology: one and many, three persons and one essence, one person and two natures, and so forth. In a dialectical way, God both transcends the world and participates in it, is both high and lifted up and at the same time very close to it. God transcends and surpasses the world as its Maker but also indwells it and is active within it. Though transcendent, God is committed to us and wills to be in relation with us. As Isaiah says, God the Holy One is in our midst (Is 12:6). Though sovereign and free, God decides not to dwell alone but to establish communion with us. He has chosen to be God for us, even God for us in a human form.

A partial analogy is that of the artist, one who transcends her work and shapes it outside of herself and yet also imparts something of herself to it. The analogy cannot capture the intimacy and penetration of God's indwelling the world, though, for in a much greater way God, though ontologically distinct from created forms, creates a world external to himself and chooses to be present and immanent within it. On the one hand, God is sovereign and free and does not need the world; on the other hand, God has decided not to be alone but uses his freedom to establish communion with creatures and to exist in openness to the unfolding world.

By divine immanence I mean that God is everywhere present in all that exists. The world and God are not radically separated realities—God is present within every created being. As Paul said, quoting a Greek poet, "In him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28). Today we understand the world as an interconnected ecosystem, a dynamic and developing whole, which has made this idea of God's immanence even more meaningful. It has become easier for us to imagine God the Spirit everywhere working as creativity in the whole cosmic situation. God is not detached from the world. Creation is not an event that happened and is done with. It is an ongoing process in which every particle, every atom, every molecule is held in existence by the Creator. Divine creativity has been taking place from the beginning until now, respecting what has already been made and calling forth new possibilities for the future. The whole world in which we dwell expresses God's continuous activity.

Process theology denies ontological independence, maintaining that God needs the world as much as the world needs God. This drops out the crucial distinction between God and the world so central to the scriptural portrayal. It makes God too passive, able only to experience the world and to organize the elements that present themselves to him. The Bible describes God as more present to the world than that, as a deity working out salvation in history and moving all things forward to a new creation.

The relation of God and creation is asymmetrical. The Creator gives life and freedom to the creature and voluntarily limits the exercise of his power in relation to it, God's openness to the world is freely chosen, not compelled. Process theism deserves commendation for opposing a static concept of God and for seeking a dynamic model, but not just any dynamic model will do. It is important to have a dynamic model that is biblically and theologically sound. Social trinitarian metaphysics (a relational ontology) gives us a God who is ontologically other but at the same time is ceaselessly relating and responsive.

In the second verse of Genesis we read about God's Spirit soaring over the creation. God not only created out of nothing—God also sustains the world, calls forth life and renews the face of the ground. God is on the inside of creation, in the processes not in the gaps. God is immanent throughout the universe in all of its changeableness and contingency and active in the whole long process of its development. The Creator has a mysterious relationship with every bit of matter and with every person. We need to recover the immanence of God, which helps us to relate to the new creation story being supplied by modern science.

THE POWER OF GOD

As Creator, God is unquestionably the superior power. His is the power to exist and the power to control all things. God depends on nothing else in order to be and is therefore free at the most fundamental level. But almightiness is not the whole story. In a world reflecting a triune community, God does not monopolize the power. Were he to do so, there could be no created order, certainly not a dynamic one with free agents, and not one producing love and communion. To achieve that kind of creation, God needs to deploy his power in more subtle ways. Though no power can stand against him, God wills the existence of creatures with the power of self-determination. This means that God is a superior power who does not cling to his right to dominate and control but who voluntarily gives creatures room to flourish. By inviting them to have dominion over the world (for example), God willingly surrenders power and makes possible a partnership with the creature.

Condescension is involved in God's decision to make this kind of a world. By willing the existence of significant beings with independent status alongside of himself, God accepts limitations not imposed from without. In other words, in ruling over the world God is not all-determining but may will to achieve his goals through other agents, accepting the limitations of this decision. Yet this does not make God "weak," for it requires more power to rule over an undetermined world than it would over a determined one. Creating free creatures and

working with them does not contradict God's omnipotence but requires it. Only omnipotence has the requisite degree and quality of power to undertake such a project. God has the power and ability to be (in Harry Boer's words) an "ad hoc" God, one who responds and adapts to surprises and to the unexpected. God sets goals for creation and redemption and realizes them ad hoc in history. If Plan A fails, God is ready with Plan B.[3]

Divine condescension is apparent in the realm of redemption, where God manifests his power paradoxically in the cross of Christ. What an astounding way for God to deploy power, in the form of servanthood and self-sacrifice. This was the mode of power God knew in his wisdom to be appropriate for bringing about reconciliation, and it reveals that love rather than almighty power is the primary perfection of God. When love says that power will not work in a situation, power is allowed to withdraw in favor of powerlessness. God does not overcome his enemies (for example) by forcing but by loving them. God works, not in order to subject our wills but to transform our hearts. Love and not sheer power overcomes evil—God does not go in for power tactics.[4]

We could also say that love is the mode in which God's power is exercised. God neither surrenders power in order to love nor denies love in the need to rule, but combines love and power perfectly. This power creates life and then awakens and stimulates it in others. The question is not whether but in what manner God exercises power. The model cannot be domination but is one of nurturing and empowering.[5]

We must not define omnipotence as the power to determine everything but rather as the power that enables God to deal with any situation that arises. Plainly God is not at the moment all in all—this has yet to happen when the kingdom comes (1 Cor 15:28). God's power presently is more subtle, much greater in fact than the coercive power of a puppeteer. Monopoly power is easy to manage—more difficult is a power that makes free agents and governs a universe where creatures can disobey. Omnipotence does not mean that nothing can go contrary to God's will (our sins go against it) but that God is able to deal with any circumstance that may arise. The idea that it means a divine decree and total control is an alarming concept and contrary to the Scriptures. Total control is not a higher view of God's power but a diminution of it. The biblical narrative plainly reveals that God has rivals and has to struggle with them.

In an attempt to preserve the notion of God's power as total control, some advocate what they call biblical compatibilism, the idea that one can uphold genuine freedom and divine determinism at the same time. This is sleight of hand and does not work. Just the fact of our rebellion as sinners against God's will testifies it is not so. The fall into sin was against the will of God and proves by itself that God does not exercise total control over all events in this world. Evils happen that are not supposed to happen, that grieve and anger God. Free will theism is the best way to account for this fact. To say that God hates sin while secretly willing it, to say that God warns us not to fall away though it is impossible, to say that God loves the world while excluding most people from an opportunity of salvation, to say that God warmly invites sinners to come knowing all the while that they cannot possibly do so—such things do not deserve to be called mysteries when that is just a euphemism for nonsense.

The all-powerful God delegates power to the creature, making himself vulnerable. In giving us dominion over the earth, God shares power with the creature. The fact of sin in history reveals the adverse effect that disobedience has on God's purpose. God allows the world to be affected by the power of the creature and takes risks accompanying any genuine relatedness. There is a paradox of strength and vulnerability of God according to the Scriptures. Though ontologically strong, God can be vulnerable because of the decision to make a world like this. The Lord of the universe has chosen to limit his power by delegating some to the creature. God gives room to creatures and invites them to be covenant partners, opening up the possibility of loving fellowship but also of some initiative being taken away from God and creatures coming into conflict with his plans. God gives us

room to rebel against him, and when that happens patiently waits for the prodigal to return.

The theme of God's kingdom helps us to understand divine sovereignty from another angle. Jesus announces that God's rule is near but not yet in full effect. At present, God's will is resisted by powers of darkness, but the day will come when his will shall triumph. At present, evil is mounting a challenge to God's rule with considerable effect. The powers of darkness put up stiff resistance and to a degree block God's plans; that is, they can restrict God's ability to respond to a given crisis. Hence Paul says that the Spirit groans and waits with us for the final redemption (Rom 8:23). God's ability to turn things around is circumscribed in ways we cannot understand, yet this is more than countered by the hope of the coming kingdom. Evil may have its day, but it will not finally triumph.[6] By his decision to create a world like ours, God showed his willingness to take risks and to work with a history whose outcome he does not wholly decide. Theology does not work with an abstract idea of power that confuses sovereignty with tyranny.[7]

Divine sovereignty involves a flexible outworking of God's purposes in history. It refers to his ability, as the only wise God, to manage things, despite resistance to his will. Owing to the emphasis in theology on almightiness, we have tended to neglect the form of power called persuasion. It is not the only kind of power God has at his disposal, but it is a noble form that has been neglected in the tradition, where power tends to be associated, even equated, with coercion. The power of God's love (for example) does not command but woos and transforms us. This power can deliver us from evil and transform the wicked heart. Yet to reduce God's power to persuasion would make God too passive—it would be an overreaction against almightiness.

At the same time, however, the power of persuasion is an admirable power. Is God's power not as wonderfully displayed in his condescension to our weakness as in the starry heavens? It is so clear from Scripture, illustrated in God's dealings with Moses, that God does not overpower his servants, even though he could easily do so, but rather works with mortals and all of their hesitations and uncertainties. God honors Moses' dignity to the extent that when he cannot persuade him to accept the call, he resorts to an alternate plan, calling Aaron into the picture. God aims for the best in every situation and is even willing to work with options that are less than the best. God accepts what people decide to do with the powers they have been given. The future is determined by God not alone but in partnership with human agents. God gives us a role in shaping what the future will be. He is flexible and does not insist on doing things his way. God will adjust his own plans because he is sensitive to what humans think and do.

Understanding God's power gives us some help with the vexed problem of evil. If this is a world in which evil is possible but not inevitable, then it can be seen as stemming primarily from the misuse of freedom. The full display of God's sovereignty would not be a present reality but something to come at the end of history, when his glory is revealed, rather than at the present time, when the Spirit suffers with us and the universe groans.

We can call this model of divine openness free will theism. Upholding God's power, it understands God to be voluntarily self-limited, making room for creaturely freedom. Without making God finite, this definition appreciates God's delighting in a universe which he does not totally control.

THE IMMUTABLITY OF GOD

The Trinity is unchangeably what it is from everlasting to everlasting—and nothing can change that. Furthermore, we can always rely on God to be faithful to his promises; he is not in any way fickle or capricious. Immutability ought to focus on the faithfulness of God as a relational, personal being.

But the tradition has taken immutability far in the direction of immobility and inertness. Some have claimed that God is wholly actual and not at all potential and thus cannot change in any way. They have equated the biblical idea of faithfulness with the Greek idea that requires any changes related to God to occur only on the human side. This is the error that tempted some of the early

theologians to explain the incarnation without admitting that God changed, and to explain away dozens of biblical references to God's repenting and changing.

This is a mistake from a biblical standpoint. The God of the Bible is a God of action, not inaction. God is immutable in essence and in his trustworthiness over time, but in other respects God changes. For example, God changes in his response to events in history. The Bible states that when God saw the extent of human wickedness on the earth, he was sorry that he had made humankind (Gen 6:5). The book of Jonah says that when God saw the conversion of Nineveh, he repented of the evil he said he would do to it (Jon 3:10). This latter passage is very revealing because it tells us that God experiences temporal passage, learns new facts when they occur and changes plans in response to what humans do.

God is unchanging in nature and essence but not in experience, knowledge and action. In nature, God is consistently reliable and loving and can be depended on completely. God's character is faithful and reliable—he is a steadfast friend who binds himself to us and does not forsake us. His concern for the creature is constant and unaffected by anything. From the point of view of experience, however, God responds to the changing needs of his children and changes direction when necessary. God is changeless in nature, but his nature is that of a creative person who interacts. God's immutability does not rule out God's responsiveness, the quality that enables God to deal with every new happening and to bend it toward his objectives without violating its integrity.

When I say that God is subject to change, I am referring to a uniquely divine kind of changeability. I do not mean that God is subject to change involuntarily, which would make God a contingent being, but that God allows the world to touch him, while being transcendent over it.

THE IMPASSIBILITY OF GOD

Impassibility is the most dubious of the divine attributes discussed in classical theism, because it suggests that God does not experience sorrow, sadness or pain. It appears to deny that God is touched by the feelings of our infirmities, despite what the Bible eloquently says about his love and his sorrow. How can God be loving and not pained by evil? How can God be impassible when the incarnate Son experienced suffering and death?[8]

The suffering or pathos of God is a strong biblical theme—God's love, wrath, jealousy and suffering are all prominent. God suffers when there is a broken relationship between humanity and himself. In this context, God agonizes over his people and says: "My heart recoils within me, my compassion grows warm and tender" (Hosea 11:8 RSV). God is not cool and collected but is deeply involved and can be wounded. The idea of God's impassibility arises more from Plato than from the Bible.

The theme of suffering strongly brings out God's openness to the world. Not aloof and impassive, God does not just imagine what it would be like to suffer, he actually suffers because of his decision to love. God has chosen to be open to the world and to share in its suffering because of his love. God's transcendence over the world does not prevent him from interacting with the world or from being affected by the world.

What does it mean to say that God suffers? This is a mystery of God's inner life. Plato was not altogether wrong to say that God must be free of certain kinds of passion and emotion. After all, God is not a creature; therefore, he does not suffer in exactly the ways that we do. Responding to pain, for example, must in some ways be an imaginative response to the suffering of a creature. How could God experience physical pain, if he is not physical? How could he suffer the pain of loneliness, if he is triune? Or the pain of fear when he is securely God? What we should say is that God sympathizes in his relationship with us. God risked suffering when he opened himself up to the world, when he made it possible for the creature to have an impact on him. God risked suffering when he decided to love and be loved by the creature. A lover's existence is inescapably affected by the other, especially when the loved one acts in ways that grieve and disappoint. Listen to the suffering in God's yearning

for his wayward son: "Is Ephraim my dear son? Is he my darling child? For as often as I speak against him, I do remember him still. Therefore my heart yearns for him; I will surely have mercy on him" (Jer 31:20 RSV). Obviously God feels the pain of broken relationships.

At the same time, impassibility is a subtle idea with a grain of truth. We have to distinguish ways in which God can suffer from ways in which God cannot suffer. God is beyond certain modes of suffering, just as he is beyond certain modes of change. We could say that God is impassible in nature but passible in his experience of the world. Change occurs in the world and affects God when he becomes aware of it. When that change involves innocent suffering (for example), God responds tenderly to it.

GOD'S ETERNITY

Should we say that God is temporally everlasting or timelessly eternal? Classical theism has made the strong claim that God is timeless, in the sense of existing outside of time and sequence. This view strongly emphasizes God's transcendence over the world. And since a timeless being would be totally actualized, it implies strong immutability and impassibility as well.

However, timelessness presents many difficulties from a theological standpoint. First, it is hard to form any idea of what timelessness might mean, since all of our thinking is temporally conditioned. A timeless being could not make plans and carry them out. Second, it creates problems for biblical history, which portrays God as One who projects plans, experiences the flow of temporal passage and faces the future as not completely settled. How can a timeless God be the Creator of a temporal world? Why is God described as being involved in temporal realities? Third, it seems to undermine our worship of God. Do we not praise God, not because he is beyond time and change but because he works redemptively in time and brings about salvation? Fourth, if God did not experience events as they transpire, he would not experience or know the world as it actually is. If God's eternity were timeless, God could not be related to our temporal world. In actual fact, though, the biblical symbols do not speak of divine timelessness but of God's faithfulness over time. Though we wither and die, God abides and is not threatened or undone by time. We need an understanding of God's eternity that does not cancel or annihilate time but stands in a positive relation to it, which is for us not against us.

Experiencing temporal passage, God confronts a future that is open. The distinction between what is possible and what is actual is valid for God as well as for us. The past is actual, the present is becoming, and the future is possible. The everlasting One is active and dynamic through all of this flow, envisaging future possibilities and working to realize them. Transcendent to temporal passage, God is in the process without being involuntarily subject to it.

When I say that God is eternal, I mean that God transcends our experience of time, is immune from the ravages of time, is free from our inability to remember, and so forth. I affirm that God is with us in time, experiencing the succession of events with us. Past, present and future are real to God. This underlies the biblical claim that God is an agent who works in history, who makes plans and carries them out, who remembers the past and gives promises about the future. God's eternity embraces time and takes temporal events into the divine life.

The God of the Bible is not timeless. His eternity means that there has never been and never will be a time when God does not exist. Timelessness limits God. If he were timeless, God would be unable to work salvation in history, would be cut off from the world, have no real relationship with people and would be completely static. God is not temporal as creatures are, however, but can enter into time and relate to sequence and history. When I say that God is in time, I do not mean that God is exhaustively in time. Even in human experience, we partially transcend time through memory, imagination and reason. God's transcendence over time is vastly more perfect than is ours. Putting it positively, the Creator of time and space is at the

same time the One who most perfectly experiences time. God loves time and enters into the experience of time, not only in the incarnation but always. The Bible sees God as present to the flow of history, facing the future as partly an unsettled matter. I say partly because much of the future is settled by what has already happened and by what God plans to do.[9]

DIVINE KNOWLEDGE

Obviously God must know all things that can be known and know them truly. To be able to know all that can be known is a dimension of God's power. Ignorance, or not to know something God needs to know in order to govern the universe and pursue his will, would be a serious limitation. However, omniscience need not mean exhaustive foreknowledge of all future events. If that were its meaning, the future would be fixed and determined, much as is the past. Total knowledge of the future would imply a fixity of events. Nothing in the future would need to be decided. It also would imply that human freedom is an illusion, that we make no difference and are not responsible.

What does the Bible say about God's knowledge? Many believe that the Bible says that God has exhaustive foreknowledge, but it does not. It says, for example, that God tested Abraham to see what he would do and after the test says through the angel: "Now I know that you fear God" (Gen 22:12). This was a piece of information that God was eager to secure. In another place Moses said that God was testing the people in order to know whether they actually love him or not (Deut 13:3). Total foreknowledge would jeopardize the genuineness of the divine-human relationship. What kind of dialogue is it where one party already knows what the other will say and do? I would not call this a personal relationship. Commenting on Israel's wickedness, God expresses frustration: "nor did it enter my mind that they should do this abomination" (Jer 32:35 NRSV). God had not anticipated it. In the book of Jonah, God threatens Nineveh with destruction and then calls it off (much to Jonah's chagrin) when the people repent (Jon 3:10). Their repenting was not something God knew in advance would happen. He was planning to destroy them but changed his mind when they converted.

Often God says things like this in the Bible: "Perhaps they will understand" or "It may be that they will listen." From such phrases we must deduce that God has different options depending on people's responses that are still outstanding (see Jer 26:3; Ezek 12:3; etc.). In saying "perhaps," God also indicates that he does not possess complete knowledge of the future. The dozens of examples like this throughout Scripture establish that the Bible thinks of an open future that is not completely certain. The popular belief in God's total omniscience is not so much a biblical idea as an old tradition.

The few verses that seem to go further do not require exhaustive foreknowledge. God's knowledge is wonderful and far-reaching (Ps 139:1–6) but need not be limitless with respect to the future. Isaiah records prophecies about things to come (Is 44:23–28), but these chiefly establish what God promises to do and do not prove limitless foreknowledge. Prophecies are generally open-ended and dependent in some way on the human response to them.

We should not think of God's omniscience as a vast encyclopedia of past, present and future facts. The Bible does not see it this way, nor is it a helpful way to think of it. When God gave creatures freedom, he gave them an open future, a future in a degree to be shaped by their decisions, not a future already determined in its every detail. We do not limit God by saying that he can be surprised by what his creatures do. It would be a serious limitation if God could not experience surprise and delight. The world would be a boring place without anything unexpected ever happening.

Those who are unsure of this should ask themselves if they think God *could* create a world where he would not be in total control of everything, where he would experience risk and where he would not foreknow all decisions of his creatures in advance. Surely this must be possible if God is all-powerful.

Then is this world not just like that? Has God not already made just such a world? Does the Bible not assume it—do we not experience it as such?

Philosophically speaking, if choices are real and freedom significant, future decisions cannot be exhaustively foreknown. This is because the future is not determinate but shaped in part by human choices. The future is not fixed like the past, which can be known completely. The future does not yet exist and therefore cannot be infallibly anticipated, even by God. Future decisions cannot in every way be foreknown, because they have not yet been made. God knows everything that can be known—but God's foreknowledge does not include the undecided.

It would seriously undermine the reality of our decisions if they were known in advance, spelled out in a heavenly register and absolutely certain to happen. It would make the future fixed and certain and render illusory the sense of our making choices between real options. We might think of this with the analogy of parents and children. As a parent, God knows what he needs to know to deal with any contingency that might arise but does not know or need to know every detail of the future. God is a person and deals with us as persons. This means that God understands us, has intuition into every situation we face and is able to deal appropriately with every situation.

This implies that God learns things and (I would add) enjoys learning them. It does not mean that God is anybody's pupil or that he has to overcome ignorance and learn things of which he should have been aware. It means that God created a dynamic and changing world and enjoys getting to know it. It is a world of freedom, capable of genuine novelty, inexhaustible creativity and real surprises. I believe that God takes delight in the spontaneity of the universe and enjoys continuing to get to know it in a love that never changes, just as we love to get to know our children as they grow up. God is the best learner of all because he is completely open to all the input of an unfolding world, whereas we are finite and slow to react, reluctant to learn and inclined to distort reality in our own interest. Rather than supposing God cannot learn, we should try to learn as God learns. If this matter of God's learning surprises anyone, be reminded that simple foreknowledge also implies that God learns from what creatures do. I am not speaking in a temporal sense now but in the sense that part of what God knows depends on what creatures do.

Thus, God does not foreknow every future choice or the outcome of every human decision. God is all-knowing in the sense that he knows all that it is possible to know and powerful enough to do whatever is needed. Under these circumstances, more power and wisdom are required for God to bring his will to pass in a world that he does not control than in one that he did control. As Gregory Boyd remarks, "It takes far more self-confidence, far more wisdom, far more love and sensitivity to govern that which is personal and free than it does to govern that over which one has absolute control."[10] As a political aside, what would we think of those who contend that total control is praiseworthy as a mode of governance?

CONCLUSION

The God whom we love and worship is the living God who is metaphysically social and desires relationship with us. God is One whose ways are marked by flexibility and dynamism, who acts and reacts on behalf of his people, who does not exist in splendid isolation from a world of change, but relates to his creatures and shares life with them. God not only directs but interacts. No unmoved mover, God responds sensitively to what happens on earth and relates to us. God is the omnipotent Creator but exercises his power subtly and carefully in the world. By bringing other free agents into being and entering into their lives in love, God is open.

We are seeking to correct the tradition without overcorrecting the error. God is high above all yet fills all things. God is unchanging yet relates to us in a changing world. God cannot be perplexed but suffers with his people. God's power is limitless but is deployed in ways that may appear weak. God is not subject to change or decay but can relate to

temporal passage. God knows everything but is still learning what the world is becoming.

The open view of God stresses qualities of generosity, sensitivity and vulnerability more than power and control. It allows us to think of God as taking risks. Instead of locating God above and beyond history, it stresses God's activity in history, responding to events as they happen, in order to accomplish his purposes. Rather than deciding the future all by himself, God made creatures with the capacity to surprise and delight him. Like a loving parent, he rejoices with them when they are happy and suffers with them when they are in pain. In and through everything, God is committed to their welfare and continually works to achieve what is best for them.

The picture of God that I receive from the Bible is of One who takes risks and jeopardizes his own sovereignty in order to engage in historical interactions with created reality. The triune God pursues this path out of the love that is fundamental to his very being. This does not make history the author of God. It portrays God as the author of history who delights in meaningful interaction with creatures as his purposes for the world are realized.[11]

NOTES

1. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* 2/1 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1957), pp. 272–321.
2. Otto Weber, *Foundations of Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1981), 1:440–47.
3. Harry R. Boer, *An Ember Still Glowing: Humankind in the Image of God* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1990), chap. 8. As an Arminian I can only wish for more Calvinists like this. For a rendition of divine providence after this fashion by an Arminian, see Jack Cottrell, *God the Ruler* (Joplin, Mo.: College Press, 1984).
4. Douglas J. Hall, *God and Human Suffering* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1986), chap. 4.
5. Elizabeth A. Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (New York: Crossroad, 1992), pp. 369–70. This book parallels my thesis about the openness of God despite the fact that Johnson identifies her position with panentheism (pp. 230–31). In reality she denies that the world exists necessarily and that God needs the world ontologically. She uses the word *Asymmetrical* to describe the relation between God and the world and therefore should not be using the term *panentheism*. Not to be overbold, I would say that Johnson needs a term like *the openness of God* to describe her view.
6. Walter Wink, "Prayer and the Powers," chap. 16 in *Engaging the Powers* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992).
7. Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, vol 1 (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1991), 416.
8. Terence E. Fretheim, *The Suffering of God: An Old Testament Perspective* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), and Paul S. Fiddes, *The Creative Suffering of God* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1988).
9. Nelson Pike, *God and Timelessness* (New York: Schocken Books, 1970), and Hasker, *God, Time and Knowledge*.
10. Gregory A. Boyd, *Trinity and Process, A Critical Evaluation and Reconstruction of Hartshorne's Di-polar Theism Towards a Trinitarian Metaphysics* (New York: Peter Lang, 1992), p. 336.
11. Anticipating the criticism that the open view of God is a form of process theology, let me reiterate two chief ways in which it differs. First, God is ontologically other than the world, which is not necessary to God—the world exists only because God wills it. Therefore, God is not dependent on the world out of necessity but willingly, because he chose to create a world in which there would be mutuality and relational interdependence. Second, God not only sustains the world as the ground of its being but also acts in history to bring about salvation. God was particularly active in that stream of human history which culminated in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, and involved himself in marvelous actions that go beyond his undergirding of the world process. God is also active in the entire history of the world by the Spirit, which sustains and directs all things.

I.A.4

God and the World

SALLIE McFAGUE

Sallie McFague (1933–) is a well-known feminist theologian whose work on metaphor in theology has been highly influential. Among her best-known books are Metaphorical Theology: Models of God in Religious Language *and* The Body of God: An Ecological Theology*, from which the present selection is taken. Here, McFague explores the idea that the world is God's body and contrasts this model for thinking about God with other models that have been prominent within the Jewish and Christian traditions. She denies that her model is* pantheistic. *(Pantheism is the view that the world* is *God. By contrast,* pan*en*theism*—the sort of view that McFague seems to recommend—is the view that the world is, or is very much like, a* part *of God.)*

A MEDITATION ON EXODUS 33:23B: ''AND YOU SHALL SEE MY BACK; BUT MY FACE SHALL NOT BE SEEN''

When Moses in an audacious moment asks of God, ''Show me your glory,'' God replies that ''no one can see me and live,'' but he does allow Moses a glimpse of the divine body—not the face, but the back (Exodus 33:20–23). The passage is a wonderful mix of the outrageous (God has a *backside*?!) and the awesome (the display of divine glory too dazzling for human eyes). The passage unites guts and glory, flesh and spirit, the human and the divine, and all those other apparent dualisms with a reckless flamboyance that points to something at the heart of the Hebrew and Christian traditions: God is not afraid of the flesh. We intend to take this incarnationalism seriously and see what it does, could, mean in terms of the picture of reality from postmodern science. Were we to imagine ''the Word made flesh'' as not limited to Jesus of Nazareth but as the body of the universe, all bodies, might we not have a homey but awesome metaphor for both divine nearness *and* divine glory? Like Moses, when we ask, ''Show me your glory,'' we might see the humble bodies of our own planet as visible signs of the invisible grandeur. Not the face, not the depths of divine radiance, but enough, more than enough. We might begin to see (for the first time, perhaps) the marvels at our feet and at our fingertips: the intricate splendor of an Alpine forget-me-not or a child's hand. We might begin to realize the extraordinariness of the ordinary. We would begin to delight in creation, not as the work of an external deity, but as a sacrament of the living God. We would see creation as bodies alive with the breath of God. We might realize what this tradition has told us, although often shied away from embracing unreservedly: we live and move and have our being *in* God. We might see ourselves and everything else as the living body of God.

We would, then, have an entire planet that reflects the glory, the very being—although not the

Reprinted from *The Body of God: An Ecological Theology* (Augsburg Fortress, 1993). Used by permission of Augsburg Fortress Publishers. Most endnotes omitted.

face—of God. We would have a concrete panorama for meditation on divine glory and transcendence: wherever we looked, whether at the sky with its billions of galaxies (only a few visible to us) or the earth (every square inch of which is alive with millions of creatures) or into the eyes of another human being, we would have an image of divine grandeur. The more we meditated on these bits of the divine body, the more intricate, different, and special each would become. Such meditation is a suitable way for limited, physical creatures with lively imaginations such as ourselves to contemplate the divine being. It is enriching for it does not occur only at one place but everywhere and not just in one form but in an infinite myriad of forms. It is neither otherworldly nor abstract, but is a this-worldly, concrete form of contemplating divine magnificence. It is a way for limited, physical beings like ourselves to meditate on divine transcendence in an immanent way. And it is based on the assumption, central to the Christian tradition, that God not only is not afraid of the flesh but loves it, *becomes* it.

If we are allowed, indeed, invited as Moses was to see God's glory in the divine back, then we experience not only awe as we meditate on the wonders of our planet but also compassion for all bodies in pain. If God is available to us in bodies, then bodies become special. The metaphor of the world as God's body knits together the awe we feel for the magnificent intricacy and splendor of all the diverse kinds of bodies *and* the pain we feel for a suffering human or animal body. We cannot in good conscience marvel with aesthetic delight at the one and not identify with the pain of the other: bodies are beautiful and vulnerable. If God is physical, then the aesthetic and the ethical unite: praising God in and through the beauty of bodies entails caring for the most basic needs of all bodies on the planet. If God is physical, then the divine becomes part of the everyday, part of the pain and pleasure of bodily existence.

We begin to see a new way of imagining and expressing divine transcendence and immanence. It is not a model of transcendence in which God is king and the world is the realm of a distant, external ruler who has all power and expects unquestioned obedience from his subjects, human beings. Nor is it a model of immanence in which God the king once entered the world by becoming a servant in the form of one human being. Rather, it is a radicalization of both divine transcendence and immanence. The model of the universe as God's body radicalizes transcendence for *all* of the entire fifteen-billion-year history and the billions of galaxies is the creation, the outward being, of the One who is the source and breath of all existence. In the universe as a whole as well as in each and every bit and fragment of it, God's transcendence is embodied. The important word here is "embodied": the transcendence of God is not available to us except as embodied. We do not see God's face, but only the back. But we *do* see the back.

The world (universe) as God's body is also, then, a radicalization of divine immanence, for God is not present to us in just one place (Jesus of Nazareth, although also and especially, paradigmatically there), but in and through all bodies, the bodies of the sun and moon, trees and rivers, animals, and people. The scandal of the gospel is that the Word became flesh; the radicalization of incarnation sees Jesus not as a surd, an enigma, but as a paradigm or culmination of the divine way of enfleshment.

We are suggesting, then, that the model of the universe as God's body is a way of expressing both radical transcendence *and* immanence, but in a fashion that limits our perception and knowledge to the back of God. In other words, we are dealing here with a model or metaphor, not a description: the universe as God's body is a rich, suggestive way to radicalize the glory, the awesomeness, the beyond-all-imagining power and mystery of God in a way that at the same time radicalizes the nearness, the availability, the physicality of divine immanence. In this one image of the world as God's body, we are invited to see the creator *in* the creation, the source of all existence in and through what is bodied forth from that source. And yet, as we contemplate divine transcendence immanently in the bodies of all things and creatures, we know what we see is the back, not the face, of God. The

very recognition and acceptance of that limit gives us permission, as the Hebrew psalmists also felt, to revel in the many embodiments divine transcendence takes: the clouds and winds, thunder and water, deer and young lambs, midwives and mothers, kings and shepherds. Everything can be a metaphor for God, because no *one* thing *is* God. The body of God is not the human body nor any other body; rather, all bodies are reflections of God, all bodies are the backside of divine glory.

Radicalizing the incarnation, therefore, by using the model of the universe as God's body is neither idolatry nor pantheism: the world, creation, is not identified or confused with God. Yet it is the place where God is present to us. Christianity's most distinctive belief is that divine reality is always mediated through the world, a belief traditionally expressed in the Chalcedonian formula that Christ was "fully God, fully man." For our time when we understand human existence in continuity with all other forms of life and hence must think of our relation to God in an ecological context, that mediation is appropriately radicalized and expanded to include the entire cosmos. In both instances, the Word is made flesh, God is available to us only through the mediation of embodiment. We are offered not the face of God, but the back. God is neither enclosed in nor exhausted by the body shown to us, but it is a body that is given.

It is enough and it is a body. "It is enough" acknowledges that for those who are persuaded to live within this model, it provides guidance and significance to life, a way of being in the world. Those who wager on this construct believe it tells them something about the way things are; in other words, that it gives them intimations of how God and the world are related. That intimation is suggested by the metaphor of body. "It is a body" suggests content, substance, for what it means to live within this particular construct. It places a premium on the physical, the lowly, the mundane, the specific, the vulnerable, the visible, the other, the needy, for all these words describe aspects of bodies of various kinds. No body, no material form, is absolute, eternal, general, abstract, otherworldly, self-sufficient, invincible, or invisible. Bodies in the universe, in all their differences, share some characteristics that suggest a focus, an area of concern, for those who would live within the construct of the body of God. At one level our model—the universe as God's body—moves us in the direction of contemplating the glory and grandeur of divine creation, an aesthetic awe at unending galactic wonders, while at another level it moves us in the direction of compassionate identification with and service to the fragile, suffering, oppressed bodies that surround us. The model embraces both the guts and the glory, both the mud and the mystery—or, more precisely, suggests that the peculiar form of divine glory available to us, if we live within this model, is *only* through the guts, the mud. Incarnationalism, radicalized, means that we do not, ever, at least in this life, see God face to face, but only through the mediation of the bodies we pay attention to, listen to, and learn to love and care for.

We have used Exodus 33:20–23b as a meditation to help us reflect on some of the most important dimensions of the model of the universe as God's body within a Christian context. In the rest of this chapter and the next, we will analyze the model in more formal terms. First, we will look at five major models within the Christian tradition for understanding the relationship of God and the world: the deistic, the dialogic, the monarchical, the agential, and the organic. We will conclude that combining the organic (the world as the body of God) and the agential (God as the spirit of the body) results in a personal and ecological way of reimagining the tradition's Lord of creation in terms compatible with contemporary science. In the next chapter [of *The Body of God*] we will turn to the Christic paradigm as the place where, within that tradition, we gain some guidance on the "shape" of the body, the forms or patterns with which to understand divine immanence. This paradigm suggests a trajectory or direction for creation. It is not one that we find in evolutionary history, but from our wager of faith in the liberating, healing, and inclusive teachings, life, and death of Jesus of Nazareth, we *can* read it back into natural, historical, and cultural evolution as a way to express