

SWORD TO THE HEART: A SYNTHETIC CHRISTIAN PHILOSOPHY

"In the [mathematical mind] principles are obvious, but remote from ordinary usage, so that from want of practice we have difficulty turning our heads that way; but once we do turn our heads the principles can be fully seen; and it would take a thoroughly unsound mind to draw false conclusions from principles so patent that they can hardly be missed.

But with the intuitive mind, the principles are in ordinary usage and there for all to see. There is no need to turn our heads, or strain ourselves: it is only a question of good sight, but it must be good; for the principles are so intricate and numerous that it is almost impossible not to miss some.

Now the omission of one principle can lead to error, and so one needs very clear sight to see all the principles as well as an accurate mind to avoid drawing false conclusions from known principles." -- Pascal, Pensees, 512/1. Translated by A.J. Krailsheimer.

INTRODUCTION

Why do I believe Christianity is true?¹

Along with 'What has Christ done in my life?', this question strikes at the heart of what it means to give a Christian 'testimony'. I testify--I swear as a witness--that what I say is true; but why should anyone believe me?

In the end, the only answer I can give to that question depends on the answer to why I believe Christianity is true.²

¹ The impatient reader may skip this Introduction. It contains information about my motives, but does not consist of any formal arguments. Some positions merely stated here, will be defended by argument later.

² Considering the range of doctrines, some of which are mutually exclusive, held by people throughout history who have, like myself, claimed to believe and profess 'Christianity'; I would be more accurate to say "...why I believe a particular set of Christian propositions to be true". I will be making the

If I myself have no reason to accept Christianity, what use will I be as a witness? If I act as a 'good person', I may be able to convince other people that I am a good person. I may be able to convince them that they should be better people. I may be able to convince them that belonging to the Church (or even to 'a church') helps a person to be a good person. At least one of these is an admirable and useful goal.

But none of these are the same as having reason to accept Christianity as being true in this or that detail.

A person may sense somehow that an organization which produces such a person as myself, is in some indefinable way 'in touch with the truth'; and so may accept specific propositions about Christianity (or this or that branch of it) in 'good faith'.

I believe God accepts such acceptance. But such a witness on my part is not the same as establishing that Christianity is the truth; or that it is truer than, for instance, Hinduism.³

Furthermore, if I am a lout, an imbecile or a traitor, and also a 'Christian', then I shall certainly be delivering a 'strong witness'! And a person may sense that an organization

specific content of my beliefs evident, as I work through this book. I think I can be safely categorized as 'orthodox': I share numerous key beliefs with Christians from a wide range of denominations and congregations, and I affirm the historical and metaphysical claims of the three commonly held ancient Creedal statements (Apostle's, Nicene, and Athanasian). My theological 'school', for purposes of categorization, follows George MacDonald and C. S. Lewis in both its affirmations and denials; and I hope this book will serve as a creditable update and extension of their work.

³ If my brethren doubt this, then they should consider whether a good Hindu, by being a good person, is evidence for Hinduism against Christianity where the two idea-groups differ.

which produces such a person as myself is against the truth; and so may reject any or all of the specific propositions of Christianity (or this or that branch of it).

I believe that such a rejection is also an act of 'good faith', and that God accepts such a rejection. By rejecting my bad witness, the rejector has not rejected God, but only my false shadow of God; and so (to the rejector's own degree) may be declaring for the true God.

Still, such a witness on my part is not the same as evidence for the falsity of Christianity. The abuse does not abolish the use.⁴

The fact is this: no matter how 'good' I behave, I might be testifying to the truth of a falsehood; and thus I might be leading my neighbor, whom I am supposed to be helping by my witness, into error--possibly into blasphemy.

So how do I, I myself, know that Christianity is true?

Unfortunately, God's existence and characteristics are not particularly (or at best not entirely) self-evident.

Some Christians think the Bible provides self-evident testimony to this effect. But these same Christians would reject other supposedly self-evident revelatory documents (such as the specifically Mormon scriptures or the Islamic Koran) on a quite

⁴ If my brethren doubt this, then they should consider whether a wicked pope, an apostate Episcopal bishop, or a scandalous Baptist televangelist, counts as evidence against the truth of Christianity.

reasonable ground: it is wrong to put unqualified trust in something merely because it claims to be true.⁵

Or, more unsettling (to my mind at least): having been trained to accept without question a document's ultimate spiritual authority, some of these Christians will have no problem accepting other self-grounding scriptures. I have been told, that at the time of this writing,⁶ the most successful field of evangel in the United States for the Mormons, is among Southern Baptists--a group of churches whose pastors and laity, as I know from long personal experience, tend to treat Scripture as being true in a non-disputable (and thus technically non-confirmable) fashion.

Experience shows me, then, that such a fortress-mentality approach does not inoculate against the acceptance of heresies.⁷

⁵ These texts do not deny the existence of God, of course; but they testify to somewhat different characteristics than Christians have traditionally accepted as true.

⁶ My first draft of this introductory chapter was written on Nov 26, 1999.

⁷ This, of course, begs the question of what is or is not a heresy; but at the moment I am trying to help a specific group--the people on 'my side of the aisle'--to understand a point, by referring to a belief they will consider to be a heresy. A habit of accepting "scriptures" without question, has led at least some Baptists to become Mormons.

I will have more to say about Mormon metaphysical propositions in later chapters, which will hopefully explain why I do not consider Mormonism (or LDS Christianity) to be equivalent to, or an improved extension of, 'traditional' Christianity. Whether my own belief is more or less accurate with respect to reality remains to be seen. Any Mormon who is familiar with his own beliefs would and should agree with me on this: at bottom our two beliefs are not actually the same, despite many surface similarities; and he would say that 'traditional' Christianity is the corrupted extension from the rapidly obscured and long-lost true religion recovered by the Latter-Day Saints--thus he would agree (for a different reason) that Mormonism is not an improved extension of 'traditional' Christianity.

I will also, however, say this: one area in which a Mormon and I will (I think) strenuously agree, is that God (Father, Son and Holy Spirit all three) cares first and foremost for charity by His servants. This doesn't mean accurate doctrines aren't important--anything touching questions about Truth

Where does this leave the everyday Christian who wants to testify her faith? I think she still has plenty of good options. The 'silent witness' of her actions and temperament will always be massively valuable (not so much as to be verifying her doctrines are true, but to be inspiring others to act in ways I believe God cares most about); and her personal witness of how Christ has helped her through her life will also always be worth sharing.

But in regard to the complex logical strengths of the Christian propositions, she must either refer back to authorities on that subject--or else become an authority herself.

I consider the second option to be the best.

Either way, I hope this book will provide tools for other Christians to use successfully in disputes. And I hope this book will also provide tools for other Christians to strengthen their own faiths by gaining a better understanding of the hows and whys of God.

At the same time, although I know better than to imagine that many sceptics will turn to my book, my main avenue of presentation will be to the sceptic. This book is my testimony.

is important, and I have written this book precisely to discuss such questions with an eye toward reaching answers. But I trust that Mormons can be doing their best to serve God (including Christ); and I trust God to take care of every person who acts in good faith. In the judgment of the sheep and the goats, Jesus does not use doctrinal accuracy as a gauge for what constitutes such good faith. (Matt 25:31ff)

This, is why I believe Christianity is true.⁸

⁸ I am entirely aware that Christianity, in total, combines certain philosophical positions with certain historical claims. However, a thorough analysis of the historical position is outside the scope of my book. Logically speaking, the philosophy must come first, because if God doesn't exist or doesn't have certain characteristics, then the historical claims of Christianity cannot mean what they claim to mean.

Therefore, if a (perhaps devout) critic wishes to state that I am not arguing in favor of 'Christianity' per se, I would accept the correction in a technical sense. I am 'only' arguing for a supernaturalistic creating transpersonal ethical-grounding God, Who can and does operate in our natural history, against Whom we have rebelled; and for what He would/could be expected to do about our rebellion. This happens to dovetail with the historical claims of Christianity!

Put another way, should the historical veracity of our scriptures somehow (per impossibility, in my opinion) completely and obviously crash tomorrow, the vast majority of my beliefs would survive untouched. I accept the religious authority of our scriptures because I believe in God; not the other way around.

SECTION ONE -- How Should I Be A Sceptic

CHAPTER 1 -- Preliminary clarifications

A sceptic, in perhaps the broadest sense, is a person who does not immediately accept a proposition, but questions it. In this sense, I believe any good thinker, including any good Christian, ought to be a 'sceptic'; so long as the questioning is intended for understanding, and not for the sake of throwing as much fog as possible.

In perhaps the most limited sense, there is a philosophical (or, rather, sophistic) position known as 'scepticism', where the intent is to call everything into inextricable question (even "intents" themselves). I will be discussing variations of this position later.

Usually, though, I use 'sceptic' in a more moderately broad (though not the broadest) sense, to refer to people who do not already agree with me on many important (even "crucial") details. This seems more polite than calling such people 'unbelievers' (for many people who disagree with me may in fact believe in God, even as I believe in God, in some fashion); or 'infidels' (which has connotations of treachery).

At any rate, all of my writing is in honor (and love) of the positive sceptic: the one who questions in search of

(perhaps better) answers, and who is willing to believe whatever can be found to be true--even if she doesn't yet know what that is.

It may be rightly asked, then, why I believe Christianity to be true. I don't only mean that this may be rightly asked by a sceptic (though that, too); I mean that I may rightly ask this in proper self-criticism! Which I have frequently done, and continue to do, in order to head off self-complacency and to help identify any mistakes I may be making at any given time so that I can correct those.

But of course, if I do this, then it means nothing as an exercise unless I play fair: I must be prepared to alter my own beliefs if I find better light to walk by. Otherwise, I am not being faithful to truth--only to my own beliefs.

Admittedly, if I turn out to be the final fact of all existence, upon whom all truths (including the truths of my own existence) depend for reality, then that might not be improper!--but then again, I might not be (let us say) God Almighty, either! If I am not, then I am dependent upon supervening facts of reality, whatever (or whomever, or Whomever) those are; and, to put it mildly, I will not be acting in best conjunction with that reality.

All of which is an initial (and very partial) illustration of the breadth of topics that will be covered, one way or another, explicitly or implicitly, in deciding what to believe

as true in what is called a person's "worldview". Put more briefly, these are some of the topics of the discipline of "metaphysics".

To say the least, most people do not rigorously engage in such belief-polishing (and/or correction). Not that it doesn't still happen, but most of time people are barely cognizant of the process; they're doing it, but they are in no position to explain what they are doing or how--not unlike the way that I may be fairly skilled and efficient at playing a computer game, without having much-or-any real understanding of what is happening in the software and hardware.

By tautology, though, someone who sets themselves to rigorously consider what they should believe, will (or should ideally) be rigorously considering what they should believe. This is what I did back in late 1999 through early 2000.

The very first thing I obviously discovered, is that I already believed very many things to be true: I was enlisted (and enlisted myself) on the side of the existence of a particular 'sort' of God, since my early childhood. The next obvious thing is that there can be a difference (though not necessarily so) between how I came to believe these things to be true, and how-and-why I may believe them to be true now, today. Indeed, if I look more closely I will find that I am bringing particular notions to the table even if I provisionally set aside the larger notions of God's existence and character.

This is nothing for me to be nervous about: you (my reader) also have certain understandings of God (or of 'theology' or at least of something regarding truth) which you are bringing to the table. I probably disagree with some of those understandings. But I hope you will be pleasantly surprised to discover I agree with you more often than you expect.

In fact, this is one of my key hopes; because without common grounds, I can have no way even to successfully communicate. If you cannot understand why I believe what I do, then why should I expect you to accept that I have argued validly to a conclusion different from what you believe? At the same time, if you (truly) understand why I believe what I do, then you might be able to effectively (and properly) refute me!

So it will be expedient for me to highlight commonalities of belief, for both our sakes.

However, this may involve clearing away some misunderstandings which would otherwise block our efforts.

I do not say these would (necessarily) be willful misunderstandings, either on your part or on mine. A misunderstanding can easily result from incomplete information, or from a logical mis-step in discovering the implications of the information, or even from a mere misconception about a piece of data. But though inadvertent, such misunderstandings do have results in our consequent understandings about what to believe to be true. You or I might decide that Argument A cannot be true

'because' Proposition Z about God (for instance) prevents it from being true; yet Proposition Z may be a misconception.

It seemed best to me, then, to spend time first, before beginning a positive argument about what I should believe to be true for my "worldview", leveling the playing field, so to speak. How many decisions could I preliminarily make about what to believe while still keeping a maximum number of potential options for belief open?

As it happens, quite a few!--the material ended up providing my second longest section of chapters (namely this first Section)! But at the time, I didn't know that this would be the result.

Where to begin, though, in leveling the playing field? How should I begin in being a good sceptic?--for, in my heart, I also wanted to be able to approach matters of belief in as much solidarity as I could find, with those who did not already believe what I believed to be true.

Well, the most basic place to start seemed to be with myself; just as, when stepping forth to climb a mountain or ford a canyon or swim an ocean, I have to (obviously!) move myself along through examination and action. But examination, of myself and my surroundings, with an eye toward such a venture, includes checking for obstacles in the way of such a venture. What if I myself am one of the obstacles? Are there ways in which that

could be true? If so, I had better deal with those now!--or else I will be tracing a path to nowhere! (Or worse.)

Self-reflexively turning the tables upon myself, then, my own first suspicion would be: 'Aha! He is going to sneak in some presuppositions, so that when he "begins" his "main" argument, his conclusion will have already been built-in from the start!'

After all, I have seen other writers try exactly this tactic. So, I made a resolution not to do such a thing, and to watch out against doing such a thing.

And in hindsight, I can report that I must have had at least some good success at this; for, so far as I can see, none of the issues I eventually raised in this section provided evidence or argument exclusively for the existence of God (especially as I understood, and today still understand, God).

Put another way, if I was (for instance) an honest and well-informed atheist, I would argue the exact same points which I ended up arguing in this section. I would not want my atheism to depend upon the positions I will be arguing against.

Hopefully, then, an atheist (or a pantheist, or polytheist, or agnostic, or rival theist) will be as close as possible to perfect agreement with me by the end of this section, and yet still be what they were when they started.

Of course this works both ways--or it had better work both ways; otherwise I will be cheating! And so I reach a next warning against myself: if I argue 'x is true' and a

denomination or some other group or individual agrees that 'x is true', then I should fairly admit that I agree on that issue. This way I can fairly claim to have a difference of belief with other people, too: my opposition when our truth-claims collide will not be due to reluctance on my part to find actual agreements with my opponents insofar as I can.

Moreover those agreements should not primarily be for 'my own' benefit, as ammunition for my own defense; but for our benefit together. Otherwise I will be led into selective abuse of agreements, and thus into abuse of those with whom I am disagreeing: it will not be about us, in an interpersonal relationship, but only about me.

To give a working example: I should accept the Roman Catholic Church to be some bearer of the truth, if I believe the existence of all things depends upon God. And I would also be obligated to agree that Jews and Muslims are being true to that extent, insofar as they claim the same thing. (My agreement with the Roman Catholic Church goes much further than this. Then again, so do my agreements with many forms of Judaism and Islam.)

Or, to give a more complex example, involving both agreement and disagreement: as a Christian, I have no problem believing that Mormons are doing their best to follow Jesus; and I have no problem believing that Jesus knows this, and accepts their faithful loyalty and devotion. And certainly a Mormon will

agree with me on this!--sins aside (which we will both agree we should be penitent about.)

Yet, I very strongly disagree with the Mormons who believe God was once a mortal human like us, causally dependent on and derived from Nature (whether this Nature or another one), who essentially 'developed' into Deity. If I conclude that God did not develop up from a derivative creature produced by Nature, I am obligated to conclude that Judaism and Islam (or even a nominal deism such as held by several of America's "Founding Fathers") are closer to being the truth, on this point, than the 'Latter-Day Saint Christians'. But, I do not accept this strenuous disagreement between us to be an excuse for me to ignore or discount or disrespect the agreements (such as they are) that we actually have. Nor should I treat such agreements as being only tools for my own ideological convenience.

So, if I think proposition X is correct, I am obligated to admit that other people who share a belief in proposition X are also correct on that score, and thus to acknowledge some real credit on their part, independent of whatever ideological use (or inconvenience!) I may find in recognizing that shared agreement. If I don't, then I am the one who is willfully burning a potential bridge, of communication and understanding, between those people and myself. To say the least, such an action on my part cannot be done in legitimate conjunction with any goal or duty to interact with persons as persons; at best I

could only be trying to make them react to my mere stimulus: the same as if I was trying to enslave them by a dark enchantment.

Rigorously speaking, I might discover later that this is in fact all I can be doing; mimetically enchanting other humans in a competition of domination. I only record here that this is where I am beginning. I leave it to my reader to decide whether you will appreciate this in principle, or not. For there might be deep logical corollaries involved in recognizing an argument to be an argument between persons.

Until such time as I can examine that notion further, I will simply note here that if all I am doing is trying (so to speak) to coat you, my reader, with paint so that you will fluoresce when exposed to ultra-violet light, then I am not really presenting arguments to be judged. Attempting to only induce a memetic reaction may be much safer for me; but it denies and traduces your own existence as a person. At best, any 'argument' I attempted to make would be the same as making 'love' to a plastic doll; it could only be a pretense (at best) on my part, even if the doll was very complex and efficient in its reactions.

Thus, if I present an argument to you, I choose instead to be at least consistent with the immediate implications of doing so: I will treat you as a person, and let the corollaries fall out where they may from that treatment.

It will be work, and where we truly oppose one another it can be only uncomfortable work. I will hope, however, that I can find enough common ground for it to be tolerable work--and that in the end it will have been worth an opponent's time and effort, whatever the outcome.

Of course, for an opponent who dismisses my attempts with an airy wave of the hand and a platitude (my opponents will probably be quite familiar with similar tactics coming from my side of the aisle), it will not be work at all and probably not uncomfortable!

And so I come to the topic of my next chapter.

CHAPTER 2 -- Presuppositionalism and negative agnosticism

Sometimes when the topic of religion (or theology, or philosophy, or metaphysics...) rises in conversation, one person will wave off the discussion with this type of dismissal: 'There isn't much point discussing such things, because such discussions cannot, by their very character, reach true answers.'

This person might also declare that anyone can argue validly to anything; or that an infinite number of true answers are possible. This type of person will express himself in several different ways; but his main position is that such discussions cannot be useful. [Footnote: I distinguish, however, between such a person and a person who wants to make some positive use of a claim that an infinite number of exclusively true answers are possible. I will discuss such a positive proposition later.]

Sometimes this tactic represents a head-in-the sand approach: the person doesn't want to discuss such things; so he excuses himself from the conversation on this ground, without really having thought out whether this proposal holds water or not. [Footnote: there is a difference, however, between a person who directly holds a belief that no metaphysical belief can be regarded as true; and a person who makes such a claim because he

himself hasn't got a clue how to effectively judge between claims. The second person ought to say rather, that he has no idea which religion or philosophy is most true, rather than say no religion or philosophy can possibly reach adequate truth.]

By default, this position ends a debate before it has begun, by erecting a fortress mentality. However, I presume that you, my reader, do not hew to this sort of 'defense', or else you would never have picked up this book! If yet you do, and have somehow mistakenly reached this page, then let me say before you throw the book away: you are only deceiving yourself. You do have opinions about this general topic; those opinions do have grounds (of one sort or another); and if your opinions can only be preserved by pretending the grounds do not exist, then your position is perilous in the extreme--furthermore in other topics I suspect you would consider such willful blindness to be irresponsible. [Footnote: I do not spare some of my Christian or otherwise theistic brethren from this reprobation; a point I will develop more fully in following chapters.]

But it would be uncharitable, as well as false, to presume that all adherents of this tactic are taking an escape pod out of the conversation. Instead, such a person might be attempting to show charity: she does happen to hold a fairly strong and (as far as she can tell) well-grounded belief in a philosophical proposition set, which she knows her potential sparring partner disagrees with; and she also thinks this potential opponent will

lose badly if they get into this discussion; and she happens to be a friend of this other person (or at least wants the general back-and-forth of discussion on other topics to continue without a serious emotional hitch). Therefore, to spare her comrade potential discomfort, she begs off with a bit of a white lie.

I can respect this use of the tactic; but it might require ignoring the question of whether the sparring partner would be better off with a clearer understanding of reality, which the user of this tactic could have been in a position to provide. Then again, perhaps this person would even agree with me about this principle, yet (understanding her own limitations) would still defuse the dispute because she doesn't think she herself can do necessary justice to the topic. Not only can I respect, I can admire this restraint--provided this is not a smokescreen for the escape pod I first described. At any rate, a person who uses this tactic out of charity would (secretly) agree with me that such discussions are not inherently useless; whereupon she could excusably skip the rest of this chapter [and the journal entries built on it].

Thus I reach, by elimination, the third category of person who might try this tactic: the person who really does believe that such questions are inherently unanswerable so that any dispute on these questions must be ultimately useless (even if occasionally entertaining--like a bit of swashbuckling stage theatrics!)

Unlike the facetious or charitable dodging of similar proponents, this person poses me a real problem. At the very best, even if I produce an ironclad argument, and even if he agrees it is ironclad, he will not accept the conclusions--and quite rightly, if he is correct and such questions cannot be adequately answered to any degree whatsoever (any possible appearances otherwise notwithstanding.)

He might agree that my argument looked interesting, was well-designed, and perhaps helped him think along some lines he had never considered before. But in the end it would all be for nothing, because he would be coming to the discussion with a fatal strike already leveled against anything I might say.

I do not think any positive argument-to-come, concerning God's existence and character (pro or con, to any degree), can be designed to defend against that lethal presumption. This is a notion that (strange as it may sound) transcends an argument about God, because it calls into question the very ability of such an argument to be what it claims to be.

Thus, I have a vested interest in trying to reconcile and communicate with this type of person before I continue. I do not want unstated presumptions of this sort lurking in the background to justify any flat rejection (or worse, outright misrepresentation) of what I will say later.

And, of course, there is no reason at all for me to continue if this person does happen to be right!

So, how might a person reach this position as a conclusion?

Perhaps this person has drawn an inference from his perception of the actual state of religion, philosophy and metaphysics: a wide, wild and bewildering admixture of beliefs ranging every possible topic, each with advocates who (in effect) claim their belief reflects reality as well as, or better than, any of the others. [Footnote: Ironically, this would also include proponents who are overtly trying to avoid claiming this! I will be discussing various reasons and stances of this sort later.] Furthermore, if he looks into past eras he will see the same conglomeration except with different players who often have different practical stances.

If, on the other hand, he looks into other purportedly 'rational' fields, such as chemistry or mathematics, he may find some disagreement concerning three or four options on a limited range of topics, but by and large the general principles at stake are not in contention (or at least don't seem to be so) among those thinkers.

And when he looks at fields where, because of intrinsic characteristics, final answers on some topics are in fact few and far between, and/or numerous discreet theories may equally well fit the facts at hand (such as in psychology or history), he sees nearly the same sprawl of theories (at least in regard to some particular topics) as he perceives in metaphysics.

From these facts, he not unreasonably concludes (especially if he has no strong stake himself to defend, perhaps) from the resemblance of final effect, that metaphysics must be a topic where either no satisfactorily 'correct' answers may be obtained; or where an unknown number of discreetly opposite theories may sufficiently account for any data we have, thus giving us no reason to choose between them other than aesthetic taste, or something of that kind. And so, being an honest and self-critical person, he refuses to allow his own aesthetic taste to dictate what 'must' be objectively true.

I can certainly imagine myself working along those grounds; and I sometimes get this impression from correspondents and critics.

Please note that these people (by definition of the type I am describing here) are quite honest, and have drawn what seems to them to be the best decision possible from the evidence. I have as much respect for them as I do for someone who begs off the question to save the feelings of her friend.

But, I think they are making an honest mistake; and I have concluded this for the following reason:

The assertion (or conclusion, whatever the actual form of the contention) that 'No useful and/or true assertions or conclusions may ever be reached in philosophy, religion, etc.' is a self-contradictory statement, because the proposer has made

a tacit exception in favor of the bit of philosophical truth he is advocating at the moment.

Let us say I am one of these negative agnostics (as I will call them). [Footnote: I also recognize a type of negative agnostic who goes this route in order to protect himself from having to recognize particular truth claims that he finds bothersome; but unlike the first category he insists on interfering in metaphysical discussions anyway. Such spurious opposition is merely a willful bar to serious discussion, and does not deserve to be more fully addressed.] I look around at the plethora of 'evidence' I have previously described, and I draw the conclusion: 'No useful and/or true conclusions may ever be reached in philosophy, religion, etc.'

What am I doing? I am making an exclusively definite statement about the character of reality: it definitely is (I think) such that no one can ever be correct in making exclusively definite statements about it.

But I am contradicting myself! If the character of basic reality is such that no one can ever be correct in making a definite statement about it (either as a conclusion or as an assertion), then neither can I be correct in making that definite statement about the way reality is!

Such a negative agnosticism therefore is self-defeating; for if it was true I would never have discovered it, nor would I

be formally capable of asserting or defending it--I would literally have 'no reason' to accept or propose it as true!

So at least one definite aspect of ultimate reality may be discovered, or at least truly asserted.

The negative agnostic could now change his stance slightly and claim that only one thing can be definitely stated about reality: any other statement (except this one) about reality cannot be true even if it happens to look that way.

My first problem with this contention is that it relies on an unstated presumption: that no other cause for the wide range of positions in philosophy could be possible. How does our negative agnostic know this? The only definitively true statement we can discover about reality is that no other definitive statements about reality are possible; and we know this because no other explanation for the state of affairs can be true? But this is only saying the same thing over again, using a different grammatic construction to make the second statement seem like something different from the first statement.

I myself can imagine at least one other potential cause for our situation: the issues are subtle and deeply mixed with emotional associations in our minds, as well as with socio-historical and familial associations. This could easily explain a vast number of viewpoints, while still allowing the possibility that one viewpoint is truly more accurate than the

others. [Footnote: Also, I happen to believe we have at least one set of supernatural enemies who have an interest in keeping us as conflicted as possible; but I understand that my sceptical reader won't buy this yet, and scepticism on this point doesn't eliminate other hypothetical causes being true.]

Furthermore, upon close study, it isn't difficult to find common themes shared by representatives of otherwise different viewpoints: a Muslim would agree with me that there is only one God, upon Whom all else depends and Who is the ultimate standard for our ethical judgments. We would disagree (in some cases very seriously) about certain metaphysical and historical questions, but we would agree about that. [Footnote: Come to think of it, we would largely agree in principle about the Enemy, too...!]

Shared viewpoints can be found linking all sorts of religions and philosophies to each other. So, we are not presented with a multitude of utterly exclusive views of reality; and even if we were, this might still be a result of subtle and emotional issues.

I can only record that I see no good reason to conclude that the only explanation for the proliferation of philosophies is that no philosophical position can be definitively true. (Barring that statement itself, of course!) The negative agnostic might reply that he just feels that if one of them (say, Christianity) represented the best truth, then some sort of provision would have been made to ensure that this truth (or

a subcategory of it) was as clear as daylight to everyone--thus the dissension among the ranks shows that such discussion must be ultimately useless.

I would reply that if I attempted to ground any one given 'definitive' proposition about reality on a feeling such as this, our negative agnostic would either cut me off at the knees (knowing full well that such feelings, although objectively real experiences, are not valid grounds for such a proposition); or he would find his own intuitive feeling directly conflicting with it, whereupon he would have no way to distinguish which view reflects reality 'better'.

Therefore, I conclude that at least one definite characteristic of reality may be discovered; and I conclude that we have no clear grounds for concluding that the only definite characteristic of reality is its inability to otherwise be discovered. [Footnote: An opponent who merely 'asserts' (not 'discovers') such a characteristics, will be covered later.]

This opens a first door to a potentially meaningful discussion on this class of subjects.

I will in fairness note that the negative agnostic could, in the end, become another type of agnostic: he has fairly looked at x-number of philosophies and, to the best of his ability, has come away with no clearer understanding of what reality ultimately is than when he started. The difference for this agnostic, is that he would recognize the limitation to be

one of his own, not necessarily a limitation of the topic itself. Presuming he is honest about this, I would consider this view (which I will call positive agnosticism) to be self-consistent as far as it goes; at least it does not nail shut the door to inquiry before the inquiry can begin. But then, for all he can tell before my analysis really gets started, he might not get that result from this book. So I am free to proceed.

Now I will examine another set of tactics, similar (in ends if not in means) to those of the negative agnostics. I will do this, not only to (at least partially) justify myself to some of my brethren, but also because (thanks to those same brethren) a sceptic might think she had grounds we have chosen, for dismissing my attempt before I have even begun. [Footnote: please keep in mind that my goal throughout this chapter, as is often the case throughout this section of chapters, is to see whether a particular stance or set of stances properly prevents me from trying with any good hope to reach conclusions that can be legitimately shared by opponents and myself, on metaphysical topics. Keeping this in mind will help avoid misunderstanding what I'm actually trying to do here; and will also help avoid critiques of what I am not actually trying to do.]

There are two subgroups of Christian proponents (and I think I can safely assume they have their mirrors in Judaism and Islam) who would agree with the negative agnostic that philosophical analysis cannot (by its very character) reach

useful and/or true conclusions about God's existence and His characteristics.

Both these groups may be called Presuppositionalists, and I distinguish them as Scriptural Presuppositionalists and Theological Presuppositionalists.

Both types of thinkers are typically devout and loyal to God, and to what they (in many cases 'we'!) believe to be writings He has to one degree or another inspired. Furthermore, both types of thinker are likely to hold Scripture to be not only inspired, but also utterly inerrant (no errors or mistakes of any kind were allowed by God in the material, even down to our present-day translated copies) and virtually dictated to the writers in all instances by God.

These people are, in essence, likely to attribute Divine characteristics to scriptures.⁹ [Note: see first comment below for extended footnote.] Again, these people do this very largely out of loyalty to, and love for, God.

⁹ The Theological Presuppositionalists need not necessarily be so stringent, but they often are. At the same time, the Scriptural Presuppositionalist--or any other proponent of scriptural inerrancy--may hold the more moderate view that the original "autographic" documents were inerrant to this extent, but have become corrupted to some degree in the centuries and millennia afterward, thanks to copy errors, misidentified scribal glosses, damaged documents, etc. There is, in fact, a wide range of theories concerning scriptural inspiration, and even of the character of scriptural inerrancy.

My discussion will leave these issues mostly to one side; certainly the point I wish to make in this current chapter, concerning Presuppositionalistic methodologies, does not depend on accepting or rejecting this-or-that type of inerrancy or inspiration; though frequently an acceptance of this-or-that type of inerrancy or inspiration will depend upon such methodologies.

Sometimes certain individual proponents of these two stances will choose this tactic in order to avoid direct confrontation with the opposition--while still trying to confront the opposition. I do not think this makes sense; mainly because I think it flies in the face of any successful Christian witness on our part. I do not consider flinging grenades onto the field and then crouching behind our benches--hoping the grenades will somehow do our responsibilities for us--to be fulfilling Christ's Great Commission. The proponent of such a tactic needs only to ask himself how he would probably respond as a sceptic to this sort of bullyragging; or perhaps (if he is a traditional Christian) he should consider what he would think of Jehovah's Witnesses (for instance) trying the same tactic on him. If he would reject such a tactic applied against him, would he consider himself to be doing so out of willful rejection of the truth? Or because such a presentation gives him no good reason to change his mind? (On the other hand, I would say 'staying home' in such a fashion out of a humble recognition of lack of skill, would make fine sense as far as it goes; but by default this would not involve opposing opponents.)

However, not all Presuppositionalists are trying to safely toss grenades onto the playing field (despite what some sceptics might be tempted to suspect!) Instead, they may be operating according to this concern: they quite consciously start with a set of beliefs they want to preserve, and so they (with equal

intent) put those beliefs first as the only possible way of successfully interpreting reality.

So, a person who is a Scriptural Presuppositionalist will (in essence) start with the following propositions: only God can be the ground for any true proposition, and the only way of discovering aspects of God is through the Scriptures He has inspired. Therefore, the Scriptures (being our only pipeline to ultimate truth) must be used as the standard for deciding the truth of any other proposition.

To their credit, they don't have to mean by this that every single question must rely on Scripture for an answer: they do not turn to Scripture to learn how to find the sum of 41 and 39; nor to find the best ways of planting seed; nor to learn how to make an airplane (or a horse-cart for that matter).

But, they would say that any answer that contradicts 'clear' scriptural teaching must be wrong, no matter how correct the answer otherwise may look.¹⁰

On the other hand (and of much more importance for my immediate topic), if a conclusion does match a position of theirs, they may admit the conclusion is technically correct-- because otherwise they would be denying their own position! But

¹⁰ The question of what counts as 'clearness' can be more than a little muddy, though. I find that even proponents of extreme literalism become selectively metaphorical when it suits their purposes. The Immanuel prophecy from Isaiah chapters 7 and 8 is an excellent example. The surrounding story has nothing literally to do with God Incarnate; and everything literally to do with a son of Isaiah whose birth and early life will mark the limit to the current siege of Jerusalem and hostile occupation of the southern kingdom of Judah.

they will also say the conclusion could not really have been reached by the method used.

Thus, even if an argument seemed to conclude that a supernatural Creator God must exist (with any further details inclusive to that theism), these people would say that the argument simply cannot be doing what it looks like it's doing, because it isn't using Scripture to get to that conclusion (and only Scripture is capable of giving us those kinds of truth).¹¹

The Theological Presuppositionalist takes a similar yet distinctive view. She would begin with the proposition that only God's existence (and perhaps other characteristics), used as a ground, can provide a coherent non-contradictive philosophy. She then attempts to illustrate that God's presumed existence allows us to account for more of reality than another presupposition would.

Depending on how she goes about it, this is not necessarily a faulty method; but it should be presented as an abductive argument (at least for purposes of arguing in favor of God's

¹¹ There are, of course, adherents of scriptural inerrancy who are entirely in favor of using arguments other than scriptural authority to reach conclusions proposed by scripture. I think these inerrantists constitute the majority of such believers, and I am not discussing them here; because in principle they would be in favor of apologetic argument. I am only speaking of a minority of inerrantists who would insist that no way of reaching such conclusions can be possible aside from mere acceptance of scriptural authority. Most inerrantists would be content to check the validity of my logic as an auxiliary to scriptural authority; and that would certainly be fine with me--although then we would have to go into questions concerning grounds for translations, interpretations of grammar and concept, etc. (And notice that 'interpretation of concept' basically means we would be back to a preliminary metaphysical discussion after all, not a discussion of scriptural exegesis. This being the case, I would rather start with the metaphysics and save a step. I'll be making this same point later in my main text.)

existence and characteristics), instead of a deductive one, and would share the weaknesses of an abductive argument.

If she tries to make it deductive, it becomes circular, and thus invalid:

Step 1, Presume (for sake of argument) x-type God exists.

Step 2, Demonstrate that the notional system based accepting the existence of this God doesn't 'crash', and provides us with a working basis for the conversion of philosophy into, for instance, valid sciences for discovering and predicting true facts about our world.

Step 3, Demonstrate that true facts about our world mesh with the system; preferably some facts the system predicted in advance.

Step 4, Conclude therefore that this God must exist.

Even if steps 2 and 3 can be shown to work, step 4 cannot legitimately follow, because step 2 requires step 1 to be true first--and step 1 equals step 4, so the argument goes nowhere, like triggering an empty revolver at a target that has already been shot. However, stopping at steps 2 or 3 can still be useful: demonstrating that a proposed system 'works' is certainly important, and at least provides a valid option.¹²

¹² Another way of attempting a deductive argument along this path--at least in effect, if not in form--would be to presume God's existence (with such-n-such characteristic set); demonstrate (formally) that this presumption works without crashing; and then demonstrate that all other proposed presuppositions fail. This is one proper approach, and I call it the system-check duel; but it has some practical shortcomings. I will discuss it a few pages from now.

But, if the proponent insists on trying to make a safely certain deductive argument from this process, it can only offer a very backhanded sort of 'help'.

What is a sceptic supposed to say to an argument like this? "So, if only I will accept God does exist, then I will see that God must exist?"

That may be true, but it isn't worth saying! To 'see' (or accept as a belief) that God exists, on this plan, the thinker must essentially begin by accepting that God exists! I do not think a rejection of this type of plan by a sceptic necessarily indicates sinful obstinance or imbecility: it might indicate a sensible and ethical virtue on the part of the sceptic--not to accept a supposed 'argument' that by its very characteristics cannot show what its adherents claim for it!

The circular Presuppositionalist may understand what I mean, if the tables are turned. Nature prevents us from presenting comprehensible cases simultaneously to each other, so one or the other must 'go first'. Therefore, let us say an atheist happens to go first.

He begins with the assertion that God does not exist: that the rock-bottom most basic Fact in reality upon which all else depends is not itself sentient. He then proceeds to demonstrate that useful and accurate philosophies and sciences can be built

upon this assertion. Therefore, he concludes, God must not exist.

Would the Presuppositionalist agree with him? I hope not! This atheist's 'conclusion' that God must not exist, requires as a necessary presumption that God does not exist!

I do not mean this atheist would have accomplished absolutely nothing: if he does get this far he will have demonstrated, to use my earlier simile, that the revolver does indeed cycle and click. But dry-clicking a revolver does not accomplish the end for which the gun is intended.

The Scriptural Presuppositionalist has an even harder job, because claims of self-grounding written material tend to cancel out one another; and the advocates can easily end up (perhaps even literally) waving books in each other's faces like crucifixes against vampires, yelling "Bible" "Koran" "Bible" "Koran" "Little Red Book"--before everyone loses patience and starts shooting.

Yet, in one way, a debate between two philosophical types of Presuppositionalists--for instance a theist and an atheist--may accomplish something worthwhile. Both sides can get into what I call a system-check duel, where they pick at problems (or perceived problems) in the opposing systems while defending their own. This could (potentially) lead to a Last Man Standing

situation: the last one with a working system may reasonably be considered to be the winner!

However, both sides have massively complex arguments; and not only is there no motivation, there is virtually no provision for keeping the entire argument of either side in view at once. Also this method highlights (and indeed magnifies) the adversarial aspect of the exercise.

And in such a strategy, the 'loser' always has an infallible escape hatch: he can always say that some new development in the future might re-open the case. Insofar as an inductive argument goes, he would be within boundaries to try clinging to this hope.

I would rather try a different route. I would, in short, prefer to grow a theist rather than merely weed out atheists.¹³

I agree that some presupposition (or limited set of presuppositions) must be proposed, upon which the rest of the argument can then be built. Near the beginning of my second section I will try to find a notion with which both my sceptical reader and I can agree in a shared mutual advantage. Then I will deduce implications from that starting point, and from there

¹³ There is a difference between weeding out atheists and weeding out atheism. A deductive argument to a conclusion of theism, by being a deductive argument, will certainly weed out alternate proposals; but not necessarily weed out the people who propose them. My point is that a system-check duel, of itself, does not invite or facilitate a shared experience of discovery. The Great Commission is a call for all people to accept a banner; not a call to destroy the infidel. (Ironically, the popular perception is usually that 'inductive' arguments are more tolerant and 'deductive' arguments more hostile.)

draw further deductions; to see if I can rule out option branches without cheating.

Meanwhile, I know some sceptics have seen the unclear (and often circularly argued) results of Presuppositionalist views; or have heard that if Christianity (or some other theism) is true, it cannot be discovered by reasoning but merely asserted. You will not, however, hear that from me! I hope I have shown why I do not consider either of those factors to be good grounds for concluding beforehand that these types of issues cannot be satisfactorily resolved by logical analysis (and I will touch on this point occasionally throughout the rest of my book, in one fashion or another).

The question of assertions vs. reasoned conclusions, however, does (as a matter of historical fact) involve the question of religious faith; a topic that has been drastically misunderstood for several centuries. These misunderstandings have been, and still are, propagated by strong factions among believers and unbelievers alike; and since these misunderstandings can often bring a useful dialogue (much moreso a process of shared discovery) to a crashing halt before either side can even begin making their case, I had better try to resolve this issue.

CHAPTER 3 -- Reason and faith

There are many devout people who rightly (I believe) value a faith in God above all other possessions, but who will also see my attempts as striking against a true relationship with God.

I think they are quite correct (as I will discuss much later) that it is better to have a living relationship with God and to work with Him, than only to understand God in some technical sense. Furthermore, I agree that if it is possible to discover the existence and character of God by reasoning from neutral propositions, this neither can nor shall ultimately benefit the thinker unless he takes the next step and chooses to work with God personally.¹⁴

But although I agree with these notions, I do not think it logically follows from these notions that such a discovery by logical analysis must necessarily fail. Consequently, these notions do not stand in the way of making attempts along this line.

¹⁴ Such work might, by necessity, entail service--assuming we discover we are not equal to, or superior to God!--and I suspect the concept of being a servant is an emotional barrier for many sceptics. At least, I find it to be an emotional barrier for many believers (including myself!); and I do not know why a sceptic, of all people, would have an easier time with the concept, especially in today's individualistic Western society. Nevertheless, emotional barriers are not logical barriers. If the best I can be is a servant of God, in the work He works, then it would be unrealistic (to say the least) for me to treat the situation as being otherwise. I will have much more to say about this later.

Yet again, for some people, that is just the problem with my attempt: I am using reason to build (or to build up) faith, and they have been taught all their lives that faith and reason are mutually exclusive. These people would say, at best, that my attempt must fail to reach any useful conclusion; maybe even that I am blaspheming by even suggesting that human reason can search out the Infinite.

This sort of opinion comes and goes throughout Christianity's history. [Footnote: it certainly isn't restricted to the history of Christianity, but it seems best for me to focus there, as a Christian apologist.] In this case, it last rose in ascendance between the middle of the 17th century and the beginning of the 19th, where it climaxed into a supposed schism between 'religion' and 'science'.

The roots of the widespread acceptance of this strategy are too complex for more than a brief summary in this entry. But the result was that during this period great sceptical thinkers were becoming more numerous than they had ever been previously; great sceptical moralists were culminating a barrage on the abuses of the various branches of the Church (and there were certainly abuses taking place for them to legitimately snipe at); and the Church had managed to remove or suppress the majority of its own great thinkers who might have met the opposition steel-for-steel in philosophical dispute.

The various branches of the Church became aware that they were losing ground. They had to choose between educating people to be able to take care of themselves (because people were becoming increasingly exposed to alternate viewpoints in the media--a situation obviously still in effect today); or else setting up an ideological fortress mentality.

But the branches had previously, in their complacency, let the opposition get too far ahead for anything less than a multi-generation educational program to work. They had few resources to begin such a task, and such a plan might entail the loss of massive numbers of people from the Church until the regrouping and regrowth could be established--and I remind the sceptic that most Christians would equate such a departure with the damning of those souls.¹⁵

Aside from all this, such a program would have had serious political ramifications; and the Church at that time, although divesting itself (slowly) from the political arena, was still very much more a political creature than we find her today.¹⁶

¹⁵ My point being, that what can with some legitimacy be called over-restrictiveness, may be the best charity the people involved can imagine or can implement at the time. Whenever I hear Christians being morally horrified that Muslims persecute Christian missionaries in some countries, I remind them that to devout ultraconservative Muslims, we Christians are worse than mass murderers, because they think we are seducing people into an atrocious blasphemy and thus damning their souls. Those people are doing their best to stand up for God and to protect the good, against evil. The Christian Church has occasionally executed people on similar grounds.

¹⁶ I find it interesting that the most politically outspoken groups on questions of religion, are still the ones who would prefer the general population to be unthinkingly acceptive about certain proposals concerning religion. This is just as true, although in a different direction, for the so-called 'liberal' groups as for the 'conservatives': I will have more to

Thus, erecting a fortress mentality must have seemed the safest, quickest, most (relatively) effective means of ensuring that as many people as possible were not deceived by these opponents and, thereby, lose their souls. And, when it came to it, these new generations of vocal opposition were formidably skilled; disputing with them would be dangerous and difficult.¹⁷

So, near the turn into the 19th century, we find a long-running development in Western thought to the effect that religious 'Faith' and intellectual 'Reasoning' must be considered to be mutually exclusive operations.¹⁸

Naturally, this sort of lesson went down very smoothly for the vast numbers of people who had no great mental strength or training themselves: they need not worry about the arguments of the opposition (or even worry about the scripturally sanctioned duty of understanding their own position as well as they can);

say later about the ironic intolerance of groups who stress maximum religious 'tolerance'.

¹⁷ The sceptic may reasonably ask why it apparently occurred to very few people that God, not being stupid, would understand and charitably allow that many of these people would not be leaving the Church out of willful rejection of perceived truth, but out of an honest mistake. A large part of why this didn't occur to more people can be explained from this observation: even though the vast majority of people who call themselves 'Christian' (including myself) agree that it is Christ the Redeemer and Advocate who (in various ways) delivers God's grace to the world, it is also true that many Christians think God is limited to Christianity (the religion) as the only vehicle for this communication. The question, in practical effect, tends to come down to whether the claim 'Christ is the Way, the Truth and the Life' entails or equals the effective claim that 'the Church and/or Christianity is the Way, the Truth and the Life'. I will be discussing this much later.

¹⁸ This development hardly stopped there. On the contrary, it accelerated so effectively that by the end of the 19th century there was a general feeling, still popularly in effect today, that it began in that century. Meanwhile, although the Eastern Church did not undergo the same historical process, it had long ago incorporated so much apophatic or 'negative' theology as a primary tool, that it had already long-since arrived at a largely counter-rational theology result.

for they have Faith. [Footnote: I still have had to be very brief in covering this issue, though hopefully I have done so in a fashion that a sceptic will find recognizeable.]

It would be a caricature (although one occasionally employed by sceptics who prefer dealing with straw men) to say this is the final position of any Christian since those times-- or at least (they might say) the final position of any Christian who really is a Christian and is not really something else (merely claiming Christian coloring for, say, political purposes or social standing).

But there have also been Christians responding against this dichotomous division of principle, especially as the 19th century began changing to the 20th; who have truly and seriously been engaged in defending a 'rational faith'.¹⁹ As in every field, not all these people have been especially proficient; and so the actual number of Christian 'apologists' who are worth time disputing (or paying attention to) remained small. Here, at the beginning of the 21st century, there are more of these people doing better work than ever; yet they are still drowned in Christian literature (and in Christian outreach programs) by primarily emotional appeals. And this disproportion can leave

¹⁹ These people can also be found in previous eras of our history, of course. Isaac Newton, for instance, considered himself to be writing, in effect, a Christian apologetic against mechanistic atheism, when he wrote his Principia. I do not think this was merely a convenient coloring on his part to allow social acceptance of his ideas (which would not have been necessary by his time anyway); for he also wrote extensive volumes on the interpretation of Judeo-Christian prophecy! (Besides, he was very consciously and intentionally 'unorthodox' in his belief on some points, so he obviously had no problem speaking out against doctrines he disagreed with.)

the 'taste' that 'real' religion (including 'real' Christianity) is not concerned with positively analytical thought.

For many people, then, a division of faith and reason remains a cornerstone of 'real religion'--particularly, of 'real' Christianity.

And here is the crushing irony: it is a lesson that sceptics have learned very well from believers.

What does the typical sceptic see and hear when, by happenstance, she is exposed to a typical Christian witness? She receives the impression that to accept Christianity she must reject her own ability to think; and/or that there can be no 'reason' to believe in God--she must have 'faith' instead.

She is given no reason to believe. Not surprisingly, she doesn't believe.

"Well, tough for her!" the believer may snort. "I don't know ontological or cosmological arguments either, and I believe. I 'only' have Faith; if I can do it, she can do it. Therefore, she should have done it!"

But such a reply (felt at bottom, I suspect, in many believers although not usually expressed so directly!) flies against a charitable attitude towards witnessing.

The sceptic does not have any of the advantages a believer already has (presuming the believer is in fact correct). The believer may be mistaking his privileges for humble submission on his part and sinful intransigence on the sceptic's. Is he

quite sure he would accept Christianity given no reasons at all (plus what seem to be many reasons against it, which the sceptic may be exposed to and the believer often will not have been)? Yet if any particular reasons have helped to ground an accurate religious belief, then for all one can know beforehand other reasons may work just as well or better! The cases must be judged on an individual basis.

"Yes," the believer may reply, "but as it happens, I am quite sure I would accept Christianity if I were like her and given no reasons at all; for I have been given no reasons and I accept it."

In Proverbs chapter 14, verse 15, Solomon (the attributed author) states that "The simple believe everything while (in contrast) the prudent man considers his steps." That whole chapter and many of the surrounding ones equate the prudent man with the good, and both with the man who fears and obeys and loves God. So, if you really have no reasons to believe--if you are not "prudently considering your steps"--which of these two men described by Solomon do you represent if you nevertheless give assent to a 'belief'!?

"But this case is different!"

Why?

"Because now we are talking about a belief in
God!"

What makes that a different case?

"Because... the rewards and perils and duties are
the greatest?"

[Footnote: I am obviously dealing in this entry
with a fairly common and unsophisticated version of
the question of faith and reason. In the following
chapter, I will be considering it from a far more
technical standpoint.]

But this begs the question: how do you know there
are rewards and perils and duties?

"The Bible says so."

Why should we believe it?

"Because it is true."

How can a sceptic know it is true?

"She cannot, she must just trust it."

In other topics you would call this the
irresponsible behavior of a credulous fool.²⁰ You
yourself would not agree to a belief on other topics
in this manner; you would consider it an insult for
other people to assume that you would or require that

²⁰ The "folly of the cross" mentioned by Saint Paul, refers to the criticism Christians received for insisting on retaining the crucifixion as a historical event, which in Judaism had shameful religious connotations, and which for the Greeks was virtually a call to be destroyed by Rome as a rebel against the Empire. Paul's remarks concerning the 'foolishness' of God being wiser than men need to be kept in their topical context.

you should. She does not know these scriptures should be trusted, and you give her no means of help.

"God will help her."

Then your witness is useless; God must come to her in some other way than through Christian witnesses.

"He can reach her through the Bible."

The Bible says that God has chosen to work effectively through us as witnesses; you have just testified this is functionally impossible! Why should she trust Scripture when you yourself deny it speaks sensibly on such a basic issue?

"There is no reason why she should, she simply must."

Then Scripture is no help to her either.

"God will help her."

But apparently not through Scripture or Christian witnesses. You (not I!) would say this essentially denies the superior truth of the Christian religion. No wonder she is a sceptic! Who is God more likely to punish for this: you or her!?

As I have just illustrated, a denial of a link between faith and reason not only erects an unnecessary barrier between a sceptic and the truth (as I think Christianity to be), but

also undermines any claim Christianity (or any other theism) may have to truth--even if we stick to a 'simple' faith.

But an even more pernicious problem rises in this situation; and although a believer of this sort may not recognize it, the sceptic very probably will...

This type of believer does in fact have a 'faith' based on reasoning!

This will be concealed from him by the fact that he is taught to distrust (or ignore) complex metaphysical and philosophical theorems, as being 'proof' or 'evidence' or 'reasoning'. It rarely occurs to him that he nevertheless all this time has been accepting evidence, and from this evidence has been drawing conclusions about the truths of Christianity.

This 'evidence' is (usually) the testimony of his teachers, preachers, friends and/or family. He may believe in Christianity because the Bible tells him so. But he believes the Bible to be trustworthy, not because the Bible tells him so, but because other people have told him so. And these are not just any people, but people who (for one reason or another) he has concluded are trustworthy! [Footnote: I do not discount witnessing by God directly via the Holy Spirit; but I will be discussing it soon. Until then, I will briefly say here that it falls into the same category of belief-formation process.]

Now I grant you, that if he bothered to trace back these habitually quick and long-ingrained inferences, the believer

might decide that such inferences are not very strong. Indeed, many sceptics are sceptics today precisely because they have discovered this for themselves; or (worse) because such underlying weaknesses were rudely forced upon them when they were betrayed (to one degree or another) by those people, and thereby lost their trust in them!

But there is a significant difference between having weak reasons (whether actually or only perceptively so) and having no reasons at all.

A rock quite literally can have no reasons at all to believe in Christianity; therefore it does not believe.

A 3rd century aborigine in the Australian Outback is very far ahead of the rock: she at least has the capability to infer conclusions from data (be it testimony or abstract argumentation or experimentation or whatnot). Nevertheless, she has access to none of these things concerning Christianity. She really does have no available reasons at all (no data and thus no inferences to be drawn from the data) to believe in Christianity; therefore she does not believe. [Footnote: of course, she will have reasons to believe her own religious propositions instead; including possibly a tacit monotheism in the background. But folk anthropological analysis of latent monotheisms is a whole other vast discussion, and one for a different kind of specialist.]

However, a person raised from childhood in (for instance) a small-town Southern Baptist or Assembly of God church, even if he rejects or ignores detailed argumentation in favor of God's existence and character, nevertheless does have reasons to believe: his parents and preacher and teachers tell him it is true, and so far he has found them to be reliable.

But these inferences are so simple, and easy, and common, and habitual, that he does not recognize their existence as such; and obviously his instructors are either in the same boat, or have a vested interest in not admitting they have no stronger grounds to use.

[Footnote: for that matter, they might not mention stronger grounds even when they do have them; because they either know their student lacks the mental acuity to handle the stronger (tougher) arguments, or because they lack confidence in their ability to teach the stronger arguments themselves.]

None of this, however, can be of much help to the sceptic: how many mission outreach programs consist of going to door-to-door and (overtly) saying, "You should accept Christianity and the Bible because my preacher says it is true"?

Yet, this is ultimately what most witnessing, and most training within the Church, boils down to.

And once a sceptic perceives this, she will not say Christians have no reason to believe (she might, deep down, respect that with a sympathetically defiant attitude); but

rather, Christians have singularly weak and puny reasons to believe--which is much worse! And to top it off, she will probably treat such witnesses as hypocrites or fools, for she can quite clearly see that they are in fact accepting reasons to believe; yet they piously tell her that she must be like them, and trust God with 'faith' instead of 'reason'!

I also reject this strategy because it repudiates Scripture itself [Footnote: at any rate the scriptures I and most other Christians consider to be authoritative], up to and including the methods of Our Lord.

In the Old Testament narratives, God gives plenty of evidence to His people; not in formal logical disputation, of course, because those formal mental tools had not yet been developed and propagated. Yet He becomes angry with them, not because they keep asking for proof and signs, but because they are not willing to believe (and do the right thing) once they have the proof and signs! The miracles of the prophets are intended to be treated as evidence by the people, that what the prophets are saying is truly from God.²¹

This concept carries on into the New Testament, where the miracles of Jesus and the Apostles function not only to relieve

²¹ For accuracy's sake, this kind of process should not usually be identified as 'God of the gaps' argumentation, of the sort typically fulminated against by modern sceptics. While that sort of argument may have been, even probably was, happening too; the OT, much less the NT, does not present its examples in terms of 'Nothing we know of could be doing this, therefore God must exist and be doing this', or even usually '...therefore it must be God Who is doing it'. Nevertheless, events were considered to be data to be reasoned about, concerning God, including to conclusions about His character and characteristics. Sometimes sceptics do much the same thing, though to somewhat different results, based on the textual details!

the burdens of groups and individuals, but also as "attesting signs" for the people to use as evidence. [Footnote: though as a fairly constant characterization across the texts, Jesus does not do miracles primarily for attestation purposes.] Again, granted, it is a different kind of evidence than what we in the modern West typically find (though this type of evidentiality still plays a significant role in belief-arrival, pro or con, within or without orthodox Christianity and its various branches, even in the modern West!) But it is still evidence, from which God (in the Biblical accounts) expects the people to draw rational inferences.

Jesus warns the people in the fourth chapter of Mark (and in the eighth chapter of Luke, which recounts the same speech in somewhat different words) that they will be held responsible for what and why they believe; and that if they fall into error because they just don't want to bother to figure out the truth for themselves, they will have only themselves to blame for the consequences!²²

Another time (reported in John 10:19-39), Jesus sarcastically asks his accusers which mighty work of God they are about to stone him for. They reply that they are going to

²² I think this is the meaning of Mark 4:10-12 plus 21-25, and Luke 8:10 plus 16-18. Jesus tells his disciples that he is not speaking parables in order to be altogether unintelligible, but in order to encourage people who care about truth to think about what his parables mean. The people who, through laziness or uncharity or an unrepentant heart, refuse to work out the meaning of what he is saying, will fall into error; and so will the people who try to work out his sayings according to principles of uncharity.

Of course, Jesus would say all this parabolically, too...!

stone him for what they believe to be a blasphemous remark concerning his self-identification. He counter-replies that he has given them loads of attesting signs (i.e., he has given them evidence), in the form of miracles, practical wisdom, etc., that show he is from God and so what he has said therefore cannot be blasphemy, even if it looks like it at the moment. His enemies cannot argue with his supernatural power; but they cannot accept his (increasingly less obscure) statements about his relationship to God, either. So they accuse him of black (Satanically provided) magic--despite his obvious good works and animosity to possessing devils.²³

After the resurrection, Jesus seems to rebuke Thomas' requirement of absolute evidence and pronounces a blessing on those who haven't seen and yet who believe (John 20:19-29). [Footnote: in fact, there is no rebuke of Thomas specifically mentioned here; although there is a strong rebuke toward the unbelieving apostles in general presented in the late Marcan epilogue-summary (Mark 16:14).] But was Thomas a speculative philosopher trying to find the truth? No: according to the story he was a man who already believed in God and the Hebrew Scriptures (including, to at least some degree, the advent of the Messiah); who had seen Jesus do amazing things for years;

²³ Since this chapter is not actually directed to sceptics, I am taking some notions for granted here; but setting aside issues of philosophy and historical accuracy, this is at least how the story runs, as a story, in these anecdotes. I mention this, because I occasionally find sceptics who want to treat these anecdotes only as 'stories', yet who still seem incapable of even giving them that much credit.

who had heard Jesus occasionally predict one more amazing thing; who had heard testimony from his closest companions that Jesus had indeed done this one more amazing thing; and then had required absolutely irrefutable proof. This is a man who, given 99% assurance, withheld any assent until he received 100% assurance--which is the same as saying that he would never choose to believe, no matter how good the evidence: that someone would have to make him 'believe'. No wonder Jesus was gently ironic! [Footnote: possibly not only to Thomas but toward the other disciples as well--for there had been many more than one 'doubting Thomas' in that group who had required absolute evidence rather than a personal trust!] And let us remember that Thomas did give a stronger assent to the evidence than any other character in the narratives: "The Lord of me, and the God of me."²⁴

Does this end with Jesus? No--his first Apostles are given supernatural power to help spread the gospel: these people could back their testimony with attesting signs, from which evidence the people were intended to infer conclusions.

It is true that in these stories, we do not find wire-thin metaphysical disputation; but neither was it needed, nor (culturally) had it been largely developed yet, and the general

²⁴ No English translation can quite do justice to the blunt affirmation of the Greek here (ho kyrios mou kai ho theos mou, 'the Lord of me and the God of me', with grammatic emphasis on 'the'), which is why attempts to write this off as an exclamation of surprise and not a testimony of the recognition of Deity fall fallaciously short. This is not the same as saying the comment and incident were reported accurately, of course; nor that Thomas was correct in his estimate--although I believe he was.

populations (for whom the scriptural documents were written) would by and large not have understood it. They get what they need; and in fact most often they already believed in the Hebrew God and the Hebrew Scriptures, to one degree or another, so that is where the reported arguments focus.

On the other hand, Luke reports Paul's statements at the Mars Hill forum, for example, presumably because those statements are (or were) still accessible to most everyone.²⁵ The letters of the New Testament are written to people already converted, and so largely touch other matters. [Footnote: not that St. Paul never engages in tough disputation--his epistle to the Romans is a famous example--but it still isn't formal in the sense we would recognize it, and his goal is still different from establishment apologetics.] Beyond the canon, some of the later writings of the Apostolic Fathers (to whom many denominations accord major authority) feature essays and letters written to begin arguing their case philosophically to pagan authorities and audiences; Justin Martyr's apology to the Roman Emperor is a good example.

I would agree, of course, that any metaphysical disputes carried out by the first Christians would be different in shape and thrust (though not completely so) than today's arguments

²⁵ Acts 17:16-34. Some of the philosophers sneer at Paul, but others agree to hear more of Paul (implying that more may well have been said by Paul later, which Luke does not record); and Luke reports that several people accepted Christ at that time and in that way, including Dionysius the Areopagite, traditionally identified as the first bishop of Athens. An especially interesting 'pagan' story connects to this incident, and can be found, among other places, in Richardson's Eternity in their Hearts.

would be. I deny that such disputes must not have ever taken place and that they could have no Divinely approved effect; and I certainly deny that drawing inferences from evidence cannot lead to an acceptance of Christian truth--not because I reject Scripture's authority, but because I accept what its writers have reported.

In this way, I hope I have explained sufficiently to my Christian (and, to some degree, my other theistic) brethren why attempts such as mine, or those of other 'classical' apologists, may be possibly useful; while I have also shown why no sceptic should be surprised at being unable to use this popular stance against me, taken from the mouths of 'Christians' themselves.

But perhaps a sceptic of 'religion', or even a more sophisticated believer of a religion, may have his own (non-religious) reasons to regard faith and reason as being mutually exclusive; and so I might as well give up and go home early rather than continue with an argument that might turn out to be in favor of God's existence and character--or against!

To this issue I now turn for my next chapter.

CHAPTER 4 -- Belief and reason

Having explained why, as a Christian, I do not hold to what many people (Christian and sceptic) have considered the 'party line' that reason and faith are mutually exclusive, I will now explore this issue from a deeper philosophical perspective.

A Christian (or other religious theist) who accepts a faith/reason disparity will usually do so for religious reasons. His argument that these two aspects must be mutually exclusive (or at least need not have anything to do with each other) will be grounded on positions and presumptions which usually proceed from a devout loyalty to God's status, or from authority of specifically religious leaders, or from the structure of religious ritual, or some combination thereof.

And a sceptic who accepts a faith/reason disparity might do so only because, as far as he can tell, his opposition has chosen that ground. However, since I obviously do not advocate a faith/reason disparity, this type of sceptic would agree that I can continue with an attempt to build an argument that might arrive at God's existence and characteristics. (Though he might perhaps be able to nix my attempt later on other grounds, of course.)

But some sceptics (and even some people who profess God's existence) accept a faith/reason disparity on different grounds.

So, I will need to consider whether (and why) I should consider this to be a facetious division under any conditions, even apart from specifically religious grounding.

The word 'faith' can hold a number of discreet (yet related) meanings. These meanings often become fused (and confused!), and this makes it hard to have a straight discussion about what faith 'is'.

I will try to disentangle this mare's nest by talking not of 'faith', but of 'belief' and 'trust'. And, since I have not yet even begun to infer the existence and character of Someone for us to put personal trust in, I will be concentrating on the 'belief' aspect of 'faith' in immediately forthcoming entries.

The event we call 'belief' either can be a person's active acceptance of an inference; or it can be an impression of perceived 'reality' to which future mental events will correspond. The second condition--the 'impression'--would be an 'irrational' belief, because it was produced purely as an automatic response to a combination of prior events.²⁶

²⁶ Common usage of 'irrational', even among specialists, can fluctuate between meaning a willful choice to accept incorrect logic (and/or a willful choice to refuse correct logic), or an accidental acceptance of faulty logic. Furthermore, sometimes it simply is used for meaning 'invalid'; and occasionally it will be used for meaning 'derived from purely automatic behavior'.

In order to avoid the temptation to switch back and forth between such wide usages, and especially in order to avoid the externalistic fallacy (where the analyst's reasoning becomes mistaken for the rationality of the object being analyzed), I have chosen to use 'irrational' in a very specific sense: as a transition state of a nominally non-automatic entity into virtually full automatic behavior. I am not proposing an entity is rational, non-rational or irrational based on whether or not that entity is applying my

So, to use an old Robin Williams comedy routine as an example: the chemical known as cocaine could, in interaction with my neurochemistry, release certain electrochemical impulses. And these impulses could be connected by physical association to other reactions currently taking place in my brain, which are resulting from the sensory impressions produced by my being on a golf course.

As a result, a 'belief' might develop within me to this effect: there is a snake in the hole of the 14th green.

This 'belief' would be a real, objective event happening in my brain, and in my psychology of perception. But it would be an irrational belief (in the stringent and particular sense in which I am using the word 'irrational'), because it would have been produced purely as an unintended by-product of non-rational biochemical reactions.

own notions (even if those notions are accepted by a majority of thinkers) of what counts as valid 'logic'. (So for instance, I do not argue the question of a computer's rationality based on 'logical' or 'illogical' behavior by the computer.)

This admittedly begs the question somewhat, as to whether an entity can possibly exhibit non-automatic behaviors; but as I will discuss in a later chapter, virtually everyone everywhere admits this happens with respect to their own selves (at the least)--even when they deny the possibility of non-automatic behavior! My discussion here can take place somewhat aside from such issues, though. These chapters represent my own thoughts on these topics in a linked progression, and so this chapter can be useful in suggesting preliminary outlines of principles and implications which will need developing more fully later as a parallel argument, but without (I think) necessarily accepting any 'dangerous' implications from those principles at this time: the immediate large-scale purpose of this chapter is, after all, only to check whether some kind of necessary disjunction between reasoning and belief per se stands in the way of reasoning to a belief on metaphysical topics, such as an acceptance of theism or atheism.

Please notice: this does not mean the content of my belief would necessarily be false! There might in fact be a snake in the hole of the 14th green.

But if there was a snake in that hole as an actual fact, it nevertheless would have had virtually no connection to my belief (in this example), except in terms of incidental environmental linkage: the particular 'shape' of my delusion would have depended on my being on the golf course, where such things as 'greens', 'cups', and 'snakes' may be found.²⁷

As a persistent state or event in my psychology, this belief could itself be a building block, either for more irrational beliefs or for rational beliefs (as far as they go).

For instance, the cocaine, or the chain-reaction it started, might continue by 'using' this new mental state as the basis for a new round of association. ("Someone is out to get me and has put a snake in the hole!") This new belief would, by virtue of its cause(s), be just as irrational as the first one, although no less an objectively real event (considered as itself).

Or, I might actively analyze this first belief-impression and draw inferences from it to new conclusions: for example, "If snake is in hole, then dangerous to be near hole. If dangerous, I could get hurt. If I don't want to get hurt, stay away from

²⁷ I will discuss primary environmental linkages to such a belief later in this chapter. I am not claiming the 'irrationality' of this belief depends on the lack of primary environmental linkages; this simply happens to be a facet of my first example.

hole." As a result of accepting this inference, I could then actively arrive at a new belief: "I should stay away from the hole."

Notice that this inference is valid and true, as far as it goes. It becomes false only if the first qualifier ("if snake is in hole") becomes a presumption ("snake is in hole") and only if that presumption itself happens to be false. (The form of the inference would still be valid, however, even though the conclusion was falsified thanks to false initial data.)

However, is this second mental state rational or irrational?

If I say my second belief ("I should stay away from the hole") is rational as opposed to irrational, what can I mean? Why can the second belief ("I should stay away from the hole") be 'rational', as opposed to the first 'irrational' belief ("A snake is in that hole")?

Does it depend on whether the second belief matches reality?

No. The snake may or may not be there: I may have made a mistake. But a mistake is not necessarily irrational. If I am adding up one hundred and twenty-seven different figures, and I take a break in the middle to answer the phone, and then start up again at the wrong place, my process is not therefore rendered irrational. This will be so, even if the cornerstone position is a mistaken assertion ("a snake is in the hole").

Remember that the belief in question--of-rationality here, is not whether a snake is in the hole, but whether it is dangerous for me to get near the hole. I have already admitted (as far as this example has gone) that the original belief ("a snake is in the hole") is a non-rationally produced chemical by-product of cocaine's interaction with my neurochemistry. Such an event (in the terms I have been describing it) is not an inference, although it can produce psychological states similar to states produced by inferences.²⁸ The question is whether my subsequent belief ("I should stay away from the hole") is irrational, and if so under what conditions.

Well then, is it a question of whether the original cornerstone belief is itself irrationally produced--does that necessarily make the subsequent mental event ("Snake, thus dangerous" or "If snake, then dangerous") irrational?

No. The first belief has already been established as a bit of data in my mind; I am using that bit of data (although I may not recognize its non-rational source) as part of the inference.

To understand this, consider the characteristics of that original mental event--the cocaine-induced delusion that there

²⁸ Admittedly, some scholars (especially atheistic ones) would claim that this event is (or at least could be) an inference. Thus, as a self-critical warning, I must acknowledge begging an important question here, which I will have to address later in my second section. But this will not be a problem for my larger-scale question at this time. That question is 'Can a belief be the result of reasoning?' If the answer is 'yes' (in whatever way we decide we should understand 'reasoning', though for practical purposes I'm working with one particular way here), then obviously there can be no intrinsic opposition between belief and reason.

Still, I'll have to be careful about how I use the material in this chapter--I shouldn't smuggle it, as if already settled, into my 14th chapter for instance.

is a snake in the hole. The physical reactions and counterreactions linked to the emergence of the belief, are not much different in physical representation than those which would accompany an inference from data.

Here are two examples of inference events: I look in the hole and see something I then judge to be a snake. Or, I hear a report of a snake in the hole from someone, and afterward I judge from other evidence the reliability of this person's report.

Either example leaves behind a persistent physical state in my brain that is not much different from what a cocaine-induced delusion leaves behind. In fact, either example might even leave the exact same result. [Footnote: an observation that will also have an important bearing on a discussion of supernatural and evidence much later.] If that is so, however, then what is the qualitative difference?

The difference is my intent, or my initiative.

The cocaine has no intent. Its chemicals are just going about their non-intentional 'business'; which happened, in conjunction with non-intentional sensory input, to produce a belief-by-association ("a snake is in the hole").

But the second belief ("I should stay away from the hole") is different, because by default I am presuming that 'I' (whatever it means to be 'myself') am initiating an action of inference.

Doubtless, the entire process is not an action I am initiating; there are still non-intended reactions and counterreactions taking place (the sensory input reactions in my head, for instance). Also, some philosophers and scientists would claim that my ability to initiate actions is itself derived entirely from non-intentional automatic reactions and counterreactions. [Footnote: I will discuss this contention much later. My point here is that I agree, that at least some non-intentive behaviors are taking place inside my head even when I am thinking 'rationally'.]

But however it got there, that second belief ("I should stay away from the hole") represents at least one action on my part, not merely reactions.²⁹

Now, as I have already illustrated, a belief's quality of 'rational' or 'irrational' does not necessarily need to involve positive accuracy about the objectively real facts. There may or may not be a snake in that hole. Even if my belief is rational, I might be mistaken. On the other hand, even if my belief is non-rationally produced, I might still be 'correct'; even though only by accident.

However, most people in most circumstances accept and understand that a non-rationally produced belief cannot be

²⁹ Some philosophers and scientists, past and present, have attempted to claim that humans do not initiate events at all. I will postpone a technical discussion of this notion until my second section; and content myself for the moment with the observation that even these people will claim they themselves are initiatively responsible for their own positions--when they want their own ideas to be taken seriously, for instance.

trusted very far to deliver an answer worth listening to, in and of itself. It may exhibit many other qualities; but a non-rationally produced belief cannot be trusted with respect to what it 'claims' to be--even if the belief happens to be accurate with respect to facts, or even beneficial.

Such a belief might possibly be trusted on grounds different from what the belief tacitly claims to be, of course. If my brother, Spencer, thinks he has good grounds for believing that my belief of a snake in the hole has been fostered purely from a cocaine-fit, then he would not (or at least should not) be embarrassed to discover there was, after all, a snake in the hole. He had no good reason to believe the snake was there.

Furthermore, my argument that he (and I) should stay away from the hole was ultimately untrustworthy. The form of the argument that we should stay away from the hole was not itself invalid; but without the anchor of rationality at the beginning, there was no good reason to pay attention either to my initial belief ("a snake is in the hole") or to my consequent inferred belief ("we should stay away from the hole")--despite the fact that my second belief was, as far as it went, rational!

In other words, there would be no good reason for Spencer to pay attention to my idea with respect to what it claimed to be--or more precisely, what I claimed for it. There would be no good reason for Spencer to pay attention to me.

Spencer certainly could pay attention to, and draw useful inferences from, the real character of my belief, insofar as he perceived it. For instance, he might conclude: "I'd better not let Jason drive the golf-cart! He's whacked out of his gourd!"

But this is a refusal to take my belief seriously. The form of my subsidiary belief ("We shouldn't go near the hole!") would admittedly 'hold water'; but there would be no 'water' to hold, because the original cornerstone belief was not rationally produced. The framework or structure would stand, but it has nothing to properly 'stand' on.³⁰

What sort of 'water' would be needed for my inference ("We shouldn't go near the hole!") to be even potentially trustworthy? (It might still be mistaken, of course.) What kind of foundation would give the valid framework something to 'stand' on?

The answer can be found with only a little introspection on how we ourselves evaluate such claims every day: the foundational belief must itself be rational. It must be

³⁰ My sceptical reader should be able to see an application of principle in his favor, here. If the sceptic believes that belief-in-God is always non-rationally produced, then I think he would agree with me that he should not put weight on such a belief: he should not accept it for himself. No one accepts the contention 'The God Module of my brain produced my belief in God' as proper grounds for accepting that God exists, for instance. (Certainly no sceptic does...!) Furthermore, if God happened to exist after all, I do not see why such a sceptic should be held liable for disbelief: if the sceptic was only given irrational grounds for the proposition that God exists.

I encourage the sceptic to keep this principle in mind, and even to accept and defend it as vigorously as possible. For, I will be returning to it later...

initiated--or, alternately, it must be judged by another initiator to be worthwhile despite its non-rational causation.³¹

If Spencer asks me why I think there is a snake in the hole, and I tell him I witnessed a group of old ladies in front of us run screaming "Snake! Snake!" off the green after one of them tried to retrieve a ball from the hole, and that as far as I could tell they didn't know we were there (and so probably weren't trying to play a trick on us); then not only would I have a rational belief (even if mistaken), but Spencer (as an initiator himself) can judge my 'reasons' and make his own decisions as to their potential trustworthiness. Now a subsidiary or consequent belief--that we should not get near the hole--may potentially be worth accepting. [Footnote: notice that although such judgments may happen so quickly that the 'form' of the judgment is not perceptible to the thinker, in principle they are not automatic despite their speed--they still involve an action by the judger.]

On the other hand, let us say Spencer finds me lying on the green near the hole. I am all swollen up, shaking and sweating. I am muttering "Snake... in hole..."

My claim that a snake is in the hole might be produced entirely by the interaction of a fever or other delirium-

³¹ In this case, the properly foundational belief would belong to the external judger who is rationally validating the impression produced non-rationally in the subject. This would not be the externalistic fallacy, unless the rational judger went on to claim that therefore the entity he was judging was rational. A valid inference from entity A about an entity B, is not the same as the rational capability of the entity B.

inducing physical effect with my brain, combined with neurophysical associations brought about by 'golf course' sensory input. [Footnote: once, while in a flu-fever, the sound of a woodpecker outside my window mis-associated itself, with the result that I saw a rattlesnake jump at me from the ceiling-fan over my bed! I probably said something loudly, too...]

However, Spencer could still put this bit of data together with other bits of data (perhaps including a rattling sound in the hole) to conclude that there is a snake in the hole, it bit me, and that has caused my delirium.

In this case, my foundational 'belief' (if it can be properly called 'a belief' in the end--see below!) was, per this example, a non-rationally produced effect and thus an irrational belief; but my brother, being a rational agent, found it to have an accuracy that happened (due to the characteristics of the situation) to correspond with my claim--despite the nominally irrational quality of my belief. My belief was irrational; Spencer's was not. But the rationality of his belief depended on his ability to act in judgment of the data, not merely to react and counterreact automatically to stimulus. (And notice that we could both still be incorrect.)

Yet there is at least one more variation for this situation. I have been building on the cocaine-induced delusion as my example, and contrasting it with some other options, because it was a relatively easy and colorfully humorous way to

illustrate certain principles. However, let us now suppose that my first belief ('a snake is in the hole') was produced in me through the following process.

As I walk over to the hole, on the golf course, and bend down to look in, photons ricocheting back from something within the hole careen through my eyes, strike my optic nerves, and send impulses back into my brain. These impulses react and counterreact with other electrochemical potentialities in my brain, which happen (however they got there) to be linked associatively with certain external facts of reality: the existence of golf courses, and of entities often found on golf courses. The result of this set of electrochemical reactions, is the establishment of a new psychophysical state within my brain: a state that corresponds (in whatever fashion) to the belief 'a snake is in the hole'.

So: is this belief of mine rational, or irrational?

Now I have reached a crucial distinction between philosophies, in relation to human mental behavior. I could, here, skip on to the beginning of Section Two, where I will discuss issues of this sort with an eye toward deductive conclusions (if any). My goal for this chapter (and this Section) is considerably less extensive, however; and so I will content myself, for now, with the following observations.

So long as we are merely discussing my own behavior as an individual entity, I think this example falls clearly enough

into the same category as the cocaine-induced delusion. The chief distinction between that prior example and this new situation, is that the environmental linkages in that prior example were secondary causes of the belief ('a snake is in the hole') rather than primary causes as in this new example. Yet the prior example of a belief did specifically depend, for its shape, on those secondary causes--the cocaine would not have produced that particular paranoia in me without relevant sensory data for the chemicals to 'work' with.

What I am effectively proposing, in this new example, is the cocaine-induced delusion--except without the cocaine. The sensory impressions themselves are proposed to be the primary cause of my belief.

And I think we should be very cautious about considering such a subsequent belief in me, caused in this fashion, to be 'rational'. These sensory impressions are as non-rational in causation as the cocaine reactions. That they happen to correspond accurately to an external fact (barring, for this example, the possibility of an illusion or other mistake), is no proper ground for calling the subsequent belief 'rational'--any more than it was a proper ground when the cocaine-induced belief happened to correspond to the existence of an actual snake in the hole.

If we say that such a correspondence was accidental, but that this new correspondence is true to the fact from which it

directly results; then I reply that when I was rolling on the ground in a delirium thanks to having been snakebit, my delirium was proposed (at the time) to have been a pure reaction to environmental stimulus, not a rational judgment on my part--and yet in that case, the environmental stimulus to which I was reacting was also entirely "true" in relation to its mental result. I was on a golf course; and there was a snake in the hole; and those facts caused, in one fashion, my reactive state of 'belief'. Now in my new example, the environmental stimulus once again has caused my reactive 'belief', and once again the correspondence is proposed to be entirely true. Yet this type of situation had resulted in an irrational belief on my part before. What is the qualitative difference in this new case?

I think it is obvious that there is no qualitative difference; which has implications about the 'rationality' of my belief.

It might be very tempting for you, my reader, to claim 'rationality' of my belief despite the fully non-rational causation of my new proposed example. It would be easy, for instance, to slide from a rational judgment on your part, into ascribing the quality of 'rationality' to my belief. But this would be the externalistic fallacy. Spencer, in my previous example, might be able to verify the accuracy of my belief for me; but his rational verification is not my rational belief.

Consequently, even in the case of this new descriptive explanation for the existence of a 'belief' in my mind, I do not think it would be proper to claim this belief to be 'rational'.

But of course, this type of descriptive explanation for the existence of a belief in my mind, is not restrained merely to my own individual behaviors as an entity. Rather, this type of process--non-rational in characteristic (even if more complex in actuality)--is often proposed and defended as being the basic process explanation of all human reasoning (yours and mine included); and the explanation is proposed in direct relation to characteristic properties of fundamental reality.

However, I am not interested (yet) in discussing this far-reaching proposition, or any alternatives. My goal for this chapter is much simpler; and I think I have demonstrated it sufficiently for my current purposes.

What I have demonstrated, is that a belief, far from being necessarily mutually exclusive to reason, can depend upon reasoning--the action (or at least the event) of drawing inferences.

This already directly parries the contention that faith and reason must, by some type of psychological or philosophical necessity, be mutually exclusive (even if not directly opposed). A faith always is a type of belief (the two terms are sometimes completely equivalent), and a belief can be the result of reasoning. Unless the sceptic wishes to merely flatly assert

that religious beliefs must be mutually exclusive to reason (whereupon I have no reason to believe him, and thus no reason not to continue), then for all we know a particular person's religious faith might be based upon (and not be mutually exclusive to) reasoning.

The faith may not be based on very accurate reasoning; I might still be mistaken either in the facts or the principles I think I know; and/or in the methods by which I attempt to reach my conclusion. That doesn't stop it being a belief (a 'faith') based on reasoning.

Thus, the question of whether my reasoning is worthwhile should be deferred until I actually explain my reasoning about the topic; yet it does clear the way for me to continue without being excluded from contention before-the-fact merely because I have a faith in God.

But I can go even further with this, although now I enter a more speculative vein.

It seems to me (as an initial expectation, based on my previous considerations), that every 'real' belief requires an acted inference of some sort on the part of the believer; although the exact inference may not be what the believer claims it is with respect to the belief.

In other words, I question whether there can be any such thing as a real belief that is irrational (in the very limited sense I am using of 'irrational'.)

As I roll on the ground in delirium after being snakebit, I might be muttering "Snake... in hole..." But that doesn't necessarily mean I actually 'believe' it: because I might not be conscious. The sounds coming out of my mouth might be the same type of non-intended effects-by-association which produced my delirium in the first place.

Dentists and some other physicians (or people like myself who have undergone special forms of anesthesia) know quite well that a human can be unconscious yet still respond to sensory stimulus in a manner not entirely different (but still somewhat different) from how the person might consciously respond. This can even include an anesthetized person answering questions. Yet the person is not conscious; he is purely reacting, not initiating events. Memory artifacts which happen to be processed during this period for retrieval later, might give that person some data to draw inferences from and thus to form beliefs later; but I do not see how the unconscious person as an 'unconscious' person can have a real 'belief' connected to his statement.³²

Similarly, a parrot can react to the environment (given proper prior conditioning) so that it responds with words which have some 'meaning' in connection with the keywords used as stimulus. An unconscious human, having a brain with better

³² Or, more precisely, an unconscious statement may reflect a belief consciously held at other times, and so be connected in that manner. But such a link is not a necessity, and at any rate I think it is a contradiction in terms to say 'I' 'am believing' something at the moment when 'I' am unconscious.

capabilities of that sort and a lifetime of already-ingrained habits, could be expected to respond more efficiently as an unconscious entity than the parrot.

But the parrot doesn't have a 'belief about what it is saying'. It might be able to consciously infer that it will get food if it replies correctly to the sensory stimulus, but that is not the same as believing what it is saying. [Footnote: my sceptical reader will probably know of some politicians and religious leaders, who consciously understand they'll be well fed if they say certain things, but who do not believe what they are saying...!]

Many people would deny the parrot is conscious in any way, and most people would deny it is conscious of what the words mean as human language (rendering it effectively unconscious in that limited respect). Therefore, it either cannot have beliefs about the ideas expressed as English language contained in the words, or if it does it will be by accident.³³

A very few people might suggest the parrot 'believes' what it is 'saying'; but if so, the corollary to this would be that the parrot is conscious of what it is saying and is actively drawing inferences from that conscious perception.

³³ The parrot may infer that if it says "Polly wanna cracker" or "Hasta la vista, Bay-bee..." then it will be fed; but only the first sentence carries a meaning in English language which properly reflects the resultant event. (Notably, the meaning in this example is given by someone who can actually give meaning. If the parrot says "Polly wanna cracker", it isn't by accident after all...)

I might even be willing to agree that this happens in the case of particular parrots! But the parrot's belief depended on its conscious perception of the meaning, and a parrot unconscious of the meaning (either by being ignorant of the meaning although otherwise capable of inferences, or by being utterly unconscious and thus completely reactive) could not have a belief linked to the content of the phrase, as such. It would be a contradiction to claim otherwise.

Not only do I therefore think that beliefs certainly can be produced by reasoning (which leaves the door open for me to continue, even without this extension to my chapter); but my further (somewhat more speculative) opinion is that every belief requires a train of reasoning in order to exist.

And 'every belief' includes 'religious belief'.

It seems to me unlikely (even contradictory) that beliefs can really exist without reasoning; therefore, I certainly want my beliefs to have the best reasonings possible (within the limitations of my capabilities, of course.) I have made some effort to discover what other people have tried in this venue, and to puzzle out for myself as much as I can.

Some philosophers, however, would admit much of what I have said above, yet still deny that beliefs necessarily require reasoning. A fideistic theist (for instance) would claim that the sheer action of asserting to a proposition entails a belief;

she would reject all support as spurious and debatable, and perhaps even unbecoming the dignity due to God.

Some of my brethren might think this sounds just fine! But notice I said all support. The dedicated fideist would reject scriptural support as well--including doctrines drawn from or backed by Scripture.

Most of my Presuppositionalistic fellow-believers would at least say "I believe God has such-n-such characteristics because the Bible tells me so, or because such a presupposition is the only way that a non-crashing reality (or at least certain aspects of reality) could exist."

But the fideist would reject both of these supports. She flatly asserts God's existence; she denies (at least for as long as she remembers the implications of her stance) that any definite characteristics of God can be discovered through any means. She would say that even His existence cannot be discovered; and that even she has not 'discovered' it. She would say she purely asserts it, without proof, argument, or even evidence.³⁴

There are several reasons for a person to choose fideism. She might have been exposed to numerous strong counterarguments

³⁴ This is another reason why I reject a faith/reason disparity, especially when proposed to be part of the religion I think to be true: such a position, carried to its logical conclusion, leads straight to the rejection of 'religion', which includes (in passing) the rejection of everything that makes Christianity specifically 'Christian'. Once again, such a fortress mentality is no safeguard against heresy. This is aside from the question of whether the fideist is correct to think this way.

involving every support to her theism, and so to 'protect her belief' she renounces all supports other than flat assertion.

Or, she might advocate one of the theories about the unfeasibility of reasoning-to-God that I have been discussing during the previous chapters, and take such a stance to the ultimate conclusion that no reasoning at all can support theism (so if she is going to remain a theist, she must abandon all supports).

Relatedly, if by taking a faith/reason disparity to its ultimate end she decides that faith must mean pure assertion, then she would reject anything except pure assertion.

She might also choose this path because she wants to recognize God's glory and/or believes the highest level of trust (or similar personal relationship with God) involves 'faith without any supports'. But remember, 'without any supports' means without Scriptural support, too, as far as the robust fideist is concerned.

There could well be other reasons to be a fideist. My goal here is not to launch ripostes against every possible reason to be a fideist. That isn't necessary, because every fideist stance has an intrinsic problem that transcends particular reasons for being a fideist:

The fideist invariably has reasons for choosing to be a fideist.

In essence, the fideist has the same problem as a more traditional 'faith-only' theist: both groups have particular beliefs about God (and religion in general) which are based on inferences they have drawn--their beliefs are in fact derived through reasoning. Indeed, a fideist may have long recognized the hidden inferences that a more traditional 'faith-not-reason' advocate doesn't recognize he himself has. What she then does (provided this is the particular path to fideism she follows), is draw an inference from the unintentional error of her fellow-believer to the conclusion that she must rid herself of what is obviously yet another reason to accept God's existence and character (for example, "the Bible tells me so").

But in doing so, she has still grounded her belief through a chain of inferences herself.

For instance: "If faith should be kept separate from reason, and if I discover that traditional faith-not-reason positions actually use reasons, then I should also renounce those reasons." But her 'if-then' is itself an inferential path and so is itself a 'reason' to be a fideistic theist rather than some other kind of theist.

The attempt must fail: no matter how well-intended the fideist may be, she cannot successfully argue that our beliefs and attitudes about God should not and/or cannot be grounded on reasons--because she will be tacitly ignoring the chain of reasoning that led her to her own attitude and belief about God

(including the inferences which led her to accept a faith/reason disparity in the first place).

Other routes to fideism carry the same intrinsic fallacy, although the expression of the fallacy will differ according to the path taken. Of course, having gotten to fideism, our philosopher (she would probably not consider herself as having anything to do with 'religion' in a 'real' fashion, although she might still appreciate it aesthetically) could make a blanket raw assertion of being "a fideist"--a "believer in God", per se.

But I think 99% of the time she will find herself explaining to the non-fideist why she is a fideist and perhaps even why the non-fideist should also reject all support of God's existence. And this immediately undercuts her position at the most fundamental of levels: by claiming God's existence and character cannot be discovered by reason, she herself makes a positive characteristic claim about God which she almost always will try to justify by showing her reasons for that stance.

What about my hypothetical 1% of fideists who refuse to give any reasons at all for being a fideist?--who, when asked "Why do you hold this belief?" respond "There is no why; I just do."

I know this cannot help but sound insulting to them, but I am not sure these 'hyperfideists' have a 'belief' either in or about God at all.

To begin with, when other topics are discussed I see very clearly that sheer assertions are not necessarily beliefs. I can quite easily assert "The sun and all the stars revolve around the earth" without believing it myself.

And if an assertion is not necessarily a belief, how am I to agree that a hyperfideist does have a belief? A further discussion beyond the flat assertion requires some kind of inferential analysis, which means a justification on the part of the fideist. But the extreme fideist will not provide any justification, because she understands perfectly well that such an act would undercut her claimed position of 'faith without justification'. But without some kind of inferential train to follow, I have no way of discerning whether her flat assertion reflects some kind of a belief on her part or not.

Second, a belief must have content; propositions must be accepted. A fideist's position either has content, or it does not (and with no content there simply is no position). Typically the fideist has one content to her belief: God exists.

[Footnote: actually, she would claim another content as well, although the claim might be only implicit: God is such that no reasoning about God can reach true conclusions.]

But existence is a positive characteristic, even if the most basic of characteristics. Why stop there? Why not make other assertions?

The fideist will say she can have no grounds for making those other assertions. But then, she can have no grounds (specifically as a fideist) for asserting God's existence, either. If she refuses to assign other characteristics to God because no grounds can be sufficient for those characteristics, why does she assign the characteristic of 'existence'?

If she follows the actual implications of her position, she ends either with a mere zero (indistinguishable from atheism in all but name) or with an ultimately arbitrary set of characteristics (even if that set only contains one characteristic: existence. Plus the tacit characteristic of 'no reasoning about God can reach true conclusions, of course.) If the propositions are arbitrary, then what use is it to say she 'believes' them?

She has no grounds for belief and she restricts content for the belief in a fashion that, if rigorously applied, ends with the removal of even the characteristic of 'existence' from her idea of God. Thus, what she calls her 'belief' is either utterly alien to any concept of 'belief' I can understand or even imagine; or else she is fudging, whereupon she might as well try to figure out as much as she can of God's characteristics by reasoning.

And that leads me to one more conclusion about fideism: if it is held rigorously as fideism, it is inaccessible to other

people. In fact, technically it should have been inaccessible to our fideist, too! But given (for sake of argument) she has reached that point, the content of her position (such as it is) renders further cogent discussion impossible--or else, not without cheating a bit.

At the very best, if fideism is correct, it is impossible for someone not a fideist to know it is correct (I would say it is also impossible for the fideist herself to know it is correct, as long as she sticks to the implications of her assertion); and therefore I cannot be faulted (on that ground at least) for continuing to derive and reinforce my (and other people's) beliefs about God through reasoning.

There is one possible fideist 'justification' (I know no other apt description for it) which could also be held by other philosophers, be they religious or not: if an ultimately transcendent God does exist, then it would be arrogant fatuity for me, or any other thinker, to claim that particular characteristics of God can be known or at least discovered.

I have plenty of sympathy for this view, because I do believe in God's ultimate and infinite transcendence. At least, I accept that unless we are discussing that type of God, we are not yet discussing supernaturalistic theism.³⁵

³⁵ I will defer a deeper discussion of this point until a later chapter. If you, the reader, dispute this point I can only ask you to hold off a little while and treat this as a hypothetical issue while I discuss further contentions and common grounds I have with fideists. For readers who wonder,

The question here is whether God's characteristic(s) as an Ultimate Being necessarily prevent us from discovering any positive characteristic about Him. And I immediately point my reader back to an earlier discussion of mine on this topic: whoever holds this position must have discovered at least one positive characteristic about God--He is such that no other positive characteristics may be discovered. Otherwise, if characteristics are merely asserted, then we are only playing word games about we-cannot-say-what, and we might as well become atheists.

My simple assertion "God exists" does not make God exist. Nor does any reasoning I do about God, of course; but then, I am looking to discover particular characteristics of God (characteristics I have not invented) through this process. The sheerasserter does not claim to be discovering any facts about God--she is only asserting them. But one of the things the sheerasserter is sheerly asserting, is that no reasoning can discover attributes of God. If there is no defense for this position (and by its own character there can be no defense) then I may safely continue.

But does this absolve me from the arrogance of claiming I can discover something true about God? Yes; or at least I will be no more arrogant than the fideist who either has discovered one particular fact about God ('no other particular fact may be

discovered') or who sheerly asserts this proposition as being itself a fact.

Personally, I would consider the sheer assertion of anything, to be potentially more arrogant (if we must talk of such attitudes) than any process of potential discovery, which at least might be qualified (as I try to constantly do in my own work). I certainly think a person, be she sceptic or believer, might possibly humbly search out a trail where it leads without forcing the issue. The discovery of God's existence and attributes (even the discovery of God's non-existence, if that is where the evidence leads) need not necessarily be an exercise in prideful self-acclimation.

But some people (believer and sceptic alike) will still have problems with the concept that anything definite may be discovered about the Ultimate Reality. To the sceptics, especially the atheists who are philosophical naturalists, I reply that we discover apparent truths about Nature and its operations and character all the time, and use (sometimes incorrectly, but sometimes correctly, too) such information all the time. This is despite the fact that if non-sentient Nature is the foundation of all reality, then it must be as impossible for derivative human reasoning to fully understand it, as for us to fully understand a sentient ultimate Fact.

For that matter, it seems clear from the science of quantum mechanics that whatever Nature is--whether it is the Final Fact

or a derivative entity itself--humans are not capable of completely comprehending it. Quantum indeterminacy assures us of this. But we did discover quantum indeterminacy; and it hasn't stopped us from learning plenty of useful and (as far as we can tell) true positive characteristics of Nature.

For instance, Newton's physical laws may have been transcended by quantum physics, but they have not been abrogated; we can still calculate with virtual certainty what will happen when physical bodies with characteristic set 'A' interact in fashion 'B'. So atheistic naturalists, at least, should (in principle) already understand and accept that we are not barred from discovering particular characteristics of the Final Fact merely by it being the Final Fact.

Religious believers, meanwhile, may or may not have a slightly different position on the matter. Pantheists technically advocate only one level of reality, which they believe to be sentient (to one or another degree). Their practical position on this topic (aside from the question of sentience) is the same as the atheistic naturalists:³⁶ they do have particular beliefs about the system of reality (even saying "God is not thus" declares implicitly that God has one characteristic and not another), and God's ultimate status

³⁶ To say 'God does not exist, only non-sentient Nature', means that Nature is the ultimate level of reality, and has a characteristic (non-sentience) that excludes another (sentience). Most atheists are also naturalists, insofar as they claim one and only one level of reality exists: the space-time of physical Nature. A pantheist, on the other hand, will be some kind of theistic naturalist.

hasn't stopped them from believing they have learned these things.

Supernaturalists, however, have an extra potential problem: the specifically 'supernatural' characteristics of 'Supernature' would seem to be inexpressible in terms of 'Nature'. Similarly, a 2-Dimensional man would have no capability of really discovering true 3-D properties via reasoning, much less perception.³⁷

Now we are touching on an issue that has great relevance to the start of my second section; because this illustration works by presuming the 2-D man has in fact no 3-D properties. But if he has even one 3-D property (and if it is the correct type of property), then the door is open for him to deduce as much as he can about the properties of 3-D reality. Perhaps he cannot deduce very much, or very much that is useful; but that must wait until the attempt is made. No immediate bar is placed in his path meanwhile--except the question of whether or not he has some (discoverable) 3-D property. Thus, at worst my attempt at an accurate and useful deductive argument is put into a reserved limbo until (or unless) I can establish we have some type of supernatural characteristic.

³⁷ He could only approach them by analogies; but without some apprehension of the 3-D reality to compare the analogies to, then the analogies cannot be representative in any fashion of 3-D reality. Circles and rectangles can only suggest the 3-D properties of a can of Mountain Dew, if the thinker has some apprehension, expressible or otherwise, of what 3-D-ness is for a can of Mountain Dew. The circles and rectangles could of course suggest common properties shared by the can and 2-D reality, and accurately so as far as they go--but the special relation of those properties might be utterly inapprehensible to a purely 2-D man insofar as the relation is a 3-D relation.

On the other hand, we also now touch the topic of God's intentions (if any) in the matter. An atheist could easily be willing to agree, in principle, that if I could discover a thread leading out of the 'black-box' of Nature, I would not necessarily be prevented from deducing something useful and true about the Supernature the thread is attached to. This would be a fair acquiescence on her part to me, whether or not I could convince her I have found a thread--for the principle would work just as well for either of us! If she discovered (or exclusively deduced) that what the 'thread' leads to is also non-sentient, then she would remain an atheist--though she would now be a supernaturalistic atheist. She would have discovered that this newly detected or inferred ultimate level is no more sentient than the evident Nature. In any event, a non-sentient Supernature would not be capable of acting to bar our inquiry about its existence and characteristics--assuming we had some qualitatively similar property deriving from it, that we could trace back to the source. (Remember, with no 3-D properties, a purely 2-D man has no data to infer with concerning 3-D reality, including its existence at all.)

But, a supernaturalistic God, being sentient and ultimately superordinate to me, could be capable of acting to prevent me (or anyone) from discovering something, or even perhaps anything, about Him.

This is certainly a possibility; but, then again, God might also decide to make it possible for me to find my way there. Almost all supernaturalistic theists claim God has in fact done this, through various means. Most of the 'faith-before-reason' theists would claim God has done so through Scripture (I agree); most of the 'faith-before-reason' theists would claim God has done so through certain scriptures, and absolutely not others (I partially agree for reasons I hope to make clear very much later); many of the 'faith-before-reason' theists would claim God has done so only through Scripture.

But even if God has done so 'only through Scripture', any knowledge we have about this still would be an instance of rational perception and judgment on our part.

In the case of the Hebrew Bible and Christian 'New' Testament, however, I want to point out once more that those scriptures themselves tell us God has used (and does use) other ways than 'pure reliance on Scripture' to get knowledge of His existence and character to us. Here are some examples:

a.) God speaks to prophets who tell other people what He said;³⁸ but the audiences for whom the message is also intended (not just the prophet) are expected to judge the prophets by using reasoning. Does the message fit with other messages

³⁸ The reports of their prophecies in Scripture obviously cannot come before their prophecy; in most (all?) cases, the prophecies were spoken first, and written down later. Any number of prophecies could never have been written down at all. The point here is that, in those stories, God was not purely relying on a Scripture for revelation. Revelation comes first, scripture comes afterward, whether immediately or at some interval which could be years or decades or even centuries.

previously judged to have come from God? Does the messenger exhibit supernatural power to 'attest' (as the Greek puts it) that at least at face value the purported 'prophet' might be expected to be speaking for God? Does the prophet, in hindsight, have a 100% success rate for anything he or she predicts?

This means someone could legitimately decide an ostensible prophet was not a prophet, in which case the legitimate thing to do was reject (or even kill) the false prophet. That judgment comes from, and through, the responsible reasoning of other people, though. Which in turn, as annoying as this may be to contemplate, means a sceptic might be responsibly reasoning, too, to reject an ostensible prophet. For example, I'm not really sure I could blame a sceptic for noticing that Micah predicts that the Messiah will throw back an Assyrian invasion with the help of a special group of judge-heroes. Clearly, when the Assyrians eventually invaded, this didn't happen! (In the larger story context, a defense could be made that God provisionally retracted that expectation to be fulfilled later somehow; but if this is put forward as a reason to believe Micah to be a legitimate prophet anyway, then it becomes a fallacy of special pleading, I think.)

b.) God allows 'pagans' (non-Jews, non-Christians, non-Muslims, if you prefer) to perceive His existence and character through their own cultures and devices. The total picture they have may not be right, but parts of it are right. Certain rulers

in the Hebrew Bible fit this category, stretching back at least as far as the priest-king Melchizedek (who evidently was superior to Abraham, as Abraham needed his blessing in the name of God). The most famous example may be the astrologers of Matthew's Gospel who, in the story, learned of the forthcoming birth of the Messiah from their 'normal' 'pagan' activities.

c.) The Apostle Paul tells the Christian congregation in Rome that God has given to all people the knowledge of His moral character, so that all people may have at least some level of personal (not just causal) relationship to God, which they deny at their own peril. This ability is also given so that all people may realize, that whatever their creed, they know they do not follow their creed perfectly, and thus stand condemned not by the lack of a foreign knowledge but by the knowledge vouchsafed to them.³⁹ This, by the way, does not mean better knowledge is not possible for them to learn, and certainly does not mean the better knowledge is not better for them: it is not a creed that all ideas of religion are equally true or even equally useful. Paul means that people cannot avoid an important knowledge of God by being ignorant of Christianity, and are thus still accountable for their actions; but this necessarily must

³⁹ Paul also tells his congregations that these people who have the Law of God written in their hearts, will not only be condemned but also defended by this inner testimony before the judgment seat of Christ. (Romans 2:14-16)

mean that God makes provisions for at least some real truths about Him to be reached in ways which are not the 'best' ways.⁴⁰

My Christian, Jewish and Muslim brothers may perhaps have an advantage at understanding this point (if they will take that advantage), because despite some very serious differences between us, which we cannot all be correct about, we do share some equally serious metaphysical and even historical beliefs. If I believe metaphysical or historical proposition 'A', and two of my competitors affirm it as well, then I must either admit that God has provided the other two people with that true knowledge (whatever my opinion may be about other particulars of their beliefs) or I must pretend this agreement does not exist. We all three agree that all mankind are brothers by God's design, grace and intention; so willful blindness to recognize shared points of reality which we agree to be true, especially when it involves the fracturing of relationships between brothers, looks to me very much like a sin! I, at least, do not intend to answer to God for a willful fostering of discord.⁴¹

At any rate, the Scriptures I am familiar with tell me that scriptures are important, but God is not limited to them. And if someone presents me with another proposed scripture, then how am

⁴⁰ I mean 'best' in terms of 'fullest and widest data'. I think God will always do everything He can to get true knowledge of Himself across to individuals, but the possible scope of success will be partly dependent on individual situations. I will have much more to say about this later.

⁴¹ I can imagine His rebuke to me now: "They got those parts right, and yet you told them they were completely wrong! Why did you expect them to listen to you when you tried to correct the parts they did get wrong after you refused to give them credit for getting something right?!"

I supposed to perceive its superiority and/or authority without comparing and contrasting in some fashion--even if, at the very least, this means comparing and contrasting its message with what my feelings (or 'inner attenuations to God' or whatever) are telling me? This comparing and contrasting, even with what may be the direct internal witness of the Holy Spirit, is still reasoning!

At the most fundamental (and fundamentalistic!) level, then, of Christian witness (and other theistic witnesses, too), I still cannot jump off that shadow. Reasoning is there; to deny it, is to cut myself off from any potential of God's witness, even to myself as a person.

If a rock cannot think, then God cannot have a personal relationship with a rock; it would be a contradiction in terms. (He would still have many different kinds of causal relationships with the rock, of course; and He could still have those relationships as a Person Himself. This is why I emphasized the word 'with'.) Throwing away or ignoring my reason, when it comes to God, leaves me in no better shape than the rock! God might as well not have raised us from the dust! Indeed, my own tradition tells me that a flat-out refusal to think cogently can dramatically ruin an established relationship with God.

Satan tempted Eve, in the story of Genesis 3, not with the lure of 'knowledge' per se (the fruit gave 'knowledge of good

and evil' which does not cover the total field of 'knowledge'), but with lures which could only have been far more obviously false to her (even if you want to treat this as purely a fictional story) than they could be to any of us: "You can be like God despite His intentions, and He feels threatened by your potential to do this, so He has misled you!"

I think I can argue conclusively that this lure must be incorrect, using fine-spun metaphysics. Eve, in the story, had a personal relationship to God that would have made any metaphysical arguments on my part merely funny to her, if she could hear them. We don't have that kind of relationship anymore, according to that story, because she nevertheless pretended she did not know perfectly well what would happen! (Essentially God had said, "If you cut yourself off from Me by setting yourself in opposition to Me, you will die.") And let me point out that according to the story, Adam didn't even need a discussion: he simply ate!

Both cases are examples of what can happen when people willingly ignore the fact that we can (and should) think cogently: it does not mean we become personally closer to God. It means we are hampering our ability to trust God.

I am a Christian, and I fully believe that by the grace of God--through and as Christ--we don't have to get everything right. But I remember no promise from Him that we don't have to try our best to get everything right with every tool we can find

at our disposal. I remember several promises from Him of what would happen to us if we shut our eyes and ears and presume that we nevertheless 'know God'.

So. Reason and belief (even as an aspect of 'religious faith') seem to me to be inextricably linked. Reason and trust (even as an aspect of 'religious faith') seem to me to be in the same boat.⁴² In fact, it seems to me that if reason does not outright produce faith, it is at least a necessary ingredient without which no faith (in any meaningful sense of the word) can exist.

I find fideistic philosophy to be self-contradictory to its adherents' propositions, and therefore I do not accept it; although I cannot prevent an extreme fideist from essentially climbing into a void and pulling the hole in after her.

If God exists, I agree that we can never know and understand everything about Him. But then again it has become obvious that no matter our natural knowledge we will never utterly comprehend Nature, either; yet we still discover plenty of useful and true facts about Nature as far as we have gone.

It is one thing to claim that the sea is infinite; it is another to claim that because it is infinite I cannot drink from it and slake my thirst. It is one thing to claim that a mountain is infinite; it is another to claim that because it is infinite

⁴² I will have more to say about this when I get around to demonstrating there is Someone to trust; I think a sceptic can fairly accept that this relationship would potentially obtain if there was Someone, and I think most of my theist brethren who already accept that Someone exists should at least partly understand now why I say this.

it is not crushing me within a particular strata of rock. Nature shows us that there might be (for all we can tell before we start) an infinite number of facts to be discovered, but not an ultimate impenetrability to discovery. I agree that God, as (by definition) a proposed sentient entity Who can have intentions, might intend that I never discover anything about Him; but then again, He might intend that I can, too. There is no way to tell without making the attempt; and it seems that there would always be at least one thing to discover about God ('if He exists He is otherwise undiscoverable')--which even itself would clearly breach any claim of the complete uselessness of a search for knowledge about Him.

People (even some on my own side) may tell me there is absolutely no way to find Him except through a given set of records. I reply that my own records (shared by very many believers) at least give hints that God did not leave the entire job up to the records (the story certainly tells us He didn't begin even special revelation with the records!); and that any real acceptance of a purely-Scriptural revelatory intent by God on my part would require at least some inferences from me which touch concepts and realities that are not themselves Scripture--and this tells me that at the very least God (if I accept those stories) intended Scripture to be used by us in conjunction with something else (which is also what Scripture seems to tell me); and thus the door is opened to the possibility that someone

could come to God without using Scripture. At least it would be impossible to tell otherwise without making the attempt. Claiming otherwise from Scripture itself, requires even in theory that I somehow have some standard to judge Scripture's veracity that is not Scripture; and in practice this always requires that I accept inferences barely connected with Scripture's authority at all.⁴³

Taken altogether, this tells me (so far as I have gone) that the attempt can at least be... well... attempted! It is not intrinsically doomed beforehand to utter failure--so, let us see what I can discover.

I also grant that God could simply 'create' a psychological state in my mind that might function like a 'belief'. But it seems to me that such a situation would be incorrigibly alien to all the other instances of 'belief' He allows me to form, to the extent that calling it a 'belief' seems facetious. Furthermore, such a forced 'belief' (if we insist on calling it by that label) violates any foundation of free love that we can return to God. Granted, some of my readers won't care about that concept. But my theistic--including Christian--brothers should care.⁴⁴

⁴³ For instance, my parents and teacher and preacher vouch for its authority.

⁴⁴ An active discovery up to even 100% certainty, should that be possible, would be at the least a responsible process by me, leading to my recognition of God as a Person, and would not suddenly abrogate my free choice to love Him or not. "The devils also believe--and shudder."

And even if some of my readers insist upon God's ability to create such a 'forced belief' as a hypothetical possibility, it seems to me to be a completely mooted point: it is patently obvious, from the umpty-three variations of religion and anti-religion in our world, that if God exists He does not choose to work that way. I don't consider hypothetical possibilities, obviously refuted by experience, to be bars to inquiry--especially ones I consider to be contradictory pseudo-problems.

This brings up one last issue on the question of whether there is something we can somehow know, before any kind of attempt at discovery is made, about the 'sheer impossibility' of reaching true and useful answers from a reasonable inquiry into God's existence and character. You, my reader, may have noticed that a not-inconsiderable bit of my rejection of this position, hinges on the proposition that even God cannot do what is intrinsically contradictory. Obviously, if I am wrong about this and God can do absolutely contradictory things,⁴⁵ then my argument that I can at least try to discover something about God by abstract reasoning loses some steam.

This leads me into the question of what it means for God to be omnipotent, which also has some misunderstandings that may need to be cleared up before we continue. And it leads into the

⁴⁵ ...like forcibly inciting a real 'belief' in me which is nevertheless free enough from automatic response on my part that I can truly call it 'my' 'belief' and not, say, God's belief exhibited through me; and that this can somehow nevertheless count as responsible 'knowledge' on my part that God exists and has certain characteristics; and that consequently I need no reasoning at all for purposes of coming to belief...

whole issue of contradictions in general, which has much more than a minor importance to my forthcoming argument.

Therefore, I think this topic will be a good bridge between these previous few chapters and the next set of 'field-leveling' chapters, as well as to my later sections of positive argumentation.

CHAPTER 5 -- Against contradictions

I have explained why I reject a flat presumption of our inability to reach true and useful conclusions about the existence and character of God through reasoning: in essence, I reject the presumption because it involves (one way or another) self-contradiction.

I have also explained why I reject much (though not all) of circular Presuppositionalism theories: in essence, I reject some of their claims because they are also self-contradictive. I do recognize some real usefulness in such procedures, (although I do not consider such methods to be the best tools for the goal of my book). But at the same time, I allow such methods have some real usefulness precisely because there are certain (limited) goals of such methods, which are not self-contradictive! I am willing to consider the feasibility of the parts which do not gut themselves; but I reject the parts which do.

However, we live in a society of people who not only accidentally produce self-contradictive theories (no ages and topics are free from that risk), but who often positively embrace contradictions. I find these positions in the theories of the religious and non-religious alike. Worse, I find people on both sides who vocally reject contradictions, yet who go on

to intentionally (not accidentally) foster them in order to 'bolster' their point.

I call this 'the 6=16 paradigm'.

I do not accept the 6=16 paradigm. I hope I do not have contradictions in my own work; but if I do they are there by accident, not by design. I think nothing real is gained by including them or resorting to them, and virtually everything is lost by the attempt.

Let me begin by examining this issue from the 'believer' side of the aisle.

When we humans try to wrap our brains around a contradictory set of propositions, we experience an emotion. Put bluntly, I think this emotion is 'confusion'. It is the same emotion we feel when we try to mentally 'picture' or 'account for' something too large or complicated for our picture-thinking to adequately express: our thoughts cannot 'take it in'.

Now, the Independent Fact of existence--the Final Ground upon which all other facts depend (which I have begun to mention already, and which I will be discussing more directly throughout the rest of my book)--whether it is sentient or non-sentient or natural or supernatural, is not an entity our thoughts can completely take in. Indeed, even if Nature (the system we perceive when we look around us) is not the IF, it is still an entity--and contains entities--which we cannot fully understand.

Please remember from my previous chapter that I do not therefore mean the IF must be completely unintelligible; if it was, we would never have discovered even that--for the utterly unintelligible can only be something about which no one ever thinks at all. There is a major difference between something being not completely intelligible to us, and being completely unintelligible.

Nature, for instance, is not completely intelligible to us. But we nevertheless know quite a lot about it; and in fact the more we discover, the clearer we can see the lines of demarcation through which our knowledge cannot reach.⁴⁶

So, for instance, we can detect the effects of quantum events in many ways, but we know we cannot simultaneously calculate the velocity and position of an electron. Yet (mathematically speaking) we can still understand and explain why this is so.

Similarly, we can look into the 'past' of our physical universe by looking in various physical directions,⁴⁷ but at a

⁴⁶ Although events do seem to be fed through that intelligible boundary from beyond, even if the 'beyond' turns out to be essentially 'natural' and not 'supernatural'.

⁴⁷ Light travels at an essentially fixed speed (setting aside the question of rare effects from super-strong gravity fields), so light takes a fixed amount of time to travel a distance. The distance light can travel in one year, is the light-year. When we look up into the night sky, we are seeing stars in positions and conditions they do not have now, but which they had thousands, millions or even billions of years ago.

The common description of the shape of the universe, is that it is like the skin of an expanding balloon. However, it does not look that way to us here on Earth, because the light reaching us right now was emitted by stars back then. Thus, when we look back into the 'balloon', we see where stars used to be. In theory, if we look into the direction the universe is

certain distance in space-time our ability to discern events breaks down--and we cannot see effectively at all into the physical 'future'!

No theist (who understands the principles) would claim the 'visual time-travel' trick illustrates a supernatural limit of perception (although perhaps quantum effects could); and certainly a philosophical naturalist is committed to the proposition that these are all natural phenomena. Yet they are blocks to our ability to perceive and comprehend reality; they are opaque to our reasoning. The best we can do is to understand why nothing intelligible can be forthcoming from these 'directions'; and, to our credit as a species, we seem to be doing a good job at this.

The atheist, then, should be able to understand that if God exists, there will be aspects of Him that our minds cannot quite 'take in'; not through contradiction, but because the Divine characteristics in fact express themselves that way--the way certain characteristics of Nature must necessarily block some (not all) of our inquiries.

I say again: these are not contradictions. It would be contradictory if, given these characteristics, we could find them all, even in principle, intelligible.

The sceptic will very wisely suspect the theist will use these conceptual 'twilight zones' as a safety-box. I admit this

expanding, we should not be able to see anything there at all, because nothing was there in that direction a few centuries or millennia ago.

strategy has been widely overused by some of my brethren; and I will try not to do it myself.

At the same time, the sceptic should remember the example of Nature; and also remember that we can always learn more about the phenomena: the causes and effects of these conceptual 'twilight zones'. We cannot see into the cosmic future the way we can see into the cosmic past; and we know why we cannot; and we have some idea of what characteristics of Nature this is an expression of. God will have conceptual 'twilight zones' as well; but we should be able to discover why we cannot functionally discover any more in that direction, and this would itself be a (further!) knowledge about God--if He exists, of course.

Now, what a devout theist (such as myself) feels when he considers the 'edges' of God's comprehensibility, also happens to be the psychological 'feeling' any of us experience when we consider anything beyond what our minds can 'take in'.

When we are discussing God or Nature or anything considered (by us as individual thinkers) to be 'real', this feeling may be called 'the Awe of the Sublime'. Many theists consider this feeling to be proper to the study of God; and I agree that it is. Many theists (and atheists, for that matter) consider this feeling to be proper to the study of Nature; and I do agree that in one way or another we thus perceive Nature's "grandeur"--it

is not a useless feeling, but reflects our perception of objective facts we cannot totally grasp.

But a theist--especially one who has been trained to value emotional response over intellectual understanding--may be led to equate this feeling particularly with God. Because this feeling is linked in a positive way with something the theist really cares about, he might fall into one or both of two errors: anything dealing with God must produce this feeling (else it doesn't deal with God), and/or anything that produces this feeling must be positively linked to a real aspect of God. In the end, a theist may combine these two errors to reach this conclusion: the best (or maybe only) way to think about God is to seek out or even fabricate expressions of this experience.

As I have said, this emotional impression arises whenever we try to mentally 'grasp' something that by its own character cannot quite be grasped in such a way. And as it happens, a contradictory proposition cannot be grasped in such a way; consequently the attempt to do so generates this feeling. A theist in the state I have just described will thus consider contradictions a Divine hallmark (or sanction) for expressing thoughts about God.

The entire situation becomes more complex because often we must express multiple aspects of real things as paradoxes. In today's language 'paradox' often means only 'contradiction'; but in antiquity a 'paradox' could mean a set of propositions (or

even an event) which, although true, looks at first glance like a contradiction.

This is a very important distinction. The proper use of paradox denies real contradiction of the propositions, while recognizing the appearance of contradiction as an alert that further knowledge must be gained to better understand the situation.

For instance, photons paradoxically exhibit properties both of waves and particles. Very few people deny photons are real; and most people who study them understand and affirm that the exhibition of these characteristics points to something real about the photons that we haven't quite figured out yet.⁴⁸ We might eventually discover, that thanks to the 'character' of 'Nature', we will always 'naturally' lack the ability to reconcile these two phenomena; but we will know this because we have discovered and understood some real principles which clearly mark the border of a photon's 'intelligibility'--just like we can mathematically explain, and understand, why it must be impossible for us to simultaneously calculate an electron's velocity and position. No proper contradiction is involved.

Similarly, there may be (and we might reasonably suspect probably will be) real paradoxes concerning the character and existence of God; aspects which at first will look like

⁴⁸ Or, perhaps scientists have in fact figured out the resolution by now, and I am simply not conversant enough in the literature to have seen it, which is entirely possible. Either way, my point will be illustrated: the situation is a paradox, not a contradiction.

contradictions, and which we may discover cannot be resolved-- not because they are contradictory, but because the necessary characteristics of God, even as a real entity, exclude that type of inquiry. Yet this means we will, in that case, have positively understood something else true and useful about Divine characteristics. We will not be left absolutely with no true and useful information about the subject.

But you, the reader, should be able to see that no matter the topic, the risk always exists that the mere appearance of contradiction in a legitimate paradox may be confused with a proper contradiction.

Furthermore, it doesn't take much imagination to see that if for some reason the 'feeling' that accompanies these phenomena should become valued in itself, or as a pointer toward something else; and if rational inquiry into these aspects should for some reason (irony intended!) be disparaged; then people who value that feeling and disparage rational inquiry will begin to treat contradictions as having real value, to be fostered and defended as 'true contradictions' (again, irony intended.) Although this process is certainly not limited to religious philosophies, I think something like this has happened in many religions--including, I'm sorry to say, in Christianity.

I am "sorry to say" this, because contradictions deny reality. A theist who turns to contradictions to generate feelings of awe about God, or (worse) proposes that God and

contradictions must necessarily go hand in hand (perhaps because he is working with the requirement of a faith/reason disparity), implicitly denies God's reality.

Sceptics just love this! Who can blame them? It plays right into their hands! I am certain some sceptics have become unbelievers precisely because they perceived this problem, and were subsequently told (by otherwise well-meaning theists) that this was the way it had to be. These particular sceptics (in another vicious irony, and no fault to them) learned their lesson quite well: these theists testify against the reality of the very Person they want people to believe exists and operates in our lives and world!

Furthermore, such a strategy of linking God (in His own character and characteristics) inextricably with contradictions denies the testimony of Judeo-Christian Scripture itself. The Psalmists tell us that God is 'emeth', or true; and the connotations of that word imply rock-bottom reliability, stability, permanence, trustworthiness. The same word would be used to describe a pail that can be trusted to hold water, or the awe-inspiring solidness of a mountain. But the water-holding pail and the mountain, are not representatives of an abstract, self-contradictory reality! (Certainly they would not have been to the ancient Jews.)

Granted, there could be some paradoxical features of their reality: sling that pail at a sufficient speed parallel to the

ground and the water won't necessarily fall out; yet hold it stationary at the same angle, and the water is lost. But such a paradox points to a real (although undiscovered) feature of the relationship between the pail and the water; it is not really a contradiction.⁴⁹

Let me strengthen the point I am trying to make by turning now to the sceptical side of the aisle. Theists claim that God must be omnipotent by virtue of the fact that (if He exists) all other things depend upon Him. We theists believe He is (as I will explain more fully later) the Final Fact; rather like physical Nature must be the Final Fact if philosophical naturalism is true.

'Very well then,' a simple atheist may snicker. 'Can God create a boulder too heavy for Him to lift?'

A simple theist may not know the answer to this; but the educated theist (and the educated atheist) should know the correct answer, which is "No."

'Hah!' exclaims the simple atheist. 'I thought you said He could do anything! So much for His omnipotence!'

Let us examine this classic situation for a moment.⁵⁰ The characteristic in question is God's omnipotence--His total

⁴⁹ I will clarify here that I am talking about properties of fundamental reality; not about properties of a set of writings. The question of contradictions has equal pertinence to atheism's truth, if atheism is true instead of theism; or any other worldview for that matter. I make this point in various ways throughout the book.

⁵⁰ I don't know who invented the 'too-heavy-to-lift boulder' test-case, but it has been around for a very long time.

power. The test-case involves two clauses welded into one English sentence.

Clause 1: Can God create any boulder? Given His omnipotence and in lieu of other considerations (for instance the method or methods He chooses for creation) the answer would be "Yes".

Clause 2: Can any boulder be too heavy for God to lift? Given His omnipotence, this answer must be No, because otherwise it would demonstrate that God (even if powerful) is not the final, ultimate power. Something not Himself can still trump Him. (Presumably in this case it would be the natural laws related to mass and inertia.)

The facetiously simple atheist has welded these two clauses together through English grammar into one question. But given God's omnipotence, the second clause is a non-issue: there can be no existent boulder that is too heavy for an omnipotent God to lift. This leaves the first clause perfectly true: such a God can create any boulder. A boulder too heavy for an omnipotent God to lift is not 'any real boulder' by definition of omnipotence. Such a boulder cannot in actuality exist, given the preliminary assumption this simple atheist wishes to attack--and that assumption must be given for purposes of argument, since what the atheist wants to do here is show that even if it is given, absurdity follows. But since the too-heavy boulder cannot exist when given the premise of an omnipotent God for sake of discussion, no real bar to God's power would follow.

Put more simply, our atheist here is asking the theist if God really does and really does not have ultimate power. The proper answer is "No"; not out of blind reverence for God's status, and (this must be stressed) not even out of a belief that God exists, but because two absolutely mutually exclusive clauses (with respect to their own definitions) cannot both reflect even a hypothetical reality simply by combining them with English grammar. The state in question cannot exist; therefore the problem in question cannot exist; therefore the purported problem is no bar to God's omnipotence (should He exist and be omnipotent--this can be merely a hypothesis for the sake of argument. I am not arguing here for either God's existence or for God's omnipotence.) Six cannot equal sixteen, presuming both properties are exclusive.

Notice, however, that last qualification: presuming both properties are (by definition) exclusive. Six can be part of sixteen; there are 2-3/4 sixes in sixteen. But the absolute total is sixteen; the absolute total of the set cannot be both six and sixteen at once. The proposed contradiction, by virtue of the properties of the ideas used in it, does not describe any possible reality.

This is why I reject the concept that God's existence and characteristics require necessary (and actual) contradictions. Such fanciful confabulations tell us nothing about God, and a

requirement that God must nevertheless exhibit them is a tacit statement that God does not exist.⁵¹

I am a Christian; I testify that God exists and has certain characteristics. I will not recourse to intentional contradictions as any kind of element of God's necessary reality; otherwise I would be defending the existence of a God Whose existence I would be simultaneously denying! But neither would I recourse to intentional contradictions, to build and defend a belief in God's non-existence.⁵²

Now let me present another (and very important) variation of my point. Our facetiously simple atheist (the educated atheists should not present this sort of problem) has, in a sense, asked us if God can trump everything and yet be trumped Himself. If he holds strictly to his paradigm, this answer must be 'No'. Now let us change the conditions a bit.

'Can God create a boulder that He chooses not to lift?' The answer (hypothetical or otherwise) is 'Yes'. No contradiction is involved. Given the starting presumption (an omnipotent God), both conditions are quite possible. God can create a boulder. God can choose not to lift the boulder. Put them together and no

⁵¹ The classic koan 'God is the sound of one hand clapping' would be an example of this. One hand clapping makes no sound (practically speaking--this koan is not meant to be used with scientific rigorousness regarding faint whiffs of air movement); the sound of one hand clapping is an overt contradiction; 'the sound of one hand clapping' = 'nothing'. This koan, designed to generate a feeling of 'awe' when 'contemplating God', ends up saying 'God is nothing'. This, frankly, is an empty attempt at being profound. (Christians throughout our history have tried much the same empty profundities ourselves, unfortunately, in attempts at trying to create feelings of awe about God.)

⁵² Although if I was trying to be playfully deceptive, I might speak of God's non-existence by using a koan of the sort I have just mentioned...

absurdity follows. Obviously, this provides no bar to God's omnipotence; not because it is an impossible-to-exist set of conditions confabulated out of English grammar, but because neither proposition interferes with the other nor interferes with the given presumption.

Let us apply this to a commonly claimed paradox (note my use of that word): God is omnipotent, yet some of His creations can do things He would prefer they not do. Is this a contradiction?

It could be, depending on some hidden addendums to that second clause. If I proposed that any of God's creations can 'sin' (for short) in a sense that there is absolutely nothing God can do to stop them, then I would have proposed a contradiction; and consequently my proposition (one way or another) must not accurately reflect a real situation.

But if those creatures can 'sin' because God has chosen to restrict how far He will influence their lives, giving them derivative autonomy, then it is not a contradiction. They can 'trump' God because (in this case) He chooses not to do a particular thing (or set of things) to them. Similarly, God can create a boulder and then choose not to lift it.

A full discussion on this situation must wait until the proper chapters on ethics (much later in Section Four); my point is that (as far as this particular statement goes) God's omnipotence meets no bar and both situations could be true

simultaneously. The situation is a paradox: it looks like a contradiction, taking the given data at face value, but is resolved by factoring in other conditions--ones which we might have discovered in this instance (by whatever means), but which we need not necessarily have ever discovered. Our lack, or even outright inability, to discover the linking condition set would not abrogate the actual existence of both conditions (should we in fact discover them). We might instead discover quite thoroughly why we cannot go further (for what it's worth, I think we can go quite a ways further in the metaphysics of ethics), and that would be real and useful knowledge about something related to the question at hand.

But there are sets of propositions which, by virtue of their given properties, cannot both be simultaneously true. Once these sets are identified, we need not wait to see if new data turns up. We can be sure that a pure contradiction does not directly reflect an existent state of affairs.⁵³ The question would then turn to the following issues:

a.) Is the combined proposition in fact a pure contradiction?

or

b.) How can we modify one proposition or the other (perhaps by introducing a new factor) so that the statement becomes something other than a contradiction?

⁵³ Aside from the existence and character of grammatic rules, perhaps...

A large amount of theology (and atheology!) consists of resolving apparent discrepancies in theories and statements about God, so that the truth will be left over. In the case of the atheologians, the discrepancies are resolved by concluding (or admitting) that God does not exist! This strategy is, in principle, a sound one--provided it can actually be accomplished. But obviously such a strategy affirms, rather than prevents, the attempt to positively answer questions one way or the other.

I suspect that some attempts by theists to necessarily fuse contradictions to theology, stem from the wish for a position that not only defeats assailants, but that assailants cannot even attempt to assail!

But such wishful thinking is harmful; it encourages scepticism rather than belief, and even encourages some sceptics to try the same tactic! Some atheistic and agnostic philosophers also use the 'mystical' sense of awe surrounding contradictions to imply they are somehow touching reality more clearly. And their positions are equally unassailable; leaving both types of contradictionists gesturing blindly in their respective foxholes, building walls of denial and assertion. At the very best, such advocates can offer no good reasons that I should not continue.

Quite a lot of this chapter seems to point to God being (or require God to be) a particular entity with particular

characteristics (if, of course, He exists at all), not an abstract generality: in other words, that abstract generalities are not primarily real. In a sense, God's reality (if we are going to be serious about our stated beliefs) repels by default any attempt at requiring Him to be unreal.

Yet strangely enough, there are philosophies and religions which reject this tautology much more overtly than the contradictionists (who may only be doing it by accident, thinking they are rendering honor to God in this fashion). Necessary Contradiction can very easily lead to these other ideas, and in fact has done so in our human history. (It is certainly no bar to heresy!)

But perhaps these other, more clearly abstract philosophies are in fact correct. So I will turn now to consider whether God could possibly have any particular characteristics to discover.

CHAPTER 6 -- Can God be an abstract generality?

As I follow my line of thought through these chapters, I am finding that certain issues which will be developed more clearly at the beginning of my second section are coming to the forefront now--and must necessarily do so. I worry about this, because I do not want to presume my later conclusions here in an unfair manner--for which I, as a sceptic, would be keeping a sharp and (rightfully) suspicious watch!

Furthermore, I suspect some of my Christian (and other theistic) brethren will be taken aback at the strong criticisms I have leveled at certain people on 'my side of the aisle'. I do think such criticism is necessary; and I have tried to explain why I think this, as I bring up the topics. Yet I would not blame such brethren for being suspicious, at this point, about where exactly I am going with all this.

Keeping these prudent suspicions in mind, let me take a moment before I forge the next link in my topical chain, to try to reassure both audiences.

To my sceptical readers: nothing I have written thus far, argues that God exists. I have of course introduced hypothetical instances where, to make my point, God must be presumed to exist; but these are not conclusions that He exists, and I have not treated them as such. A hypothetical discussion is one that

does not need to be true, nor be accepted as true. For instance, given Robert Jordan's cosmological structure in his Wheel of Time series, readers of his books (like myself) can sit around all day discussing his metaphysical logic (such as it is) without ever once believing that his works necessarily reflect our ultimate reality. I think my sceptical reader could treat my chapters up to this point in the same way: you could (and I hope do) agree with my logic so far, without accepting the reality of some of the topics I have discussed with (and for the sake of) my allies. Put another way, I think I am still fulfilling one of my key goals for this section: if I was an atheist (for instance), I would still be making these exact same points. I will not deny that I am, in certain respects, refuting some kinds of philosophical claims; but I am not yet replacing them with a particular set of religious beliefs. I have said this whole book is my testimony to why I believe Christianity to be true; you could say this first section would be my testimony to the kind of sceptic I would be if I nevertheless rejected the Christian philosophical position.⁵⁴ I would not be 'this' or 'that' type of unbeliever; and this is why. I think I am doing a fair enough job, so far, as an analytical sceptic.

"Yes, a 'damnable' good job!" the theist may snort. Well, that's the way my argument has gone so far, so I can hardly blame that sort of response. I can only ask you to hang on,

⁵⁴ Again, I will not be directly analyzing the Christian historical positions in this book; but I will have more to say about them, and why I accept them, in my final section.

because (as I know from hindsight) I will be getting back eventually to a fully supernaturalistic theism, with all the attendant philosophical details (including those specific to Christianity). I think I can even set up the argument so that many of my theistic-yet-non-Christian brethren (such as Jews and Muslims) will be able to follow along in agreement pretty far, and thus will find my book useful (up to those points, at least) for their own positions. I am not abandoning the faith. I am trying to clear it up by pointing out aspects of the faith as the faith has sometimes been presented which I consider hazardous; and I have tried to explain why I think this. I do indeed affirm many specific proposals which shall be entirely familiar to my theistic audience (including my specifically Christian audience), and toward which I am slowly working. Which leads me back to the topic for this chapter!

One potential objection to trying to reason out what the particular characteristics of final reality are, is that God (if the final reality is God) does not have particular characteristics to discover. He is, instead, an abstract generality.

The people who would make this objection might be pantheists or nominal deists or cosmological dualists. However not every adherent to these three ideas (which I will be discussing more fully later, in various places) would agree that God is an abstract generality. Therefore, I will artificially

break such proponents into their own subgroup according to this common belief of theirs, and call them 'generaleists'.

A generaleist may have any of several grounds for believing God to be an abstract generality; and often generaleists intend to render honor to Him (or perhaps I should say 'to the idea of Him') by expressing, through this concept, that God transcends discursive thought.

I do not deny that if God exists, He transcends, in some fashion, our ability to think about Him. But as I have already indicated, there is more than one way for God to transcend our thought.

In fact, there are basically three ways to interpret this transcendence:

- a.) nothing we say about God can be true;
- b.) everything we say about God can be true;
- c.) what we can say about God can be true or false, and there are (effectively) an infinite number of topics concerning God which may be described this way.⁵⁵

Of these concepts describing God as 'transcending discursive thought', the first two do so by negating discursive thought. I do not consider 'transcending' and 'negating' to mean the same thing; so I am immediately suspicious about whether options 'a' and 'b' are viable.

⁵⁵ Even atheists are not left out of this option: "God exists" is something we can say about God and may, as far as I've gone, be false.

Furthermore, I have been discussing variations of option 'a' already; and the key problem remains for me here: if option 'a' was true, then at best it would be something we never could have discovered, and at worst it refutes itself for it posits at least one 'true' thing we may say about God.

Calling such a situation a 'divine contradiction' does not help matters (as I argued in the previous chapter) because such a tactic destroys its adherent's ability to propose one thing and not another as being true about God; which, despite appearances, is exactly what the contradictionist does, although he may not have intended it.

If he claims that nothing we say about God can be true, he is concurrently denying that I can possibly be correct in discovering particular characteristics of God--which is one popular type of generaleism. But this proposed indescribability of God is one characteristic, and not another; which is precisely what this kind of generaleist denies can be posited (or argued or discovered or whatever) about God.

Or, if he embraces this position as a contradiction, then he has no way of denying (short of flat assertion) a refuting position from me.

In the end, this strategy seems to me to lead away from rational thought altogether; I will not follow that route because it leads literally to nowhere. Thus, in a way, I have already argued against this position.

But I have a further qualm with generaleism that is more specific (please pardon the pun) to the claims of its proponents: I do not think a generality can produce the concrete. This notion has quite a few links to some common misunderstandings of 'natural laws', so I will also try to defuse this potential landmine as I pass near it.

What is a 'generality'? The answer to this question can be horribly complicated; but I think the basic answer (upon which all other more advanced answers must be based) is that a generality is a description: it is about something, as distinct from being something. It is like a reflection in our minds of a pattern of what has happened, or can happen, or will happen. The pattern does not exist as a particular entity; it is about entities.⁵⁶

This can be hard to understand, but try thinking of it this way: the word 'pink' is an adjective, a word that describes a property (hypothetical or actual) of the behavior of particular objects. 'Pink' is not a photon; 'pink' is not even (in the rigorous sense) a photon behaving such as to vibrate at a certain frequency. It is our way of describing that photon's vibratory state--its behavior or characteristic. Given such-and-such preconditions (which need not necessarily ever come to

⁵⁶ Or, to be more specific, the pattern of 'aboutness' does not itself need to be the entity being described by the 'aboutness'. Obviously, there will be a few exceptions, such as when we think about thinking: yet the principle must still hold. Not everything I say with my tongue is 'about' my tongue, or about tongues; but I could also say something about tongues with my tongue. This would not obliterate the distinction between a description and an existent entity.

pass) any photon may be accurately described as 'pink'. 'Pink' implies that these conditions (whether by hypothesis or in actuality) have been met: that the photon has conformed to such-and-such a pattern.

Perhaps you may understand the 'abstractness' of such events if you consider that I can represent the event to you in an imaginary manner by asking you to think of a pink turtle, without a real pink turtle (per se) already existing or popping into existence. It is a placeholder; it describes what will happen given certain preconditions.

The 'laws of Nature', relatedly, are a special category of generality that describes what particles of energy or matter shall do in certain circumstances.⁵⁷ The principles of 'double-entry accounting' are another commonly used set of generalities.

The practical definitions of 'general' and 'real' repel and self-attest one another. The 'general', is the pattern a given 'real' thing may correspond to. The 'real', is that which falls into (and/or creates) 'general' patterns: you could say the 'real' is that which can be described. I do not mean that everything which can be described is necessarily real, or even potentially real. I only mean, that in order to discuss 'real' entities, we must use 'abstract' descriptions: the descriptions are not the thing itself.

⁵⁷ We call these regular behaviors 'laws' as a convenient shorthand metaphor, because the particles seem to 'obey'. Such an expression does not necessarily indicate the existence of, or even a belief in, a Chief Executive.

The descriptions do not equal what actually happens; they communicate or record what actually happens. The two categories--'happening' and 'description of happening'--are distinctive, and we recognize one by in effect denying it is the other.

Maybe I can help make this clearer by borrowing an old example from Lewis. The 'laws' of accounting do not themselves accomplish anything; they describe what will happen if you put money into the system. You can do 'accounting' until doomsday without generating a cent; in fact, if you are learning to be a professional accountant, your instructors will require you to work hypothetical accounting exercises to ensure you know what you are doing before someone entrusts 'real' money to you.

Similarly, the 'laws of aerodynamics' are abstract; you can do calculations all day and nothing especially 'aerodynamic' will happen. But they describe what real airplanes will do in given situations; and before anyone entrusts you with the real thing, they will require you to be familiar with the generalities.

This is how I find the interaction between the 'real' and the 'abstract' playing out in the world around me; and it doesn't take much effort for me to derive some principles from this.

When I turn to questions about God, and I am told by a generaleist (for whatever reason he may give) that God must only be an abstract entity or a generality, then to me this is the

same as saying that God does not really exist. God (under this plan) is the way something real would behave if it could be induced (or if it could induce itself) to do so. God would only be a potentiality, and not an actual. Perhaps this is true, but then let us stop talking of God really existing, and admit atheism. However, I don't think we are quite in that strait just yet.

Nature (after we have bothered to 'pick at it' for a while) seems pretty clearly to be a set of 'real' things going through 'events' according to 'generalities'; all of which we may perhaps discover. (Or, if we cannot discover a particular fact, we should be able to discover why we cannot do so and thus learn something else true and useful about the entity in question.) I think virtually any atheist today will agree with me on this; so would a pantheist of a certain sort (what I call positive pantheism). Either of these people would claim, and understand, that the thing from which everything else derives, is the most real, concrete, and (in its own way) minutely articulated thing in existence.

Or, more precisely, I think the most rigorous of either type of naturalistic philosopher (positive pantheist or atheist, insofar as either of them accepts philosophical naturalism) would say that strictly speaking there is no 'thing' upon which 'everything else' is based; but that the whole reality must be considered as itself, with all evident entities equally

interdependent upon every other entity. The system is what it is, and there is an end to it. But they would agree the system is real (as opposed to being an 'abstraction') and if we considered the system as a whole it would, of course, have ultimate complexity.

These people would therefore be in agreement with me, that the abstract neither can nor does produce the real; at least, I think if they considered the base-bottom of their beliefs they should agree with me: the atheist (naturalistic or otherwise), the supernaturalistic theist, and a certain variety of pantheist (i.e. a certain variety of naturalistic theist) stand together on this.⁵⁸

But some generaleists also would agree with me (and the atheist and the positive pantheist), in principle, that the abstract cannot be the foundation or producer of the concrete. Therefore, those generaleists would conclude there can be nothing real or 'concrete'--everything, including us, must be abstract as opposed to real.⁵⁹

This position has the neat advantage of being as unassailable as its adherent wishes: in the last resort, and crudely (though effectively) speaking, he can always deny that his opponent really exists!

⁵⁸ Even so, it is very easy for people who agree the abstract does not produce the real, to slide by accident into proposing that abstractions are producing realities.

⁵⁹ I have in mind the basic principles of some types of 'illusionary' pantheisms, but any generaleist might try this tactic.

But I have a similar problem with this as I had with some earlier positions: if this idea about reality is true, the adherent could not have discovered it, because he himself does not really exist, either.

This is one of those places where a self-reflexive test really hits home. The extreme generaleist might reply that of course 'he' does not exist; 'he' is under an illusion that 'he' exists, and in fact 'he' should escape from this illusion.

I am certainly strongly in favor of escaping from illusion as a practical goal (including as an ethical obligation), but I think this only puts the problem back another stage: the belief of this generaleist that he must be an illusion, must itself (under this extreme position) also be an illusion. To me, this says pretty clearly that a mistake has been made somewhere!

And, to where are we supposed to be 'escaping'? Is it not also a generality, a pattern without content? Then the escape is to nowhere: meaning either annihilation or that the escape does not in fact happen.

Again, some generaleists would agree with this as well. No matter, they would say: we deserve to be annihilated! Even if I granted this, these same people will also tell me that morality is relative and all things are equally good and evil (and equally illusory); so it would be useless to say that I 'deserve' annihilation. I am quite certain, in any case, that I cannot profit by annihilation; in what sense can 'I' be said to

be profiting if 'I' cease to exist? 'I' must still exist for it to be 'better for me'; but the extreme generaleist will deny this existence as well.

Some of them would say I am to be absorbed into the Absolute (and that I may call this 'God' if I wish). But the Absolute must then be actual; for if it is an abstract generality, then what exists for me to be absorbed into?

And the whole notion avoids the question of how it is even possible to recognize the concept of an 'illusion', without some frame of reference to compare it to an 'actual'.⁶⁰

In the end, the generaleist's position, no matter what philosophical flavor he takes or how far he goes, leads to massive internal contradictions; and I have already rendered my opinions about that.

No doubt, there are many intricate edifices built on this type of foundation. But if the foundation requires constant underpropping from contradictions (or 'worse?', underproppings from theism--or 'worst', if the foundations are ultimately as illusory as everything else!) then I think I am safe in concluding that whatever reality is, it must not be like that.

At the very worst, short of a flat 'faith-not-reason' assertion to the contrary (let my allies note that heresy strikes again from this quarter), all appearances tell me that actual things exist. They may not be quite what they 'appear' to

⁶⁰ This is a specially important point in itself, and I will be covering it in a later chapter of Section Three, in more detail.

me to be, but existence is nevertheless real. Therefore, I might as well stay with the gameplan and try to figure out particular characteristics about an actual reality, including foundational reality (or realities). A generaleist may assert that I should free myself from such an illusion; but then he proceeds to undercut any methods by which I could do so, other than by sheer denial. It seems to me that a person in sheer denial of the possibility of reality (including his own reality) is a person building (or already in) a hell; and this will be especially true if reality meanwhile keeps whacking him on the head.

And--what if reality never stops doing this?

So, I think the best plan is for me to continue with an attempt to discover particular things about basic reality: the Final Fact (or Independent Fact, or Interdependent Fact perhaps--either way you may call it an 'IF') that is the, or a, bedrock of our existence. I will either assume that particular facts are discoverable about It; or... well, there is no 'or', because (as I argued several chapters ago) everyone presumes that something distinctive can be discovered about It--or else they say nothing to the purpose and cut themselves off not only from an effective ability to convince (and help?) other people, but also from their own conscious attributes.

This leads me to the option 'b' group whom I noted several pages back: the people who would agree, "Yes, whatever the IF is (and many of us agree we can call it God), it has an infinite

number of particular characteristics--but this means everything anyone can say about It must be true, so there isn't really much point for you to continue!"

This 'b' position is also linked topically to the question of infinite regression: in other words, "Hey, what is this IF thingy you've been mentioning recently? Why does there have to be a 'Final' Fact? You're talking about the 'infinite', aren't you? Doesn't infinity keep on going without reaching a finality?"

These are important questions to discuss. So, on to the next chapter.

CHAPTER 7 -- In question of infinite regression and
infinite possibilities

In the previous chapter, I brought to the forefront a term I have already begun to use here and there in this book: the IF, the Independent-or-Interdependent Fact.⁶¹ Now I will discuss this concept directly, not only because I will be using it with increasing frequency as I continue, but because I think its existence must be accepted to avoid nonsensical positions.

I have just finished explaining why I reject the position that God must be an abstract generality (and thus can have no particular aspects, even in principle, to be discovered). My reply was that in my experience the abstract describes the real (or, more accurately, we use 'the abstract' to describe the real) distinct from being the real; and that consequently that which is purely abstract cannot be the foundation or ground for other realities. Or, put another way, there is in fact no such thing as pure abstraction; abstraction is dependent upon reality.

I used observations of Nature to bolster this point.
Nature, the system in which we exist, apparently exists in an

⁶¹ The acronym for Independent or Interdependent Fact happens to be the English word 'if'; but this is accidental, and will be different if my book is ever translated to other languages. As I will argue later in this chapter, and throughout my book in various places, I do not mean, by this acronym, that I question the existence of the IF. I do, however, question its properties and characteristics: these questions, and any answers I can find, are the basic subject of this book.

actual fashion; or, if it does not 'actually' exist, then we in this system can know nothing including that Nature does not exist in that fashion. I did not mean by this that the material of Nature must be such that we can describe it with ultimate and total accuracy--evidently we cannot in fact do so. Our inability to completely describe the 'physical' in terms of the 'physical' may simply be a practical manifestation of what amounts to our attempt at a circular proposition: we may be reaching the level where Nature simply 'is' and so our categories of description based on what Nature does as a complex must necessarily break down when we try to cogently describe what Nature does at its most particular.

This is not quite a contradiction in terms; rather, it would be a contradiction in terms if we could accurately describe the ultimate particular physical units in terms of their group behaviors. If Nature is the only level of reality, then we could expect it to repel our probing (as composite entities ourselves) in this fashion.

Some people conclude that because the data we find fits this hypothesis (as far as I have carried it, anyway), the hypothesis must be true: Nature is the Independent Fact (or IF) of reality. In one sense, everything depends upon it and it depends upon nothing; yet, because Nature (on this hypothesis) is the only level of reality, then Nature essentially means 'everything' in total, and so strictly speaking there is nothing

'to depend upon' it. Nature (in total) might therefore also be usefully described as the Interdependent Fact.

Either way, it would be the most complicated, minutely articulated, particular Thing; and 'everything else' would only be parts of it, considered to be 'dependent' or 'separate' from Nature (where Nature is proposed to be a one-system total of everything) only for convenience of discussion.⁶²

The natural system itself, then, is one candidate for an IF. As I noted above, some people would argue that because (or if) our data fits this hypothesis, then Nature must be the IF.⁶³ But this is not a deductive argument; it is abductive (a special form of inductive argument). Even if it is successful (and I will have much more to say about naturalism later), it only establishes a viable contender. It does not necessarily exclude other hypotheses from being true--thus the conclusion of 'must' would, for this specific argument, be unwarranted.

On the other hand, if the exclusive alternative--commonly presented as 'God', although properly it would be 'Supernature' (which could itself be atheistic)--must be a generality or pure abstraction; and if (as I have argued in the previous chapter) such a view is tantamount either to a denial of Supernature's existence or at best to an ungrounded assertion with no

⁶² What I am describing here is philosophical naturalism, as distinct from philosophical supernaturalism. It need not be equal to atheism, although most atheists are also naturalists in this sense: one and only one level of reality exists, and it is the system we call Nature.

⁶³ Although they probably won't call it "the IF", of course--they'll use different names for the concept.

attendant strength; then a successful inductive or abductive naturalistic argument of this sort would be part of an exclusively naturalistic conclusion: not because the positive (though inductive) naturalism argument excludes the Supernature hypothesis, but because (given Supernature must be a pure abstraction) the Supernature hypothesis excludes itself from contention.

This would be a reasonable, and even reliable, conclusion-- I can easily imagine myself accepting it--given that Supernature (be it God or otherwise) must be a generality about which nothing in particular can be true. After such a conclusion, any co-presented inductive conclusion to naturalism would be virtually incidental.⁶⁴

But as I have argued in the previous chapter, we quite literally have no reason to presuppose that God (or even an atheistic Supernature) must be only a generality; and I cannot think of valid arguments to that conclusion. Rather, I think the situation is reversed: if God (or rather a Supernature of whatever kind) does not exist, then it would be true to say that this Supernature is only, at best, an abstract principle; but if Supernature does exist, as the IF, then that Supernature, as the IF, must be the most detailed, real, actual, 'concrete' entity in existence. If everything derives its existence from an

⁶⁴ Essentially, in this case Supernature would be deductively removed from contention by its contradictory proposed characteristics ('Supernature must be general' and 'generalities are not actuals'). Any inductive argument in favor of naturalism would be purely secondary.

ultimately most-real Fact, then that Fact is still the most particularly detailed Thing that exists--whether the Fact is sentient or not.

This concept has strong connections to what is known as 'the Ontological Argument'. A person proposing this argument in theistic apologetics (where this argument has been most traditionally employed), attempts to infer that if anything really exists, then we either should believe God must exist or at least we have good inductive reason to believe God exists.

But all positive apologetics, whether theistic or otherwise, may be considered variants of the Ontological Argument: if A really exists, then we may infer the existence of B; and whether B is dependent on A or vice versa may be learned from the argument depending on how it is structured. Variants would occur by being more particular about A and its characteristics. So, for example, a popular theistic variant would be the philosophical Cosmological Argument: if Nature exists, then we have reason to believe God exists. The Kalam CosA focuses this to a scientific inference from the characteristics of the universe, such that if the universe does not eternally exist, then we have reason to believe God exists.

However, I am not talking right now about inferences from the existence and characteristics of anything other than "existence" itself--thus, I will be making a broadly ontological argument.

And I do not take this argument so far as to infer that God (per se) exists; or even that supernaturalism is true! I think the Ontological Argument has only a limited use, one which works just as well for the atheist or positive pantheist: if anything real exists, then whatever the foundational Fact is that cannot be 'gotten behind' and upon which 'anything' and 'everything' (even itself) depends, the Fact must itself be ultimately real and ultimately complex. In whatever sense it is possible to say that 'derivative entities' 'really' exist, they must by necessity be less 'complete' or less 'detailed', or even (in a sense) less 'real', than the IF.

As I have said, though, this does not mean the IF must be sentient, or even supernaturalistic. The ontological arguments I have seen (where the focus is on the existence of anything at all), including many cosmological arguments (where the focus is on the existence of evident reality), have only reached such a supernaturally theistic 'conclusion' either by a flat (and unjustified) leap, or by applying to some other argument(s) far more particular than the Ontological (or even Cosmological) Argument itself.

But, why does there have to be a stopping point at all? Why must there be an IF (whether it is sentient or non-sentient, supernatural or natural)? We are talking about something that is, for all practical purposes at the very least, infinite; correct? So why can there not be grounds stretching on forever

with no end, no Final Fact? Why can there not be an infinite regression?

For what it is worth, I don't think it is possible to prove that an infinite regress does not exist--nor that it does exist. So I will presume each of these two mutually exclusive options; and then check to see if either or both of the options crash.

Let me presume, for purposes of argument, that an infinite regress is real. What advantages does a proposed system of thought have, when based on this presumption?

None! If an infinite regress is true, then we have no means of reaching valid conclusions.

This is because we habitually presume, when we offer explanations or arguments, that somewhere 'behind' or 'under' the explanation (metaphorically speaking) is an actual reality that just is. This reality provides us the standard by which to explain other things; it cannot be explained the same way.⁶⁵

Now I grant that we humans are very good at turning our analytical 'spotlights' onto our presumed grounds and discovering that those grounds can, after all, be explained in terms of something else. But then the 'something else' becomes in effect the ultimate ground. Perhaps it, too, can be explained in terms of 'another something else'. That would be fine: as long as the next 'something else' doesn't turn out to be one of the earlier 'somethings', because then we have a circular

⁶⁵ I mean it cannot be explained in terms of something more fundamental than itself.

argument and all the conclusions reached along that train of thought collapse!

We can keep doing this for as long as it is non-contradictory, and non-circular, to do so. But every time we do this, we must presume that we have reached a stopping point. We may eventually discover that we really had not reached the last stopping point; but that is very different from proposing that there is no stopping point!

We (usually) explain the existence of 'something' in regard to a more foundational 'something else'. But an infinite regress, per se, means that there can never be 'something else' which stands as a proper explainer to the 'something'.

Put another way: if there could be such a thing as a bottomless pit, you would never be able to answer the question "How deep is it?" Replying "It is infinitely deep" would be one way of saying the deepness is real but cannot be quantified: and "How deep?" asks for quantification. Yet in the case of an ultimately infinite metacosmic regress, this would apply to every question, and not merely in regard to quantification.

The infinite regressor may not be bothered by this. "Why, I can answer all sorts of questions!" he may snort. "I can add 2 + 2 and get 4 just like anyone else!" Yes; but you do this by presuming there is an unalterable characteristic of reality which cannot be 'explained away' or 'explained in terms of

something else', which the math expression (and, for that matter, the logical 'law of noncontradiction') reflects.

"No, I pretend for purposes of convenience that there is a stopping point." Yes--because you know perfectly well that the statement will be reduced to absurdity if there is no stopping point! Yet, by saying there is (in fact) no stopping point, you concurrently assert that the proposition $2 + 2 = 4$ is in fact (all possible appearances to the contrary) an ultimately unreliable statement! Furthermore, any arguments and conclusions you may draw with an infinite regress as your ultimate presumption, are rendered equally nonsensical.

"Christianity and similar theisms are false", the infinite regressor may say, "because in fact there is an infinite regress."⁶⁶ But this statement has been rendered as moot as the statement $2 + 2 = 4$. The only 'explanatory power' an infinite regressor has, is borrowed by him from the position of his direct opponents: the people (atheists, theists, etc.) who do propose an IF of some kind. A position that must borrow all of its strength (even if only 'for purposes of convenience') from a presumption that at least one of its opposition must be correct, can only be an untenable position.

In other words, infinite regression has an ultimate and inescapable problem, which I think sinks it as a viable

⁶⁶ This attempt could, of course, be made against atheism by counter-atheists, too; perhaps by some kinds of positive or even negative pantheists.

alternative to an Independent Fact: no one can possibly believe in an infinite regression.

'What!? Are you telling me I do not really believe my own position?'

Do you propose that there really is an infinite regress?

'Yes, of course!'

Then you have proposed that there is, in fact, a final characteristic of reality: there is an infinite regress.

'So?'

So you are proposing that it is impossible to explain an infinite regress in terms of "something else" which is itself not an infinite regress.

'Naturally; otherwise I would be saying there is ultimately no infinite regress!'

But an infinite regression requires precisely that everything can be explained in terms of "something else" forever! You must make a tacit exception against the infinite regress itself, to even seriously try proposing it is true; thus immediately contradicting your own position!

Even if I tried to accept a so-called 'infinite regress', I would necessarily be putting it into, or proposing it as, some

type of ultimate framework which cannot itself be explained in terms of something else--and this immediately undercuts the whole point to proposing an infinite regress. What does the infinite regress depend on for its existence? Nothing else? Then the infinite regress is the IF--but then, there is no infinite regress after all.

I therefore conclude, that although I may assert I believed an 'infinite regress' to be true, I would have to be mistaken. I would actually be proposing an Independent Fact even in order to try to propose an infinite regress; and I would have been misled in my labeling by not considering one of the chief properties of an infinite regression: it must be self-existently what it is, and so not be grounded (even in principle, much less in practice) in terms of something which is not an infinite regress. But then I would no longer be proposing an infinite regression philosophy.

I find myself and everyone else (including the infinite regressors!) already presuming that an IF of some sort must in principle exist; so either an IF exists or we might as well treat reality as if it did. To do otherwise leads us precisely nowhere, even if it was possible to consistently (or even coherently) presume otherwise (which I think is impossible).

So an Independent (or Interdependent) Fact should be formally presumed to exist. For all practical purposes I should even believe it must exist; and all metaphysics and philosophy

should center either on discovering what we can about it, or else on working out what must be true given presumptions about it (including the necessary presumption we all evidently make--whether we express it or not--that it in fact exists).

But the infinite regressor has one more bolt for his crossbow: the IF must be something that is not 'caused' by something else, or 'derives from' something else, or is a 'piece of' something else that 'includes' it. It is what it is (or even "I AM THAT I AM!") and absolutely no further reductive explanation is possible.

Opponents to supernaturalism (and especially to supernaturalistic theism) have a popular way of deploying this concept. "To explain the origin of Nature," an atheist may say, "by invoking a supernatural Designer, is to explain precisely nothing, for it leaves unexplained the origin of the Designer." This is a common and, as far as it goes, a reasonable type of complaint, especially against an overreaching application of cosmological or ontological arguments. However, if we rigorously accepted the use of this principle, then to explain the origin of the DNA-replication process (for instance) by appeal to a blindly automatic Nature would also be "to explain precisely nothing"--for it would also leave unexplained the origin of the Nature. Even when CosAs are over-applied to reach theism, there is usually some prior reason for inferring (or at least suspecting) that the system of Nature cannot be the IF, which

points to some kind of supernaturalism being true. That prior rationale itself may be faulty, but this kind of reply doesn't address prior rationales per se.

Be that as it may, our objector in favor of philosophical naturalism (and usually of atheism, in Western thought) does have a point worth considering. When we look at objects or systems within Nature, we find that we can ask how they came to be, and so we discover that they are dependent upon something for their existence. Nature itself is also a system, though; so we (naturally!) ask the same question in regard to it. But if we are coming to this with a presumption that anything of which we can ask the question must be dependent for its existence upon something else, then there is no reason in principle to stop with The-Something-Else-On-Which-Nature-Depends-For-Existence. This introduces an infinite ontological regress, however, with the logical consequences previously mentioned; which is exactly what the philosophical naturalist, in making this argument, is trying to avoid.

"Aha!" says the infinite regressor (taking aim with his crossbow). "Now you see why I propose an infinite regress!" But there is no escape by that route; I can ask the exact same question about the infinite regress: how did it "come to be"? And this leads us back to my previous observation: either the infinite regression is what it is without recourse to further explanation, or the infinite regression depends for its

existence on something that isn't an infinite regression. Which is to say, either way, that ontological infinite regression is principally false.

So whatever philosophy we propose (and apparently whyever we propose one), we end up explicitly or implicitly requiring the existence of an ultimate Fact that is not dependent on anything else, and so is not caused by anything else.

"Hah!" barks the infinite regressor (releasing his final bolt for what logicians call a tu quoque rebuttal). "That which is uncaused, does not exist! Here is a contradiction! Eat your own sword; for your own position is no less nonsensical than mine!"

Well, actually there is quite a bit of dispute about this in the history of philosophy. Does it make sense to say that an uncaused causer exists? Is this a legitimate paradox, or only a contradiction?

An uncaused causer would certainly be an Independent Fact, if it exists, whereas a causer caused by something other than itself would certainly not be an IF. But these are not the only two conceptual options. The third option is a self-causing causer--which would also be an IF.

So, there are two concepts to consider for an Independent Fact: un-caused, or self-causing. In technical parlance, this would (respectively) be privative or positive "aseity" (which roughly means 'is-ness' or raw existence.)

Many philosophers and theologians throughout history (including many Christian authors) have thought not; there doesn't seem to be anything contradictory about a sheerly static existence--it is hardly contradictory to say that existence 'exists', after all! But, on the other hand, does it make sense to say that something which in its own self-existence is sheerly static, behaves to cause anything? Or does it make sense to say that something which is the ultimate source, one way or another, of all behavior, has utterly nothing to do with behavior in its own intrinsic self-existence?

Our infinite regressor may in fact be right to be suspicious about claiming that anything, even the IF, can exist without causing! And as it happens, I can say in hindsight that later (in Sections Three and Four) I will be agreeing, for reasons related to the questions I just asked, that it would be contradictory for the IF to be an uncaused causer--therefore, I will not believe such a thing to be true. Meaning that I will agree that our infinite regressor is right to disbelieve such a thing, too.

However, I am not presented, at this point, with only multiple contradictory proposals to believe. I am presented with at least one obviously non-contradictory option: that the IF is self-causing. The infinite regressor, on the other hand, presents me either with a self-causing infinite regression or an uncaused infinite regression; but neither way is going to help

his position because (as I previously demonstrated) his infinite regression is either way actually a tacit claim of the existence of an Independent Fact after all. A self-contained infinite regression might even be one way (if not the most accurate way) to describe an eternally self-causing IF! But in any case, there is no escape for the infinite regressor by means of his 'yeah, well, you too!' (or 'tu quoque') attempt. One way or another, we seem to both be talking positively about the same thing, and we may even be in some substantial agreement about this thing; and at the very least, our regressor cannot appeal to a regress in order to avoid making particularly definite claims about final reality: such claims are inherent in his own appeal, too.

So I find, whatever I do, that I am necessarily presuming an IF exists. I would feel nervous about this, except (as I've already noted) I think virtually every philosopher does this already, whether they spell out the implications or not.⁶⁷

For most people, this shouldn't require anything like a jolting revelation. If I go to an atheistic naturalist and ask her, "Does Nature really exist and is it dependent on anything else for its existence?" she would probably answer Yes to the

⁶⁷ I have not yet considered cosmological dualists; but I will be discussing them soon. A dualist would, in principle, agree that at least one (actually more-than-one) Independent Fact exists, and so (to that extent) they would be in favor of the IF notion over against the proposal of an infinite regression. I have been careful, up until now, about switching back and forth between saying 'an' IF and saying 'the' IF, with an emphasis on 'an' IF, precisely because I do not want to exclude dualists before discussing them.

first part, and certainly answer No to the second.⁶⁸ If I go to a certain type of pantheist (one who is not a 'negative' pantheist in the sense that everything must be illusion, although he might perhaps say that most things are illusion) and ask him whether the Absolute exists and if it depends on anything else, he will also say Yes and No respectively. If I go to a Muslim and ask him if Allah exists and if anything created Allah, he will also say Yes and No to those questions.⁶⁹

All of these people (I would fall into the same basic class as the Muslim)⁷⁰ are affirming the existence of what I am calling 'the IF'. They will be assigning different properties to the IF; but they are still talking about an IF. They can even all be correct about the IF, to at least some extent.

But, to what extent?

In the previous chapter, I said there were three ways the Final Fact can be (and historically has been) considered to transcend our ability to think about it.

⁶⁸ If she thinks Nature depends on something other than itself for its existence, then she is not a naturalist but a supernaturalist. She could, of course, still be an atheist: she might claim there is a supernatural-but-non-sentient system that produces the 'natural' Nature of physics, chemistry, etc. On the other hand, if she denied that Nature really exists, I am not sure what she would be but I doubt she could be usefully called 'a naturalist'.

⁶⁹ Notice, by the way, that I am not hanging anything here on positive vs. privative aseity. (The Muslim, for instance, would almost certainly be a privative aseitist: even Allah doesn't cause Allah to exist.) In fact, I won't be arguing much else along that line until I re-establish the conclusion again, later in Section Three.

⁷⁰ I mean, as being a supernaturalistic theist.

I have already dealt with the first option: that nothing we say about the IF can be true; and I have explained why I reject this position and any positions built upon it.

The second option is that everything we say about the IF can be true.⁷¹

This would certainly qualify as a concept we cannot fully fathom; and its adherents often affirm that such claims are particularly true: i.e., that the IF is not a generality or pure abstraction (although sometimes they go this route, too).

Best of all, its adherents can say not only that they are rendering honor to the IF (to whatever extent that may mean); but also that they need not dispute with any other belief. All religions and philosophies are equally true and valuable, they will say: none has preeminence.

On the face of it, this seems like a sensitive, refined, tolerant belief that reduces friction between people. Everyone comes out a winner, hostilities are minimized, and anyone disputing it automatically seems revealed as being necessarily fractious and an enemy to peace. And I admit, insofar as those reasons go, I would very much like for this concept to be true.

But I am certain that it is not.

⁷¹ An infinite regression proposal might be attempted as grounding for either concept, by the way: that all propositions are ultimately true or that none of them are. In my experience, I've seen inf-reg proponents attempt to link it to the former idea more often than the latter, though--maybe because linking it to the latter is too quickly and obviously self-contradictive to their own attempt! If no propositions are ultimately true, then neither is the proposition of an infinite ontological regression.

Let me imagine a meeting to discuss God. A naturalistic atheist, a positive pantheist and a Muslim show up.

I agree that any one of these people might benefit in various ways from listening for a while to the beliefs of the other two. They may find issues where they really do share beliefs, and so may establish a certain amount of sympathy for each other as people. They may have their own beliefs strengthened by listening to an opposing viewpoint and seeing serious problems with the opposition. They might even begin seeing serious problems with their own belief-system and act to modify it accordingly, perhaps closer in line with an oppositional belief.

But what they cannot do, is seriously discuss the topic of God from three different stances and agree that everyone is saying everything equally true about that topic.

The Muslim will say that the final fact of reality is sentient and moral, and that this entity (Allah) has definite opinions about, for instance, Muhammad. He will also say that God is one thing, and not another. If he did not, he would not be a Muslim; that is part of what it means to be 'a Muslim'.

The atheist will say that the final fact of reality is non-sentient and amoral, and that it doesn't have thoughts about anything, including about Muhammad: the prophet was not created by a sentient Entity upon Whom everything else depends, but by the non-sentient amoral Natural system instead; and consequently

Muhammad was quite mistaken about being inspired by Allah and/or the angel Gabriel. Muhammad may have said some interesting things, may have done some important things, maybe even have said some true things about reality; but he wasn't correct about those things. Our atheist will say this, because those beliefs are part of what it means to be 'an atheist'.⁷²

The positive pantheist will say that no Supernature exists, only Nature (there is only one metaphysical level to reality); in this she will agree with our naturalistic atheist, and disagree with our Muslim. She will say that this natural system is sentient; she will disagree with both of her friends on this. She will probably say that God is amoral (or perhaps 'beyond good and evil'); again, disagreeing with both her friends. (The atheist would say there is no God, or ultimate sentience; the Muslim would say that God is moral.) She will say these things, because this is part of what it means to be a (positive) pantheist.

These three people cannot all be equally correct in what they are saying about God.

One or two of them may be correct on topic A, and the third may be correct on topic B. And one of them may even be completely correct on all counts. But to claim they all can be completely correct on all their mutually exclusive positions

⁷² The atheist could even technically allow that an entity corresponding to Gabriel communicated with the prophet; but as an atheist, he will contend that this entity was not sent by a sentient Independent Fact (any claims of the entity to the contrary), and if (as is very likely) he is also a naturalist, he will also say the 'angel' was not a supernatural entity.

would be to claim a flat contradiction; and I have already explained why flat contradictions cannot be true realities.

Some pantheists, of course, are quite comfortable with assigning mutually exclusive properties to God as mutually exclusive properties. God is non-purposive, yet sentient, for instance; or, God is amoral, yet still provides us with a real moral grounding. So, our pantheist might decide she is really quite at home with this arrangement; she might decide she can stay a 'pantheist' and affirm that all things are true about God.

But our naturalistic atheist and our Muslim are not in the same boat; their beliefs only make distinctive sense by saying one thing and not another. They are always free to modify their beliefs, of course.⁷³ But then they will no longer be an atheist and a Muslim. They will be some kind of pantheist--and not even every kind of pantheist!

And this is my second reason for rejecting this type of concept: it is presented as a way to respect and acknowledge diversity, but when it is seriously practiced it leads directly to one (extremely muddled) type of pantheism--either that or its adherents aren't really practicing it yet.

Again, unitarian pantheism (to coin a phrase) is not supernaturalistic theism or atheism; it is certainly not the

⁷³ Actually, some atheists and Muslims might disagree with me about whether they are free to modify their beliefs, depending on their opinions about the existence of human free will. It would be more fair to say that their beliefs may be modified, which leaves the free will question to the side, for the moment.

kind of supernaturalistic theism believed in by conservative 'Unitarian' Christians, for example. The philosophy that promises an ultimate safeguard to all beliefs, instead converts all beliefs to a particular belief that is not those other beliefs.

I am tempted to call this 'insidious'; but I would be uncharitable to presume its adherents are consciously attempting this under the flag of tolerance and of acceptance of all beliefs. I think, however, that if I want to protect a distinctive belief of mine--or even to respect and listen seriously to the distinctive beliefs of you, my reader!--I cannot simultaneously maintain that all beliefs are true.

And this leads to my ultimate reason for rejecting this sort of position: its proponents do not--they quite literally cannot--mean what they claim to mean.

'All beliefs about God are equally true.'

Really? I believe some beliefs about God are more accurate than others and some are completely false.

'You are correct as well.'

But we disagree on this point! You say that all beliefs about God must be equally true, and yet also say that some beliefs about God are misleading or outright false! You are saying nothing at all about God.

At bottom, this position must be meaningless gibberish; or else it is a distinctively exclusive proposition about God. If it is the first, then I will not claim a 'belief' in it. If it is the second, then I still will not claim a belief in it, for I would be refuting myself immediately. Resorting to flat contradiction to save the position is, as I have explained, a useless tactic.

There is another way of putting my last point: such people often deny their own position in the practice of ethics.

'Really, none of this matters! Don't you see that we must for the sake of society turn to a recognition that all beliefs are equally valuable and true?'

Why do you say that?

'Look at your own obscurantist intolerant beliefs! Your Christian Church raped and plundered its way across the Old and New Worlds, exterminating whole peoples and cultures and rendering untold misery throughout centuries!'

I myself am of the opinion that the particular parties you refer to were not, in fact, following the metaphysics or ethics of Christianity when they did this, and rather were implicitly rejecting them while holding to them in name for personal gain.⁷⁴ However, let us assume for the sake of argument that they were

⁷⁴ Nor do I exempt myself from the principle of this opinion; for I am also a sinner, as well as a Christian. I will discuss this much later in my chapters on ethics.

indeed reflecting quite well the implications of Christian belief. What is your problem?

'My... my problem?? What kind of monster are you!? Is it not obvious?'

It would be obvious if they were wrong to do that.

'You're saying they weren't wrong!?'

No, we both are saying they were wrong to do that; and in your case you are putting at least part of the real blame on the specific characteristics of Christian belief.

'Certainly, because they were opposing other beliefs as damnably false! That is why we should embrace and recognize all beliefs as equally valuable and true.'

Except the belief of those people, evidently.

'Not if it leads to tragedies such as that.'

Then you are saying that all beliefs are equally valuable and true, and that some beliefs are better than others. Your beliefs (you say) lead to peace; some beliefs (apparently) lead to strife, hatred, fear and pain. You claim that strife, hatred, fear and pain are not equally valuable as peace--indeed that they have some kind of negative value; therefore the particular notions that lead to those things should be

rejected. That is why someone should be a unitarian pantheist (or whatever) and not exclusively a Christian (or whatever). But then, so much for the whole point to an all-inclusive belief-system. It turns out that some beliefs should be excluded after all--which is just as restrictive (in its own way) as Christianity, Islam, atheistic naturalism, or whatever.

As can be seen from the previous example, a practical appeal to action requires a decision to do one thing and not another; thus, even if only in particular circumstances, one course of action is really somehow better than another, which implies that the truth of one action is somehow also more accurate than another (even if, again, only in regard to some set of circumstances which might alter or be altered so altering the truth of those circumstances.)

My point is not to dissuade people from seeking peace and mutual fellowship. But, to try to seek peace by appeal to the idea that all ideas are in principle equally true or even only equally 'worthy', is either naively self-refuting--in which case practical action can only be achieved by, in effect, cheating against one's own position--or else it's a smokescreen of popularizing rhetoric, disguising the real position of the appealer, thus protecting it from rejection.

I don't have any problem believing that most (or even all?)

advocates of such a position, are honestly trying to come up with something to protect as many people as possible. But this kind of appeal simply doesn't work for that: the principle being appealed to has to be abandoned in order to act according to the goal for which the principle was appealed to. It may be paradoxical, it may even be ironical: but the truth turns out to be that in order to protect and respect the beliefs of everyone as far as possible, there must be an acknowledgment, at least in principle, that some ideas are truer and some are falser than others--and some ideas turn out to be simply false, in principle and in practice as to facts.

Much less can such a principle be appealed to as being logically true in itself (regardless of application); for, as illustrated, even then a tacit refutation of the principle must be included and affirmed. The idea that all ideas are equally true (or even equally 'worthy', as in 'worthy of application'), turns out itself to be a simply false idea.

Therefore, I cannot really consider all claims about God (or, to re-include the atheists here, let me say 'the IF') to be true.

This leaves the third option: whatever the IF is, it must have particularly exclusive characteristics; and I have explained already why I think that at least some of these characteristics must be discoverable in some fashion. There are claims about the IF that are true; and claims that are false;

and perhaps there are claims that are true about It under one condition and false under another. But that does not (as I have said) imply contradiction--although such a situation might manifest itself as a paradox, about which itself we should in principle be able to discover something particularly useful and true.

But some of my readers may now raise a worthwhile question: "You keep talking of 'the IF' and 'it' and 'itself' or 'Him'--or anyway as if It is singular. Perhaps you are right about an infinite regress being either necessarily false or necessarily presumed to be false; but why can there not be two (or some other limited number) of IFs?"

In fact, until now I have tried to alternate between saying 'the' IF and 'an' IF, precisely because I haven't yet touched this issue. Now it is time to consider whether there must be one and only one IF--be it sentient or non-sentient, natural or supernatural.

CHAPTER 8 -- in question of multiple IFs

So far in this Section of chapters, I have been proceeding by analyzing concepts which, if accepted, would shut down attempts at discovering anything particularly true about ultimate reality. These concepts have turned out, on analysis, to be either ultimately self-refuting (so that even trying to accept them ends up requiring that these concepts be rejected by their own acceptance); or else to be (or at least to require) some other concept instead that was supposed to be opposed by the concept.

Thus, the concept of an infinite ontological regression, ends up either leading to self-refutation (where there can be no legitimate grounds for discovering and so believing an infinite regression to be true) or else it actually ends up requiring at least one Independently existing Fact to be true after all: the regression itself, which was proposed as an alternative to the existence of a final Independent Fact, turns out to have the final characteristics of the IF. Or at least, it turns out to have the final characteristics of one IF.

But, instead of an infinite number of systems or levels of reality, each of them substantially different from one another and each dependent on something more fundamentally real and foundational with (supposedly) no final foundational reality

that just exists without dependence on something else more fundamental again--could there not be a multiple number of Independent Facts?

This question has to be asked, because in the process of trying to avoid absurdity, I have discovered I have to introduce the concept of what I am calling an Independent (or alternately an Interdependent) Fact--an IF. As I have done this, I find I am essentially recognizing and calling attention to something which everyone at bottom agrees exists; because in the process of checking the systemic integrity of fundamental proposals, I have discovered that even the opponents of an IF, if they are saying anything other than meaningless nonsense, are talking (without realizing it) about an IF.

As I have said, in a way my conclusion (so far) can be considered a variation of the Ontological Argument--but only in a limited sense. The IF might be sentient (a SIF), and be a supernaturalistic or naturalistic God; or it might be non-sentient (a n-SIF) and be the ultimate level of reality posited by atheists (be they naturalists or supernaturalists). Either way, I have concluded that we can discover (in principle) particularly real things about this IF--we can, in principle, identify true and false propositions about it.

But, as I suggested at the end of my previous chapter, since I have now decided that I must believe an IF exists, should I be speaking of the IF--only one IF? Or could there be

multiple IFs?--even an infinite number of IFs, though not an infinite ontological regression?

The difference between these two ideas of infinite systems of reality, would be that the regression is supposed to have no IF at all, but rather an infinite number of dependent levels of reality, where each level is dependent on something more fundamentally real (e.g. turtles all the way down); whereas, an infinite number of IFs would involve each system of reality being independently existent of each other--infinitely horizontal instead of infinitely vertical, metaphorically speaking. (e.g., an infinite number of turtles with universes on their backs, but the turtles aren't standing on anything.) Similarly, if a finite number of IFs exist, whether two or two billion or two sextaquadrillion, they would each exist independently of each other, without dependence on anything else (but themselves, perhaps) for their continuing eternal existence.

As it happens, the principles of multiple IFs may be discussed by considering the idea that only two of them exist; and interestingly, when philosophers and priests throughout history have proposed the existence of equal but separate ultimate entities, they almost invariably propose two rather than more. I will be concentrating, then, on 'ontological dualisms' in this chapter--as I hope you will see, whether we

are talking about two or two hundred million multiple IFs, the underlying principles come out to be the same either way.

I call these philosophies 'ontological dualisms' to distinguish them from other topics in philosophy which may be called 'dualisms'. For instance, the theory that the human mind is to some degree independent of the human body is known as 'mind-body dualism'. But M-B dualism is a rather specialized topic; and right now I am trying to decide what types of overarching philosophies do (or, deductively, do not) make sense as viable contenders for The Way Reality Really Is.

I think it doesn't matter in the end what type of ontological dualism is being proposed; but for purposes of example, let me present two of the most popular types. One I will call God/Nature dualism. The other, I will call God/Anti-God dualism.

God/Nature dualism proposes that God and Nature both exist and both are independent of each other. Nature cannot affect God; God cannot affect Nature. Nature is self-existent; God is self-existent. Neither one produced the other; both are eternal. Strictly speaking, God is extranatural, not supernatural, to Nature.

Put another way, one ultimate system is sentient (God), one ultimate system is non-sentient (Nature), and neither is 'above' or 'below' the other.

Or, to be more precise, Nature could be considered to be sentient or non-sentient in this type of dualism. A nominal deist who takes his worldview (God exists but has minimal effect on Nature) further into ontological dualism would, for instance, very probably consider Nature to be non-sentient (as cosmological dualists typically did do during the Enlightenment; which, being the most recent form of God/Nature dualism in Western culture, is why the sentient/non-sentient distinction between the two IFs is more familiar to philosophers today). On the other hand, some religions in world history seem to have proposed, or came close to proposing, that Nature and Supernature are both sentient, yet are also both equal and Independent of each other. (Such beliefs commonly involve masculine/feminine notions, too; but a very curious implication follows when they do--which I will discuss later in Section Two. Historically, I wouldn't say there is much evidence of a robust belief in both the Sky-Father and the Earth-Mother being both ontologically independent; but our sources are rather fragmentary. Modern neo-pagans sometimes go this route, however.)

God/Anti-God dualism states that Nature (which is usually agreed to exist--and is usually agreed to be non-sentient) is dependently produced by two ultimate entities. Both these entities are sentient, but they are both perfectly equal in

power. Neither one can affect the other;⁷⁵ neither one depends on the other; neither one produced the other; each entity is self-existent and was not created.

Although these two variants of 'cosmic dualism' have their own distinctive features, both of them propose or require two IFs to exist. Let me look more closely, however, at what this common idea entails.

By the terms of the proposal, the two IFs can have no power to affect each other. The problems associated with this can escape our notice because we, as humans, affect each other and Nature (and are affected in turn) all the time. But you and I as humans are not independents--certainly not within the worldview of any cosmic dualism I am aware of. We are at the very least commonly dependent on the overarching natural system that encompasses us.

For instance, I can poke you, and you may or may not be able to prevent me. If you can prevent me, then something other than my own choices may be constraining me; if so, then I am either partially dependent on this 'something', or this 'something' and I are interdependent and can affect each other equally.

But two interdependent entities, considered as themselves, must be part of an overarching system that allows them to

⁷⁵ Being sentient, one might perhaps choose to allow Itself to be affected by the other, although this is dubious--see below...

interact with one another. For example, the system of Nature encompasses both you and me.

This principle may not seem important when we are discussing 'dualisms' merely in theory; but it becomes devastating when a dualism is practically proposed.⁷⁶

Let us say a God/Nature dualism exists. Why should we say that? You and I are evidently part of Nature in some fashion; Nature affects our ability to think and to move, for example. But what does the proposal of a supernatural IF provide us, if Nature is also Independent? Explanations of events? What events? Not any event exhibited in Nature!--for if Nature is an Independent it must be invulnerable to extra-Natural effects. God might choose (as an intently active entity) to allow something, such as an extra-natural (or even a derivative) Nature, to affect Him; but a non-sentient Nature does not have that option.⁷⁷

God, in this proposal, can only exhibit events Nature does not exhibit; so how are we to perceive God? If we cannot perceive or otherwise detect God, or at least the effects of God, we are left with no positive grounds to accept a proposal of His existence; if we can perceive God's effects, then under God/Nature dualism they cannot be effects within Nature. But that doesn't matter, because we are derivative of Nature (at

⁷⁶ The principle also has some striking consequences in regard to a theistic IF. I'll be developing the topic much later in Section Four.

⁷⁷ The implications of this notion in regard to a pair of sentient IFs will be discussed presently.

least) under this theory; here we are within Nature, being clearly able to be affected by Nature (whether we choose to be affected by Nature or not), thus we must be derivative of Nature, and not derivative of God, Who (as an extra-Natural entity, even though also an IF) cannot cause effects within another IF system.

Yet, under God/Nature dualism, we can somehow 'perceive' God, at least insofar as having some mental 'conception' of God—otherwise we would not even be able to make the proposal of a God/Nature dualism. This perception must either be sheer illusion, or at best only an imaginary conception of ours (and there goes our last ground for accepting the proposal of a God/Nature dualism, leaving us with Nature as the sole IF); or else we somehow share or exhibit or form a common ground where the two effects (Divine and Natural) meet in some way.

But there can be no common ground in a cosmic dualism! Otherwise it isn't a cosmic dualism, because the common ground shows the existence of an overarching system that (even if metaphorically) 'encloses' the two effect-producers.

The actual implications of a God/Nature dualism, then, require me to reject it. Any conditions that might give me some initial grounds for concluding or even merely suspecting the truth of a God/Nature dualism, also require that I must be mistaken to even merely be hypothetically proposing it. I grant (as I have done before) that someone could sheerly assert this;

but I have explained why I do not think a mere assertion counts as a belief in the proposition. The characteristics of a God/Nature dualism, repel my ability to even cogently propose, much less accept, its existence. This being the case, I will believe that something else is true.

Let us say, as another example, that a God/Anti-God dualism exists. Why should we say that? You and I are obviously part of Nature in some fashion; and Nature for this scheme must be derived equally from these entities--otherwise it immediately runs into the problems of the God/Nature dualism.

Each SIF, though, God and Anti-God, would have an intrinsic interest in opposing whatever the Other is doing, including within commonly operative systems such as our Nature. Any action taken by one entity within the proposed system should be capable of being instantly countered as a zero-sum opposing effect by the other entity; and this zero-sum effect would be a guaranteed result of two necessarily equal/opposite entities, with perfectly ultimate access to our natural system. This perfect zero-sum effect, however, would extend to Nature being supposedly derivative from both IFs: there would be no resultant effects at all, including no generation of a derivative natural system.

Which of course brings us right back to the notion that our system of evident Nature is one of the IFs, only this time equal-and-opposite to the other IF. And I think dualists are

correct when they propose that a dual set of IFs would necessarily be opposed to one another in this fashion, down to their final foundational characteristics. Any characteristics they shared would imply a commonality of their own (purportedly Independent) 'natures'. Religions which feature (or could feature) an ontological God/Nature dualism where both are sentient Independent Facts--Sky-Father and Earth-Mother--are just as vulnerable to this problem, too, even though they wouldn't necessarily be vulnerable to the problem of mutual invulnerability (since each SIF could voluntarily allow the other to affect Him or Her.) And clearly there is an attempt at proposing the God and the Goddess to be equal-and-opposite: one is masculine, one is feminine; one is material, one is immaterial; one is cerebral, the other is emotional (maybe). Sometimes there is a reluctance at considering one to be good and the other evil, though; maybe both are just different kinds of neutral, or something like that. But even when people go the distance with this concept (and going the ethical distance on a masculine/feminine opposition certainly doesn't lead, in itself, to increased cooperation between men and women), the problem is that they just can't go far enough on the equal-but-opposite theme without one of the IFs being essentially denied as having existence at all.

This leads back to the most fundamental problem with any type of dualism, including God/Anti-God: the concept of two (or

more) IFs sharing any commonality, not only a common field of activity but even sheer existence, is contradictory to the concept of both of them being truly Independent. It indicates, instead, that they share some overarching reality, and this reality (not them) would be the true IF.

If it comes to it, the mere fact that we (as derivative beings) even try to think of two completely Independent entities, slurs over the fact that (for the moment at least) our own minds become the common medium. Or, perhaps not--for it would be a contradiction in terms for us to even cogently imagine the existence of at least one of them: the one with the property equal-and-opposite to that of 'having existence'. Such an 'entity' does not even exist; and then, so much for actually proposing an equal-but-opposite ontological dualism.

So, at best I am disinclined to consider an ontological dualism as a viable option. Thinking through the implications of such notions, leads me directly to something other than a ontological dualism: it leads me to some single IF.⁷⁸

⁷⁸ I will be returning on occasion to the concept of multiple IFs, in future sections of my book, in order to draw further contrasts between proposals.

I will also mention here that I distinguish between an ontological dualism (or other multiple-IFism) and a doctrine such as trinitarian theism. I realize this will look rather suspicious of me; but I cannot go into the details of the differences yet. At the moment, I will merely observe that multiple-IF systems, such as ontological dualisms, propose that the multiple IFs exist in complete and thorough independence of each other; whereas, for example, the Father and Son of the trinitarian Unity, do not exist independently of each other in any sense.

The intellectual difficulties of a trinitarian theology are admittedly intense, and efforts at reconciling the implications have led to the creation of many other religious groups, from modern times back throughout the history of Christianity. I think such solutions are incorrect, as I hope to

I will now add that theisms are not dualisms, and are not usually presented as such.⁷⁹ Jews, Christians and Muslims may believe in a Most Powerful Evil Entity--a Satan, or Shai'tan--but it turns out there are legitimate metaphysical reasons why we should, and do, say this entity is a derivative rebel against God, not an equal-and-opposite opponent.

Often theists will allow that Satan may have an equal-powered (and equally derivative) opponent against whom he fights. The Big Three Theisms have historically tended to identify this good opponent as the archangel Michael. But 'evil' (per se) is not explained this way--by theists, at least. (I will be returning to this in a much later chapter.)

Having brought up peripherally the concept of other Very Powerful Entities, I will now backtrack a little and explain in

demonstrate later; but I am certainly willing to believe the solutions were attempted in good faith--and accepted by God, in good faith. (Not that He would accept any error per se, but rather any good-faith intentions by which the people acted. Granted, this presumes a bunch of things, such as God's graciousness and charity and even existence, which I haven't established yet.)

⁷⁹ When such dualistic theisms formally arise in history, they are inevitably proposed to be distinct from mainstream theisms--by the mainstreamers and the innovators alike. On the other hand, it can be easy for a mainstream theist who isn't paying attention to his implications, to accidentally propose what amounts to an ontological dualism, even though when pressed he would disagree with the notion.

Also, I further distinguish between accidental slippage on one hand; intentional but serious alteration on the other; and intentional but fictional innovations: dualisms proposed in literature, film or other stories for merely narrative convenience. Such innovations are not usually intended to be definite metaphysical propositions; although given the right common desire to understand our world through stories, the line between mere narrative convenience and serious metaphysical proposal can quickly become blurred. I am entirely in favor of such attempts, when made in good faith; I only want to remind my reader that Satan may be presented as equal and opposite of God in a movie (for example), but this doesn't mean it makes sense, nor that theists accept such a belief as theists.

a bit more detail the notion of God which, even as a sceptic, I
would consider the primary argument to be about.

CHAPTER 9 -- God and gods

In my previous chapter I explained why I think the concept of two or more IFs (whatever their other characteristics may be) leads, one way or another, to a functional proposition of only one IF.

So far when I have discussed a sentient IF (or a SIF), I have identified the IF as 'God'. But of course, our history is full of religions where people declare the existence of numerous gods.

Notice I have changed the big 'G' to a little 'g' in that statement. I am not trying to belittle this type of belief, but to preserve an important philosophical distinction.

I had to delay this discussion until after I had already covered the issue of what an IF is, and also until after I had established that there was no real point to discussing multiple-IFs (whether sentient, non-sentient, or any mix thereof). Now, I can now safely go back and cover this important distinction.⁸⁰

The IF, as I have been describing It (or Him), is the basis (even the 'base' or foundation)⁸¹ of reality as a whole. What I

⁸⁰ I am also now in a position to cover in more detail what I mean when I contrast a non-sentient IF to a sentient IF--and that will be the topic of my next chapter.

⁸¹ In Greek of the New Testament period, this would be 'logos', a word originally linked to building-blocks; which may be why some popular children's toys today are called Legos... (The most famous Christian use of the word, is in John 1:1, of course: "In the beginning was the Logos, and the Logos was with God, and the Logos was emphatically God...")

can discover and reason out about the IF, will affect the scope of intrinsic possibilities of any future propositions I may consider.

If, for instance, I discover that philosophical naturalism must be true, then I must reject as an error any supernatural theory of angels or devils. 'Angels' and 'devils' might still exist, but if naturalism is true they cannot be supernatural in origin or character. It would be a contradiction for entities to have aspects not dependent on Nature, if Nature is the IF--and if naturalism is true, only Nature (one particular system of reality) exists: a philosophical naturalist denies the existence of multiple systems in an ontological sense.

So, any conclusion I reach about reports or propositions concerning angels and devils (for example) should reflect any previous conclusions I have drawn about the characteristics of the IF.

Here is a different example of the same concept. In some versions of Greek mythology, the Fact from which all other things derive their existence is Chaos. It does not think; it is not moral; it makes no choices. It simply reacts and counterreacts according to its own self-existent character. From Chaos, directly emerge the Titans. The Titans cannot overthrow Chaos; and not only are dependent upon it, but also exhibit many of its characteristics. From the Titans come Zeus and Hera, who begin the process of begetting the other gods of the Greek

pantheon--and the other gods produce more gods and demigods, humans, etc.⁸² The new gods can overthrow the old Titans because they are not utterly dependent upon them; but they cannot overthrow Chaos. Indeed, many Greek myths illustrate quite well, that (in their own fashion) the gods continue to exhibit the fundamental characteristic of the chaotic Final Fact.⁸³

The Greek gods, therefore, are not IFs; they are very powerful derivative entities. The entities derived in turn from them, could be less, more, or equivalent in power to them. The gods can trump each other, and to a certain extent they can be trumped by natural processes.⁸⁴ The gods are not supernatural; they are preternatural. And even if in some ways they might be considered to be supernatural (the distinction is sometimes smudgy and sometimes clear, as should be expected in stories told over long periods of time in a culture which developed and honed the practice of principle analysis), Chaos is supernatural to the gods and they still depend upon It.⁸⁵

⁸² I am not saying this is how the pantheon was developed by Grecian cultures historically, by the way. I am only borrowing one common, and perhaps fairly late, version of the myth as an example for purposes of illustration.

⁸³ The main difference is that the gods can take actions rather than merely react; and they do seem to have at least a truncated grasp of morality, neither of which are characteristics of non-sentient Chaos.

⁸⁴ It can be difficult to tell whether these natural processes are or are not supposed to be gods themselves, especially in Greek mythology; either way, the principle is the same.

⁸⁵ Curiously, some stories--later ones, perhaps?--also feature the Fates. The three sisters are peculiar adjuncts to the pantheon; they don't seem to be in the same class as the gods, and can trump them without being trumped in turn. They seem intended to represent something above the pantheon system which nevertheless is not Chaos: amoral and deterministic Law, perhaps.

This example illustrates why, although I consider the question of the existence and characteristics of gods to be interesting and even important; I don't consider it to be one of the first (or even middle) things to discover metaphysically.

Again, I don't mean this to denigrate those religions--I am trying to recognize the real implications of what those religions themselves have been designed to represent or 'say'. Polytheisms rarely (if ever) posit multiple self-existent gods (or Gods, in that case) from the get-go; and I have already explained why I think the very concept of multiple IFs leads to the recognition of a single IF anyway. So I should, and will, postpone the question of the character and existence of gods, until I figure out what properties the IF itself has.

Having explained why I consider the question of the existence of derivative gods to be secondary to (and dependent upon the conclusions of) my main task, I am now in a position to better explain my attitude toward Mormonism.

According to Mormon theology,⁸⁶ 'God' was once a man (presumably human, with basically human DNA, capable of breeding with us as a species), qualitatively like us, who somehow achieved Godhood on a different world (or perhaps natural universe) and then went off with His wife to establish our Earth

⁸⁶ Or, more precisely, according to one agreement among Mormons concerning their theology--the actual tenets for this notion are, to the best of my knowledge, found only in two sermons, one each by Joseph Smith and Lorenzo Snow, which sermons are not regarded as canonical authority by the LDS church.

(maybe including, if I have understood the claim correctly, this evident natural universe in total).

I have a number of problems with this proposal (presuming I have understood the Mormons correctly): for instance, I think it is untenable to claim that natural properties can somehow develop into previously nonexistent supernatural properties. But more to the point of this chapter, I think such a philosophy is technically, at bottom, some type of atheism, insofar as it distinguishes itself--not theism.

Naturalistic atheism would not, in principle, exclude the possibility of a naturally produced creature eventually attaining massive natural power and then doing many of the things attributed to God by the Mormons (or by any traditional theism, actually). God would be a naturally produced entity; He (or, rather, he) would be 'a god', not God.⁸⁷ He would still be, admittedly, the most interesting thing Nature (or some Nature somewhere in reality) has produced; and it would admittedly be prudent to obey such a powerful creature, in the same way that it would be prudent to obey King Arthur--or Stalin.⁸⁸

⁸⁷ Insofar as proper names go, it might be sufficient to say that he is 'God' if he is unique; but then one of the points to Mormonism is that any of us can attain exactly the same kind of development, and be exactly the same kind of entity as 'God'--and purportedly this happens on a fairly regular basis. The superiority of God to exalted humanity would only be the superiorities of a father to any of his natural descendants within a species.

⁸⁸ I don't think such an entity can be the proper ground of morality, although I will have to defer this topic until much later when I discuss the question of objective ethics. Without a proper ground of ethics, we would have just as much survival prudence to obey a powerful fiend. Of course, neither would there be anything wrong (per se) in loving and obeying a benevolent god of this type, any more than in loving and obeying a good father. But this gets back to the question of ethical grounding again.

The Mormons thus seem to be telling me about an emergent god. That may be well and good, it may even be true, but I want to find out what the characteristics of the final Fact are. And, not coincidentally, 'traditional' Judaism and Christianity (and Islam, which also claims Judeo-Christian historical/theological roots but which is not connected to Mormonism) are trying to tell me about that Final Fact--what I am calling the IF. Of course, so is atheistic naturalism. One set of philosophies tells me the IF is sentient, one set tells me it is non-sentient. The Mormons seem to be telling me the same thing the atheists are telling me, except with some unusual historical details.⁸⁹

So the Mormons must be quite right about at least one thing: either they or we 'traditional' Christians (or both) have gotten far off the tracks. But maybe I can get some hints about the correct answer by checking out potential IF properties and the consequent implications.⁹⁰ Looking for the characteristics of

⁸⁹ The unusual historical details would, in many cases, be ones I happen to agree with, of course. The LDS Christian and I would disagree on the meaning of some of those historical details; but then neither, I suppose, am I likely to have total agreement on interpretation of meaning with any theologian even within the 'traditional' branches of Christianity.

⁹⁰ I want to emphasize, however, that I am not arguing, in this chapter, that this aspect of the theology of the Latter-Day Saints is certainly wrong. I am only making use of a LDS theological position as an example of a distinction between a sentient Independent Fact, and a derivative-though-supremely-powerful creature. My first positive goal ought to be to discover whatever I can about the characteristics of the IF--and the implications of those characteristics.

I also understand, so far as I know at the time of this writing, that no authoritative source within the LDS church has specifically stated that God, having once been a finite and mortal man, was produced as such by a foundationally non-sentient reality. I only ask them to understand, in turn, that such a doctrine of God's pre-existence as a finite mortal human, implies God's own derivativeness from something else; and so--not having heard

the IF will give me at least a potential handle on what to make of existence/characteristics claims concerning entities which are (by the characteristics notably ascribed to them in their own stories) themselves derivative.⁹¹

But throughout my book I have been dividing one of the chief potential characteristics, into sentience vs. non-sentience. Some of my readers may ask whether this is a facetious division; or at least, should I not introduce a third category? There are some pantheists (not necessarily all) who would claim that the IF is mindless yet purposeful--or words to that effect. So this is where I will focus my next chapter.

further from them that the formerly mortal human God was himself produced by a truly final and transcendent God--the result implies an ultimate atheism to me. Call it a technical agnosticism if you wish; but if we are not to even consider or hope to worship the IF, but restrict our worship and regard 'as God' to these lesser entities instead, then the result is to shut out one option open to an actual agnostic, leaving over... what?

In any case, I think it is proper for me, if I am going to think about such issues, to discover so far as I can the properties of the foundational IF: and at this time, the LDS doctrine--popularly accepted as it is though without officially canonical status--is that the God they are proposing is not the final truly Independent Fact of reality. (Although the President of the LDS church or the Quorum of Twelve Apostles may clarify this at a future date.)

⁹¹ I understand there is another, perhaps less prevalent, type of Mormonism, wherein the three persons of God are treated as ontological IFs in themselves. I have already noted recently, though, how multiple-IF claims end up pointing toward a single IF after all, upon which the IF claimants would themselves be dependent. While my analytical examples were limited to two IFs, the principles work out just the same with any greater number of multiple IF claimants. This leaves me in much the same position, in regard to this variant of Mormonism, as to the more popular 'developmental' Mormonism: either way, the claims point back to an overarching IF; and as a metaphysician, my first concern is with figuring out the properties of that IF, insofar as I can.

CHAPTER 10 -- SIF/n-SIF vs. ??

I have been arguing throughout this book that philosophical positions can be most cogently divided into two mutually exclusive categories: non-Sentient Independent Fact, or Sentient Independent Fact. I have reached this position mainly by tracing the implications of apparently competitive belief-systems (it turns out they were advocating one of these at bottom all the time), or by discovering that competitive theories end in self-contradictions.

But some people throughout human history would agree there is such a thing as the IF (or at least we must presume there is, in order to build philosophies and subsequent sciences) and that we can discover particular things about it (at least in principle); yet they would also propose that this IF is, in essence or in effect, sentient and non-sentient.

For instance, the early Stoics (dating back before the Christian--or, if you prefer, 'Common'--era⁹²) believed the rock-bottom irreducible Fact of reality possessed Reason. Because of this, they insisted that human laws should be drafted and polished to mimic as closely as possible what we could discover about this divine Reason. At the same time, these Stoics insisted that this Reason had no purposes. It was, after all,

⁹² The replacement of BC and AD with BCE and CE works just as well either way. The 'Era', after all, is only 'Common' by being 'Christian'...

the physical element of Fire (which they thought was the basic building block of all reality--today we would think of it as 'energy'); and Fire, while it clearly 'behaves' very effectively, has no purposes. They thus rejected the concept that the Ultimate would initiate its own agendas or plans within 'our' world or in our societies. In a way, this philosophy was a rejection of Greek polytheism, perhaps (curiously) by combining the characteristics of two of its ultimate aspects: Chaos and the Fates. Exactly how people got to this belief is not what I am concerned with, however. Some early Stoics proposed (in effect) that what I am calling the IF was really sentient, and really non-sentient.

This type of idea can be found in many cultures, across many eras. In the late 18th through early 20th centuries, as scientists and philosophers were hammering out the implications of biological evolutionary theory, some thinkers proposed vitalism to be true. The rudimentary non-reducible Fact of reality is (according to this proposition) the space-time system we call Nature (taken as a whole); but the basic irreducibly fundamental units of Nature are alive. Yet they are too simple to have a mind: it seemed evident that minds (per se) could only be exhibited in the nervous clusters we call brains. The totality of Nature, considered as a whole (since it is not a 'brain'), must therefore also be considered mindless. Yet (said the vitalists) evolution could be explained as the striving of

this mass of ultimately living matter to the intrinsic purpose of self-organization. Entropy might win out in the end, but the natural cohesion of matter (despite entropy in the meanwhile) illustrated this willfully purposeful organization.

Against the vitalists were the mechanists, who proposed that Nature as a whole was not and could not be alive, and certainly its most basic units were not alive; and without life (or even with rudimentary life), purposes did not exist at that level. Obviously the mechanists included atheistic naturalists; but (for what it is worth) they also included supernaturalistic theists of various stripes, trying to make sense of the new data.

Again, the scientific/philosophical combinations involved at this juncture are too numerous for me to try to trace (and frankly I haven't the pertinent information to do so). My point is merely that vitalism was another (yet distinct) example of a belief that what I call the IF is both sentient and non-sentient.⁹³

'It really can think, but it really has no purposes and does not initiate action.' 'It really cannot think, but it really has purposes and does initiate action.' I think either

⁹³ In fact, I am a little unsure about how accurately I have represented these belief-systems. But my point here (and even in other chapters) is not to argue that such-n-such people believe(d) this-and-that; but rather to discuss the implications of this-and-that belief, for which purpose I think such-n-such people provide good examples. If I am wrong about whether they are proper examples of the notion(s) I am discussing, the correction would merely eliminate an illustrative example; the correction would not cause direct problems for my inferences about the principles I am discussing.

version of this concept is necessarily self-contradictory when referring to properties of final reality at the primary level; and anything built on this concept will either carry that self-contradiction at its core, or else emphasize (perhaps accidentally) one side at the expense of the other--thus ceasing for all practical purposes to be that sort of belief.⁹⁴

Where self-contradictions are maintained throughout more complicated expressions of the concept, I still literally have no good reason to accept the proposition and so no good reason to accept anything developed afterwards on those grounds: the self-contradiction itself ensures (as I illustrated earlier) that there are no grounds. Advocates of this type of notion might be saying true things about reality when they get to their more complicated proposals; but they would be saying those true things despite their initial position--and this would tell me that if they do happen to be matching reality, then there should be another way to get there.

Furthermore, an attempt to begin in flagrant contradiction must (as a practical matter) collapse into either one proposition or another, in order to maintain some kind of cogency (so far as I have examined SIF and n-SIF propositions).

⁹⁴ As I will discuss much later in Section Three, however, I actually have quite a lot of sympathy for this position when regarding Nature not as the IF but as a creature; and even quite a lot of sympathy for this position when regarding the IF, not as the IF essentially is, but in Its (or His) generation of a reality that is not substantially the IF. In a way, then, I do in fact consider the intuition behind the sorts of metaphysic I am discussing here to be correct, though misapplied in an inadvertently, or even overtly, contradictory fashion.

The Middle and Late Stoics, for instance, focused increasingly on the practical application, at both the individual and state level, of the ethics derived from the ultimate Reason. Eventually, some Late Stoics began to express their views in language that hinted an approach to--or maybe even an acceptance of--the notion that the divine Reason was a purposeful, fully sentient deity; the IF was a SIF.⁹⁵

This would be only another working-out of issues I have raised before (primarily why I should avoid truly contradictory claims about the IF, if I am going to bother searching for true ideas about it); except that it also has more than a passing acquaintance with some issues I will be raising later in my second section. So I will focus a little longer on these two propositions, and see what comparing and contrasting these claims can tell me about how we, as humans, perceive 'sentience'--which will also help illustrate why I consider this both/and notion to be contradictory, not only paradoxical.

On one side of the attempt to combine both positions, we have this concept: the IF is a Mind, but it has no plans and does not initiate events.

⁹⁵ I am qualifying myself here, because it is highly debatable exactly what some of the Late Stoics thought about the matter. That their language began to trend this way seems indisputable, but they might have been borrowing language for convenience from truly theistic thought which was becoming increasingly more popular in the Mediterranean area during the Late Stoa period. Similarly, theists, including Christians, would also borrow language for convenience from belief-systems they did not precisely agree with. Keep in mind that theistic thought can include naturalistic theism (pantheism) as well as supernaturalistic theism.

On the other side of such an attempt, we have this: the IF is not a Mind, but it has plans (or 'purposes') and initiates events (or 'strives').

One way to analyze the cogency of these propositions is to ask: what do these propositions offer?

The first option may seem to offer an explanation for the apparent intelligibility of the universe: the universe is not completely arbitrary, and there are notions we can discover about it which we can trust to a very large degree (maybe absolutely) to be true statements of the way reality really is.

These notions could be called static, or even objective, truths, although (like a mountain that isn't going anywhere) these truths would reflect different aspects under different conditions. Two oranges and two tomatoes will always take up four spaces in your box--unless you cut the oranges into sections, after which they are arguably no longer 'two oranges'. And the observations we make about things like this, give us data from which to infer reliable truths.

It would be easy to slur 'intelligible' into 'intelligent'; it would, in fact, be one variation of the famous (or infamous) Argument from Design.⁹⁶ But I don't think the Stoics did this, necessarily. I think they looked around at their lives and their world, and concluded that the entities capable of the best efficiency were capable of reasoning. Greek thinkers were very

⁹⁶ It would also, I think, be another variation of the externalistic fallacy: just because an entity behaves intelligibly, does not mean the entity is itself intelligent.

concerned with 'efficient causes', and the Stoics were no exception; thus the ultimate (and most 'effective') efficient cause must (they decided) be capable of Reason. The 'highest' thing they (and we) meet in our world is reasoning ability; thus Reason must in some way be a function of the highest thing.⁹⁷

Yet the Stoics do not seem to have been proposing an entity that could give commands or introduce effects into the natural order in any fashion; they had already had quite enough of that, thank you very much, from Greek polytheism.

At any rate, I can see that if I accepted the first variation of 'sentient and non-sentient', I might have some reassurance that reality was, at bottom, at least somewhat similar to myself--and a Stoic was very properly concerned with reaching his or her full potential, which involved interfacing most efficiently with reality (which naturally would be feasible if ultimate reality shares some key characteristics with us). At the same time, I wouldn't need to worry about this Mind personally bothering me--it has no purposes, no plans, no personality. It doesn't initiate action. It isn't going to send a priest to my door asking for contributions to the temple, or for my sons in a war--or for my soul's allegiance. I can pay attention to it as a Mind when I want to, and when I feel like it; it is convenient to me. (Time to suggest new laws at the public forum? Well, let's think about how this divine Mind would

⁹⁷ This would be one variant of the Argument from Reason, though not one of the variants I myself employ.

try to order things if it was faced with our particular situation.)

The second proposition offers me a very similar package, despite the switch in characteristics. Instead of the cold, unfeeling mechanism of Darwin and his ilk, Nature must be alive--like me!⁹⁸ Nature is 'up to something', and for all I know it could be something good--if not for me, well, then for my descendants, because self-ordering is in Nature's character (so to speak).⁹⁹ I am alive; it is alive. It and I are not so different. I can look back in all sorts of history, and see Nature providing just the right events at just the right times to bring about--me! At the same time, I needn't worry about Nature bothering me--it has purposes and initiates action, but it has no personality. The kind of actions it initiates are, well, really beneath my notice; too simple and basic to bother me. It isn't going to send a priest to my door asking for contributions to the local parish, or for my sons in a crusade--or for my soul's allegiance. I can pay attention to it as a Life when I want to, and when I feel like it; it is convenient to me. (Look at the past, this is the way history is going; and that means this is the way Life itself, the irreducible Fact of the universe, is striving to go. It is mankind's destiny to be part of the plan I am advocating.)

⁹⁸ Remember that insofar as natural mechanism goes, the supernatural theists would also usually be included with the "ilk" of Darwin...

⁹⁹ Well, somewhere in Nature's character anyway, mumble mumble entropy mumble...

Obviously, these two ideas throw a sop to my own pride; it is (only) up to me to figure out what the Divine Nature is up to. The Divine either isn't smart enough to understand its own plans, or despite being 'rational' it doesn't have plans. It either isn't smart enough to have opinions of its own, or despite being 'rational' it cannot initiate judgments to form 'opinions' per se. The world is on automatic pilot; and the pilot is an autistic savant who happens to be pretty good at piloting! He's going to do his job, which is only worth my time noticing on the macrohistorical scale, and I'm going to do mine (vitalism). Or, he's going to do his job, and I'm just along for the ride; although it makes a difference to my happiness whether I buckle-up in a first-class seat and take the ride as it comes, or pop open the hatch to crawl out on the wing (early Stoicism). Either way, the pilot isn't going to come out of the cabin and annoy me. I may have to put up with some unruly passengers, of course; but that is to be expected.

On the one hand, we have a denial of initiation ability for the IF; but it still somehow represents the necessary order of interactions between cause/effect, ground/consequent. It is unconscious, but can still produce efficient mental effects--as I can reactively answer questions under anesthesia, although I didn't choose to.

On the other hand, we have an affirmation of initiation ability for the IF, although this doesn't include the processing

of efficient mental effects: despite its initiation ability, it is still considered to be (quite overtly so) 'unconscious'. Thus it doesn't consciously judge--especially it doesn't judge me! The particular actions it initiates are essentially beneath my notice. Insofar as my own convenience goes, it is not initiating actions at all. (Unless of course its actions are convenient for me to notice and appeal to.)

An atheist, in distinctive opposition, would say: the IF does not initiate purposeful actions. It does not think. It is blind, unconscious, automatic. There is no point in saying that It has Reason if those other claims are true about It; that is just playing with words.

A theist (including, I think, even some pantheists), in distinctive opposition, would say: the IF does initiate actions. It has purposes, and plans, which It is striving to bring to fruition. It knows where it wants to go; and It knows where It wants Nature to go. And that means It knows where It wants me (and you) to go, because one way or another we are part of It. And if It has plans and purposes, then by default--by definition of what a 'plan' and a 'purpose' is--It is intentionally, actively excluding one set of potential behaviors for another set. There is no point in saying It does not have Reason if those other notions are true about It; that is just playing with words.

The n-SIF advocate (for example the naturalistic atheist) and the SIF advocate (for example a Jewish theist) both cut pretty cleanly, I think, through the contradictions of the attempt at a middle-ground. For this reason (and for some reasons involving contradictions in general, which I have already covered in previous chapters), I will eventually be required to decide, if I can, whether the IF is sentient (as an action initiator that can, among other things, actively judge the coherency of linked propositions), or non-sentient (a blind, automatic, non-purposive mechanism that initiates no actions but very effectively reacts and counterreacts).

The middle-ground pantheist (this type of middle-grounder is typically a pantheist, although not all pantheists accept this both/and proposition about the IF) may reply that she didn't literally mean the IF has Reason, or that it has 'purposes'. She was 'only' speaking metaphorically.

I note that in the way she would use this term, she means something reductive--she means the reality is less, not more, than her description implied. I also note this can only lead to a n-SIF proposition if it is followed through consistently. No one ever bothers to say they were 'only' speaking metaphorically when they denied something had active purposes or when they denied something could accurately judge abstract links of reality in what we would consider a 'cogent' manner. No one bothers to say they were 'only' speaking metaphorically when

they described reality as 'blind, automatic and non-purposive'!

The middle-ground proponents could turn out to be atheists (of some sort) after all.

On the other hand, I don't think reductionism is a very good example of what it means to speak 'metaphorically'. Although I think such reductionistic use of metaphor can represent a definite notion that its adherent is trying to get across, such a tactic can be abused to imply that whenever anyone speaks metaphorically they really mean less than they appear to be saying.

I strongly disagree with such a use, and the removal of this misconception will help some people deal with claims about 'religion'. So to the topic of metaphor I now turn.

CHAPTER 11 -- 'on' metaphors

People sometimes attempt to explain apparent contradictions in this fashion: "I was only being metaphorical." This does resolve the contradiction; but at the cost of retaining anything like the apparent meaning of the term or phrase thus 'metaphorized'.

If a person claims that $6 = 16$, she can always later say, "I was only being metaphorical when I claimed '16'". But then, so much for '16' representing any kind of distinctive property. She really meant $6 = 6$; and if she is going to play fair, she must remember that having 'explained away' 16 as a 'metaphor', she should not go back to its apparent attributes later and treat them as if they were in fact exclusively reflective of the properties of 16.

Thus I grant that this type of reductive metaphorization can be done. It can also be abused (and quite often is in discussions about religion), but if it is done fairly and the implications are kept in mind and not shuffled around for convenience, real progress can be made in hashing out the implications of an idea.

So, for instance, almost everyone except the vitalists thinks the fundamental units of Nature are blind, automatic and non-purposive; the opposite properties do not appear within

Nature until certain levels and types of complexity are reached. Theists, atheists, dualists, all agree with this--even many (if not all) polytheists, and some pantheists might.¹⁰⁰

Nonetheless, when discussing what these particular base-units are 'doing', we often end up talking as if we were vitalists; speaking for convenience as if muons and electrons and carbon-ring molecules were initiating actions instead of merely reacting and counterreacting purely to environmental stimulus or internal randomization.

It is very difficult to have a discussion about these entities unless we use words in this fashion. Even the most dyed-in-the-wool naturalistic atheist will occasionally (even often!) find himself speaking about the 'order' and 'design' of Nature using terms which do not fit atheism. And this isn't necessarily a bad, or incorrect, or misleading practice--unless he goes on to require as part of his theory of the origin of (for instance) sentience, that these particles really do initiate actions and have purposes after all. This would be an accident--he is an atheist, he doesn't really mean that--but the correction might have serious implications for the viability of the particular theory he was trying to build.¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰ Specifically, some pantheists might agree that although the sum-total of Nature is really sentient, the particular units or even some complex parts are not. Our own bodies would make a handy analogy. 'Negative' pantheists, to give a very different example, would regard the fundamental units of Nature to be illusory; which certainly is no positive claim about their active sentience.

¹⁰¹ Although perhaps his conclusion could be reached by a different, even equally atheistic, argument.

However, although we can and do sometimes use metaphor this way, I don't think this is the way we normally use metaphor. I think it is not only possible but also very common for us to use metaphor to stand for (or 'mean') more, not less, than what the imagery implies.

In writing this book I was inspired by the efforts of C. S. Lewis in his Miracles: A Preliminary Study. This is probably the only chapter that has a direct parallel in MaPS, though: the chapter on "Horrid Red Things".

Lewis asked us to understand three principles, all of which affect how and why and when we use metaphors. But I will be taking them out of his order of presentation, to better fit my own flow of discussion:

1.) "Thought is distinct from the imagination which accompanies it."

Sometimes this can be true without using metaphor, per se. For example, when I write Christian apologetics, I occasionally have background imagery in my head of cinematic fencing duels and/or epic music. When I wrote the first draft of this chapter, there were fragments of Jerry Goldsmith's score from the movie The 13th Warrior pinging around in the back of my mind. I suspect this happens because those sounds and images were stored in my memory with certain 'riders' or 'tags', so that similar emotions and cognitive thought processes would be likely to catch on those tags and 'pull them' in passing. This may be the

psychological event known as 'association'; but it is not itself the event of 'building an argument'. I don't need to have associations with swashbuckling movie scores floating around in my head to cognitively analyze propositions, or to express my conclusions to myself and to you.¹⁰²

If I tell you about those associations, however, you can probably infer some useful and true information about the emotional and perhaps ethical quality I assign to my work. I could also choose to build sensuals like these directly into my relation of my experience, or even of my ideas: I would be expressing myself poetically, to help communicate the quality of my experience to you.

Similarly, associative sensory imagery can give me a means of expressing my ideas to myself--something to build on, and go beyond. If I am trying to think about the spatial relation of the Earth and the Sun to each other, I inevitably imagine what I am talking about. But I don't imagine it accurately; indeed, I cannot. No one can accurately imagine 93 million miles of space between the Earth and the Sun, much less the proper proportionate sizes of the Earth to the Sun, very much less the detailed physical description of each cosmic body. Granted, the physical description may not be important for expressing the distance and the calculated conclusions from the distance; my point is that even if my mental imagery was expressed to you in

¹⁰² Indeed, in the years since first writing this book, these associations have become much less frequent when I do apologetics. Perhaps from mental fatigue...?

detail as my imagery stands, the resemblance to the 'real' things, in their real situations, would be extremely inaccurate.

But would that resemblance be inadequate?

It depends on what I am using the resemblance for, and the degree to which I mistakenly believe my imagery to reflect the reality. Thinking of the Earth as a blue dot instead of a blue/green/brown/white dot with all the clouds and continents and oceans and icecaps in their proper positions, does not mean my conclusions about orbital mechanics will be inaccurate. For that matter, the fact that I cannot quite get the comparative distance/size proportion imagery correct in my head when I discuss the issue, does not mean I cannot reach proper conclusions about the subject.

Here, then, is a further principle subordinate to the first one. I cannot with total accuracy express the topic I am discussing with sensory imagery, even to myself.¹⁰³ How much less, then, can I accurately express to you the details of what I am thinking about? Thus:

2.) "Anyone who talks about things that cannot be seen, or touched, or heard, or the like, must inevitably talk as if they could be seen or touched or heard."

I think this is correct; but I take it a bit further, along lines which Lewis himself discussed in that chapter and in other books (and which lines I think he would approve).

¹⁰³ It could be orbital mechanics, or genetics, or quantum physics, or psychology, or sociology, or legal theory, or any of a massive number of topics.

In principle, you could get in the right spatial position so that the lightstreams emanating from the Sun and reflecting off the Earth would each strike your optic nerves at the same time without you having to turn your head; and in principle, your eyes (or other recording instruments) might be sensitive enough to properly represent this state to your mind for processing. In such a way, the spatial relationship of the Earth to the Sun could (in principle) be 'seen'.

Nevertheless, I doubt whether an accurate attempt would succeed in giving the mental representation we might expect. Indeed there would still be some details inevitably missing: the Earth would at best be a mere white or whitish-blue pinprick of light, which misrepresents (as it stands) the complexity of its surface and atmospheric features. And in any case such a perception would by necessity ignore details on the other sides of the Sun and Earth!

Then there is the variety of appearances which might mislead without correction: if I am returning from the Moon to the Earth, I could possibly see the Sun and Earth together at the same time, and simultaneously I would be 'looking through' the 90+ million miles of space between them. But taken by itself, this image could be extremely misleading. The space certainly would not look like it is 90 million miles wide;¹⁰⁴ the Earth would look much larger than the Sun; and the Sun would

¹⁰⁴ Because I would be looking along the space between the Sun and Earth, thus perceiving a foreshortened line, rather than perceiving the line in 'all its length'.

have hardly any visible detail, but would be a mere pinprick instead.¹⁰⁵

Even in the more complete sense, then, Lewis' dictum stands: we cannot receive a fully accurate sensory impression of the relationship between things that even can be 'seen' (much less what cannot be seen).

And this applies to everything in our experience. The book you are reading right now presents one appearance to you; set it on the table, and it presents another appearance. The information you thus receive may be complementary by inference and conflation; but the mere presentations they make to your senses are not (taken by themselves) compatible, and may even be mutually exclusive. If I throw the book at your face, its appearance shall change once again rather drastically (a blur and a bright light in sequence) and shall be accompanied by different sensory impressions (a 'whiff' and a burst of pain-feeling, perhaps). Even when the book sits on the table without being moved around, its appearance taken by itself is misleading to the reality of the book: it does not really have three sides (the ones visible to you at any time), but six (not counting various levels of 'bumpiness'!) And it is not sitting motionless on the desk. Its composite parts are in constant motion, and the book itself as a unit is hurtling through space away from the

¹⁰⁵ Alternately, you yourself can go outside roughly once a month and see the full moon and the sun in the sky at the same time. Going strictly by that sensory image--especially during a solar eclipse--you might conclude they were roughly the same size; which is what many ancients did quite reasonably conclude!

center of the universe, orbiting other galaxy clusters as part of a supercluster, orbiting other galaxies as part of a cluster, orbiting a galactic center, orbiting a star, revolving with the skin of the planet, tilting slightly as our planet's axis shifts, and drifting with our continent on a sea of magma. All these events are happening; but we cannot detect them all simultaneously and fully, nor even keep them all properly in our minds as abstract concepts!

We must use extremely inaccurate sensory descriptions of these things when communicating our ideas to ourselves and to other people, whether we know the extent to which we are being inaccurate or not.

So what happens, when we turn to concepts or physical events for which there cannot be, even in principle, accurate sensory information? The quantum physicists tell us that atoms are, in reality, unpictureable. Any illustration of a carbon atom is very inaccurate because photons don't interact with atoms like that. If you can understand this, then go one step further (one step farther?) and consider how inaccurate the words 'understand' and 'one step further' are, to the mental events you are currently expressing!¹⁰⁶ We never really see or hear or smell or taste or feel things in their completeness; but we must speak for convenience as if we do. We have no other way of thinking and communicating.

¹⁰⁶ Thus, the quotes I humorously put around 'on' in the title for this chapter; this chapter is not literally sitting 'on' metaphors!

Some people would take this view into a complete philosophy of subjectivity or relativity. I do not take it that far; but neither do I claim that a perfectly objective thought or perception can be achieved--except perhaps by the IF (if It is Sentient). It is true that different circumstances will result in different appearances of the solar system or of my book in your environment. And it is true that taken as themselves these perceptions are not only misleading, but misleading to different degrees and in different ways in different circumstances.

But behind all of your and my subjective perceptions and expressions, are real objective realities, with their own composite properties. These realities might not be what I think they are--if atheism is true, for instance, then my experiences of being in a relationship with a supernatural God Who has a personality, must not be what they seem to me to be. But my subjective perceptions of such an event will reflect some other objective facts. An atheistic psychologist will agree that real objective events are occurring in my brain to produce this perception. They are just not the events that I think they are.¹⁰⁷

On the chance that some readers have misunderstood me: I am not saying that all our perceptions and expressions are completely inaccurate; I would be refuting myself if I did, for I am expressing these thoughts to you and trying to convince you they have some sufficient accuracy! I am saying that all our

¹⁰⁷ I do not necessarily deny that such events are also taking place, by the way. For reasons I will talk about later, I would actually expect those events to be also taking place.

perceptions and thoughts are (and must be, by our nature) inaccurate to some degree; but they may be accurate in one way while being inaccurate in another.

When I ask if you understand what I am trying to get across, I do not mean that I am asking whether you are standing in a deep ditch while I toss something above you spanning the sides of the ditch. I might mean that; but if you are familiar with the English language and can analyze contexts sufficiently, you will receive an adequate (not completely accurate) communication from me about the topic of your success at 'following' me in my 'point'.

And as you can 'see' from these last few sentences, I cannot 'jump off my own shadow'. Our languages are 'incurably' metaphorical. "We can make our language drier," Lewis says. "We cannot make it more literal." The 'literal' is in fact the 'actual'; our expressions and thoughts and imaginings (especially our imaginings) do not create the actual.¹⁰⁸

On the other hand, if there is a God, His expressions may be perfectly 'literal'. It is no accident, perhaps, that in Judaism and its descendants, God speaks creation into existence.

Then again, if there is such a God, and He communicates to derivative beings such as you and I, He will have to communicate in a fashion we can 'relate' to, through the Nature He designed

¹⁰⁸ Or at least very rarely do we create an actual that corresponds very closely with what we are talking about. If I deliver a speech on sound transmission, part of my communicated description will describe what I am in fact actualizing at that moment; but such circumstances are rare coincidental exceptions, not necessities.

and implemented (and still implements). And this means that what He tells us, however He might choose to do so, will be communicated in metaphor; just like what you tell me and what I tell you must be expressed in metaphors. To require that He could do otherwise would be not only to misunderstand how we already express ideas to ourselves and to others, but would probably require that we be God's equal in actuality and ability and independence. Even God (as I have argued earlier) cannot do what is self-contradictory; and it seems to me that expecting or requiring ultra-literal communications from God to us, requires contradiction.

Remember, however, that such metaphorical expressions may very well still be adequate (including in a historical sense). Indeed, if God expresses them then they will be fully adequate for whatever purposes He has in mind. But then again, we might ought to be cautiously careful about concluding what purposes He has in mind! If we believe in God, and if we believe we have communications from Him, then we can trust (given we have already established those other notions) that He is giving us true and useful information of some sort, and so we could reasonably attach great authority to the communication. But it will still be up to us to figure out what exactly is being communicated, and why, and to what degree later information may alter our perception of what is being communicated to us by God.

I realize this introduces what is perhaps an unwanted level of complexity for Jews, Muslims and Christians (like myself) who would prefer a straight-up straight-out reading of Scripture at all points. I am no different; but I also ought to ask myself whether the designs and intentions of God should perhaps be given some priority to my own wishes, on this matter!

And, as a Christian at least, if I do consider our scriptures to be in any useful sense historically reliable (which, as it happen, I do), then I have my answer about God's actions on this subject. The man I believe to be God Incarnate, Jesus of Nazareth, rarely gave a 'literal' answer to any question, and the information he (or, rather, He) communicated to His followers was not always exactly what His followers thought He was telling them. Evidently, He did not even intend that His listeners would understand Him instantly! He expected them to work it out themselves; and sometimes the greater impact of what He said had to wait until His followers had other data at hand.

Or, as another example, if scientists (atheist or otherwise) now replace what we would call the 'scientific' details of the Genesis creation story (or stories) with more detailed information, then I think I am not working against God's own 'modus operandi' to seriously consider whether their theories help us understand better what God may have had to colorfully abbreviate for the sake of His original audience. If

I flatly refuse to take modern science's attempts seriously, because God 'would not' tell our distant ancestors a story which was anything other than the pure 'literal' truth and could not be added to in understanding; then in taking that superliteral stance I would be (as far as I can tell) implicitly denying the divinity of Jesus--because that is not the way He worked!

So if we Christians think Jesus was (and is) God, then yes: God might give us information in this metaphorical, not superliteral, fashion. It remains to carefully check, on a case-by-case basis, to see whether He has done this or not. If I take seriously the message of the Hebrew prophets to Israel, as reported in the Hebrew scriptures, then God evidently communicates very often to us in this fashion: the truths of His messages have to be worked out to some degree by us, and later events and knowledge might bring expanded meanings (fully intended by God) to old communications.¹⁰⁹

The preceding few paragraphs probably won't be very interesting to my sceptical reader--I still have a large and chewy wad of inferences (metaphorically speaking!) to successfully draw before I could fairly expect it to mean much to you--but the point I am trying to make for this chapter is that recognition of metaphor is not necessarily (or even usually) a means of explaining away religious propositions. Even

¹⁰⁹ As with most contentions, there is a danger of heresy here; but by acknowledging the act of reasoning involved in the process, at least we won't be hampering our ability to avoid or reverse heresies.

in our own commonly shared 'mundane' experiences, metaphors usually mean more than they appear to say, not less.

The reality expressed by a metaphor can be (and often is) further along the lines that the metaphor itself represents, precisely because metaphors are shorthand ways of adequately (although somewhat inaccurately) expressing our ideas, to ourselves and to others. As in my solar system example, or the example of my book in your hands, one single perception or expression taken by itself may be perniciously misleading; but multiple perceptions of the same event or object will (almost by default) provide us with a better composite 'picture' of what we are trying to think or say, correcting misleading perceptions but very rarely overthrowing completely our entire idea about the concept or object. You can often find authors (like myself) putting this strategy to use with illustrative analogies: different practical examples of the same principles allow us to provide for a richer and fuller understanding of the actual object or condition or idea we are trying to express to you.

Presenting the analogies as arguments, of course, is a conclusion-killing gaffe. Sometimes it can be hard to tell the difference between the two situations; but even the abstract concept of those two situations illustrates the principle I am trying to get across here: metaphors are about something else-- usually something more than the metaphor (by itself) implies. When the metaphors are mistaken for the something else in its

entirety (or much closer to its entirety), then a faulty foundation is laid for whatever may follow afterward.

This is one reason why we humans make so many mistakes: the field for error can be very wide, especially when we are mistaking a piece for the whole. But we must be careful, following the same principle, not to automatically toss away every attendant proposition if we discover that someone has mistaken a false image for reality. And this brings me to Lewis' third point:

3.) "Thought may be in the main sound even when the false images that accompany it are mistaken by the thinker for true ones."

I may have my visual proportions mixed up in my necessary mental image of the Earth's proximity and size compared to the Sun; but I can still work the math and get it right. I may get some answers that consequently don't look right compared to my mental image; and of course that may be a clue my associative impression needs improving! But generally speaking it would be fallacious of an opponent of mine to attempt to refute my orbital mechanics calculations by reporting that they don't match my mental impressions, even if I happened to believe the content of those mental impressions (not realizing the content of both ideas must be exclusive). My opponent could use one of my concluded beliefs (A) to correct another related belief of mine (B), and he might rightly fault me for trying to hold both

at once; but he could also be wrong to use the falsity of B to argue the falsity of A.

Lewis uses the example of a little girl who thinks that poison, in any given substance, is "horrid red things". She really believes that if she separated the poison out of 'poisonous' solids and liquids, the poison would really look like, and be, horrid red things. But an enlightened adult who attempted to refute her claim that lye is poisonous by correcting her false belief about what 'poison' looks like, would still be in for a nasty shock if he drank it! Indeed, with a little investigation he might have discovered that she did not believe lye poisonous because it contained horrid red things (which she knows she cannot see in the lye), but because her mother (who may have sufficiently accurate reasons for saying so) has told her the lye is poisonous and she trusts her mother. She imagines, and so thinks, the red things are in the lye, not because she can see them, but because she already believes the lye is poisonous; therefore it must (as far as she is concerned, mistaking her associating mental imagery for the truth) have those horrid red things in it somewhere.

The little girl's imagery is mistaken; but it also turns out to be, upon fair examination, ultimately of little importance to the issue at hand: whether lye really is poisonous. If she was corrected about the nature of poison, it would probably not (nor should not) affect her belief about the

toxicity of lye. She would know more, and in knowing more she would not necessarily be refuted in her core belief.

Lewis puts this into religious practice with the example of the story of Jesus' Ascension into heaven. We do not know whether the original promoters of this story believed in a sky palace with God on a throne (they may not have--Jewish apocalyptic can be shown to be quite abstract with relation to Jewish metaphysical belief); but the imagery can stand for something other than this without gutting the main point of their proclamation.

Indeed, the type of event which Christians (or trinitarian Christians anyway) claim happened here--one aspect of the Incarnated God departed from this physical Nature after beginning a drastic change in it, to a new (and superphysical) Nature which shall be progressively made out of this 'older' one, while verifying His identity as the basic Action of what I have been calling the IF--is not something that by its character would be easily perceivable or understood. If this did happen, I would not (nor should not) be surprised in the least if God allowed the witnesses to see the images they eventually reported--that would be the type of image which they (and millions and billions of people after them, even to this day) can understand, in principle, without training in formal metaphysics. It gets all the salient points across; and allows

the expansion of detail for fuller understandings of the same event.

A facetiously simple sceptic might say that she will believe the Ascension if we ever discover a 1st-century Palestinian sandal in geosynchronous orbit over Israel. But that is not the type of evidence that I necessarily expect from the story. It is not (as far as I can tell) that kind of event; so I don't expect it to leave that kind of evidence.

This leads into the question of what kind of evidence a proposed supernatural event (such as the Ascension) might be expected to leave; which in turn shall bring up the question of possible and plausible relationships between Nature and Supernature (should Supernature exist).

CHAPTER 12 -- Supernature and evidence

At the end of my previous chapter, I demonstrated that metaphor does not necessarily need to mean something less than its imagery suggests; and that to immediately presume otherwise is a common fallacy in the discussion of religious propositions. Incidents and claims should be taken on a case-by-case basis, and filtered through an already developed philosophical position.

So, to return to my example of Jesus' Ascension into heaven: what you or I believe this imagery can mean, is constrained by what you or I have already decided is, or is not, possible. If a supernatural God does not exist, then Jesus cannot have moved from our Nature to a Supernature while exhibiting the extent of this God's divine authority and/or existence. The story must reflect some other set of objectively real events: for example, perhaps the story was invented for any of a number of purposes; or perhaps aliens levitated Jesus to a throne-shaped craft.

If, however, God does exist as the supernaturally transcendent Sentient Independent Fact--what can we say about the story?

Frankly, such a truth would not automatically exclude the forgery explanation--or even the alien-superscience explanation!

But it does include as a live possibility (to be strengthened or refuted on further grounds and evidence) that a traditionally 'orthodox' reading of this passage is true. I have not yet begun to argue positively for the truth of a reality where (what, as a category label, what eventually came to be called) an 'orthodox' interpretation could (much more would) subsequently also be true. But I have now reached the question of the principles of evidence, for such an inquiry.

When we are attempting to prove or disprove metaphysical and/or historical claims (and for convenience I am limiting my discussion here to religious issues), we all apply and appeal to 'evidence'--if we can. 'The burden of proof' comes to the forefront. In the case of purportedly historical claims (especially claims exhibiting circumstantial characteristics which match characteristics common to other historical claims we have found to be trustworthy), the burden of proof is almost always placed on the detractor who wants to discredit the purported historian.

This is a widely recognized principle of historical inquiry, and its widespread authority can be accepted as a practical affair by anyone who understands the principle involved: either we must assume that most of the time people are not only telling what they believe to be true but that they have a certain amount of accuracy in their reports; or else we will

have no presumptive grounds for believing that any historical data can be recovered from documents--including modern ones.¹¹⁰

On the other hand, when the accounts conflict drastically with what we have already established to be 'the way reality works', then we have quite reasonable grounds (whether or not we are in fact correct about our philosophy!) for an initial scepticism of the claim. In that case, I suggest the burden of proof for the claim should fall on the purported historian and his defenders.

Thus, I do not begrudge the sceptics who demand more than a document (or other account) as evidence of real historicity for a claim. I am no different from them. Neither, I will add, are almost all of my brethren. The most fundamentalistic Bible-based 'faith-only' Baptist preacher would suddenly turn quite a different eye upon a conflicting claim from, say, the specifically Muslim or Mormon or 'Christian Scientist' documents. And he would do so for at least the reason I have just given: he can tell the claims are quite different from the way he thinks reality is. He would require the burden of proof

¹¹⁰ The archaeological study of artifacts as artifacts does not (so far as I can tell) require this presupposition; and since documents are also artifacts they may also be analyzed archaeologically. The years since the mid-19th century, have seen the rise of a broad range of documentary analyses built on this concept. Such studies are often very useful and informative; but when historians resort primarily to such methods at the expense of necessarily ignoring what the document purports to say in itself, they tread on dangerous ground. After all, these historians themselves write books and articles that purport to clarify what has happened in history; and they can be deconstructed and dismembered with equally efficient facility through the lens of intrinsic historical scepticism.

to be on the adherents of Islam, or the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, or the 'Church of Christ, Scientist'.

At the same time, and for the same basic reason (along with perhaps other reasons), a Jewish rabbi, or a member of the Internet Infidels, or even a Muslim Iman, will look to this preacher (and his supporters) for burden of proof.

I do not think this necessarily indicates sinful obstinacy by anyone involved. It might instead be a prudent (and loyal) recognition that the new claim conflicts strongly with what the resister accepts as a true underlying philosophy (or even a true underlying history); although the resister may not describe it quite that way, of course.

Let me emphasize, in case I am misunderstood, that I am not saying the burden of proof must always be put on the shoulders of one definable side of an argument. Historians do generally agree that the burden of proof should fall on the detractor, but not because there is some specially important intrinsic property of being a 'detractor'; rather, because most of the time underlying metaphysical positions are not being called into question by historical analysis.

But when core beliefs are challenged, then I think the burden of proof ought to be placed on the shoulders of theasserter. This would mean, ideally, that in a dialogue entered into freely by two sides, both debaters should be ready to shoulder the burden of proof! But in the case of an intrusion by

a detractor into the life or lives of asserters (i.e. where the detractor is also the initiator), then the detractor (mere politeness suggests it!) should not expect the established and assaulted position to sortie out onto his ground (so to speak), nor see a refusal to do so as a tacit or explicit surrender.¹¹¹

Very well then; but in a situation like this--in a discussion or argument about what the Final Reality is and what He or It (or She?) has done--what type of 'evidence' is appropriate? I think the answer to this question is all-too-often oversimplified by believers and sceptics alike.

An acquaintance of mine once told me (quite seriously, I think, and not at all in a hostile manner) that she would believe the Devil existed when he appeared in front of her. If I had replied that I would believe 100,000 galaxies existed in the universe when someone shows me a picture of them and counts them out for me, she would have thought I was only being funny. And she would have been right!--but that is because my conclusions (and thus my beliefs) about reality allow quite easily for the real existence of 100,000 galaxies. I don't need much evidence or argument to believe they may well exist. If I was being careful and fair, of course, I would need some strong arguments (and I also suppose some strong evidence) before I staked a conclusion on the required existence of those galaxies. My

¹¹¹ This applies just as much to secular historical revisionists who are making claims about the transhistorical meanings of documents: they should also shoulder the burden of proof. In my experience, such revisionists can be at least as 'fundamentalistically' inept about this (often moreso) as any uncritical religious conservative.

friend's understanding of reality, however, does not easily allow for the possibility (much less the actuality) of the existence of a massively powerful and thoroughly hostile supernatural creature. She would not be favorably persuaded (much less convinced) with minimal evidence and argument; and rightly so.¹¹²

I may have taken her by surprise with my actual response, though: I would not necessarily believe I was seeing the Devil in front of me in that situation, and I do already believe he exists!

Do you see how this fits with what I have said earlier? My belief that the Devil exists (and that he can perhaps do things on occasion like pop into view in front of people, through various methods) does not automatically mean that I would (or even should) take such a situation at face value. I might be suffering from a brain tumor. I might be hallucinating after eating a batch of bad shrimp. I might merely have had an especially annoying dream. Someone who thinks about such issues as much as I do (and such themes are also prevalent in the fantasy literature and computer games I enjoy, although of course the metaphysical rationales are usually very different) would have plenty of imagery to draw on by association in the case of a naturally occurring mental disturbance--even if the Devil exists and has such abilities. At the same time,

¹¹² Let me add, by the way, that we were discussing a literary topic, and not specifically debating metaphysics.

hypothetically granting his existence and abilities, he might also manifest himself to me through the manipulation of such otherwise natural events! But I would need something other than that mere appearance before I concluded (and thus believed) it really was the Devil.

This example illustrates a factor of supernatural operation which sometimes escapes sceptics who demand hard proof: the character of the proposed event might easily dictate that some kinds of 'natural' explanations could similarly be proposed to explain the event--even if the event truly was supernatural in character.¹¹³

Let us pretend (what I do not claim!) that I can create a cloud in the sky through supernatural power. What type of evidence and/or abstract arguments could a naturalist (i.e. someone who doesn't believe any kind of supernature exists) fairly accept, concerning this claim? (I am presuming for sake of argument that the naturalist is an honest sceptic to such a claim.)

First, I am not sure he would be obligated to accept any argument from evidence, if he had already responsibly concluded 'There is no such thing as supernatural power'. That type of conclusion is a core belief, which has deductively necessary consequences about what should and should not be accepted as true; and so which would function as a proposition which such a

¹¹³ Of course, other sceptics are not only quite aware of this, but robustly (maybe even a little too robustly!) make use of the principle. I will be discussing them presently.

person would necessarily add into the accounting of any topically related argument.

Steadily mounting evidence to the contrary might suggest a prudent consideration on the naturalist's part that he should perhaps recheck his logical math; but that is not the same as abandoning his belief. He might conclude, after doing the logical math again, that one of his most basic conclusions was wrong; but I am not sure at what point it would be proper for him to reject his core belief, where the rejection was only based on apparent evidence to the contrary around him (not bearing directly on his overarching philosophical grounds). It would, at least, have to be extremely good evidence to logically require overturning a prior philosophical conviction. And that kind of evidence is manifestly not usually forthcoming.

I am assuming, of course, that this particular naturalist--call him Chase--is a fairly stable and intelligent person with some training in how to discern these issues; and who either has no strong emotional stake for or against 'changing his views', or who recognizes that he feels strongly about the issues and nevertheless resolves to try thinking them through fairly and clearly.¹¹⁴

¹¹⁴ This has to be a somewhat idealized example, because there isn't much point for me to offer suggestions on how, when and why someone should change views if, for instance, he is suffering a fit of despair--no one thinks very clearly in the middle of such pain. A person may change beliefs for emotional or for logical reasons in that condition, but a clear rationalization for why will have to wait until later.

Also I am restricting this hypothetical example to a question of supernatural effect. 'Chase' and I might both be atheists in this example; or

So, what kind of evidence (within or against Chase's philosophy, either one) can I produce for him?

Let us say I supernaturally create a cloud, and then call Chase over to see it. What does he see?

A cloud.

Is he likely to believe my claims from this? I see no reason why he should, especially in regard to his opposing philosophy. I might be a liar (or, more politely, playing a joke on him). I might be insane. I might be mistaken in some other fashion.¹¹⁵ There are no other options for Chase to choose from, as a naturalist. Even given supernaturalism's truth, any of those might still have been the proper explanation--not supernatural power.

But let us say Chase has a friend, Reed, who is a supernaturalist. It might be supposed that Reed (a supernaturalist) will have a radically different set of possible evaluations of my claim that I just created a cloud by supernatural power, compared to Chase (a philosophical naturalist). But to best compare their evaluative options, let me present those options in a topical nest.

I create a cloud with supernatural power, and then call Chase (the naturalist) and Reed (the supernaturalist) to come

we might both be theists. The question of supernatural effect in Nature is technically not the same as theism vs. atheism, remember. But for ease of imagination, it would be okay to assign me the role of supernatural theist and 'Chase' the role of naturalistic atheist.

¹¹⁵ Perhaps I created it in a naturalistic manner, for instance.

look at it. I claim to them that I did this with supernatural power.

A.) I am someone who, for one reason or another, often claims what is not true.

A.1.) Chase.

A.1.a.) Chase knows me well; and so knows I am someone who often claims what is not true. So he has no preliminary expectation to believe me--thus, prudently speaking, he should not believe me.

A.1.b.) Chase does not know me. But Chase is a naturalist; as far as he knows, supernatural manipulation of Nature cannot happen. Why should he believe me? Anyone can point at a cloud and say, "I created that." Prudently speaking, he should not believe me.

A.2.) Reed.

A.2.a.) Reed knows me well. As far as he knows, such a thing could occur; but he also knows I am someone who should not be trusted. Unless he had good prior (or other concurrent) grounds for accepting my word (which I have not provided in this example), there is no good reason why he should be expected to believe me. Prudently speaking, he should not believe me.

A.2.b.) Reed does not know me. At this point, it's a toss-up; but I think he would be justified in a fairly agnostic stance, reserving judgment until he finds or receive more

evidence (which, in practice, could amount to provisionally discounting my claim, of course).

B.) I am someone who usually tells the truth, or someone who would not be expected to invent something like this in my circumstances.

1.) Chase.

a.) Chase knows me well. It would therefore be quite fair for him to conclude that I believe what I am saying; but he has no good reason to deny his naturalism on my mere say-so. And, after all, a cloud is pretty much a cloud. His most reasonable conclusion would probably be that I am mistaken. (Medically, psychologically, coincidentally, whatever.) Let us go further: he gives me a medical/psych exam and (assuming no exam-rigging presumptions based on my claim vs. his philosophy) I receive a clean bill of health; meaning that he has good grounds to believe I saw the cloud form when I wished for it to form. And the chances that an atmospheric phenomenon of this sort would spontaneously arise at that point in time (when I wished for it) are remote. But, even the most remote possibility is better than what Chase thinks is impossible. So, although he may have a much greater respect for my belief now, he should go with that which he thinks is at least possible (if improbable, following the famous dictum of Sherlock Holmes), and disbelieve me.

b.) Chase does not know me. He is basically in the same position as option A:1:b--anyone can point at a cloud and claim

to have made it through supernatural power. Given his philosophy, he would be justified to disbelieve me.

2.) Reed.

a.) Reed knows me well. He would still have to contend with the possibility that I am mistaken, or even the possibility that I am playing a game with him. But he would be inclined, I think, to believe me; and it would be fair of him to do so. Still, it might be a very cautious and provisional sort of belief. He did not actually see me make the cloud.

b.) Reed does not know me. Basically the same as A:2:b.

I could introduce the concept of witnesses now. When Chase and Reed arrive they find x-number of witnesses who claim to have seen me do this. The weight this lends to my claim would usually be positive, but could vary widely according to circumstances.

In the best-case scenario, numerous witnesses who are demonstrably upstanding sensible and honest citizens (perhaps even likely to suffer by the claim, certainly not gain much) might convince Chase that he is not being intentionally deceived. Their testimony might even convince him to take a closer look at his core belief (upon which his judgment of the possibility of the cloud's supernatural formation depends). But as long as that core belief remains honestly accepted as valid (even if he has done 'the math' wrong, and just hasn't found the error or hasn't carried the math far enough yet), Chase might

still properly decide that a spontaneous mass hallucination, or mass lying by people not otherwise known to be liars, or a freak atmospheric phenomenon, or some other (perhaps unknown) grotesquely improbable explanation must be true--because (he thinks) the other cannot be true.¹¹⁶

Reed, meanwhile, believes that something like this could happen, and so such ideal witnesses would be good grounds for him to more strongly advocate a good belief in the cloud's appearance.

Please note that I believe Chase and Reed are each making proper decisions in every one of the situations I have presented. Chase (in this example) happens to be wrong, but it is a very understandable error. In the case of the numerous ideal witnesses, he might possibly be a bit embarrassed--or maybe even honestly relieved!--to be shown after all to be wrong; but he was still making a very prudently proper choice (in my idealized example) given his data. I do not think he would have anything to be ashamed of, given his core belief plus only scanty evidence.¹¹⁷ Of course, if the truth ever does become

¹¹⁶ It should be fairly noted, in order to avoid drawing somewhat false comparisons, that due to the complexity of the case for an 'orthodox' resurrection of Jesus, some sceptics do present more complex variations of the alternative explanations represented here. The simple sceptical hypotheses here are intended to be commensurate with the simplicity of the incident setup; and keep in mind that I am presenting them as properly rational conclusions anyway. Anyone (on any side of the aisle) who thinks I'm trying to tacitly refute scepticism of claims of supernatural events by this example, or in this chapter generally, has completely misunderstood and misread what I am doing.

¹¹⁷ Or, worse, given negative evidence: if the crowd of people asserting my little miracle happen to be obviously untrustworthy and/or likely to gain heavily by lying, then this might count very fairly against my claim!

clear to him, he could still choose to reject (as far as possible) what he himself has now recognized to be true. But that is another issue for another chapter.¹¹⁸

This is the type of situation in which most people find themselves concerning 'evidence' of supernatural events (or even often of claims about natural events!) If a supernatural event occurs, it will either be perceptible or imperceptible. If it is imperceptible in its effects (immediately or otherwise), there is an end to the matter. No matter how perceptible such an event may be to me, if it is functionally (according to its characteristics) imperceptible to you, then I do not think you can legitimately be considered unreasonable for not believing it happened. From your perspective, it would be indistinguishable from a lie or a mistake. If, for example, God speaks to me and gives me a message to pass on to you, how are you to tell whether I am lying or mistaken or not? Even if you appeal to a previously acknowledged communication from God, in order to judge my claim to revelation, that's done because my experience wasn't, in itself, accessible as such to my audience. My claim ought to have inferential verification of some kind, to be responsibly accepted as true.

I think this is why prophets in Jewish and Christian scripture (and to a certain extent in Muslim tradition--and not discounting other religious traditions either) almost always are

¹¹⁸ I will be thoroughly considering this behavior, its implications and consequences, in Section Four--primarily in connection to my responsibility as a person.

portrayed as being able to back up their claims with "attesting signs". Whether or not those events actually happened, even a sceptical reader should be able to understand why such events would be considered very useful and helpful, especially to a population who lacks access to formal analysis principles. (This same rationale would stand behind the temptation to hoax attesting signs, too!)

For that matter, if the signs were sent by an Entity Who strongly wanted us to establish a personal and loving relationship to Him, I think there would very probably be a sharp limit to how many (and under what circumstances) signs would be given by this Entity. Such events would excite (almost inevitably) fear and wonder; which are not necessarily bad feelings in themselves, but could possibly build up attitudes of cowed submission rather than personal trust and love.

If, besides all this, the sub-entities in question were rebellious to one degree or another (and thus likely to abuse any authoritative power, knowledge or experience given to them), then an even sharper limit could reasonably be established by the Entity as to where, when and how many attesting signs would be sent.

Finally, if this Entity was also the IF--the Independent Fact of reality upon which everything else is based, including Nature--and if the IF was supernatural; then at the level of the system we call Nature, 'natural' events would be by default the

'norm': this is why Nature could be distinguished as one system and not another. Thus, effects introduced into this system by the IF, other than what we might call 'maintenance' effects (normally below our threshold of perception), would be relatively rare purely by Nature being, per the supernaturalistic hypothesis, an established and distinct subsystem.

Of course, I have not yet argued positively for any of this. But it doesn't take much imagination to see, that if certain conditions could be established, then the frequency, circumstances, and types of 'obvious' miracles--obvious interruptions or supercessions of the natural process--might easily follow an inferable pattern.

Let me jump ahead quite a lot, for a moment: it does not surprise me in the least (once I have thought the situation all the way through) to hear that God sends obvious miracles at what He (not necessarily I) would consider to be lynchpins of history; nor does it surprise me to see a lack of obvious activity (setting aside what I may think of as suspiciously convenient circumstance!) in my own general vicinity; nor that there should be few prayers of mine granted in an obvious and immediate fashion; nor that missionaries in underdeveloped regions should report a higher incidence of obvious miracle than either they or I find in already heavily Christianized societies (even if increasingly apostate ones) such as the United States

and most of Europe; nor that the reports of Christianity's spread through 1st Century Mediterranean in the face of strongly established religious/state conflicts of interest should include reports of an unusually high incident-rate of miraculous activity; nor that as the burgeoning Church becomes stronger over time, such activity begins to drop off in the reports; nor that such activities are reported to be lesser in scale than the reported activities of the founder of Christianity himself. (Nor would it surprise me much if real miracles are granted by God to people who are not believing altogether correctly about doctrines; or even to people teaching correct doctrines but otherwise rebelling against God!¹¹⁹)

I easily grant that particular instances of these reports should always be up for discussion (and also debate--which is the only way a sceptic has of entering into discussion, I remind my brethren!) And I also grant that elements of this pattern can be explained in other ways. I even grant that the total pattern can be explained in other ways. Yet the general pattern that emerges from my own tradition and experience, does also fit the inferred pattern I find emerging (subordinately) from my

¹¹⁹ "Lord, Lord, we have done prophecies and exorcisms and other great signs in Your name!" "Why do you call Me, 'Lord', when you do not do what I say?! I never knew you. Depart from Me, you many doers of injustice!" (Matt 7:21-23; Luke 6:46) Correct doctrine, and even attesting signs granted by God, are not sure evidence that a 'Christian' is truly following God: a warning that I, the hyper-doctrinaire, had better take seriously!

metaphysic. And this increases my confidence, that by following this particular tradition, I am on the right trail.¹²⁰

As I have said, however, this is jumping ahead quite a lot; it may be only of direct interest to my Christian (and perhaps other theistic) fellow-believers. My non-Christian readers, especially if they are not supernaturalists, should very properly have a different perspective on the subject of miracles as 'attesting signs'--after all, it's one thing to appeal to attesting signs as evidence of a claim, but what if the claim is about the properties of the 'attesting sign' in the first place?!

So, regardless of what I may be currently sceptical of, and putting myself back into the place of someone sceptical of what I believe, what kind of evidence would I accept as grounds for changing my mind to belief instead?

I will presume I am not in the grip of a strong emotional pull toward some belief. I do not (speaking actually as a Christian) deny that God can and does convict many people through a process that doesn't seem, at first, to have much to do with analysis. But I think that sooner or later the converted

¹²⁰ The chain of inference goes: if my argument, beginning in Section Two, is deductively valid (and if its presumptions are accurate as to the facts), then my speculations about how God would operate in our world will fall into a general pattern that will be accurate with respect to His intents (although shy of detail). This, if my argument is correct, is what I may confidently expect God to do. A tradition of God's behavior that matches this expectation of mine, would therefore be a tradition seriously worth my time and effort to pay attention to; even though the historical accuracy of the tradition would be a further issue still to be judged according to historical criteria.

This will be the shape, and goal, of the remainder of my book, beginning in Section Two.

sceptic, whether to or from a religious belief, should face questions of coherency and intelligibility in the new position he is taking. Otherwise, I cannot see how he would be acting responsibly. I think it is easier for errors (or 'heresies', religiously speaking) to hide behind overt inscrutability than behind dense logic; indeed, the density of a train of thought can only hide an error by being difficult to work through and thus effectively inscrutable to people who lack the tools and training to sift through the claim. But that kind of inscrutability can, in principle, be effectively 'seen-through', to discover real strengths and weaknesses; while the overt inscrutability of 'mystery' claims (improperly so-called, for 'mysteries', at least in the canonical New Testament texts, involve new knowledge, not un-knowledge or currently-held secrets), or of 'glorious contradictions', never pretended to be intelligible. But this also means they are humanly indistinguishable from error. That means it would be entirely up to God (insofar as a religious belief goes) to provide an emotional impulse so powerful that people are headed off from false beliefs. But this obviously is not the case ; if God exists, He does not regularly do that--otherwise everyone on the planet, and throughout history, regardless of any other circumstances, would already believe a particular set of religious doctrines to be true, while having absolutely no

understanding of what they're believing at all, merely 'feeling' those ideas must nevertheless be true.¹²¹

Some of my Christian (or other theistic) brethren might say that He never compulses, but that He does always provide enough information in this life for someone to know which is the true belief, so that any rejection of it is due to willful rebellion. I do think this is true, to some extent--although I am certainly not convinced that this is how He works in regard to a set of religious doctrines per se--but by advocating even this, these fellow-believers have abandoned a 'faith-not-reason' stance: for they are now saying that people are faced with a rational choice and are responsible for analysis of something as part of accepting or rejecting truth.

And, at bottom, that is exactly what I have been proposing throughout this section; we would only be differing in regard to what God provides for the analysis.

But if He provides one thing, we cannot automatically exclude the possibility that He would provide something else to help people to the same critical point.¹²²

¹²¹ There are of course some Christian and other theistic believers, such as hyper-Calvinist Christians, who do in fact believe that all Christian belief is 'implanted' in a non-rational fashion (sub-fideistically, not even as an assertion by the person) into those whom God elects for that purpose. But even they would have to agree that God does not regularly do this. History simply says otherwise. And besides, or so such people sometimes argue, what would be the value of everyone being elected to the spiritually elite?--some people should be refused such an honor and/or such a salvation for comparison purposes so that those chosen to be elite will be more grateful for their elected status.

¹²² Typically, a Christian would say the critical point of belief (i.e. after this one would be "a Christian") is our acceptance of God-in-Christ being (in various ways--not all of which are necessarily 'orthodox

So, sooner or later I should honestly and responsibly check evidential claims, if I care about whether I follow a true belief rather than a false one. And if I was a sceptic who cared about believing true claims rather than false ones, I would be acting responsibly to require sufficient evidence of some kind. Psychologically speaking, different people will require different levels of 'evidence' before they choose to accept a belief. But if I wanted to maximize my chances of choosing the most 'realistic' belief--the one that most closely matches the way reality 'really' is--what kind of evidence should I responsibly look for?

Let me go a bit further: as a 'sceptic' I am not sitting around in some positivistic vacuum, even for purposes of argument--only newborn babies who have never thought at all, yet, are in that position, among living, conscious persons. Even if I am a 'sceptic', then I already have a definable opinion of some sort (with attendant reasons of varying strengths) for believing (or doubting) reality to be a certain way. The

trinitarian') the necessary means of our relationship to God, and our acceptance of at least certain parts of the 'New' and 'Old' Testaments as being historically reliable. A Muslim, for one contrasting example, would probably say the critical point for belief (i.e. after this one would be "a Muslim") is the acceptance of the existence of God as the only God, and the acceptance of Muhammad as the Seal of the One-God's Prophets; which would, as a corollary, involve the acceptance of the Koran as the ultimate revelation of God's will--through Muhammad--to the world.

As for me, I will let my forthcoming positive argument explain what I believe and how I believe it and why, without here promoting a specific type of criteria-point for classification-identification among various specific religions. Besides, it may be discovered that God, if He exists, is more interested in helping people to critical points other than what 'religion to believe is true'. (Though that might be one of God's goals, too.) Or I might discover that God has no such goals, or no goals at all, or doesn't even exist at all.

question should be: what kind of evidence might I responsibly require to actively reject my (sceptical) belief and accept another view of reality as being more accurate?

As I think about it, it becomes clear that not just any evidence will do. The best type of evidence would need to have the following characteristics:

a.) It must be evidence I actually have access to, and that I can clearly detect that I have access to.

b.) It must be evidence that is clearly distinctive without question-begging. It might take a lot of detailed and difficult study to ascertain that some documents claiming to be God-inspired are more historically grounded than others (especially if I am a sceptic); and even then, that conclusion doesn't immediately demonstrate that the documents may be trusted to convey metaphysical truth. If my brethren have trouble understanding this concept from the sceptical point of view, let me remind them that historians have demonstrated Homer's Iliad contains quite a few accurate historical details; but even if its historical details were discovered to be altogether and absolutely accurate, virtually no one (especially an advocate of one of the Big Three Theisms) would accept this to mean the truth of the Greek divine pantheon as represented in the Iliad has thereby been solidly established.

c.) Ideally, it must be evidence which can in fact provide a solid foundation from which a deductive argument can be

developed; because only a deductive argument can be functionally exclusive.¹²³ This would be important to me as a sceptic; because I am not being asked to reinforce a belief I already have, but instead to reject a belief (or beliefs) I already have in favor of another belief; and this requires some type of exclusive conclusion. Furthermore, it is, perhaps, technically possible that the deductive argument will not exclude my belief I am being asked to reject; the result may be parallel and complementary to my own belief, in which case you (the believer) would be unfair (and making a logical misstep) to ask me to give up my belief. So if I am asked to reject my belief in favor of the alternative, the (ideal) alternative must be functionally and formally exclusive.¹²⁴

d.) The argument deduced from this evidence must be valid. If the logical pathway from the evidence to the conclusion is broken, then by default I should not be expected to reach that conclusion via that pathway.

¹²³ An abductive argument, which suggests a hypothesis and then tests system integrity of theories drawn from that hypothesis (especially in conjunction with evidential data), does not exclude other alternatives, even if successful. It only provides a working option. An inductive argument, on the other hand, arrives at an expectation of likelihood from repetition of conjunctions--someone trying to exclude black swans on the basis of their routine experience of white swans, wouldn't only be making a formal error in induction; she would be setting herself up for a surprising refutation of fact.

¹²⁴ I keep saying 'ideal', because it isn't impossible that I may eventually lean in the direction of another belief than my current one, based on abduction or induction. But ideally a deductive conclusion would be better; especially vs. any deductive inference behind any current beliefs of mine!--since in that case, an abductive or inductive inference could only at best suggest something is wrong with my reasoning somewhere, and not necessarily with the current reasoning behind my scepticism.

I think these general guidelines are fair ones for an apologist (of whatever belief, religious or non-religious or anti-religious) to work within when arguing a position with an intelligent, informed sceptic. These are the general guidelines I would apply if I was a sceptical opponent of Christianity; and they are the general guidelines I do apply as a Christian when I am asked to reject part or all of my beliefs for an exclusive alternative!

Having established these parameters for my positive argument, it is time for me to finish this section.

CHAPTER 13 -- the leveled playing-field

Having followed a path throughout this section that leads to the question of evidence, I am now ready to proceed with my positive argument. However, before I begin my next section, let me summarize where I am.

As I said near the beginning of this book, my goal for this section is merely to level the playing field so that misunderstandings about religious propositions don't lurk undisclosed in the background, inspiring unwarranted and spurious opposition. In the process, I have necessarily had to pare off certain propositions here and there. But I have at least followed one of my core positions for this chapter: no matter how complicated the proposition, if it is built on a fundamental misunderstanding of the implications of propositions, then the proposition ought to be rejected.

This does not mean I necessarily reject absolutely everything proposed by the adherents of the beliefs that I have had to treat rather shortly in this section. As I explained back in Chapter 1, I am still obligated to recognize at the very least where I agree with them and to thereby acknowledge real credit of theirs on those issues. Furthermore, it is in principle possible that many of their subordinate points may be

valid taken as themselves, and might even be deductively valid if grounded using different foundational principles.

Surely the most obvious illustration of my potential relationship with these people and their beliefs, involves my actual relationship with some of my Christian brethren. I think some of them ground their positions (often without them realizing they are 'grounding' anything!) on some drastic misunderstandings; nevertheless, I actually agree with them on virtually all of their ultimate positions as well as with many of their subordinate ones. I just don't think they can get there from where they start and/or from how they proceed.¹²⁵

Relatedly, an ontological dualist and I will rapidly come to many serious disagreements; but we also share a few common beliefs (sometimes even for the same reasons). The ontological dualists perhaps make a better example, because I think their core proposition, of multiple-IFs, ends up becoming really a proposition for a single IF, if I follow through the implications of their position. I suggest this is one way that reconciliation can take place between myself and at least some of the advocates I have mentioned in this section.

Meanwhile, the advocates with whom I am least likely to find common ground, are the ones who explicitly or implicitly deny their (and my) own rationality (whether or not they are technically on 'my side'). But that should not be surprising:

¹²⁵ As I pointed out in early chapters, many of them would say the same thing in return about me, too!

digging a philosophical hole, jumping in, and pulling it in after you, not only leaves no bar to further progress by me but also leaves no means for common dialogue (and thus no means of having, much less finding, 'common ground') between us.

In most cases, however, very many of my opponents should still be on board as viable opposition. I submit that if I had started this book sceptical of Christianity, I would still be a sceptic. But what kind of sceptic would I be?

I would be a sceptic who recognizes that it is entirely possible to discover at least something regarding religious (or anti-religious) propositions. I would not be what I have called a "negative agnostic". I would understand that the statement "discussions about religion can reach no useful answers" undercuts itself, and so cannot be true. If I was an agnostic, I would have reached my agnosticism by evaluating competing claims and finding none of them satisfactory--all of them would, in my opinion, have major problems, including naturalistic atheism.¹²⁶ But I would therefore be affirming that in principle useful answers one way or another could be discovered (just that, as far as I could tell, nothing I had seen yet had sufficiently accomplished this).

Very closely related to this, I would be a sceptic who does not accept that all statements about God are equally false. I

¹²⁶ Not that I have found anything against naturalistic atheism here in my first section, of course. Nor am I saying I have developed a position of positive agnosticism in this section. I am only saying that if I ever became an agnostic, this is the type of agnostic I would be: I would not be an negative agnostic.

would understand that such a statement refutes itself, because I myself would be claiming thereby to make a true statement about God. My claim would thus end in a necessary contradiction.

Closely related to that, I would be a sceptic who does not accept that all statements about God can be equally true. It cannot be equally true that God really exists in a particular fashion, and also does not really exist in that fashion. Various religions and anti-religions make exclusive claims about what is true or not true about God, Nature, man, etc. To accept that they all hit the mark equally well, I would have to be willing to accept flat contradictions.

Closely related to all of the above points, I would be a sceptic who understands the devastating effect of requiring necessary contradictions in a theory. I would understand that contradictions are propositions which borrow their seeming force from the coherency of language, not from any other sort of reality they may seem (on the face of it) to represent.¹²⁷ However, I would also fairly recognize that a properly paradoxical claim is not a true contradiction, but only looks like one--it points to a further link to be discovered which reconciles the apparently exclusive claims of the paradox. Of course, I would check extremely closely to ensure that a proposed 'paradox' really is a paradox and not a contradiction claimed as 'paradox' to deflect analysis (and thus save the

¹²⁷ For that matter, sometimes a contradiction won't even involve a merely grammatic coherency of language.

theory by cheating). The paradox invites further analysis, in the real hope of truly reconciling the (merely) apparent conflict. I would obviously be on the lookout for requirements of contradictions in religious theories; but if I was a fair sceptic I would also keep a sharp watch for theories from any anti-religious side of the aisle which require necessary contradictions.

Furthermore, as a sceptic, I would keep an eye out for circular argumentation as support for a conclusion, on any side of the aisle; because I would understand why such methods lead a thinker precisely nowhere.

I would be a sceptic who understands that a successful system check of a theory grounded on a hypothesized proposal does not necessarily exclude other theories from being true explanations; and I would also understand that a failed system check does not mean that a given attempted conclusion must necessarily be false. Also, I would be ready to apply this concept both to theories I sympathize with, and to ones I oppose.

As a sceptic, I would be rather suspicious of theories which require that I accept anything without analysis; and this would include theories which hinge on accepting documents as normative without such confirmational analysis. At the same time, if I was going to be fair, I would be ready in principle to acknowledge when documents have details that can be

historically corroborated. That would not mean I would be suddenly ready to believe everything else the purported author has claimed; but I would be ready to revise my opinions (to at least some degree) about why and how those documents were produced.¹²⁸

Although I might not have started with an understanding of the intimate interrelationship between religious beliefs and reasoning, I think that after studying how we develop beliefs in other venues I would be prepared to reject any attempts (by any side) at divorcing the two concepts. As a sceptic, I think this means I would fairly conclude that religion is not necessarily a private assertion separated from the 'real' 'practical' world by some kind of negatively spiritual ditch. If I did think that, then I might be justified in blowing off the whole proceeding as not having any possibility of relevance for myself. But once I check how beliefs develop in other topics, I would be ready to allow that religious beliefs might possibly be something other than isolated psychological effects. To put it another way, in order to be fair I would deny that "only believers believe their beliefs are based on something other than belief" (as a respondent once dismissively told me). At best such a position would be fatally contradictory to my own beliefs, whatever they are as a sceptic! (It might also be grossly unfair game-rigging

¹²⁸ To use an extreme example, if I started with the position that the authors of the New Testament cared virtually nothing for historical accuracy, I would have to be ready to revise that opinion--and any conclusions I had based on that opinion!--to whatever degree that evidence to the contrary was clearly demonstrated to me.

if someone showed up for the discussion who really did have reasons other than sheer wish-fulfillment impulses.)

Closely related to the last few points: as a sceptic I would not accept that a flat assertion functions as a belief. Of course, it could easily (and very often does) reflect a developed belief. But that isn't the same thing as being a belief in and of itself. Put another way, I would see such a position as being perhaps the ultimate in wish-fulfillment: to claim reality is such-n-such a way with no justification for this claimed truth other than my mere say-so. As attractive as that position might be to my nature (especially to my ego and my sense of self-preservation), I would still reject it not only for fairness' sake but also because I am not sure I could even reach that position (much less maintain it) without contradicting myself. Put yet another way, if I brutally claim 'no reasons' for holding a stance (no matter what pious coloring I give it using religious-faith language), then I also have 'no reasons' why I should not hold a different stance (much less 'no reasons' why something other than my assertion cannot be true.)

As a sceptic, I would not advocate the concept of an infinite regress. I would understand that this position either denies a real ground to any conclusion (rendering all theories invalid, especially any theories of mine concerning infinite regressions!), or if examined carefully actually turns out to be itself grounded on an Independent Fact. This would also, in

passing, close off yet another potential attempt at claiming that 'all religious ideas are equally true/false, therefore I can safely ignore religious questions'.

As a sceptic, I would not advocate the existence of multiple Independent Facts. I would not, for instance, be an ontological dualist, either in terms of a God/Nature dualism or a God/Anti-God dualism. I would understand that the implications of such a stance either cancel themselves out in practice, or else in practice actually reflect the existence of some type of IF above and beyond the entities for which (or for Whom) I was previously claiming that title.

Putting together, to some degree, many of the previous points: as a sceptic, I would not propose that we can discover nothing useful and/or true about the IF. I would understand that such a proposition immediately contradicts itself: if it is impossible to discover true things about the IF, how did I discover that? And I would be extremely leery about proposing that the one possibly discoverable characteristic about the IF is that nothing else can be discovered. For example, there is a good chance that if I was not a Christian, I would be a philosophical naturalist.¹²⁹ And virtually any philosophical

¹²⁹ More likely a neo-pagan naturalist than a naturalistic atheist--at least aesthetically...

naturalist will affirm that true things can be discovered about Nature--which, for the philosophical naturalist, is the IF.¹³⁰

Closely related to this, as a sceptic I think I would discount worldviews (atheistic, pantheistic, theistic, whatever) that require the IF to be an abstract generality. The implication of such a worldview, when followed through, ends by denying the existence of the IF--or else holding such a worldview in name, I would still end up contradicting myself by treating the IF (after all) as a particular highly concrete thing. Put another way, I would understand that the implications of the relationship between the IF and 'derivative' things (even if they turn out to be parts of the IF considered as separate for purposes of convenience) require by default that the IF must be the most real and (in some way) minutely articulated, complex thing in existence. So, for instance, if I was a philosophical naturalist, I would consider the field of Nature (taken as a whole) to be by default the most real, minutely articulated and complex thing in existence. It is not a generality or an abstraction--it could not be an 'abstraction' for the very simple reason that it is by default (per the naturalism philosophy) the Total. More to the point, I would understand that generalities and abstractions and relationships describe

¹³⁰ I would also, by the way, consider the naturalists who have surrendered the claim that science can discover true facts about Nature, to be people who recognize irreconcilable problems in naturalism but who are unwilling to advocate something other than naturalism. As a sceptic I would be very suspicious of such claimants; as suspicious as I would be of people who claim to be theists but who deny that true facts can be discovered about God.

things: they are adjectives, not nouns (even if we for convenience often treat them as nouns). It is nonsensical to claim there is an entity corresponding to Pink. Pink describes the attributes of something.

Closely related to that, I would as a sceptic reject theories which require that I do not exist, or that my thoughts must be illusionary, or something of that sort. Such philosophies can only get going by immediately positing and overtly embracing contradictions; and at the best this means I can have no reason to believe them to be true. Put more bluntly, if I really did not exist then 'I' would not be in a position either to discover this for myself or even to flatly assert it!

As a sceptic, although I would perhaps consider the question of derivative gods interesting, I would be much more concerned (at least at first) with discovering the characteristics of the IF. Put another way (for instance, in terms of typical Greek mythology), I would consider the question "Does Zeus exist?" to be subordinate to the question "Is Chaos the fundamental grounding aspect of reality?" Otherwise I would only be putting the horse behind the cart.

As a sceptic, I would be extremely suspicious of philosophies which require the IF itself to be both sentient and non-sentient; again, because deep internal contradictions are necessary to propose this belief, and also because when this

type of belief is put into practice it eventually 'collapses' into a practical belief in either a SIF or an n-SIF anyway.

As a sceptic, I would try to treat metaphors fairly and realistically. When reductive metaphors are used, I would try very hard to remember that we should not then subsequently refer back to the distinctive characteristics represented by the reductive metaphor. For instance, although I might have to speak for convenience as if molecules and atomic particles made choices and initiated actions, I would be extremely careful not to hang argumentative points on the requirement that they did those things (assuming I didn't really think they did those things--which, by the way, I don't). People who talk as though parameciums and other microscopic lifeforms 'choose' and 'act' don't always think this is what microorganisms 'do'; yet sometimes these same people will require their metaphor to be literal--that more is going on than what they would otherwise propose was going on. I would always be on the watch for that kind of fudging, be it from supernaturalistic theists or atheists or pantheists or whomever--and I would especially be on the watch for it in my own arguments.

Yet, I would as a sceptic also understand that most of the time when we use metaphorical language we mean more, not less, than the language indicates. The biologist who speaks of a paramecium 'deciding' to go thataway for food probably means less than his imagery suggests--most biologists don't consider

paramecia to be capable of conscious choices and other actions, but only capable of automatic reactions and counterreactions. But such use of metaphor (though important) is relatively uncommon. More often, we mean more than the imagery suggests. Language is necessarily reductive, so we have to use similar words for multiple meanings. For example, by 'reductive' in the last sentence, I don't mean that language makes real things smaller. I mean something more complex and nuanced than my language indicates. And I would also play fairly by not requiring that people somehow abandon metaphor and 'talk plainly'. It can't be done; the effort to do so results in choosing other metaphors (without realizing they are metaphors) which are often less efficient at helping the idea across than the original metaphor. On the other hand, sometimes it isn't a bad idea to restate the contention using different imagery and then using a comparison of the two images to help correct and refine the perception of the idea I am trying to communicate. This same process takes place on a somewhat larger scale when analogies are used to help illustrate a previously developed argument.¹³¹

As a sceptic, I would be very interested in 'evidence', for both my own side and another's. But I would require the burden of proof to be on the instigator of the debate (although if I

¹³¹ I would, of course, be on the lookout for the so-called 'argument from analogy' where the analogies only illustrate a blanket assertion--the argument only being presumed to have been made--but I would also be careful not to fall off the horse on the other side and accuse someone of arguing by analogy simply because he happens to use a number of illustrative analogies.

was going to counter-convince I would need to be ready to marshal my own arguments and evidence).

Also, if I was going to be fair, then as a sceptic I would recognize that a purported supernatural event would very probably leave evidence not much (perhaps not any) different from a natural event. The good news (if I happened to be a naturalist) is that this usually cuts both ways. If a city buried by volcanism is found near the Dead Sea, or another city in Mesopotamia turns up the base of a large ziggurat with attendant documents suggesting that a confusion of language prevented the ziggurat from being completed, then although I might be inclined to accept that the historicity of these accounts in purported scriptures has more strength than I originally allowed, I am not necessarily obligated to assign a supernatural cause to the natural effect--no more than I am necessarily obligated to accept the existence and character of the Greek pantheon after Troy's existence and history are finally corroborated by archaeologists. Then again, if on other grounds I was persuaded that something exists which could be expected to exert supernatural influence to produce those effects, and if the stories tended to match in metaphysics the characteristics of the entity in question, I would be much further along the road to accepting the accounts as presented in the documents. Similarly, if the Greek pantheon could be established metaphysically, I might decide to take Homer's

stories as being even closer to history than I originally thought.

So the evidence would have to be something that didn't depend solely on (purported) historical documents; because how I interpret those documents is always strongly affected by my trans-historical beliefs. This is true, even if that trans-historical belief reduces simply down to: "My parents and teachers (and/or preacher) told me so, and I find them to be otherwise trustworthy."

Therefore as a sceptic, I would require that the evidence in favor of, for example, a Sentient Independent Fact (SIF) should be of a type closely related in character to the proposed SIF--and that I should be able to figure out this close relation from inferences about the evidence (not have it dictated to me as an unexaminable premise). In other words, if I thought reality had only two dimensions (length and width) and did not have depth as a third dimension, I would require evidence from the 3-D proponent that some kind of 3-D effect takes place where I can detect it.

I might possibly allow that the effects would be immediately represented in terms of a 2-D effect, and so not hold this necessarily against the 3-D proponent.¹³²

¹³² When a sphere progressively intersects a plane by passing through it, the 2-D man would see a circle grow from apparently nothing and shrink back to apparently nothing--he would not see what we would consider to be the 'shape' of a 'sphere'.

However, I would at the same time require that this proposed evidence should not be effectively reducible (or fully explainable) in terms of 2-D causes. If the evidence can be explained that way, then although I might still allow that the evidence might perhaps still be explainable by a 3-D cause, I cannot see that I would be under any fair obligation to exclusively accept the 3-D cause over the 2-D cause. The evidence must be such that in principle it cannot be the product of 2-D causes--even if I am naturally restricted from directly perceiving the 3-D cause by being an entity with 2-D perception.

Similarly, the evidence for supernatural ultimate sentience should be such that the evidence cannot in principle be fully explained as a product of the Natural system (taking into account whatever characteristics of the Natural system we can discover, or at least agree upon). Otherwise, although I might allow that the evidence could perhaps be caused by the SIF, I would be under no fair obligation I am aware of to accept the existence of the SIF rather than accept the explanation of purely non-sentient natural causation.

I think this leaves a wide range of potential opposition to Christianity. I can see myself holding these views, and still being an atheist (of various sorts); or some type of polytheist; or perhaps a positive pantheist; or a nominal deist (God created Nature, but has never interfered with it afterwards). I could still be an agnostic (although not an 'intrinsic' agnostic). I

think I could be a Jew or Muslim, or an adherent of any of a number of theisms which oppose (to whatever degree) Christianity. I could even be a Mormon, I think.

But I am not any of these. I am a Christian.¹³³ And now the time has come for me to begin to build, if I can (or not, if I cannot), a positive argument for the existence and characteristics of God which, although some of my opponents may also find it useful, will (insofar as possible) exclusively answer the question: "Why do I think Christianity is true?"

¹³³ Or, to be fair to the Mormons and other claimants of Christianity, I am a Christian who thinks I am proposing a more proper orthodoxy.

SECTION TWO -- REASON AND THE 1ST PERSON

CHAPTER 14 -- The Golden Presumption

In geometry, as every high-school student is taught, all theorems and other geometric rules can be deduced from axioms. The axioms you use, determine the type of geometry you have. In Euclidian geometry (the kind normally taught in high-school), there are three axiomatic assumptions which cannot be proven, and upon which everything else depends. Points have no dimensions; lines consist of an infinite number of points in one dimension; and planes consist of an infinite number of lines in two dimensions. Solid-body or 3-D geometry extends the classically Euclidian axiom set to include a volumetric space with an infinite number of planes in three dimensions.

No one can prove any of this, but not to assume these axioms can lead to nonsense.¹³⁴ Nonsense does not necessarily follow by changing these axioms; that is how non-Euclidian geometries were developed. But the more basic and fundamentally necessary the assumption, the more likely that any alternate assumption will lead to nonsense.

The most basic and fundamentally necessary assumption should therefore be one that would be nonsense to deny. Such a

¹³⁴ Curiously, the chief axiom--that points must be presumed to exist yet also to have precisely zero physical characteristics--might itself be considered nonsense in light of a naturalistic philosophy.

key assumption (or presumption) will be the bedrock from which trustworthy deductions may be drawn about the rest of reality--it will be a reliable foundation, because to deny it leads precisely nowhere.¹³⁵

You should be able to understand immediately why theistic presuppositionalists want to put God in this spot. The language I must use to describe this 'Golden Presumption', is language that most properly applies to God--if He exists.

But I should be careful here. I am only talking about an assumption that is a tool for my purpose ('To deduce characteristics of ultimate reality'); and I think even the presuppositionalists would deny that God should be considered a

¹³⁵ This may be the best time to clarify how I will be, and have been, using 'deduction' and 'induction', as well as 'abduction'.

An inductive argument would look like this: these are taxis; all these taxis are yellow; therefore we may reasonably expect further taxis (and maybe even all further taxis) to be yellow.

An abductive argument is a special form of induction, and would look like this: hypothesizing that all taxis are yellow, how well does the data fit this hypothesis? The extent to which the data fits, counts as weight in favor of us reasonably expecting all taxis to be yellow.

A deductive argument would look like this: all taxis are (presumed or previously established to be) yellow; this is (presumed or previously established to be) a taxi; therefore, if these propositions are true, this taxi must be yellow.

Not all of my 'deductive' arguments will have precisely this form; but the underlying principle will be the same: I will be examining the implicative constraints either of necessary presumptions (which requires establishing them as being necessary, of course), or of previously established conclusions based on a running chain of such inferences, in order to discover what the constraints must necessarily entail.

A constraint (as the word implies) prevents some option(s) from being true; discovering the implications of a constraint therefore involves either tacitly or explicitly removing (or 'deducting') one or more options that might otherwise be proposed as following from a necessary presumption or a previously established (deductive) conclusion (now being used as an assumption for new inferences).

When the options that could be proposed also can be grouped into two mutually exclusive classes; and when the constraint necessarily removes one option group without necessarily removing the other; (and if the assumptions have been properly established) then the remaining option (or option group) should be considered to be true.

tool for my purposes! What seems to be the proper position due His dignity, becomes a position beneath His dignity (if He exists) once we put the position into practice. God is not a tool of metaphysics. I will not be using Him as such.

There are other problems with putting God into the Golden Presumption slot. As I argued briefly in the first section, it doesn't help the sceptic. A hypothesis for God's existence is not necessarily a bad thing; but it becomes mockery when the purpose of the exercise is to argue that a person (especially an atheist or agnostic) should accept God's existence. A theist would not (or at least should not) stand for the same thing if the shoe was on the other foot: I see no good reason why a religious presuppositionalist, or anyone else, should accept that God does not exist based on an argument which proceeds by requiring God not to exist.¹³⁶

There is at least one more problem with putting God into the Golden Presumption slot: He never quite makes it there. Even presuppositionalists tacitly assume one more key position, prior to their construction of an argument based on God's required existence: they presume that they (and their audience) can think.

¹³⁶ I suspect a large number of sceptics are sceptics precisely because, having been taught by certain theists that arguments are supposed to be built this way, they subsequently discovered this misapplied argument could be developed just as easily from the other direction. This misapplication does have some similarity to a properly abductive argument--but a properly abductive argument is not trying to deductively prove its hypothesis, which is how the problem of malignant circularity arises.

They may deny they are presuming this before presuming God's existence, of course; and I grant that they deny it out of reverence and prudence. They don't want to claim they are putting themselves before God, and I think this is an entirely proper attitude. Nevertheless, they are humans, not God themselves (most Western theists would agree with me at least on that). They have to start from where they are.

Let me put it another way. I do not perceive that I am God. I am, or at least perceive I am, a human being (leaving room to discover maybe I'm wrong about this and am actually God after all. I'll be covering this much later in Section Three.) I want to discover whether God exists, and I want to help other people discover whether He exists. I will build an argument to help them and/or me.¹³⁷ But in doing so, I am flatly presuming that I (and you) can think.

It doesn't matter whether my goal is to argue against God, or to argue to God, or to simply argue about God (in order to discover whichever way the argument may lead). It doesn't even matter whether I am using metaphysical argument or basing it 'purely on Scripture'. I am arguing; that means I am working from a necessary presumption (even if it is an unstated one). The presumption is that I, and you (my reader), can think.¹³⁸

¹³⁷ This argument could even be as 'fundamentalistic' as "The Jewish and Christian Scriptures are all God's direct verbal revelation to us."

¹³⁸ I am not yet considering any particular details as to what this presumption must entail. I'll get to that later.

Already, then, I have an interesting candidate for the Golden Presumption: your and my own sentience. It is a presumption a sceptic and believer may both accept (regardless of relative belief and scepticism on whatever topic). It is a presumption that underlies every argument we make, and can be easily seen to underlie every argument--if we bother to look for it. A religious presuppositionalist will have to work very hard to convince a sceptic (or anyone else) that the sceptic actually presumes God's existence (as such) every time the sceptic begins constructing any argument! But that is the type of characteristic necessary for the Golden Presumption: it should be a presumption that underlies every possible argument, whoever develops the argument.

What happens if I deny this proposed presumption--that you and I can think?

I am not sure it is even possible to do so. Technically, it is possible for me to utter the sounds (or my fingers to peck out the words) which correspond in English to "I cannot think"; but for those sounds to correspond in reality to the general meaning they hold for someone who understands the English language, would entail (it is a tautology) that I cannot in fact think. This would mean that I (as myself) would quite literally have 'no reason' for saying the words even as a groundless presumption: no understanding of what they imply as 'language', no consciousness of their meaning as such.

That being the case, how could I be 'denying' or 'asserting' anything by this event? It would not be 'me' 'doing' it--my body would be reacting in some fashion to environmental conditions of some sort to produce the effect, or perhaps some other real sentience would be using my body as a puppet.¹³⁹

For 'me' (myself) to 'deny' that I can think, requires that 'I' have 'some idea' of what 'a denial that I can think' 'means' and then 'actively' deny it: in short, such a denial by me (as 'myself') requires that I can actually think! This would be necessary, even if I never bothered to take the position any further than the asserted denial "I cannot think."

I am loath even to speculate for the sake of argument that such a proposition ("I cannot think") could be granted. Setting up, as a (much more the) chief presumption, a proposition which in fact we don't believe (and notice that you and I would be both denying this speculative proposition merely by 'speculating' about it!), runs the terrible risk of accepting a nonsensical position as viable from the outset--leading to folly which must grow more profound (and more subtle and subsequently harder to detect as such) as positions are developed further and further ('for sake of argument') from it.

However, in case you, the reader, have missed my point here (or perhaps you think I have made a mistake), I can make the

¹³⁹ This latter position wouldn't necessarily deny the presumption in an absolute sense; the "I" would be some other thinker pretending to be me. This is why fictional characters and entities can still be treated as making arguments--behind their (fictional!) efforts is a real thinker somewhere.

same point by ignoring the question of whether such a position ("I cannot think") makes any kind of sense to propose.

So let me simply brutally propose it, and ignore the issues surrounding the cogency of the event of the proposal: I cannot think. Very well. What happens if I attempt to deduce (or otherwise infer) further positions from this proposition?

Well, if I really cannot think, then 'I' cannot actually be 'deducing' any further positions from that proposition. If I can deduce (or in any way otherwise infer) further propositions, then I am denying the truth of my denial ("I cannot think") and implicitly affirming the truth of its opposite ("I can think").

So even if I brutally propose that I cannot think, 'I' can only 'go anywhere' from that point by refuting my own first presumption. The proposal that "I cannot think" quite literally leads nowhere beyond the sheer proposal--unless I cheat. At the very best, I would require a 6=16 paradigm to use this position: I must really not be capable of thought (per presumption), but I must also really be capable of thought (per my use of that counter-presumption as grounds for further argument).

If I could possibly deny the proposition "I can think" and mean anything accurate (or even coherently useful) by it, then that proposition would admittedly be excluded from contention as The Golden Presumption. But it turns out that I cannot possibly mean anything even useful by denying it, and it may even be

impossible for me to deny it at all (depending on what we mean by 'deny').

Furthermore--and this is very important--I have not therefore 'proved' that "I can think" is a true proposition. It may still in technical fact be true that I cannot think; I simply would have no way to tell. This satisfies another criteria of The Golden Presumption: if it could be logically 'proven', then it would not be the most basic, irreducible presumption for any argument.

So the denial of my reasoning capability quite literally would be unreasonable.¹⁴⁰

But perhaps I could find something else I must presume before I presume that I can think; then that presumption would be The Golden Presumption--or at least "I can think" would not be.

This question can be answered the moment I consider it: as I have shown, if 'presuming' does not entail some kind of 'thinking', then at best there is no way to tell; and to deny that 'presuming' requires 'thinking' leads to absurdity--or at the very best it calls into question the validity of any argument as an argumentative claim (by introducing a presumptive denial that undercuts all intellectual relevance to the study of

¹⁴⁰ I do not mean unreasonable in the sense of being logically invalid--a presumption cannot be logically invalid, although invalid logic may be produced while using it. I mean something more primary, and I will be discussing its implications soon.

an argument and its claims), including arguments leading to or based on the position that presumptions don't require thinking.

This being the case, it would be nonsense for me to suggest 'presuming' something other than your and my reasoning capability to be logically prior in an argument.¹⁴¹

"But," you may say, "there are conditions or states or anyway facts which must first be true before you or I can think!" I agree: to give perhaps the most basic such condition, I must 'exist'. But this priority is not formal priority; it is causal (or effectual or factual) priority. These are two different types of priority.

Let me illustrate what I mean. Let us say that I change my hypothesized Golden Presumption to "I exist": by this I would be claiming that the first presumption I make (either tacitly or explicitly) in any argument is "I exist".

But to mean anything by this proposition, much more to do anything with this proposition, requires that I have also presumed my ability to think. 'Understanding' what "I exist" 'means' (even in any incomplete way) requires that I also accept that I think. Stating "I exist; therefore X", also requires that I accept that I think before I make the argument.

Am I presuming both contentions ("I exist" and "I can think") with equally presumptive force? Both presumptions are

¹⁴¹ If I am not rational, then 'I' am not actually 'arguing'; if you are not rational, then why am I presenting an 'argument' to you for you to judge? The exercise requires that I presume from the outset that you and I have the ability 'to reason'--whatever that means, which I will be discussing soon in later chapters.

certainly necessary for me to make an argument; but only one of them is inextricably connected with the entire notion of 'a formal argument': the "I can think".

The tissue-paper next to my computer may exist, but my tissue-paper cannot argue because it cannot think.¹⁴² The formal argument is an abstract tool, which we use to discover properties of things. Granted, something must exist for arguments to exist; but the Golden Presumption shall be the first tool of the argumentation process (itself a tool). Thus the Golden Presumption must be uniquely related to the process of argumentation itself. 'Existence' is certainly related to argumentation, but it is not uniquely related to argumentation.

Perhaps I can illustrate it more clearly this way: if I say "I cannot think", I must of course exist to say it, but I (as 'myself') cannot be presenting the statement either as a flat assertion or as a presumption for argumentation without cheating and smuggling in my ability to think. My subsequent 'argument' could just as easily be something which only appears to be an argument; my mere 'existence' doesn't help my 'argument' as an 'argument'. Thus the presumption of my ability to think is more

¹⁴² A vitalist would say the basic units of the tissue are alive, but non-sentient, and therefore the tissue does not think. A naturalistic atheist, along with most supernaturalistic theists, would say neither the tissue as such nor any part of it 'thinks', and neither does the specific system the tissue is part of, whether or not that system is part of a subsystem. Most pantheists would either say the tissue does not exist, or the tissue taken as itself does not think even if the Absolute Total--of which the tissue is a proportionate part--does think. But even if there are pantheists who claim the tissue shares all total properties of the sentient Independent Fact--and there may be pantheists of this type--the mere existence of the tissue-paper would not of itself provide an inextricable connection to an argument as an argument.

important to my argument (as an 'argument'), than the presumption that I exist.

One more illustration of the same point: I could claim "I am, therefore I think" or "I think, therefore I am". But unless I was presuming preparatory to the rest of the argument that I can think, the first claim would not get off the ground as an argument. "I think, therefore I am" turns out to be an implicit part of the argument form, even for "I am, therefore I think".

Now, the formal requirements of an argument as an argument, are not necessarily the same as causal requirements. It still is true that I must exist 'before' (causally, and even sequentially) I argue; and also true that my existence is a necessary presumption for argumentation, even if not uniquely related to argumentation as such. So if I tried to deduce (or otherwise infer) my existence, I would be engaging in hidden circularity again. Yet if I think, I may deduce (or otherwise infer) causal priors to my thinking which are not themselves presumptions I must necessarily hold (even tacitly) in order to make an argument.

Therefore, it is entirely possible and proper to reach deductions about causal necessities even if the Golden Presumption is not itself considered to be the ultimate causal necessity.¹⁴³ This means that if I deduce God's existence and character from the necessary presumption that I can think, I am

¹⁴³ Notice I am claiming the Golden Presumption is "I (and you) can think", not that "Reason exists" which is more general. I will be refining this claim further as I continue.

not thereby 'putting myself ahead of God', nor presuming myself to be more important than God, nor requiring that God is not the most necessary Fact of reality. The formal necessary presumption of an argument is not the same category type as the causal origin(s) of the argument. The relationship between Ground to Consequent is not necessarily the same as the relationship of Cause to Effect. We use our recognition of formal ground/consequent relationships to discover the existence and relationships of cause/effects: including (where possible) the causes of our own ability to reason.

This is a legitimate exercise. At the very least, atheists should accept and understand this; because (just like most people) they are not in the least reluctant to attempt many types of logical explanations about how we reason and how our sentience came into being, while still tacitly requiring as a necessary presumption (for formal purposes) that they themselves can in fact reason. Nor is this necessarily the same as 'proving we can reason' (although of course particular atheists may accidentally attempt this just like anyone else); that would be a logical fallacy, because the proposition to be proved (that we can reason) requires as a necessary presumption the proposition to be proved (that we can reason).

So, as long as we (be we theists, atheists, pantheists, whomever) don't produce what amounts to an argument that we can reason (which is circular and thus must fail); and as long as we

don't produce what amounts to an argument (or requirement) that we cannot reason (which is self-refuting); then we may legitimately attempt to deduce propositions from the presumption "We can reason".¹⁴⁴ And those propositions and conclusions may be about conditions or situations or entities, which are themselves causally (not formally) prior to any reasoning ability we in fact have.

But what does it mean 'to think' or 'to reason'? What basic requirements does our thinking entail, which we may safely use as characteristics upon which to draw deductions? What effect(s) may we commonly agree on, as taking place when we 'think'? I will have to establish this before I go any further.

¹⁴⁴ 'We' means 'you and I' personally, not some hypostatized abstraction of 'humanity'.

CHAPTER 15 -- a necessary characteristic of 'reasoning'

In the previous chapter, I argued that the proposal "You and I can reason" is the Golden Presumption: the implicit or explicit presumption that must stand behind any argument advanced by any person on any topic.¹⁴⁵ I specifically pointed out that it is entirely possible to search for and discover the causal prerequisites for our reason; but that none of these characteristics (our own existence, the existence of a stable field of reality, the existence of God, and/or whatever) would function as the Golden Presumption because they have no specific relation to 'an argument' as 'an argument'.

For instance, I may exist but it doesn't necessarily follow that I am in fact capable of reasoning. On the other hand, if I am capable of reasoning, then formally I should be able to deduce a characteristic of causal priority: I cannot be an illusion. If I did not exist, then 'I' could not be reasoning--either no reasoning at all would be taking place, or something else not 'myself' would be reasoning. Thus, if 'I' can reason, 'I' must exist. "I think, therefore I am."

Furthermore, I argued that any attempt to justify a 'better' or 'more irreducible' candidate for the Golden Presumption could only get off the ground by presuming first

¹⁴⁵ Remember, an argument that this must be the Golden Presumption is not an argument that we can in fact think; that would be vicious circularity.

(even if tacitly) that you and I can think: which affirms that our rationality is the Golden Presumption after all. Finally, if we deny our rationality as a fact (much less a presumption), then we are left with no valid means of continuing.¹⁴⁶

Very well then: "You and I can think" must be presumed to be true, as the formal start of any argument as 'an argument'--including the argument that recognizes it (not 'proves' it to be true) as the Golden Presumption!¹⁴⁷

I therefore think that such a presumption must be the closest any of us can come, to a mutually agreed-upon formally self-grounding principle.

The next step, before drawing deductions from this presumption, is to figure out with better detail what this presumption means.

Let me begin by contrasting our presumed condition ("You and I can think") with the condition and properties of something almost all of us agree does not (in itself) have the property of sentience: a piece of chalk.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁶ Besides which, the very act of 'denial' is impossible, as such, without presuming our rationality.

¹⁴⁷ Remember that although, technically speaking, it could still be a false presumption, there is literally no reason to speculate that it is false--because the event of such speculation would tacitly require it to be a true fact, and if the fact was false then no reasoning could be taking place during such a speculation!

¹⁴⁸ I think the only person who would disagree that the chalk cannot think, would be one sort of pantheist who claims all particular units of Nature must fully share all attributes of the Independent Fact including sentience. Since this person will already agree that the final level of reality--he would say the only level--is sentient, he is already several steps ahead of where I currently am in the argument. Therefore, I will ask him to wait for me to catch up, at which time I will be considering claims of pantheism more closely.

What properties do you and I have as thinking entities that the chalk doesn't have? Well, we certainly have radically different chemical properties compared to the chalk. But I should be careful here, so I don't accidentally slur a property with a proposed cause.

A naturalistic atheist, for instance, might say at this point, 'You and I have chemically organic structures we call brains, with such-and-such configuration and properties; which is why we can think and why the chalk, which lacks a brain, cannot.'

But that wasn't what I asked. I haven't asked (yet) why we can think and the chalk cannot. I wanted to know what properties we are exhibiting which distinctively count as 'thinking', that the chalk is not exhibiting.

'But we are exhibiting these physical properties, thanks to brain chemistry, and the chalk is not.' This is still begging the question: that phrase 'thanks to brain chemistry' is an explainer, and a rather significant one.

Let me try another way of getting my point across: ignoring for the moment how we are thinking, what is taking place when we are thinking? If the chemistry (or anything else, or anything else combined with the chemistry) is producing this effect, then what effect is being produced? What are the results?

I think any other pantheist would agree with me that the chalk is not, considered as itself, sentient; any more than my toenail, considered as itself, can be considered sentient. (And some pantheists would say rather that the chalk doesn't exist at all; and so of course could not be sentient.)

'That depends on what is producing the effect,' the atheist may say. I agree; in fact, I agree very strongly with that answer: it is part of the principle of property transmission. But the question of what is producing the effect is the topic we will be disagreeing about. Are there not very basic characteristics regarding our thinking ability vs. the chalk, that we may agree about, regardless of what is producing the effect?

I think there is at least one such characteristic. However this ability of ours has come about, you and I can act. The chalk merely reacts. You and I may occasionally (or even often) react. The chalk does not act.

What does this mean? I think we now are reaching an opaqueness of definition, a virtually irreducible set of concepts--as indeed we might expect if we are considering the most fundamental aspects of reality. But although opaque, such concepts are not unintelligible.

Atheists, for instance, have quite a robust understanding of the distinction between actions and reactions, when it comes to proposing that God does not exist. If you ask a knowledgeable atheist what it means for the Independent Fact to be non-sentient--for an ultimate God to not exist--he will reply in language that indicates the IF (which, if he is also a philosophical naturalist, he will say is Nature) takes no actions, initiates nothing, and so is incapable of any sort of

'thinking'. The IF may indeed behave, but the atheist will usually have a pretty good idea (even if unspoken) about what kind of behaviors and abilities he is denying to the IF that the IF would have if it was sentient. He may claim that such abilities do come about at particular physical locations due to particular physical arrangements, including due to particular physical arrangements of the IF (if the atheist is a philosophical naturalist); but these would be particular exceptions to the usual, and foundational, situation.

Does our atheist agree that he takes action? He might possibly deny this overtly, but if pressed I think he will eventually agree that he does act. At the least, when he assigns his own beliefs (including atheism) any credence, he will have to speak as if he necessarily is capable of action, not merely automatic reaction, unlike the foundational Independent Fact and unlike the vast majority of natural formations, including the chalk.

So, for instance, if you decided to be rude to the atheist, and attempted to explain away his psychological state of 'believing atheism is true' as being only an automatic response to his environment, he will probably (quite hotly!) deny this and attempt to show instead that he has responsibly grounded his beliefs on inferences. But this defense simultaneously ratifies that he does in fact accept and apply a real distinction between (what I am calling) action and reaction; and that this

distinction has a direct bearing on whether a person is or is not 'thinking'; and that actions (namely his) do in fact take place (rather than being merely useful legal fictions, like the square root of negative one).

Of course, he might brazen it out and claim, that yes, his beliefs about atheism are in fact entirely a result of his automatic response to the stimuli of his environment. If he stops there, then the accuracy of his belief as a psychological state enters limbo: a mere assertion by itself is no reliably accurate means of conveying truth.¹⁴⁹ His 'belief' might be true (in the sense of corresponding accurately to real facts); or it might not. But he himself would not be in any position to help establish the credence of his own claim, without tacitly admitting that some of his beliefs are not entirely the result of his automatic response to environmental stimuli: for if his attempted defense is itself also an automatic response to environment, then the deadlock is put one stage further back for no gain. Or, someone else (such as you or I) might be brought in to judge the accuracy of his assertion; but then again, this presumes that you or I are not utterly, always, automatically responding to our environment, or else once again the question of reliability is put one stage further back (this time on us) for no gain.

¹⁴⁹ If you think otherwise, I have some ocean-front property in Montana to sell you! And if you were fool enough to buy it on my mere assertion that such property exists, then the laws of the United States would still be on your side and I would be charged with felonious fraud.

When you and I think, therefore, we are not merely reacting--responding automatically--to our environment. More precisely, we must presume we are not, in order to assign even potential credence to any formal argument, as an argument. I think this is the most basic level of the Golden Presumption: you and I can act.¹⁵⁰

But this ability of ours to act, instead of only to react, carries with it very serious deductive consequences; and I think this is why some philosophers would like to get away from any special concept of 'action' altogether (such that 'actions' turn out to be only reactions and counterreactions mis-perceived to be something qualitatively different.) I will begin to spell out those consequences in my next chapter.

¹⁵⁰ It may be technically possible for something to 'act' without 'thinking logically', per se; but it is impossible to claim that 'thinking' takes place without action, comparatively distinct from reaction, if we want to mean anything distinctive about 'thinking'. I will be demonstrating this later.

CHAPTER 16 -- the deductive implications of real action

You and I can act. I think we also react; but evidently we must presume, for the sake of our own arguments, either that we can also act or that somewhere someone else (who can judge our proclamations) can act.

This is why, for instance, we have mental competency hearings in our legal system. A person or group of people who are presumed not to be utterly and automatically reactive to environmental stimuli, sit in judgment to decide whether a given person (not themselves) is or is not utterly (or at least significantly) reacting to the environment: a decision that carries subsequent conclusions about notions such as 'ethical responsibility' (although I must defer that particular issue until Section Four). The jury may say 'This man was not responsible for his actions'; what they really mean, however, is that although the man is responsible for his actions (whatever those may be), the behaviors being judged in court were not his actions. They were the equivalent of a sneeze, even if rather more complex. This is the difference between a sick man, and a guilty man.

Or, put another way: if an atheist posted a defense of atheism on a website, and then added that the beliefs and arguments represented in his letter were purely the result of

his automatic response to environmental conditioning, I do not think his defense would be considered worth listening to (assuming we believed he was serious about his explanation for his own beliefs). At best someone might charitably write in: 'Don't worry; I ran through your argument and you seem to be on target anyway'--a response which itself would only have weight for the original 'argument' as an argument, if the charitable responder was presumed or concluded to be doing something herself other than merely responding automatically to her environment.

I don't think it is possible to jump off the shadow of real action. A presumed and commonly accepted distinction between action and reaction (whatever words we use to describe the distinction) is irreducibly and irreplaceably fundamental to the acceptability of a formal argument.

But any distinction accepted as real has deductive consequences; and if this particular proposition is (as I am arguing) the Golden Presumption itself in its most basic possible form, then the deductions will be proportionately monumental.

Specifically, any attempt to propose further positions (either as hypotheses or conclusions) should be discarded if they contradict this position.

Very well then; we can act. But any variety of atheist forthwith is faced with a serious problem. Action entails

addition to, instigation in, and freedom (in some fashion) from the web of reactive causation. Atheism, as a chief branch of philosophy distinctive from "not-atheism", either provides for this ability, or it does not. If it does not even in principle allow for this ability, it should be considered false and deducted from the option list.

I do not mean, 'If experiments, run under the presupposition of atheism for purpose of argument, never adequately demonstrate real action ability, then atheism should be considered false.' If I was at that stage, I would be agreeing that it is at least possible in principle for an atheistic universe to produce creatures (specifically you and me) who can act, and that now we should look to see how this might have come about.

But I haven't agreed that such a situation is even intrinsically possible yet. If it is intrinsically impossible, then consequently no experiment can ever possibly succeed in demonstrating the reverse.

Atheists really should have no problem with this principle, because they apply it all the time in regard to other questions. If, for instance, a supernatural God does not exist, then no amount of clever historical argument or hypothesis-testing could ever possibly correctly conclude that Jesus of Nazareth was supernaturally resurrected by that God. Some other explanation would have to be true; and any conclusion we reached that seemed

to suggest otherwise, no matter how strong it might look, can and logically should be reliably dismissed as an error, even if the error has not yet been specifically detected.

I have not found any atheist who has any problem whatsoever applying this principle at this level; I know I certainly would apply it! But the principle itself is topic-neutral (distinctive states have consequent impossibilities and thus deductively certain consequential conclusions of one sort or other); and I am applying it here, at a very much earlier stage of argumentation than any historical question. If atheism as a general branch of philosophy is intrinsically incapable of allowing us to meet the Golden Presumption (you and I can act) then it should be discounted as a possibility. Some sort of not-atheism would be deduced to be true; and we may reliably hold to this conclusion even in the face of apparent evidence to the contrary.¹⁵¹

What does atheism entail? The Independent Fact (usually Nature--thus 'atheistic naturalism'--but it could be Supernature), the ultimate Fact upon which all other facts are based, does not act. It does not initiate events. It does not choose to do one thing, nor choose to refuse doing another.

The IF may feature random events, such as quantum fluctuations; but then again, it is difficult to say whether

¹⁵¹ Apparent evidence to the contrary might be intuitively gauged by us as strong enough to warrant rechecking the original logical grounding, in order to ensure a mistake had not been made in the preparatory philosophical conclusion; but apparent evidence to the contrary would not be enough by itself to legitimately overthrow the prior deducted possibility-filter.

these events are truly random or whether they are merely permanently incalculable to us. Either way, if you ask an atheist, "Do these fluctuations mean there is an acting, thinking Ultimate Fact after all?", he will (as an 'atheist') still say "No." The fluctuations may be random, but there is still no active initiative involved. Nothing is being 'chosen' (except in a merely convenient descriptive sense). No actions are being taken.

So, even if quantum behavior might require abandoning naturalistic atheism for a technically supernaturalistic atheism--such fluctuations may be evidence of a Supernature--this by itself will not entail the falsification of atheism. Whatever 'level' of reality the fluctuations come from, as long as they are considered to be ultimately random, then precisely because they are considered to be ultimately 'random' they cannot cogently be proposed to be exhibitions of real purpose, initiation, choice, action. If they were, they would not be 'random'; they would be intentional.¹⁵² Leaning over a craps table to turn a rolled pair of dice so that two sixes are showing, may be probabilistically indescribable; but it is not, technically speaking, a necessarily random behavior.¹⁵³

¹⁵² Rigidly determinate results can, of course, be another type of 'opposite' to random results; and yet also not be intensitive.

¹⁵³ Unless it is true that all behaviors are necessarily random and so non-intentional. But presuming this would void the Golden Presumption again; and certainly it cannot be intentionally argued that all behaviors are non-intentional, whether randomly or determinately so!

If atheism is true, then the IF is utterly reactive as a system. But if arguments to atheism (or to any other notion) are to be considered even potentially reliable, then the arguers (or the judges of the argument) must be capable (as I shall demonstrate presently) of at least some action. For us to be able to act in an atheistic reality, reactions must be capable of producing actions.

But if it is nonsensical to propose that reactions can produce actions, then one of two conclusions will follow:

A.) None of us can actually act;

or,

B.) The IF is itself capable of actions.

If A. is true, then the accuracy of what we call our 'arguments' is indefinitely mooted in a limbo; which incidentally includes any argument in favor of atheism itself. Granted, this limbo would also incidentally include any argument against atheism; but if atheism entails a consequence (our inability to do anything other than automatically, blindly, necessarily respond to our environment) which prevents any argument (including atheism) from getting off the ground as a real argument (not just something that looks like an argument), then there is no point--it would literally be impossible--for us to 'accept' atheism as being even possibly true.

Notice that I am not saying 'Atheism must therefore be false if none of us can act'. Atheism might still be true if we

cannot really act. But we would never be able to cogently propose or defend it; the quality of all of our apparent behaviors in that category would be an illusion, just as it sometimes seems that genetic proteins are actively 'choosing' to do one thing or another, although virtually all of us agree that they aren't doing this.

Passive agnosticism may at first glance seem to be the best alternative under this proposed condition--except, of course, that even 'passive agnosticism' would not be rationally defensible under such a scheme, due to the simple fact that without the ability to act there can be no such thing as a rational defense for any proposition.¹⁵⁴ Therefore I would be unable to rationally accept passive agnosticism to be the 'best' option. My beliefs would only be a reflection of my environment, possibly true, possibly false, and with no way to adequately analyze their accuracy, because any attempt at analysis (by anyone, not just me) would contain the same inherent defect: the 'attempt at analysis' would itself be one more automatically blind knee-jerk response to my environment, whether it happened to 'feel' that way to me or not.

Option B, on the other hand, would entail the falsification of atheism altogether: some type of not-atheism would be true. We would be concluding that the Independent Fact can itself act, initiate, with true purpose, not merely behave unpurposively.

¹⁵⁴ If I cannot act, then 'I' cannot be defending a proposition at all. If no action capability exists at all, then no human at all--including you, my reader--can be defending any proposition at all.

If the proposition 'reactions produce actions' is nonsense, then either atheism is false, or we might as well treat it as false because it can never, in any legitimate way, get going even as a live proposition (much less as a possibly cogently defended one). Atheism could still be sheerly asserted; but a sheer assertion is not a reliable conclusion upon which to form a subsequent belief.¹⁵⁵

Two categories of defense may be attempted against this deduction.

da.) The proposal 'reactions produce actions' is not nonsensical.

db.) Defensible arguments (such as, for instance, atheism theories) can be produced purely by automatic reactions without actions.

Adherents of the first defense would proceed by one of the general following methods (with variations):

dal.) The terms 'reaction' and 'action' are proposed or demonstrated to be so vague and subjective that no distinctively useful definition of them can be formed, therefore aborting the question of whether it is nonsensical to say one comes from the other.

da2.) Reactions really exist, but actions are not distinctive from them, as they are merely our subjective

¹⁵⁵ Atheism can certainly be presumed for sake of argument; but unlike the GP, it is not a necessary presumption for every argument. Neither atheism nor any other notion presumptively granted for argument (including the GP) can be deductively concluded by any argument requiring that notion, except in a trivially meaningless circular fashion.

perception of reactions, considered to be something 'other than reactions' purely for convenience in certain discussions.

Therefore, it is a non sequitur to claim that 'reactions produce actions' is nonsensical.

da3.) Reactions don't really exist, all events being purely action; what we call reactions are only a term of convenience for particular discussions. Therefore, it is a non sequitur to claim that 'reactions produce actions' is nonsensical.

da4.) Real actions and real reactions both exist; but we can successfully argue that reactive systems produce actions. Therefore, it is not functionally impossible for reactions to produce actions, thus undercutting by demonstration the grounds for my attempted deduction.

da4 will be saved for last: although the principles of my counter-rebuttal to it are simple, they are also subtle and will require some extended discussion on my part.

da3 succeeds by affirming that the IF can behave with real purposes, which is the same as affirming the truth of some type of not-atheism (perhaps pantheism); so if successfully proposed and defended, it would refute atheism rather than defend it.

da2 is essentially the same as defense b above, as it denies real actions altogether, leading to the question of whether the lack of real initiative can still result in cogent arguments. Therefore my counterdefense against it will be

equivalent to my reply to defense b, to which I will return later.

dal might seem a worthwhile tactic; but its feasibility is sharply limited by inconsistent practical application. Specifically, it would be contradictory for an atheist as 'an atheist' to claim that the distinction between action and reaction is only our subjective perception of an otherwise inscrutable property of reality--because the atheist as an atheist proposes that ultimate reality doesn't instigate, doesn't initiate, has no purposes: doesn't act. There is no God, he will say, only a blindly automatic mechanism, which may have random events but those random events by their utter randomness are also unpurposive.¹⁵⁶

But the moment the atheist proposes that reality doesn't initiate events--and as an 'atheist' he will have to propose this or some polysyllabic variation--he has simultaneously affirmed that he understands and accepts quite robustly a necessary and real distinction between actions and reactions. If he didn't, his own profession of 'atheism' would be meaningless.

¹⁵⁶ Random events are themselves causes of effects which, being determinately caused, are not themselves random. A lightning bolt may strike randomly, but the thunder that follows is not a random event, being determined by the actual character of the bolt and actual local atmospheric conditions. (Actually in both cases random and determinate variables play a part, but I am oversimplifying a bit for purposes of principle illustration.) I mention this to clarify that I am not trying to paint atheist philosophers as claiming all events to be utterly random and unpredictable. Obviously, determination of an event doesn't necessarily involve rational action either, as the event may be only mechanistically reactive: the atmosphere's reaction to lightning being a pertinent example. This will be discussed in more detail later, although it has also already been discussed in much detail back in Chapter 4.

The dal defense, therefore, would not bulwark atheism if it could be successfully proposed and defended. But perhaps it would bolster some type of agnosticism.

Maybe; but the person using this defense must consider whether she actually accepts the consequences of applying this defense successfully. And I think this will always be untenable. The moment the agnostic defender attempts to employ this defense--and if she isn't going to employ it, then there is no good reason to make it--she will be tacitly refuting herself; for she will be making a tacit but quite necessary exception of the proposal 'reactions and actions are only subjective descriptions we perceive of events' in favor of her own deployment of the tactic to defend against (for instance) an encroaching not-atheism.¹⁵⁷ She will not be able to maintain that this defense is usable without simultaneously requiring (whether she mentions it or not) that her own thoughts definitely have a certain quality or characteristic pertinently related to the distinction between action and reaction.

'Reactions into actions is nonsensical,' I say, for example. 'And we require actions to be real for our own arguments to have even the bare possibility of cogency. Therefore, ultimate reality--the IF--must be capable of actions,

¹⁵⁷ What the agnostic defends against, however, makes no difference; she could be defending against an encroaching not-atheism or cosmological dualism instead, for example. That she is employing agnosticism to counter a move one way or the other is the main point I'm making here.

not only blindly automatic non-purposive behaviors. Therefore, God, the ultimate Act-er, exists.'¹⁵⁸

'That argument might work,' the agnostic may say, 'except it depends on there being a real distinction between actions and reactions. Maybe there is, but our perception of an event as "action" or "reaction" is utterly subjective, therefore unreliable as to the actual state of the event. Therefore, we cannot be sure that any given event really contains an action or is "only" a set of reactions. Therefore, any event you propose as being necessarily an action, cannot in fact be accurately said to be "necessarily" an action; and as you require certain abilities of ours to be "necessarily" actions for your argument to work, then your argument fails because it cannot get off the ground.'

'That looks like quite a good reply,' I return. 'Too bad there is evidently no way to tell whether it was produced in you by the non-rational environment around you; or whether you might have contributed something yourself, instead, such that something other than non-rational events took place in your mind as you said that. So, why should I bother to give your defense the time of day?'

'Because...' begins the agnostic (perhaps a little heatedly!)

¹⁵⁸ I would rather use the word "actor", but that word is too closely linked to a specific profession today. I will also point out that I've here used an oversimplified version of my argument.

'You can stop right there,' I interrupt. 'Why should I accept that your explanation for your defense might itself be something other than a purely reflexive unthinking response? You yourself require that your own utterances should be accepted as being functionally distinguishable in a real and truly distinct fashion between initiation on your part and blindly non-rational responses on your part. For your own defense to have any even merely apparent success as an argument per se, you must make a tacit exception in favor of you yourself and your argumentative defense. You necessarily presume the truth of my contention, that such distinctions are real and detectable, in order to get your opposing contention off the ground.'

In refuting this type of agnostic defense, I am not merely arguing that someone hasn't lived up to her own standards. I fully agree, for instance, that procrastination is an ethically wrong behavior: a facet of gluttony. I also happen to procrastinate quite a bit. (There is a very good chance I was procrastinating from doing something else while drafting this chapter, for instance!) This doesn't change the fact that I consider procrastination to be an ethically wrong behavior, and in my honest moments I emphasize this and ask people to realize that when I procrastinate I am misbehaving, whatever justification I may attempt to give at the time.

If my imaginary agnostic wishes, she may try the same tactic: 'No matter what I may seem to imply on occasion, being

only human; please remember that it is in fact impossible for us to distinguish and apply a true and useful distinction between action and reaction.'

Very well; but then so much for any attempt at justifying why I should pay any more attention to her defense than I would pay to a rushing brook or to the cackles of a gaggle of geese (depending on the aesthetic quality of her voice!) Whenever she attempts to employ her defense, which assigns a tacit possibility of distinctive value to it, I will remind myself that she has asked me to disregard any tacit claims of that sort which ride along with any of her propositions; because she wanted me to understand that she is only human and so often makes the mistake of assigning the possibility of definite value to her own statements!

In point of fact, she cannot jump off her shadow, either. Whatever she says, she will continue to require that her own utterances and mental behaviors are practically and usefully and (potentially, at least) truly capable of being graded according to the level of actions and reactions they contain, with consequent conclusions about the relevance of her remarks--including perhaps most tellingly her own practical opinion of their relevancy.

This being the case, the defense of action/reaction inscrutability can never be anything better than a daydream--

once the principles of the defense are actually applied and followed through.

The refutation I have just employed may also be leveled against the fourth variety of defense 'a' (which general defense was 'reactions into actions is not nonsensical'). This fourth defense (da4) attempts to conclude, via experiment or logical argument from principles, that sometimes reactions do produce actions. As my reply to this contention shall draw on points I have previously developed in this chapter, and as my reply to defense 'b' ('cogent human thought can take place without any actions whatsoever') will feature essentially the same tactic--and as this chapter has already been rather lengthy--I will continue my discussion in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 17 -- a dialogue against the justification of
reasoning ability

A philosophy that posits that the Independent Fact (the ground of all other facthood and the base for all reality) devises purposes, makes plans, initiates events or otherwise takes action, will fall into one of two mutually exclusive philosophical branches: 'theism', or perhaps better for our present purposes, 'not-atheism'.

'Atheism', by contrast, posits that the IF behaves only automatically, nonpurposefully, noninitiatively. An atheist could be (but usually is not) supernaturalistic. She could even (but usually doesn't) propose that the IF is 'alive' in some sense. Neither of these posited IF characteristics necessarily entails that the IF acts. An atheist might even allow that a Most Powerful Thinking Entity exists, which could without gross abuse of language be considered 'a god' and which might very easily and forgivably be mistaken for 'The God' (in other words, be mistaken for the Independent Fact, and thus inspire a belief that the IF itself is rationally active). However, such an 'emergent' god (if its/his/her existence could be established) would not technically falsify atheism, which concerns the properties of the IF itself.

So: I think an atheist, as an atheist, has a vested interest in proposing and defending the proposition that the final, ultimate base of reality does not act.

Granted, most atheists would probably say rather that their vested interest is to defend the proposition that the IF does not think; but if I was an atheist, I wouldn't require much introspection to recognize that this 'thinking' ability attributed to 'God' involves at a more basic level the practical exhibition of action initiation; or else, if not, then I might as well comfortably stay an atheist.

Let us say I am an atheist. A nominal deist claims to me that God exists, but (going a bit too far and transitioning inadvertently into cosmological dualism) also claims that God takes no actions whatsoever in my sphere of reality. What, as a consistent atheist, would be my response? As far as I can see, it would amount to a variation of one or both of two replies:

1.) 'Oh. That's rather... um... interesting. But if God never takes any action that relates to my reality, then on every conceivable and practical point God might as well not exist. That being the case, I'll just stay an atheist, thank you.'

2.) 'Ah. But if God never takes any action that relates to my reality, then you cannot possibly have any grounds for proposing God's existence other than your own sheer assertion. That being the case, I'll just stay an atheist, thank you.'

In other words, a consistent atheist will (with admirable prudence!) either consider a non-acting God to be a non-issue, or else a non sequitur (and thus a mistaken belief).

In either case, the proposed ability of God to 'think', as such, makes no practical difference to 'atheism', as such. If the nominal deist replies (as a nominal or even minimal deist would in fact do, not being a cosmological God/Nature dualist) that God doesn't only think, but also creates my reality, then I would consider it a real challenge to my atheism (to be defeated, of course, if possible). Now the claim would encroach on my actual beliefs. A claim of 'sentience' sheerly by itself would not be a major problem, to me, because sentience can be so variously defined as to be rendered innocuous. (God is sensible to stimulus??) But when a claim about God entails practical action by God, then things become much less ambiguous--and so much less safely ignored.

To put it bluntly, actions have consequences; and proposed actions of God have the most far-reaching of consequences. As an atheist, I would have no particular compunction to waste my time bothering about a claim that a thinking God just sort of exists somewhere out there. But if a thinking entity designed, instituted and maintains me? Now I have a serious issue.

God has a purpose for my life; God expects me to do certain things; God will act as ultimate judge of my conduct, and will take further actions to uphold that judgment; God sends messages

to me and to other people; God grants authority to people and expects them to share in His plans and purposes as vice-regents, and thus as authority over me: these are propositions which strike me right in the face.

A man attempts to gain political power in my country, who merely claims 'a thinking God exists': what do I care about his opinion on this matter? He might as well be claiming that galaxy NCC-1701 has a black hole at its center. I am more concerned with whether he can manage governmental functions competently and honestly.

A man attempts to gain political power, who claims that God acts in the history of our reality. Now I (as an atheist) am concerned, because this is a man who could easily be trying to 'act' 'with' 'God'--and if I think he is mistaken about God's existence, I will conclude it would be dangerous to have a man so incorrect about reality to be in a position of such great power: because even if he has the best possible ethical intentions he will be acting in a way which (I think) cannot help but be questionably inefficient. To be mistaken about reality and to act on that mistaken belief is to court disaster, because you will be expecting reality to behave one way, and it will instead behave in another way--quite possibly (or even probably) at direct odds to your intention! This is not a person who should be in public office, other things being equal; certainly not who should hold the strongest authoritative power

in our country (if not the whole world). But the person who merely proposes that a 'thinking' God exists? No problem.

And, of course, hyper-minimal deists (or, for that matter, hardcore God/Nature cosmological dualists) are rather rare. Someone who proposes the existence of God, usually means more than the mere proposition of a 'thinking' entity; they mean that the ultimate Fact of reality takes actions--one type of action being 'thinking'. This person may be Jewish, Christian, Muslim, some type of pagan henotheist, perhaps a positive pantheist, or even a 'non-religious' theistic ethicist. Strictly speaking, even the nominal deist would be claiming God takes actions, even if the deist restricted this claim to the absolute minimum of a one-time creation event beginning our Nature's history; but as a matter of history, nominal deists have a tendency to appeal to God's institution of Nature as a ground for practical moral action. Sometimes they acknowledge God as an active judge of morality, too, beyond death if not today in this life.

So what I will care about at bottom (if I am an atheist) is whether this 'God' of theirs acts--and especially whether this 'God' of theirs is still supposed to be acting in relation to the Nature I live in. Not just whether He, She or It 'thinks'.

Similarly, one type of pantheist (such as an Early Stoic) who claims that Nature is sentient but that Nature never takes actions, would not be worth my time as an atheist, except perhaps in a purely abstract debate--where my reply would

probably be, "What is the point of proposing a 'sentient' Nature if you simultaneously deny its ability to act? The claim is contradictory. I also deny Nature's ability to act; that means Nature cannot be sentient, either. And that claim is self-consistent."

So when I put myself in an atheist's shoes, I discover pretty quickly that an atheist as 'an atheist' claims at bottom that the ultimate fact of reality, the Independent Fact upon which all other things are based, does not act--and, in passing, this also happens to mean It doesn't "think", either.

On the other hand, as an atheist, I would probably be very insistent that I can act--especially in my own judgments! "You are only an atheist because you were brought up that way," a theist might tell me. At this point, I would have one of two basic options open to me:

1.) "Hmm. I guess you're right," I could reply. "But," I might continue (assuming I don't thusly abandon my atheism as being irrational) "it doesn't matter, because those environmental pressures are such that they can be relied upon to produce true beliefs in, or through, me."

or,

2.) "That is most certainly not true!" I could hotly retort, whereupon I would launch into a string of arguments to demonstrate that my beliefs about the non-existence of God are

not only automatic knee-jerk behavioral responses of mine to my environment (even if I did happen to be raised by atheists).

The first type of defense would agree that I am not capable of action, but that this doesn't matter with respect to my 'thinking' behaviors. The second type of defense certainly involves a defense of my action ability.

These options may seem rather different modes of defense; but essentially, both these defenses involve the justification of what I call my 'reasoning ability', whether or not I consider this ability of mine to be utterly reactive.

And this leads me back to the end of my previous chapter. There, I had concluded that my ability to think (and otherwise act) either comes from a fundamental reality which engages in action itself; or else blindly automatic reactions must be considered capable of producing events which are themselves capable of active or only (yet sufficiently) reactive justification.

If the ultimate fact of reality--what I have been calling the IF--acts, then the whole wide-flung branch of 'atheism' must be untrue, and should not be reinstated later under any circumstances or conditions.

On the other hand, if reactions are proposed to have produced actions, then either this contention is intrinsic nonsense or it is not nonsense. If it is nonsense, then it is removed from the option list, to be replaced either by the

proposition that mere reactions can be reliably self-justifying, or by the conclusion that a purposefully active IF exists. If this last defense of atheism turns out to be nonsensical, then it is also removed from the possibility list, leaving the existence of a Sentient Independent Fact--a purposeful, active IF--as a deduced conclusion: God (of some sort) will be deductively established.¹⁵⁹

A defense of atheism therefore sooner or later entails defending the contentions 'it is possible that actions are ultimately produced by reactions'; or 'it is possible that reactions can be reliably self-justifying.'

Claiming that 'action' and 'reaction' are terms too vague to support the deduction runs almost immediately into the atheist's (or even the agnostic's) own practical acceptance of some such clear distinction as a professing atheist (or practicing agnostic). Thus, this tactic cannot be successfully used to defend against an anti-atheistic deduction.

Claiming that 'reactions' don't really exist, only actions, essentially means accepting that the IF purposefully initiates events after all; thus it would be a rejection of atheism.

This leaves the two basic lines of atheistic proposition, either one of which may be used as attack or defense (depending on who goes first in a discussion of the topic).

¹⁵⁹ A successful conclusion of this type would still have some highly important qualifications to keep in mind, however, as I will discuss later.

The atheist may claim that only reactions in fact exist (thus entirely avoiding the question of whether it is nonsensical to claim action-from-reactions--or even agreeing that such a claim would be nonsensical), and yet these reactions may produce behaviors that for all practical purposes equate to reliably 'rational' behaviors in us (particularly in our arguments).

Or, the atheist may attempt to establish experimental and/or formal arguments of reactions producing actions, concluding that the principle is not nonsensical.

The attempt to establish the consistency of the claim 'all actions could possibly be produced ultimately by reactions' seems to me to be the more popular of the two branches--atheists have a wide and impressive battery of claims along this line. That is, these claims are impressive in their density, and in the apparent scientific validity they possess, or in the apparent reasonableness of the proposed enterprise (assuming the relevant experiments haven't exactly been run yet). The claims are also impressive in their sheer number, and in the strident (sometimes triumphant) authoritativeness of their proponents.

But as impressive as such attempts may look, I think they are all, in principle, founded on a devastatingly circular argument; a circular argument actually shared by those who attempt to claim that reactions and only reactions can reliably justify conclusions.

I will illustrate this formal problem underlying the connection between atheism and human justification attempts, by presenting an imaginary dialogue between Chase (whom I will arbitrarily assign to the atheist role) and Reed (whom I will assign as the theist, using a variation of the theistic Argument from Reason).¹⁶⁰

Reed: So, you claim that reality is, at bottom, non-rational.

Chase: Yes, I do; in the sense of being "non-sentient".¹⁶¹

R: Is your claim itself non-rational, or is it rational?

C: My claim is rational; if it was non-rational, it would not be worthy of potential trust.¹⁶²

R: I agree; although of course an honest mistake or a dishonest cheating is also rational.

¹⁶⁰ As with all my dialogues, unless I have specifically said otherwise, this one is fictional--I am arguing against myself, as an illustration of the application of the principles I have been discussing.

¹⁶¹ Chase is not using 'non-rational' to mean invalid. It would be silly for him to claim that reality is at bottom 'invalid'!

¹⁶² Similarly, Chase is not using 'rational' to mean valid; so he is not instantly introduced a category error here by jumping between concepts. I will return next chapter to the question of trustworthiness in a world with only non-rational behaviors.

C: I agree; those are rational behaviors. The dishonest man, such as the Christian who fudges on his history to mislead the simple and gain power over them, is still engaging in a rational action. That is why I consider such a person wicked, not merely misguided. On the other hand, if I have added up my logic incorrectly due to human error, that mistake also does not negate the rationality of my action.¹⁶³

R: I agree with your judgment of both those examples. Very well. Non-rational causes can have non-rational effects, yes?

C: Yes, that is elementary.

R: You say your mental behavior, corresponding to what you claim is a "belief" about atheism, is rational. Also, you say that this belief ultimately was produced by non-rational causation.

C: It may have its origin partly from other rational humans, like myself; we don't need God to explain it.

¹⁶³ Chase is committed to avoiding the externalistic fallacy: his rationality is not merely the formal validity of his thinking, and he does not claim the rationality of other people on that ground either. (His ethical judgment against this hypothetical Christian would not necessarily extend to all Christians, of course; he would think the other ones, like Reed, are making an honest mistake somewhere.)

R: Are these rational humans the ultimate foundation of all reality?

C: No, of course not; they were produced by non-rational Nature.¹⁶⁴

R: So bringing them in only puts the question one stage further back for no gain. I grant that your rationality might be partly derived from their rationality in some fashion, but you claim that their rationality is ultimately derived from non-rationality; so whether we go the long road or the short, we're still talking about your rationality being ultimately produced by non-rational Nature.

C: I concede the point. And I see where you are going with this: if non-rational causation at least sometimes produces non-rational effects, why should I be considered correct in claiming that my own belief concerning atheism is itself rational instead of non-rational?

R: It seems to me that it is nonsensical, to claim that rationality is totally produced by non-rationality. A Christian may have a "belief" in God, but if you happened to know that her

¹⁶⁴ Chase, like most atheists, is also a philosophical naturalist. He could be a supernaturalistic atheist, but the basic principles of this dispute would remain the same.

"belief" was utterly produced by her automatic reactions to her environment, you would claim her belief was non-rational.

C: This is true. But my beliefs are not utterly caused by my automatic response to my environment. I am different from her case.

R: How was your belief produced, then?

C: I drew inferences from principles, and drew further inferences from experimental data using those principles. I am a free thinker; I think for myself, and am not in thrall to the millennia of cultural pressures that promote such superstitions.

R: I think that this is entirely proper. This means you did not automatically respond to your environment, then?

C: Correct. When I was a child, I unthinkingly, automatically accepted what my family and friends in the Church told me, but not anymore.

R: So your current opinion about God was not, in fact, utterly produced by non-rational causation after all.

C: Exactly; as I already said, not thirty seconds ago, my beliefs are not utterly caused by my automatic response to my environment. Unlike the theist of your example, or when I was a child; I am now a free thinker who thinks for myself, and I reject theism as a result of my own competent, responsible and rational inference that theism is either certainly or most probably not true.

R: For what it is worth, I suspect that as a child you in fact drew quite a few inferences, to reach your belief in God. Specifically, you inferred that certain people could be considered trustworthy; and you inferred that if they told you something (God exists and has certain characteristics, the Bible has such-n-such level of reliability), you could therefore trust what they told you on that subject as on others. You may have decided later that they were honestly mistaken after all; or you may have decided later that they were being dishonest after all, either on this topic or generally on other topics, and so could not be relied on to provide you truthful answers to such important questions. These things happen; but I seriously doubt that you unthinkingly automatically accepted what they told you across the board. You do yourself, and children in general, a great disservice by describing such a reactive behavior as being distinctively childlike. Meanwhile, have you decided whether your rationality, including your rational belief in favor of

atheism, comes from ultimately non-rational causes, or not?

Because it seems like you are saying they do, when you want to claim atheism to be true; and also like you are saying they don't, when you want me to take your beliefs about atheism seriously.

C: Just because my inferential ability was produced by an ultimately non-rational cause, doesn't mean my arguments are thereby non-rational.

R: In the same vein, just because your arms were produced by non-rational causes, does not mean every behavior they exhibit is non-rational.

C: Quite so.

R: Similarly, just because your mouth and vocal cords were produced by non-rational causes, does not mean every sound you utter is non-rational.

C: Correct.

R: Do you understand that I have altered your proposal slightly to avoid a nonsense statement on your part? Your arms and your mouth are not your ability to move your arms and to

speak. This ability to 'infer', which you mention, is really an abstract way of describing the behavior of actual materials in your body, brain-matter presumably being chief among them.

C: So what?

R: Are your arguments actually produced by your inferential ability?

C: Yes, of course.

R: So are you claiming an abstract description produces an actual event?

C: No!

R: Then what is your "inferential ability", if it is not an abstract description of an actual behavior set?

C: Okay, fine; but what it describes is what produces my arguments.

R: What does it describe?

C: The movement of certain electrical impulses across certain neural structures in my brain.

R: So would you say that this explanation, in principle, effectively and sufficiently describes your thinking behavior without having to bring in anything other than non-purposive Nature?

C: Correct. There is no need to bring a purposeful God into it, supernatural or otherwise.

R: So these movements in your brain, corresponding to your beliefs about atheism, are completely non-purposive?

C: No, I am causing them.

R: They aren't merely an automatic, non-purposive knee-jerk reaction to your environment, then?

C: No, not hardly! I have said this already.

R: So they are something other than non-purposive Nature. I thought you said we didn't have to bring in anything other than non-purposive Nature. Here it is!

C: I didn't "bring it in"; non-purposive Nature produced it.

R: I see. Is this a usual result of the effects of non-purposive Nature?

C: It is, under the type of conditions inside my head.

R: What makes these effects of non-purposive Nature something other than merely more non-purposive behaviors?

C: We don't know yet.

R: So you are simply sheerly asserting that these particular results of non-purposive, non-rational Nature are rational and purposive?

C: No--I am only saying that we haven't exactly figured out why it should be different this time.

R: But you apparently already have some clue as to the principles involved. If you didn't, there would be nothing to distinguish your proposition from a sheer ungrounded assertion--essentially a flat wish.

C: It is not a mere ungrounded assertion! We have some clues here and there; enough that we can be sufficiently confident that we are on the right track.

R: Why should I agree that your evaluation of those clues is rational?

C: What?! That's rather rude!

R: Pardon me; let me try a different approach. Would you say you have drawn some reasonable conclusions, about the development of our sentience from non-purposive Nature, from these clues?

C: Yes. Would you like some examples?

R: No, thank you; it isn't really necessary.

C: You aren't even going to look at the examples for yourself!? That seems rather like you're afraid you'll find something that disarms your point!

R: It could only disarm my point if the inferences drawn from those clues could possibly be rationally established.

C: I assure you, they can.

R: Really? Would you mind explaining again why we would be drawing inferences from those clues in the first place?

C: To explain how it is possible, in principle, for non-rational causation to produce rational thinking.

R: And you're confident that this explanation is rational?

C: There is in fact a wide battery of explanations along this line that I think are rational, and I would be happy to show them to you.

R: If you're confident these explanations are rational, why are you bothering with the inferences from these clues?

C: Excuse me?

R: Supposedly, you're going to show me these inferences drawn from experiments or principles or whatever, so you can explain that it is functionally possible for non-rational causation to produce rational thought.

C: Yes, and I will if you'll just let me!

R: But you apparently don't need them; you are already confident that your thought processes are at least possibly rational even though you consider them to be produced ultimately by non-rational causation.

C: Well, I'm not doing it for me; I'm doing it for you, since you're the one having a hard time with the concept!

R: All right; I say it is intrinsic nonsense to claim that non-rational causes and only non-rational causes can produce rational behaviors. What types of things are you going to show me?

C: I have a whole boatload of data and arguments which demonstrate that you are wrong, and that such things are possible--although you seem suspiciously afraid to look at them!

R: And these arguments (including the analyses of the data) will be reliable because they are rational?

C: Yes!

R: So I must begin by jettisoning my contention, and then accepting instead from the getgo that it is possible for non-

rational behavior to produce rational behavior, before you get to the arguments explaining that this is possible. How convenient!

C: No, all you have to do is look--

R: All I have to do, is accept that your arguments which purport to justify that your ability to justify your arguments is possibly rational, are themselves possibly rational.

C: I think you are twisting my words around.

R: Let's start again. These arguments of yours are rational?

C: Yes!

R: And you claim these arguments of yours are themselves rational behaviors ultimately produced by non-rational causation?

C: Yes; that is what it means for me to be an "atheist", among other things.

R: And your arguments will make it clear that this is a possible situation?

C: Yes!

R: So we have to sheerly accept first that this must be a possible situation, before we get to the arguments that show it is (or even can be) a possible situation.

C: No, you don't have to sheerly accept it, that's what the arguments are for.

R: If I offered to demonstrate to you that God does exist if you would only begin by accepting that God must exist, I suspect you would refuse my offer.

C: Absolutely: that's a circular argument. It can't go anywhere.

R: So if you offer to demonstrate to me that your demonstrations can possibly be rational, if only I will accept first that your demonstrations can possibly be rational, what should I do?

C: You should refuse it: that's a circular argument. It can't go anywhere. But my strategy is different than that.

R: What is the difference in principle?

C: Well, I'm not talking about God.

R: I said "in principle", not "in topic". What's the difference between the two tactics?

C: But it isn't really necessary to demonstrate that I might be rational. You said it yourself earlier.

R: True; we can start with that as a necessary presumption: you and I can be rational. It is entirely proper to go on to ask: "What produced this characteristic of ours?"

C: Nature.

R: Non-rational Nature.

C: Right, not a pantheistic or theistic God.

R: Are you claiming non-rational Nature produces rationality so often, that the odds are pretty good you and I are rational no matter what possible physical condition we have?

C: Of course not. Rationality only comes with certain physical structures in Nature, as you are well aware.

R: So, overall in Nature, it's rather rare?

C: Taking Nature as a whole, yes. Solar fusion is rather rare in Nature, too, considering the physical space of Nature as a whole. Nevertheless: there's the Sun (and billions of other stars besides)!

R: I agree. So why do you think that this particular physical arrangement has done the trick?

C: I don't have to justify it. You said I can just stoutly assume it.

R: We can (and in fact do) stoutly presume that it is possible for us to reason. Do you stoutly presume that every given case of human mental behavior is rational?

C: No, of course not!

R: Neither do I. So evidently, we both share some kind of criteria as a fairly reliable clue when we're no longer talking about our human ability in general, but about particular instances of that ability instead. Let us see if we can put our common agreement into play. I claim that Christianity is true; and let us say that I claim this because of automatic knee-jerk reactions to the cultural stimuli that have pummeled my mind since childhood. Any comments?

C: I seem to recall already addressing this example.

R: Indeed, you yourself introduced it earlier! What did you say back then? Or what would you say now? Would you say my belief, under these conditions, is rational or non-rational?

C: As a rational agent myself, I would judge your belief to be, at best, irrational, and maybe non-rational.

R: Are you at least ready to stoutly presume I am in principle capable of rational behavior, just like you presume about yourself?

C: Yes. But you are not being rational within these circumstances. So you wouldn't be behaving non-rationally,

perhaps (presuming you are a rational agent), but you would be behaving irrationally (as if you were not a rational agent).

R: Given this explanation for my belief, would you accept my offer to go to church next Sunday and be baptized?

C: Certainly not!

R: And why not?

C: I don't have to do anything I don't want to do; I'm a free person!

R: So you're an atheist only out of your own subjective aesthetic taste.

C: Absolutely not! Admittedly, my aesthetic taste for or against atheism might in theory have something to do with why I believe it--just as it might in theory have something to do with why a Christian or any other religious person believes their religious beliefs! But in my case, no, I assure you I reject my mere aesthetic taste as a criteria for believing what is ultimately true.

R: I quite agree! So, you wouldn't go to church on those grounds? Don't you consider them to be an intrinsically reliable means of leading you to truth?

C: No! Do you think they are?

R: Frankly, no. And I suspect we agree why this hypothetical condition on my part would not be a reliable path to the truth. Do you want to say it, or shall I?

C: It isn't rational.

R: I agree. I only gave one qualifier for the existence of that 'belief', (if we want to dignify that behavior with the label 'belief'). Why should we not consider that belief to be rational?

C: Because...

R: ...that belief was totally produced as a series of automatic non-rational responses to non-rational causes.

C: ...yes.

R: If you yourself decided my belief was logically valid anyway, would that therefore mean my belief was actually rational after all and worthy of attention and assent on its own grounds? Or, if you decided that my belief, although logically invalid, still happened to match up with factual reality. Would you go to Church and be baptized because my belief that Christianity is true was entirely produced by automatic knee-jerk reactions to my environment?

C: No. That would be the externalist fallacy. If I did decide you were right, it would be due to my own responsible judgment of the matter.

R: And would you then abandon your own responsible judgment in order to 'believe' according to the utterly non-rational causes of my belief?--throwing away the rationality that led you to God?

C: Absolutely not! That would actually be less than totally pointless!

R: Which of course is why atheists often denigrate religious belief, or try to do so, on exactly the ground you've been using all throughout your side of our dialogue. You've transcended such unthinking acceptance of beliefs.

C: Exactly. And I am a better man for it.

R: I don't have any problem agreeing with that in principle, and maybe even in practice!

C: So why are you smiling?

R: Because you're proving my point the whole time. The claims you make for yourself and your own responsible judgment, are just the reason I reject atheism for theism: because I accept and respect your responsible personhood. And also the implications of your responsible personhood.

C: So... you're a theist because you believe in atheists.

R: That's an excellent way to put it! And it looks like you and I agree pretty closely on the application of a general principle: the first conclusion to draw about behavior utterly produced by non-rational causes, is that the behavior is itself not rational.

C: All right, I'll grant that.

R: So, if you propose to me that your and my reasoning ability--which will include all particular behaviors which we term "reasoning"--is produced ultimately by non-rational causes, what should my first response be?

C: Yes, I understand that your first response should be "No, that's nonsense." But that doesn't have to be your only or last response.

R: Then you will have to show why the normal judgment can (or even should) be set aside in this instance. You will have to show why, against this sceptical threat, it is possible for non-reason to come from reason.

C: Which I am reasonably confident I can do.

R: Except that this presumes already (whatever method you go about trying it makes no difference) that it is possible to successfully set aside the sceptical threat of "non-reason into reason is nonsensical". Otherwise I could level that at your explanation itself--because your explanation for why it is possible, is also (according to you) ultimately a product of non-rational causes.

C: Fine! But that doesn't mean God exists.

R: If it is nonsense to claim (whether we go the long road or the short) that rational behavior is ultimately a product of only non-rational causes; and if we must stoutly presume that you and I nevertheless can be rational; then what is the conclusion of combining these two principles?

C: Our rationality must be at least partially produced by rational causes. Which is something I have affirmed and not denied!

R: Causes? Plural? Such as?

C: Such as other humans!

R: Yes, I recall you trying this back at the beginning. I also recall you admitting that other humans are not ultimately a rational cause.

C: We presume they can be rational.

R: Agreed. Are you ready to presume they are ultimate causes, though?

C: What does an 'ultimate cause' mean? That's just playing with words.

R: Was the first reasoning animal taught to reason by his or her reasoning parents?

C: No, that would be ridiculous. And certainly any competent atheist would have enough sense not to say that.

R: Is Nature ultimately non-rational?

C: If atheism and naturalism are true, then yes.

R: Were we caused by something more basic and fundamental than Nature?

C: No. Unless supernaturalism is true. But supernaturalism could be true and also atheism.

R: Would that Supernature be ultimately rational?

C: No, as I just said: not if atheism is true.

R: So as an atheist, you do accept, in principle, what the phrase "ultimate cause" means. I'm not just playing with words.

C: sigh...

R: I repeat: if we stoutly presume that it is possible for us to reason, then that ability must ultimately come from a rational cause.

CHAPTER 18 -- a dialogue against the justification of non-reason

Reed (the theist): I repeat: if we stoutly presume that it is possible for us to reason, then that ability must ultimately come from a rational cause.

Chase (the atheist): ...sigh. No, not necessarily. We don't have to begin by presuming that it is possible for us to reason.

R: What would we begin by doing?

C: That's the answer: "we" wouldn't "begin" by "doing" anything. Your argument only works if it is possible for us to reason.

R: Are you really sure you want to go this route?

C: Just listen! It's true that--

R: True?

C: No, forget that. ... Behaviors reflect reality. Yes?

R: Seems true. Are you sure you want me to forget the concept of truth?

C: That was a rhetorical question. Whatever may produce behaviors, different causes have different effects. Some of those effects result in a certain composite entity being able to do things--

R: "Do?"

C: --metaphorically! Some of those effects result in a certain composite entity continuing to exist, and to behave, although not actively, as that composite entity--

R: Has this happened?

C: It doesn't matter!

R: Well, you said that these effects result, which sort of implies that they definitely do, which seems like a statement of a truth-claim, which sounds like the result of a rational analysis...

C: Just hold up, okay? Some of those effects could result in a certain composite entity continuing as that entity, despite

other effects that could dissolve that entity as such. And some of those entities could be such that, between one thing and another, they happen to be capable of producing entities like themselves. And the chances that they would be able to... I mean that they would in fact exist long enough as those Entities to produce more of themselves, would directly bear on whether the particular non-rational effects which produce their behaviors provide behaviors which happen to facilitate their survival and reproduction. The success of these groups of Entities as distinct groups--call the groups 'species'--the success of these species would in that situation require that they be able to interface effectively with their environment: that the behaviors caused in them by non-rational Nature would be such that they didn't self-destruct. Now, if the process of replication was not perfect, if thanks to entropy (or something similar) the internal reactions which governed the shape and behavior and efficiency of each species member (and thus of the species as a whole) occasionally resulted in a change to the structures by which the individual's behavior was governed; then those changes would either be equally capable of sustaining the resulting 'new' type of individual in the environment, or less capable, or more capable than its peers. If it is less capable, the odds are proportionately good that it and its descendants would not survive long in the same environment; they would either go extinct, or luck-up and happen to be exposed to a more favorable

environment (perhaps during a migration), or maybe luck-up and get a new mutation that happens to offset the old one. And if the new individual and its descendants were equally or more efficient, then chances are proportionately good that soon there would be a viable population of a new species, and maybe even it could eventually crowd out the older, less efficient variety. And so on, and so on. Follow me?

R: Are you asking whether I agree that this is reasonable? Or are you only automatically checking to ensure that I am reacting, in turn, efficiently to your story, thus blindly 'following' you like a lemming?

C: Whatever... The behaviors we call 'reason' are generally helpful to the individual, and although we may exhibit such behaviors in ways that ultimately do not help us as individuals (messing with a stable society that supports us, etc.), we haven't been on the planet long enough as this species for these behaviors to weed themselves out. Plus, of course, our environments change, which causes problems for old modes of previously effective behavior. But, in general, these behaviors are still likely to become more and more efficient as they help the success of individuals (and thus help get similar automatic behaviors spread through the gene pool); and we call this 'learning', both at the individual and at the cultural or even

species level. This can account fully for why our behaviors can be successful, without introducing anything other than automatic reactions taking place inside us, leaving Nature free and clear to be a non-rational cause of all our effective behaviors. So!

R: So.

C: ... Yes, so! What do you--

R: Think?

C: (sigh!) Say! What do you say to that?

R: Are you saying you care?

C: ... No; what I call "caring" is merely an emotion which by being present helps foster the spread of what we call "ideas". I may for convenience say I "care"--

R: That seems rather dangerous, as it could lead to other conveniences which in turn could lead you to speak of yourself as if you do take actions; and thus lead via the route we went over earlier to the conclusion that we should consider atheism to be false if we believe our rationality to be true.

C: It doesn't matter. I just want... I am feeling that you should respond to this... uh...

R: Idea?

C: For want of a better word. "Idea". Sometimes we have to speak metaphorically, as you well know.

R: Just remember that.

C: I will. I am feeling that you should respond to this "idea", which will in turn lead to better levels of efficiency in our behavior.

R: What if I respond in a manner antithetical to your "idea", for want of a better word?

C: Well, that is your affair.

R: No it isn't; it would just be happening automatically, according to my conditioning. What would happen if I responded antithetically to your "idea"--if I didn't "agree" with it (for want of a better word)?

C: Then we would bounce it back and forth automatically until the efficiency sorted itself out, or until other non-rational causes intervened to stop the exchange.

R: The exchange of what?

C: Of... of air molecule vibrations, which thanks to a delicately and supremely complex biological arrangement will translate, purely through non-rational physical reactions, into electroneural reactions, which in turn will rearrange electrical potentialities in our brains so that we, as individuals, may be more efficient.

R: Or at least this is likely to happen.

C: To an extent likely; the likelihood probably depends on randomly unpredictable quantum flux, genetic differences, microscale and macroscale health, etc.

R: And this rearrangement toward better efficiency could happen to either of us.

C: ... Well... yes. In principle.

R: Including the possibility that your "idea" (for want of a better word) about atheism might be rearranged to a "belief" (for want of a better word) in God.

C: ...Maybe. I suppose I have to agree that's possible. But I'm confidently willing to take that chance.

R: No, you aren't.

C: Excuse me?

R: No, I won't. We're just automatically reacting here, according to this new proposal of yours. You're not "willing to take that chance"; that's only a metaphorical description you slipped into by accident, and not a very efficient one in this case, under these circumstances. What actually happened (if your theory is true) was that the physical reactions and counterreactions which corresponded to your perception of an argument that ends up with accepting the existence of God, induced a purely non-rational revulsion in you, resulting in another set of reactions and counterreactions which would not lead you "mentally" (for want of a better word) down the "path" of theism--the path that induced a merely non-rational revulsion in you, which you then merely reflexively gagged on. Whether this alternate "idea" of yours is sufficiently efficient to

prevent that revulsion (and so that gagging) again, and whether that revulsion is itself a sign of better correspondence to reality, remains to be established.

C: Whatever. This "proposal" happens to have spread very efficiently through very efficient minds over the last two hundred years or so, and seems to have non-materialism-based "philosophies" on the ropes--or at least it has competed very successfully against them in many endeavors.

R: What makes you say those minds were very efficient?

C: A bunch of non-rational reactions inside my mind makes me say it, of course! Thought you'd catch me, eh? Excuse me, you didn't "think" you'd catch me, but that behavior is how you've been programmed to automatically respond; and I must respond by admitting, that... um...

R: That my behaviors seem to be rather efficient, too, despite their theistic flavor, hm?

C: Whatever.

R: This proposal of foundationally non-rational materialism--the proposal of naturalistic atheism, in other

words--has been around a very long time, although admittedly not quite in the form it has "achieved" during the last two hundred years. So have not-atheisms.

C: True, I admit this. Just as species compete more and less effectively, relative to each other, when random mutation provides changes beneficial and harmful to their chances of success, and when environmental conditions change; so species of "ideas"--our behavioral means of efficiently interacting with the world--also change, grow, or become outdated.

R: The way atheism became extremely outdated across most of the planet for, oh, about 1500 years or so. After not having really gotten a good foothold to begin with.

C: A harmful mutation in the "idea of atheism" occurred--

R: Or perhaps a beneficial mutation in the "idea of theism" occurred?

C: ...theoretically, I suppose I have to admit that's possible. And I admit that the behavior of atheism could have had a final "death" as a species. But it didn't. Conditions became favorable for its re-ascendance in a mutated form that better allowed the "idea" to successfully flourish, so to speak.

R: So whether atheism is actually true or not, is not really entailed by your "idea".

C: Well, if it succeeds it would probably, most likely, be reflective enough of actual reality that we could say with some accuracy it was "true"...

R: But it could have died accidentally, thanks to random environmental 'mutation' factors and, shall we say, natural selection processes; just like any other widely spread behavioral pattern within an evolving species, or just like any species itself.

C: Yes, atheism could have "died". But it didn't.

R: Did atheism "survive" because it reflected reality better?

C: Yes... probably.

R: I thought you just told me it survived and began to flourish again thanks to a random mutation that allowed it to spread more efficiently. Do random mutations have some property

to automatically provide just the impetus needed to reflect reality better?

C. Of course not; but in this case, that's what happened.

R. So why did the "not-atheisms" also continue progressively developing?

C: The "not-atheisms" also continued developing because... um... the structure of those "beliefs" allowed individuals and cultures to flourish at a number of levels, despite the "beliefs" not actually reflecting ultimate reality accurately--a sort of tellurian ripple effect. And you cannot deny that this is possible!--because if theism is true then atheisms have continued developing in just this way despite not actually reflecting ultimate reality accurately.

R: I wouldn't deny that; just as you admit that atheism's resurgence could only be the same sort of ripple.

C: ...Technically, yes. We shall see.

R: We shall see, on these conditions, whether or not atheism successfully survives as an idea-species, regardless of whether it reflects ultimate reality accurately or not.

C: Not entirely regardless. The question of how accurately a "belief" reflects ultimate reality should have some bearing on how efficiently its "holder" interfaces with reality, and thus with how effectively the "belief" spreads.

R: But there is no way to ascertain this accuracy from the actual behavior of the "idea-species" per se on an individual basis--such as your own particular "ideas" about atheism.

C: No, if you come right down to it, there isn't. But I think--

R: Think??

C: I say we can be sure that the surviving and developing "idea", as an evolving non-rational behavior in our species, will at least probably have a good chance of being accurate to some degree or other.

R: Well, that's sufficiently qualified! So in effect, you're an atheist by historical accident.

C: Whatever; and given its success in spreading, I seem (by "accident", as you say) to be likely on the side which is more

"correct". At least, the current situation is bound to produce that inclination of behavior in me, and for want of a better word this means I think I have a better "reason" than you for my "beliefs".

R: Until and unless the environmental climate changes, so to speak.

C: If that happens sufficiently, I'll either be around to be part of the change, or not; and I'll either be sufficiently affected to be part of the change, or not.

R: You understand, of course, that you've thereby surrendered any claim of accuracy for "atheism" per se.

C: What?! I've done no such thing! Atheism could still be the fact, or characteristic of ultimate reality.

R: But that in itself would not have had a necessary effect on how your belief came about.

C: As I said, whichever belief ends up as the most successful will very probably have been influenced by the actual state of reality; just as the most successful state of my belief about my bank account, will most probably have been influenced

by my efficiency at detecting and responding to my actual bank account amount.

R: A relationship that seems rather more direct than the relationship between the actual status of ultimate reality and your beliefs about it.

C: But the actual status of that reality will be affecting my beliefs far more intimately. If God exists, you can chalk my atheism up to Him, in the end.

R: I have to say, you seem very much like someone covering his ears and squinting shut his eyes, yelling "YAH YAH YAH I REJECT MY ABILITY TO THINK BECAUSE IT EVIDENTLY LEADS TO A CONCLUSION THAT GOD IN SOME WAY EXISTS YAH YAH YAH WHETHER SOMETHING IS TRUE OR FALSE ISN'T MY CONCERN YAH YAH..."

C: I have to say that you were apparently conditioned to probably resort to such insults to try to carry your point.

R: So how did that expectation of probability arise?

C: ... Come again?

R: You talk a lot about "probabilities" and "chances being good" and such, especially since you started attributing your own mental behavior to utterly non-rational causation. You've apparently been conditioned to expect, for instance, that whichever "idea" survives the best in the "idea-species" philosophy conflict, will probably reflect the real condition of ultimate reality most accurately. Thus, since atheism seems (thanks to its currently efficient spread) to be "winning" the battle (or at least winning some battles), in your non-rational estimation, you are consequently assuaged, if not assured, that atheism is probably correct.

C: Cute. I acknowledge I would have been insulted earlier, had you described that as my "non-rational estimation". But yes, more or less.

R: For this comfort to be more than an illusion, though, your expectations of probability must also be usefully accurate.

C: To a certain degree. But that isn't a problem.

R: We'll see. After all, you've been conditioned to automatically expect that the mental behaviors we call "probability estimation" are usefully accurate at reflecting potentials.

C: You've been conditioned that way as well.

R: You're only saying that because you've been conditioned to say it.

C: Granted; but you're in the same boat.

R: Makes for a rather interesting "development" in our efficiency at reflecting reality, doesn't it? Your thesis leads, in terms of explanatory power, to an infinite regress with no useful conclusion!

C: Whatever. I have been conditioned to cut that type of useless knot and move on to more profitable endeavors rather than reflect on that.

R: Would a proposal from you, of how we developed a useful probability-estimation faculty, be profitable?

C: That might be capable of smoothing your efficient ability to reflect the actual state of reality.

R: I wonder how long you'll be talking like this after we're through...

C: You're the one who insists that I keep as far as possible from misleading metaphors concerning our state.

R: You mean concerning your conditioned perception of our state.

C: Whatever.

R: Please, continue with your description of the development of probability estimation, according to the "idea" you've been conditioned to accept that you currently perceive to be probably true whether it's true or not.

C: ... If you insist. I have been efficiently affected in my beliefs about the development of our probability estimation ability, and I will be... satisfied... to share with you an efficient explanation of this sort.

R: Fire away. Please begin by clearly stating the particular position you will be efficiently representing.

C: Our brains have come into existence by natural selection in favor of random non-directed mutational changes in our

genetic codes, where those changes positively affect our abilities to assess probability and risk.

R: Into what type of range do these assessments fall?

C: The range that would be useful in human life.

R: Useful in every human's life?

C: Given the proper circumstances, yes.

R: So humans fifty thousand years ago found it useful to speculate abstractly about the probability that atheism may adequately reflect reality. Did we start out as twenty-first-century philosophers? We don't seem to have advanced very far...

C: Your feeble attempt at humor isn't helping. No, the applications of this ability were different then. Different applications don't necessarily indicate a different principle in operation, as you yourself have pointed out numerous times.

R: I would apologize for my feeble attempt at humor, except I have no reason to, my attempt being the type of automatic response I have been conditioned to exhibit under circumstances of this--

C: Fine, whatever.

Reed (the theist): I find myself curious to know... excuse me, "desiring to be told"... what types of usage this principle of behavior exhibited itself in, among us humans when we first developed.

Chase (the atheist): When we first developed as a species per se, we had the legacy of billions of years of environmental conditioning and mutation from previous species, having honed our inherited instincts to such a pitch, that we were in a position to respond to certain types of stimuli, in such ways that we would consequently behave in fashions most probably suitable to succeed and survive.

R: And we call this response today, or our reflections on and expressions of this response, "the estimation of probability".

C: Correct: which doesn't keep us from erroneously attaching more meaning to the event than is actually happening, but that type of result is probably unavoidable. Certainly the existence of such further beliefs about the event are themselves self-consistent with the theory.

R: So far, it does seem that way. What types of "probability estimation" did non-rational causation kit us up with?

C: It kitted us up with the ability to instinctively "assess" probability on the order of, say, being gored by a buffalo if we shoot an arrow at it, being struck by lightning if we shelter under a lone tree in a thunderstorm, or drowning if we try to swim across a river.

R: Which are risks, and situations, commensurate with our ability to efficiently replicate: to Feed, Fight, Flee and (ahem) Find-a-mate for spreading these genetics through the species pool.

C: Of course. The whole process runs on that provision, you might say.

R: And we had the legacy of billions of years, and perhaps hundreds of ancestor species, passing on these behaviors to us?

C: Obviously the precise behavior sets would vary according to the complexity of the entity and the actual characteristics of the environment. But, yes.

R: And these same principles are still in play today?

C: Yes, although they have taken different applied forms.

R: Are all my perceptions of "relative probability" accurate?

C: I dare say most of them are, but not all of them.

R: So, you're saying it's possible to tell which of them are intrinsically more accurate than others.

C: ... Well...

R: I say this, because you yourself have been appealing to all sorts of probability statements in this dialogue, which is why I brought up this topic in the first place. You can tell which probability estimates are intrinsically accurate enough to be useful--come to think of it, you've implied this a few times already in your discussion about how our perceptions of probability developed!

C: ...Yes, that seems correct. Probably.

R: If I said the hypothetical success of all those hundreds of prior species seemed rather improbable to me, what would you say?

C: That you are misjudging the improbability because you are looking at it from the wrong angle.

R: No, I am misperceiving the improbability. Real judgment has nothing to do with it, under your current theory.

C: Whatever. It's still from the wrong angle.

R: Please explain.

C: Non-rational causation, behaving through mutation and natural selection, has equipped our brains with a subjective consciousness of risk and improbability suitable for creatures with a lifetime of less than one century. That is the type of "impression of probability" you are automatically perceiving, which is why you find it difficult to assess the reliability of, I admit, extremely improbable situations which nevertheless took place over much-more-extremely-long periods of time. Your subjective judgment of what seems like a good bet, is therefore irrelevant to what actually is a good bet.

R: What is the correct way of perceiving the situation?

C: Let me use an imaginary example. If on some planet there are creatures with a lifetime of a million centuries, their perception of comprehensible "probability" will be such that they will reflect better the timespan involved in the gradualistic development of natural species.

R: Are you saying these aliens will have developed under different principles than us?

C: No, not ultimately different principles; although the expression of the principles will of course reflect their environment. To that extent, their physiologies could be radically different. This, in fact, would be why their perception of comprehensible probability would be so different under my example.

R: So we've got "us" as a species, and "the aliens" as a species. Both of our species are wired up by the same general processes to subjectively assess probability in similar fashions but with drastically different ranges.

C: Right.

R: And the aliens, being very long-lived, would have the correct point-of-view regarding probability estimates concerning such long stretches of time and circumstance. Therefore their perceptions would reflect reality more accurately on this topic.

C: Correct. ... Why are you laughing?

R: Are you an alien with a lifetime of a million centuries?

C: ... Excuse me?

R: Let me rephrase the question. Do you perceive yourself to be an alien who has lived a million centuries?

C: Your pitiful sense of humor seems to be reasserting itself...

R: I am entirely serious; and I will continue asking the question until I get an answer.

C: Fine. No, I do not perceive that I am any such thing.

R: Do you have any inclination whatsoever to consider yourself anything other than a human like myself?

C: No; and I have never said anything to that effect! I specifically said that this was a fictional example--!

R: So mutation and natural selection have also equipped your brain with a consciousness of risk and improbability suitable for creatures with a lifetime of less than one century.

C: Of course!

R: Mmm-hmmm... You say that mutation and natural selection, when they wired the early humans like this, kitted them so their perceptions were subjective; and that this has continued unto the present day, because you dismissed my perceptions of probability as being "irrelevant" thanks to that subjectivity. So, are your perceptions objective instead?

C: sigh... No, no perception is objective; the objective is the actual, and perception is the representation of the actual. You yourself have said this earlier--

R: Nevertheless, you decided that my subjective perception, despite being based on an actuality, was still irrelevant due to its subjectivity.

C: No, not just because of its subjectivity, but because the actual conditions to which it subjectively corresponds are not conditions which would produce a proper perspective on the problem at hand--

R: But those same basic primary actual conditions somehow managed to produce a properly corresponding subjective perception in you. I notice you are not talking about recent conditioning which has taken place in our individual lifetimes.

C: Of course we have been recently conditioned--

R: But it doesn't matter, because according to your own testimony, the exact same principles are in play in these recent conditionings as in the original conditionings underlying our species-behavior.

C: But different results can come from those same principles being put into play in different environmental conditions.

R: Meaning that you might possibly now have a properly corresponding perception of relative probability.

C: Right.

R: Or, my perception of the relative probability might possibly be correct despite being different from yours.

C: ... Yes... But as it happens, you have the incorrect perception.

R: So we are not talking any more about the mere possibility of this-or-that correct perception; we're talking about the certainty or probability of your perception being the better one.

C: Yes; and it is.

R: Why do you say that?

C: Because... ..

R: Yep: because a great number of non-rational reactions and counterreactions have taken place inside your head. And if I ask why those events should be considered to be more efficient than mine at representing reality, I shall get an answer from you which is also generated, just the same, by a host of non-rational reactions and counterreactions.

C: That doesn't mean they aren't effective at interacting, and even corresponding to, actual reality!

R: And that is the fundamental similarity between both our perceptions, yours and mine, of probability as humans today. Which is also the fundamental similarity between our perceptions of probability today (yours and mine) and human perceptions of probability back then. Isn't it?

C: ... Yes. But our... I mean my perceptions might be...

R: Better now? That's a judgment of value which (according to your theory of non-rational justification) you were non-rationally conditioned to produce. And the judgment of the value of that judgment turns out to have the same inherent problem. In point of fact, your estimate of the probability of having a better perception, requires that we already accept from the outset that it is possible and likely that you have a better perception. Yet this process, in you, can be traced back directly to those same processes in our most remote human ancestors, and indeed are the same processes merely with different environmental conditions to filter for producing our behavior. Isn't that what you said?

C: ... Yes.

R: So, what we have here is the same ability kitted up in both of us by processes which are themselves non-rational, and which thereby produce, in both of us, subjective perceptions of probability which, as you insisted, are irrelevant to what actually is a good bet probabilistically. But of course, you only insisted that when you were talking about me. So, are you in the same boat I am? Or are you not!?

C: I... I mean we...

R: If you are, then the sauce of subjective probability assessments cooks your gander along with my goose. If you're not, what's the difference? I think we're both willing to agree you are not an alien with a lifetime of a million centuries behind you.

C: I never said I--!

R: No, but you have been constantly applying, or at the very least appealing to, a perception of relative probability which according to you would be the result of that type of characteristic (having a lifespan of a million centuries): not the characteristics you and I actually have--according to your

proposal of our origins. Would the long-lived alien have the correct perception of the probability?

C: Yes!!

R: How can you tell?

C: Because... I mean, my impression on this subject...

R: Your impression on this subject is an irrelevant impression, due to its instinctive subjectivity.

C: So is yours!

R: Granted!--and under your proposal, that's all that I or anyone, including you, could ever have. By contrast, I happen to maintain that you and I have access to something other than a knee-jerk automatic impression subjectively built into us for purposes of surviving long enough, as humans, to replicate. Is a purely subjective impression of your sort, on the other hand, the kind of probability estimate you yourself are actually putting into play when you estimate probabilities?

C: ... No.

R: I agree, no it isn't. I contend that above and beyond whatever instinctively associative impression you and I might have about the probability, the existence of which I certainly don't deny either, you and I also have the active ability to transcend our automatic responses to our environment and instincts, and actively judge the probability ourselves. And for what it's worth, my rational judgment of the topic, results in a conclusion on my part that my merely instinctive rejection of super-improbabilities in gradualistic biological development is untenable.

C: ... Uh... Yeah! See?

R: Yes; but I got to this agreement with you, by presuming (even if only tacitly) that I could in fact actively add an effect over and above--really more than--my mere automatic instinctive response to non-rational causation.

C: ... Well... I got there by... uh...

R: You got there by presuming the same thing. Even when you were trying to find a way to deny that presumption and still keep the effectual result for your belief-producing processes. You can deny it if you want; but we both just saw what the result will be of that. Your estimates of probability, upon

which you try to escape active claims of truth by qualifying your proposal that your behaviors might "probably" be adequately accurate, still require rational grounding on your part--or else they are subjectively irrelevant in principle. Just like you thought it most proper to dismiss my merely instinctive estimates as being irrelevant. Even though you aren't an alien with a lifetime of a million centuries either, but a human with the same human properties and species-history as me.

C: ... That doesn't mean I am active!

R: No, not necessarily. But by denying it per hypothesis, you leave yourself no possible way to reach even merely probably reliable "perceptions of reality". Your perceptions of probability end up trapped in a formal limbo where no judgments of their relative worth--compared to other estimates of probability for instance--can be legitimately made. Those judgments which might possibly ratify the probability estimates, require active ability to exist on our part. If that ability is proposed not to exist, neither can those judgments effectively exist. Something like judgments could effectively exist; but their potential effectiveness will also be put under the same explanation which already requires the probability estimates to be potentially reliable.

Once again you have tried to justify the potential effectiveness of your mental processes, against a sceptical threat--a sceptical threat that atheism leads to as the first rational conclusion!--by presuming first that they can be effective. But if you presume that your mental processes can be effective, then it is merely redundant to try to justify later that they can be effective. You cannot legitimately prove that legitimate proofs don't have to exist.

C: All right, so... what if I have a lifetime of a million centuries behind me?

R: Well, certainly I've seen atheists go routes just as outré rather than decide they should believe God exists! (DNA clearly cannot have naturally evolved in the time constraints of our planet's history, so we had to have been seeded here by aliens...)

C: One outré explanation is as good as another--by which I mean theism! You of all people can't just hold that against me!

R: Not for being outré, I agree! But I'm glad you brought up the possibility for consideration; so, let's consider it. It won't matter which form of that theory you choose.

C: Well it matters to me. Notice, I didn't say "what if I'm an alien?" I was thinking instead, what if there's something like genetic instinct being passed along which might as well count as having a lifetime of a million centuries? Many instinctive behaviors in the animal world seem far more developed and efficient than the mentality of the animals themselves would account for (bees, to give one famous example).

R: So we, ourselves, would have instincts (kitted up non-rationally in us by purely non-rational development) of a lifetime of millions of centuries, instead of a lifetime of less than a century? We might as well just consider the million-century-old alien directly, whether that alien is supposed to be us (or you) or not. In fact, I recommend you keep the distinction for purposes of comparison. (I'll show why I recommend this in a minute.)

C: Okay then: let's say the alien represents the theory that we have genetic 'memory' instincts accumulated to the point where we might as well have lived a million centuries.

R: And by contrast the human represents, let's say, the other instincts, commensurate with a lifetime of less than a century, which you and I, the humans, both agree are not properly reflective of the levels of long-term probability

assessment we would need in order to make a good intuitive and non-rational bet about evolutionary probabilities.

C: ...okay, I can see where you're going with this. Why would there be two surviving instincts of probability association at such direct conflict with one another?

R: Unless of course I'm supposed to be destitute of the proper genetic-memory instinct and I only possess the normal human instinct, whereas you would be destitute of the normal human instinct--

C: Okay! Fine. It has to account for both our behaviors. Unless, both instincts contribute to our survival-to-breed in different ways, and so both kinds of instinct have survived: the undeveloped and the developed instinct, one of which happens to be stronger in each of us (you and me respectively).

R: Fair enough. You still might as well use the alien vs. us as the example, for sake of clarifying the distinction. If there is any distinction.

C: Well, the alien has been kitted up so that his perception of relative probability reflects the vast amounts of time we're talking about in terms of gradualistic development.

R: Is his perception merely subjective?

C: Any perception is going to be subjective. You know that.

R: But there's a difference between it being relevantly and irrelevantly subjective, as you well know--having tried to deploy the irrelevancy against me earlier. Which I was willing to agree about. Indeed, the whole point of your distinction now is to set things up so that I have an irrelevant instinct about evolutionary super-improbabilities while you do not! So I ask again: is the alien's perception merely subjective?

C: No, it's relevantly subjective.

R: Why?

C: Why do I say so?

R: No, I'll let you off on the question of mental mechanics behind why you would say so (for now). I have another point to make first: what is it about his perception that makes it relevantly subjective?

C: The fact that it corresponds better to the probabilities we're discussing.

R: In other words, it's only relevant externally to the alien--only relevant in regard to our external consideration of the situation. It isn't relevant in terms of the alien's own mental behavior. Even if he happens to be correct, we're the ones doing the justification, the ratification, of his behavior; not the alien himself.

C: ...which is no good if our own mentality is no different in principle from the alien's.

R: And if his perception is not merely an automatic response to his conditioning?

C: Then he could possibly give us a justifiable answer.

R: His main advantage would be that he starts with a bit of instinctive impulse which happens to incline him toward the right answer.

C: Yes.

R: But merely inclining toward the right answer does not constitute reliable judgment, does it? That is, unless we fudge by concluding in our own judgment (not the alien's) that the inclination is correct. But our rational judgment is not the alien's rationality. Which, for example, is why you were willing to distinguish the instinctive competency of the bees from the actual mental capabilities of the bees: so it doesn't get any better whether the instinct is an imputed habit (the alien's expectations being an inputed, unconscious, non-rational habit of a lifetime) or a genetic accumulation of the species per se.

C:

R: So, what if you combined both factors for the alien?-- individually long life and the corporate existence of his species? (Even though that would no longer apply to us humans, with our lifetimes of less than a century.)

C: ...sigh. Yes, I understand, that wouldn't do any good accounting for my impression or understanding of the probabilities involved (compared to your instinctive impression or otherwise.)

R: But would it even help the alien? Could the extreme age of his species contribute in principle to a development of real action ability?

C: ... Well there would be greater refinements in his responses...

R: But that isn't really the same thing as action ability, is it?

C: ... It...

R: Has the contention "actions can be produced completely by reactions" suddenly been reinstated now, merely because a longer period of physical time has passed? Does the length of time, whether individually or concerning the species, change the underlying principle involved?

C: No.

R: No. If we asserted (or otherwise decided) from the beginning that the principle was not intrinsically nonsensical, then length of time might perhaps contribute to the conditions which finally bring the fulfillment of the principle about. Do you want to try claiming again that the contention "reactions

and only reactions can produce actions" is not intrinsically nonsensical?--thereby returning to the beginning of our first dialogue?

C: That does not mean God exists!

R: If our mental processes are completely non-rational, what happens to our own formally self-reflexive claims of (at least possible) reliability, which include claims that reality is one way and not another?

C: ... They fall through, and cannot be established by us personally.

R: If non-purposive automatic reactions are the fundamental base of reality--if reality, at bottom, is not purposive, not capable of choosing, not active, not rational--then our mental processes are ultimately what?

C: ... Non-rational.

R: Are your mental processes, including your belief about atheism, ultimately non-rational? Because, ironically enough, I would insist, in your favor, that your beliefs about atheism are not ultimately non-rational. Mistaken, maybe, but not--

C: That does not mean there is a God!!

R: Why not?

C: You and I might not be rational after all! You can't prove that we are!

R: True. Even so, our presumed non-rationality (setting aside for the moment the nonsensical character of the phrase "our presumed non-rationality") would not even then entail atheism, would it? Not necessarily.

C: No.

R: God might still exist; or might not exist. If we are non-rational after all, we (as ourselves) would simply lack the ability to potentially discover this fact, one way or the other--meaning atheism would never be able to get going, either--even if we nevertheless behaved in various fashions according to what a rational person would recognize as "the topic". There would be exactly no point debating metaphysics with a Furbee, much less accepting an argument from the Furbee, even if someone programmed it to talk about metaphysics. At best I would be debating or considering the argument of the programmer at

secondhand. (That would apply to you and me, too, if we were only fictional characters in a metaphysician's literary dialogue!--no sane person would seriously debate 'you' or 'me', or even listen to 'us' as persons: they would be dealing with our author, pro or con.)

The starting point that avoids a deductive conclusion of "not-atheism", allows no theory, including atheism, any responsible reliability by you or I personally. Is that irresponsibility, or even denial of your own personhood (while insisting we treat you like a person during argument anyway), really a price you want to pay to avoid the conclusion that God exists?

C: Maybe.

R: I see. Let me present another interesting irony (as you may consider it). You are probably aware that the Big Three Theisms usually claim that hell exists.

C: Yes! And it's an abominable, intolerable--!

R: And you are probably aware that certain theologians, especially on the Christian side (although not necessarily limited to them--that's just the side I am most familiar with),

have for millennia claimed, from metaphysical reasoning and from analysis of what they believe to be revealed testimony, that hell is, at the very least, the state a creature is in when it attempts to cut itself off as far as possible from God.

C: That doesn't make it any less abominable.

R: Actually, I agree! But, does the following description sound vaguely familiar to you?

A man would prefer to commit cognitive suicide, insofar as he can, rather than deal with God's existence as "God".

What state, at the traditional least, is that man, himself, voluntarily choosing to enter?

CHAPTER 19 -- summary and restatement of the first
deduction

My previous two chapters not only continued my line of argumentation, but also (in their own way) summarized, and illustrated through practical applications, the points of my argument, in an imaginary informal debate.

Dialogues, however, although useful in some ways, are not formal arguments; and as these second-section chapters are perhaps the most critical in my entire book, I will take one more chapter to summarize and re-present the argument yet again, before continuing with my inferences.

My argument can be developed from several directions, although the final result is the same in each case. As even now I am still not sure which 'beginning point' is best, I have presented slightly different variations for each run-through; and I will do this again here.

I find myself, however the situation came about, behaving in a certain way, in order to maximize my efficiency in relating to reality. This behavior may be called simply 'thinking' or 'reasoning', or more precisely 'analysis'. What does this behavior, as I actually and/or necessarily claim to practice it, involve and entail?

1.) I find that when I engage in this behavior, it seems to me that a quality exists above and beyond the mere flow of stimulus in and out of me. I seem to be a contributor to the process. The responses flowing from me, seem more than the sum-total of the impulses coming into me. I perceive I am 'adding' something to the chain of causation. I perceive I am 'acting'.¹⁶⁵

Furthermore, I find that other entities similar to myself claim to have this same property or ability; in fact, their sheer behavior of 'claiming' anything--of claiming to claim--is itself a testimony on their part to this behavior (even if that testimony to apparent behavior turns out to be wrong).

2.) I find I must stoutly presume that my perceptions in general are not utterly unreliable. There is not even any real question of behaving otherwise. The imagining of a counter-presumption with corollaries (of any sort whatever) may perhaps be possible; but to "draw any conclusions" or otherwise "use" this counter-proposed impression or presumption (i.e. that my perceptions are utterly unreliable), is to deny the accuracy of that counter-proposition with respect to the reality of me.

If my perceptions of reality are utterly unreliable, every conclusion or action I take would be equally unreliable (even if incidentally effectively corresponsive). But that means my

¹⁶⁵ My mere perceptions of this are not the same as a conclusion, or even a necessary presumption, that I am 'acting'. But I have to start somewhere.

perception or proposal of "general unreliability of perception" would also itself be unreliable (even if in fact true).

It is impossible to claim my general incompetence of perception to be true, and simultaneously mean anything useful and distinctive by the claim. Admittedly, such a behavior might take place (I can type the phrase, for instance) but I cannot accept, or assent to, the claim without immediately violating the claim; which means that 'I' cannot actually 'accept' the claim. Whatever I do and whatever I claim, the very instance of my claim entails a logically prior claim to some degree of perceptive competence. And I find other entities similar to myself (such as you, my reader), who claim to behave (and so thus behave even in the claim) the same way.

3.) I find, in tracing these perceptions, an even deeper and more primary presumption: I not only must presume that at least some data reaches me with adequate correspondence to reality; but I must also presume I can adequately process at least some of this data.

The arrival of the impressions or data I use in 'thinking' may be sequentially and/or causally prior to my 'thinking'; but the possible effectiveness of my 'thinking' must be presumed before any judgments about that data can be accepted.

If I flatly cannot adequately think, then 'I' quite literally cannot 'mean' anything even by saying "I flatly cannot

adequately think." I can tape-record my voice and the recorder can play back my voice, but the mere utterance of the sound does not entail the ability for the 'utterer' to itself 'mean' something by the sounds. And I find that this corresponds to my own impression that what comes out of me is in some way more than what goes into me. If I was only a tape-recorder (even a fantastically complicated one), 'I' literally could not 'mean' anything by proposing such a condition ("I am a fantastically complicated tape-recorder") as a fact.

4.) I find that these perceptions of mine lead to discovering (or at least they involve) a central presumption concerning the actual reality of myself. It is, even if only tacitly, a necessary and unjustifiable presumption: I can act (not merely that I perceive myself as acting). Not necessarily always, not necessarily with total efficiency; but I nevertheless must still be able to act.

If I try to reduce this or explain it further, I find I have merely repeated the proposition or else I have denied it. Repeating it does not lead me to a deeper truth; denying it leaves me no ability to (quite literally) 'do' anything further—at least, not without cheating and secretly smuggling this ability back in.

It is a proposition that is sheerly unjustifiable as it is; because any attempt to justify it (or, alternately, to explain

it away in terms of more basic events) requires that its qualitative properties be accepted first from the getgo. A justification of our justification ability cannot succeed due to its circularity, and thus cannot reliably lead to truth; and a deconstructive reduction of our justification ability requires either eliminating justification ability outright (thus destroying the deconstructive reduction attempt itself) or rejustifying the justification ability at a 'deeper' level, which again becomes circular.

My ability to actively think is the Golden Presumption of any inference I draw; and in order to argue to anyone other than myself (such as to you, my reader), then I must extend this Golden Presumption to stoutly include your capability to actively think as well.

5.) Therefore: whatever other truths I discover about this quality or characteristic or ability of mine; or whatever truths I propose or discover about reality other than myself; I should not contradict this central presumption: I (and you, quite literally "for purposes of argument") do possess the ability to act.

Any purported hypothesis or conclusion which denies this, I should reject; indeed, even if I "accepted" such counter-presumptive hypotheses or conclusions I would be claiming something about myself which such hypotheses or conclusions

deny, and thus I could only be making a mistake by proposing such hypotheses or conclusions, if I take my own thinking seriously.

6.) After spending some time processing data, I learn that human beings--such as myself--are (at least apparently) derivative creatures. We are born, and we die. We are affected against our "will" or our "desires" or our "wishes" (whatever may be true about those words), by other entities. Something other than me myself seems to have brought me into existence, and my continuance is ultimately a factor of this other thing or set of things. What properties does this thing, this producer, have?¹⁶⁶

7.) There are properties distinctively attached to the concept of action: initiation; choosing; not-necessarily-automatic behavior; simultaneously non-random and non-determinate behavior. (The two terms 'random' and 'determinate' are not opposites: effects may be determined by random causes.)

So I ask the question about this Producer which I have discovered that I do presume about myself: does it act?

¹⁶⁶ Notice I have qualified myself here; I am leaving room to discover that I myself am the ground of my own existence. I might discover that I am derivative of myself, and thus that something other than myself only seems to have brought me into existence.

There are two mutually exclusive and fundamentally basic hypotheses about this Producer: It can act (in at least the same fashion that I can act); or It cannot act.¹⁶⁷

8.) Can one of these alternative characteristics of the Producer (can act / cannot act) be solidly removed--or 'deducted'--from the list of possibilities?

9.) If the Producer cannot act, yet It can still behave, then what is It doing?

There are only two basic behaviors in my experience: actions, and reactions. There are also composite behaviors, but the sheer description of them as 'composite' requires a tacit recognition that those behaviors are exhibitions of a combination of distinctive behaviors: and again, these are actions and reactions.

If I choose to pick at the scab on my arm, the scab shall react in response to my choices--it shall behave in an automatically necessary response to my contribution and to its surrounding environmental conditions. It shall fall off, and bounce a bit when it hits a solid object, or perhaps displace a tiny splash when it hits a liquid, and/or various other things of that sort; and the path of its fall will be determined by

¹⁶⁷ The question of its existence would fall in line with the question about its mere behavior: if this Producer did not exist, I would not be here to ask the question. If this Producer did not produce effects, then again I would not be here to ask the question. What behaviors does the Producer exhibit? That is the question.

vector energy states of my contribution, as well as by gravity, elasticity, air currents, and quantum behaviors to some degree. The scab does not (as far as I can tell, anyway) contribute to its own fate in any sense which is not determined for it (randomly or otherwise) by its relation to other realities. It is re-active. And the water which splashes or the chair cushion which deforms and reforms elastically (giving the scab a bounce) are continuing the chain of reaction: they are counter-reactive. But their behavior is qualitatively not different from the scab's reaction (although physically and chemically they will be different--that is, in accordance with particular quantities of material and energy states, in a given space).

Counterreactions are only 'counterreactions' as a matter of descriptive convenience, for tracing the path of reaction. But actions are not reactions, and reactions are not actions: they are qualitatively distinct. If this Producer is not actively initiating events, then its behaviors must be utterly reactive and counterreactive; or else they are unintelligible to me, and I am left without any opinion about it whatsoever--including the opinion that its behaviors are 'unintelligible'.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁸ If its behaviors do not correspond adequately to behaviors I am familiar with, then there is no way I could even propose a Producer. I could simply sheerly assert that Its behaviors are unintelligible, but then I am left with my own existence--and evidently the rest of reality--which does seem to correspond with behavior of that type, both from within and from without. My own existence and the fundamental behaviors I discover about myself and about other things, indicate that action and reaction are not concepts utterly alien to the character of the Producer, and thus to the Producer's own behaviors, whatever unimaginable else they may be.

10.) I can discover from observation that the great bulk of reality around me behaves reactively; so this seems a plausible place to begin for answering the question as to the most fundamental property characteristic of the Producer.

Does the Producer only react and counterreact? Is its behavior purely automatic, non-purposive, non-choosing? In a word, is 'atheism' (of either the naturalistic or supernaturalistic type) true?

11.) If atheism is true, then non-sentient behaviors would be ultimately behind all effects. 'All effects', includes my own sentience. Automatically reactive causes would ultimately be producers of all effects. 'All effects', includes my own action ability.

12.) If atheism is true, then either automatic causation produces non-automatic effects (and/or reactions produce actions); or no such thing as non-automatic effects (or initiated 'actions' per se) really exist.

13.) If no such thing as non-automatic effects really exist, then I cannot justify even the possible reliability of my own 'thinking' behavior, because such a 'justification' (no matter what particular shape it entailed) would under that hypothesis be only one more necessarily automatic response to

stimuli, under the same suspicion about reliability as the behaviors it was put into play to help ratify.

This suspended limbo of justification would extend to anything I 'thought' about atheism, too. If only necessarily automatic behaviors exist, then I cannot defend even the possible reliability of my proposing that only necessarily automatic behaviors exist; much less could I defend even the possible reliability of my taking that proposition and building consequent positions out of it.

Any real strengths a science has, for instance, shall have been borrowed tacitly, either from the belief that the Producer is an Act-er, or from the belief that although the Producer only reacts it could still possibly produce real actors (who can possibly justify the cogency of atheism or any other theory and proposition--thus providing, for instance, strong sciences).

If only necessarily automatic behaviors exist, there is no way for me to reliably believe that I had reliably discovered this. Indeed, it would even be impossible (no matter how it seemed to my perception) for me to sheerly choose to assert this as a fact, or even a hypothesis, to work from. What seemed my raw choice would be only one more necessarily automatic behavior with questionable reliability.

14.) Therefore, the proposition that there can be nothing except necessarily automatic, fully and blindly reactive behaviors, can and should be deducted from the option pool.

In fact, this proposition is always tacitly denied by any thinker who holds any worldview (even if the worldview, such as the philosophy of hard materialism, distinctively promotes this concept.) It may still be true, but it cannot be justifiably concluded nor can it be the presumptive ground for justifiable conclusions.

15.) This leaves, on the atheism side, the proposition that a fully automatic system can produce behaviors which are themselves non-automatic.

16.) This proposition entails, that even though true action capability (such as what I must presume you and I have) exists now, it did not always exist. The reactive process has brought into existence (eventually, having gotten into the correct configurations) active abilities. Against a primary sceptical threat, which necessarily calls into formal question the presumption we make in favor of (at least) the possibility of our own rational competency, can this proposition be a defense?

17.) The attempt to justify the proposition breaks down on the same problem as proposing that no active ability whatsoever exists.

To explain how reactions have become actions, is to concurrently claim that those reactions did not produce merely more reactions. The question has become: can we reliably say that the behaviors in question are qualitatively and sufficiently different from prior (reactive) behaviors and from currently surrounding (reactive) behaviors--qualifiably different enough that they can be concluded to be possibly reliable in the special sense of reliability we presume for ourselves when engaging in any argument?

Any answer we give, however, assumes from the start that we can at least possibly reliably discover the answer to the question. To answer the question of how our answers can possibly be reliable, is to beg the question in favor of possible reliability to start with. And it must; for you and I must presume before any argument that we are in fact capable of reliably analyzing data.¹⁶⁹

If I hypothesize that 'Reality', considered fundamentally, is incapable of reliably judging an event; then the question

¹⁶⁹ To presume that we are in fact 'capable' of analyzing data, does not mean we will always necessarily be correct.

must arise of how I am capable of behaving in a fashion that is qualitatively different from the behavior of ultimate reality.¹⁷⁰

I could perhaps understand if the behavior I am supposed to be exhibiting is a declension or reduction of the ultimate quality of reality: if my behaviors were qualitatively different because I am a derivative entity, then it would be contradictory to propose that my behaviors are at all points qualitatively similar to that which is my ultimate Producer.

But now, I am being asked to accept that I, as an entity derived from this (hypothetically proposed to be) automatically reactive ultimate reality, can accomplish something qualitatively superior to ultimate reality!

A particular action may at times be less effective than reaction in particular circumstances: if I have to 'stop and think' to do something, I may be less successful than the entity who, however it came about, can instinctively react to the same end. But any entity--any person--who affirms that she can 'act', affirms that this ability of 'acting' grants her greater qualitative efficiency in at least some affairs than any automatically reactive behavior could achieve.

'Reality is not ultimately sentient: there is no God.' --
 'You were raised in an environment wherein this idea was pressed in upon your psyche, and so you are only reflecting your environment, regardless of whether God exists or not.' -- 'No! I

¹⁷⁰ I will deal much later with the question of how sin can be sin and yet be a behavior not utterly alien to God's characteristics as God.

say this because I have analyzed such-and-such data and have thereby responsibly reached this conclusion.'

This is a person who affirms she is capable of achieving greater efficiency thanks to her independent action ability; indeed, she affirms even that she must affirm this, or her beliefs will be cast, at very best, into a cloud of suspicion as regards their reliability. Here is a clear situation where automatic behavior, far from being considered the epitome of efficient behavior, is itself proposed as evidence of dangerously un-reliable behavior; and our exemplary atheist accepts this as a true principle, which is why she expends so much effort to show she is not behaving in such a knee-jerk automatic fashion.¹⁷¹

Even when the automatically reactive behavior set is clearly superior in raw power to act-er, indeed even when the reactive set is such that it can easily destroy our action capability (insofar as this system of Nature is concerned anyway), we still perceive a superiority in the act-er to the mere reactions. Our planet may be at any moment blasted into nothing by the electromagnetic pulse of a star that went supernova thousands or hundred of thousands of years ago (which, by the way, is a real threat astrophysicists have discovered); yet although that would destroy all natural life on our planet,

¹⁷¹ Indeed, she may even say she has chosen atheism precisely because she discovered she was unreflectively accepting her earlier environment, if her earlier environment was permeated by theism; thus she might very well claim 'I have broken free from irrationally dogmatic religion', etc.

we rational entities have this superiority: we can understand and consciously appreciate that threat (for better or for worse).

We may stand under an unimaginably huge number of dangerous and intoxicating things (in several senses of 'intoxicating')--humanity has always been aware that the world is unspeakably large and dangerous (up until recent industrial societies anyway, when we tend to forget such things due to the insulating effects of our own increasing power). But at least we can truly understand something about them; whereas those things cannot even begin to approach understanding anything, whether us or themselves. An avalanche can kill a skiing town; but the skiers can understand the tragedy. Indeed it is especially a tragedy for the skiers, whether considering themselves or considering damage done to other entities: a skier may mourn for a rabbit or a cougar, but neither the cougar nor the rabbit, despite having emotional reactions of their own (including to an avalanche and its results), will mourn for the skier (much less for each other).

18.) But does it make any kind of real sense, for me to accept a claim that my behaviors are qualitatively superior to the characteristics of reality that produced me? Granted, such a claim might please me very much to believe, but that is not the issue; the issue is whether it is self-consistently proposable.

It is, at best, not defensible, nor any kind of defense, against a necessary sceptical threat derived from proposed characteristics of that reality; because the defense of the proposal requires the proposal to be accepted first, after which the defense is moot.

A totally non-rational behavior results in unjustifiable claims;¹⁷² and my Producer is (according to atheism) utterly and ultimately non-rational; yet I can produce justifiable claims. If I attempt to defend the disparity of this proposal, then I cannot win; because my defense would involve the tacit claim, to be accepted by everyone involved in the discussion, that I truly can in fact possibly produce justifiable claims. But I cannot justify that my claims can be justifiable.

Very well: what happens if I sheerly assert this instead?

19.) I could sheerly assert, that the proposition 'actions can be produced by an ultimately reactive reality' is not self-contradictory. But what use is it to assert this? I can assert 'the moon is made of green cheese' or 'there is a God' just as easily. Why make that assertion?

20.) My mere say-so doesn't make the assertion true; it is not a necessary presumption for logical disputation, either. The vast bulk of evidence I find in Nature seems to lead to the

¹⁷² More precisely, any entity that only exhibits non-rational behavior cannot itself justify anything.

conclusion that a reactively or non-rationally produced behavior is at least usually non-rational or reactive; further leading to the question of why my behaviors should be (or even can be) considered rational or active instead; and this question cannot in principle be answered without begging the question in favor of presuming my own rationality before the justification.¹⁷³

Beyond all this, the sheer assertion (that reactions can possibly produce actions) cannot even reliably be said to be a belief of mine; for I can assert all sorts of claims I don't accept with belief. So to merely flatly assert 'yes I believe it' produces the same problem of reliability--for I am entirely capable of asserting a belief about something I don't really believe.

21.) This leads me to the conclusion that I must be required to give logical grounds for such a proposition. I can give logical grounds for the proposition 'actions can produce reactions', because I always tacitly assume for purposes of argument that I act; I then 'choose' to do something, and observe the consequences. Using my earlier example, I pick off a scab and study the behaviors that follow. Perhaps those behaviors could be considered an extension of my initiated action; but I would draw the line at the point where my intentions failed.

¹⁷³ This would still be true, even if the vast majority of natural processes clearly led to rational behavior. But the evident characteristics of Nature, certainly as accepted by naturalistic atheists, make this easier to perceive.

If I aim a gun and pull the trigger, then the chemical and physical behaviors which immediately follow might be considered reactions (because I didn't intend and initiate every single one of them); or the chain might be considered a single action on my part, because I intended--I chose--to behave in such a way that the target a quarter-mile away was blasted to pieces. But I certainly did not choose for the bullet, continuing through the flimsy target, to ricochet off the nearby lake at a shallow angle and careen through a car window one mile away, embedding itself in the driver's skull;¹⁷⁴ nor did I intend for the driver's dead muscles to thus be given electrochemical impetus to stomp the gas-pedal and yank the wheel, swerving the car into a Girl Scout camp nearby.

Yet, while I might call those events 'reactions', the fact would be that my choice had contributed to the chain of events in an initiatory fashion; and a court of law would attempt to establish to what extent I was intentionally responsible for the deaths of those people. That I pulled the trigger, starting the sequence of events (considering the sequence as itself), would be an undeniable fact; one the insurance companies (not the courts involved in justice) would see as closing the case. All behaviors have consequences; so consequences are not themselves the distinguishing factor of an 'action'. 'Intent' is the distinguishing factor.

¹⁷⁴ I recall this being an example from an old rifle-safety film I was shown in high-school...

Be that as it may (and it is something worth returning to later in the question of ethics), I can easily demonstrate that intended behaviors can produce unintended behaviors. I can thus give a logical and even experimental defense (if anyone cared to ask for it) for the proposition that 'actions can produce reactions'.

But I cannot give a similar defense for the proposition that 'reactions can produce actions'. I could show that reactive behaviors provide data and material for an 'act-er' to 'act' upon, but that is not the same thing as causally producing the 'action' behavior. I could show that reactive behaviors might produce other behaviors which are as effective as actions; but that by itself is not the same thing as claiming the produced behaviors are actions.¹⁷⁵

The moment I attempt to logically ground the proposition, I find that I am trying to logically ground the effectiveness of my attempt at providing logical grounds; which requires that I already accept my ability to do so exists--thus, no justification can or does occur. Yet if I do not justify the proposition that reactions can produce actions, then I am left with a sheer assertion which by itself has no reliability, not being a necessary presumption (with equally necessarily presumed reliability).

¹⁷⁵ Indeed, in some ways such a claim might be a tacit refusal to ascribe action ability to the behavior. A practical definition of 'instinct' is 'behavior as if from reason', which tacitly affirms that the instinctive behavior is not itself rational behavior.

22.) The proposition that ultimate reality (which produced, causally, my action ability, including my reasoning ability) is itself incapable of intended behaviors, thus leaves me no formal grounds to continue. If only automatically blind non-rational behaviors exist, then my own behaviors must also be of the same sort; and this defies the Golden Presumption ('you and I are not utterly non-rational', to put it another way). If I propose that my intensive action ability was causally produced by ultimately non-intensive automatic behavior, then sooner or later I will have to justify my own presumed ability to think--a justification which is circular and cannot succeed. If I sheerly assert such a condition as being (despite the formal appearance) reconcilable with the Golden Presumption, then I still cannot treat the presumption as reliable, for it is not a necessary presumption; indeed, it is likely to be a conclusion derived from observations about my environment, and thus not a sheer presumption anyway.¹⁷⁶

23.) This means I should logically reject the proposition of an ultimately non-sentient, non-active, non-intensive, non-purposive reality. The proposition either has no grounding, or it contradicts the Golden Presumption.

¹⁷⁶ If I decide that observable reality is largely reactive, then my first inductive inference would be that reality as a whole is utterly reactive. But this turns out to be deductively falsified once the Golden Presumption is identified.

I consider atheism thus to be logically deducted from the theory pool. If I take my own rationality seriously (and yours, my reader's, as well--even if you are an atheist), then whatever ultimate reality is, I will not consider it to have specifically 'atheistic' characteristics.

Does this mean atheism is necessarily false? No. I may not in fact be capable of thinking. If I am not capable of thinking, then my deductive removal of atheism falls immediately to the ground, of course! But at the same time, if I am not capable of thinking, then my qualification (in atheism's favor) concerning this deduction cannot be considered reliable, either.

I have therefore discovered that atheism either is not true, or at best can neither be discovered nor even usefully (appearances notwithstanding) proposed.

I should therefore, for all practical purposes, conclude that some type of 'not-atheism' is true.

Notice I have been saying "should therefore conclude". This is, in some respects, weaker than a 'must': logical conclusions do not equate to a necessary behavior on my part. I can act. I can choose to reject this and flatly assert atheism, if I wish. I can pretend that atheism 'makes sense', if I wish; and at this point such an action on my part (not necessarily on the part of other people) would be pretending, as I would no longer have

certain complex and difficult barriers insulating me and allowing an honest mistake due to miscalculation.

Thus, 'should' is the correct word; for it also carries a moral imperative, itself not necessarily binding in the behavioral sense (else it would not be a 'mere' 'should'). Having gotten to this point, I find that I 'should' conclude (and by assenting to the conclusion thereby 'believe') God exists.¹⁷⁷

The normal opinion among theologians (and anti-theologians), and among practicing advocates of religion (and anti-religion), has often been that the existence of God cannot be established deductively. In a way--a paradoxical way--I have found that this is both correct and incorrect. God's existence (and, as I shall demonstrate, a wide range of God's characteristics) can be deductively established; yet, a loophole does remain.

It is a logical loophole, in the sense of being a 'formal' loophole; yet it is also an anti-logical loophole, insofar as a person who takes the loophole either begins to commit cognitive suicide, or begins to deal with reality dishonestly, or perhaps both. At the end of this phase of my positive argument, there is, after all, a step to be willed; a step that can be rejected, although for (literally) no good reason. The path branches here; one side leading to truth and to further truths, the other to

¹⁷⁷ I am not yet saying that I should believe in God; that's a related matter, regarding personal trust, but I will discuss it later.

(literal) 'self'-destruction: and in either case, a willful choice precedes the step.

If there is a 'must' at this point, then it is the necessity of choice itself, one path or the other. To refuse to choose is the same as taking the path to cognitive suicide, or at best to a self-crippled perception of reality: it would be a refusal to deal with reality as reality is being revealed to be, which is the same as a claim to be able to ignore reality at the preference of our own wishes.¹⁷⁸

Understand: I am not saying anything about 'religion' yet, nor anything to do with a personal relationship to this God as a Person. But I have now reached the stage where even discussing such issues becomes a shatteringly practical question: will I continue?

I do not say that a choice either way at this point is irretrievable; I am not talking of other chances I may have to retrace the steps, or to jump from one side to the other. I could still choose to jump to the path of disbelief at any point--and I assure you, there are times when I am strongly tempted to do so. But if I did, I would be doing so in defiance

¹⁷⁸ This assumes my argument is formally correct, of course, and that I have properly understood its meanings.

I am not, by the way, attempting to sneak a conventional 'damnation clause' into my presentation here. All I have said so far, is what I think is common sense: committing cognitive suicide is foolish; and holding a doctrine that requires committing cognitive suicide while shuffling contentions around to avoid that implication, is cheating. (There have been some 'Christians' to whose theories I would apply the same principle.) I will have more to say later about ethical implications of such choices.

of what I have already concluded about reality. I would not be a true man.

Trying to be true, admittedly involves checking carefully to see if I am perhaps mistaken. But being true also means I am obligated to stay the course as well as I can in deeply painful situations (as I have done); because pain and grief can drive us to think irrationally. For what it is worth, I can therefore respect an oppositional commitment to what you, my reader, think is true; including in the face of a merely emotional doubt (of whatever strength). The question is, why do you disbelieve me-- or perhaps why do you think I am mistaken? And, are you checking to be quite sure you are not salting the pizza in your own favor?

But speaking of salting the pizza in one's own favor: an especially astute reader may see in my argument during the last few chapters, a hole I have so far left untouched. It is a very subtle hole, that I myself discovered while working on this book; but from which, once I discovered it, I learned something new about what I could argue concerning the character of ultimate reality.

I will explore this hole in my next chapter.

CHAPTER 20 -- a serious problem with this argument for
theism

One of the key points to my past few chapters is that philosophies can be broken down into two mutually exclusive categories--atheisms, and not-atheisms--and that if one of those general branches requires a contradiction of the Golden Presumption, then it should be deducted from the option list. Using this strategy, I pared off atheism, leaving the branches of 'not-atheism' for further scrutiny.

However, there is a potential problem looming: would the same tactic also deduct not-atheisms from the option list?

Does the proposition of an ultimate Act-er contradict the Golden Presumption? Is it self-consistent to claim that actions of God produce actions of derivative entities such as you and I? (Or, are we derivative entities after all?!)

Everyone, I think, agrees that actions can produce reactions, insofar as they acknowledge the existence of actions at all (which as I argued previously everyone has to at least tacitly, do in regard to at least themselves). But the whole point to the Golden Presumption is that we must presume you and I are not utterly reactive. A conclusion of not-atheism therefore leads to the question of whether it is nonsensical to propose that actions can produce actions.

It is easy to slur this problem, because in our direct experience we see active people interacting all the time: one person creates conditions through action, which provide a situation for the next person to choose between. If we are playing chess, and I choose to move a pawn a certain way, you now have a situation within which to make your own choices. That situation would have been different had I moved a different piece, or had I not moved at all (by my choice or otherwise), but your ability to choose would remain. You may not be free within the rules of the game to respond exactly as you wish--that is why it is possible to 'lose' a chess game! But your reality supersedes that of the chess game, and you can always take actions above and beyond the subsystem of the chess rules: you can accede the game politely, or throw a fit, or distract me while you switch a couple of pieces around on the board, or ask me to return you a bishop so that we can play out a variation of the situation.

So far this is plain sailing, I think; this type of 'interaction' between a derivative sentient and an Independent Sentient can easily be self-consistently imagined.

But that is not the problem. Granted I am already here and active, and granted a God Who chooses to relate to me personally (something I have not yet established in my argument, by the way), then He and I could respond and counterrespond to the situations created by one another's actions--as friends, as

enemies, or even if one or both of us were ignorant of the other.

The problem is the 'Granted I am already active' part! Whence did I, as a derivative being, get my ability to act?

From God, if He is the ground of all existences.

But: how can it be cogent to suggest or require that God 'made' me 'act'?!

It is no use applying to incorrigible mystery; if I do that, then we run into the sheer assertion problem I torpedoed earlier: an atheist could just as easily sheerly assert, despite the logical contradiction, that a purely automatic system can produce a non-automatic entity such as you or I or he.

It is also no use for me to propose that what God acted to do was to provide me a natural vehicle for sentience, and then my sentience just sort of sprang up once the materials were in proper relation. Functionally that would be no better than an atheist's proposal that blindly automatic Nature (or Supernature) reacted and counterreacted in such a fashion, that a body (such as mine) resulted which somehow 'produces' sentience. It would either imply a discontinuity between my reasoning ability and God's, or else it would only put the problem one stage further back for no gain.

The problem I detect in atheism is that if atheism is true, then what I call my thoughts are ultimately produced by non-

rational causes and thus (by the rule I use every day, simply put) those 'thoughts' of mine must not at bottom be rational.

On the other hand, if my thoughts are ultimately produced by active causes, then this might mean God is thinking His thoughts through me; but that would mean it is not the apparent 'I' who am rational, but merely God. Alternately, if God winds me up as a biological toy and turns me loose, I am merely reacting.

The problem might be put another way: if God is supposed to exist, what kind of God is He and what relation do I have to Him? This, I suppose, is the basic question dealt with by any religion that proposes an ultimate sentence.

Obviously, some of these questions must be deferred until later. At the moment, I only want to consider situations where it is not nonsensical to propose that actions produce actions.

One answer, as I have just suggested, would be that the Independent Fact is Sentient, but that we are not in any way declensions from It: this would be a proposal of some type of positive pantheism. The actions 'we' take would therefore be the actions of the IF itself directly. 'We' (according to this proposal) are God.

For what it is worth, I think this can be deductively removed from the option list; but the removal requires going rather further along the path I've started, so for the moment I'll let it stand. At least, it doesn't seem to immediately

contradict your and my own presumed ability to think (and the properties we implicitly assign to this ability for ourselves).

A slight variation of this hypothesis (and again, one on which I touched a bit earlier) would be 'The Great Puppeteer': we are qualitative declensions from the IF (a supernaturalistically theistic rather than pantheistic hypothesis) but God is still doing all the acting.

In either of these cases, the action-to-action problem is mooted by (in essence) removing the subordinate action: what I perceive to be 'my' action is not really 'my' action at all, but only God's action.

I will have to decide later whether either of these concepts stand up to further scrutiny; but neither one seems to contradict the Golden Presumption, and I haven't yet gotten far enough along the logic trail for other necessary implications to collide with the proposals.

Yet, these options (although leaving open the path for deduction by avoiding contradiction) do not truly represent action to action; they reflect only God's direct action, expressed perhaps at different levels of reality. They avoid contradiction by proposing the existence of only one acting entity; which certainly allows reasons to be grounded, but does so at the expense of my own existence as a person.

If that is where the argument must go, then that is where it must go; but is there not meanwhile any non-contradictive proposal of action to action?

I think there is at least one such proposal; and although it does not lead immediately to a validation of my individuality, it does have a very direct--indeed necessary--link to the path of deductions about the characteristics of God. Indeed, had I not perceived the potential problem with my deduction (requiring this short chapter to state it), I still would have found myself nevertheless at this next step. And so I will advance to that next step with a doubled interest in the outcome.

But first I should, and shall, make a bit of a detour.

CHAPTER 21 -- some detours

Setting aside (but only for the moment) my concerns about the question of the relations of Independent Action to derivative actions (such as my own), and whether this is an intrinsically contradictory proposition, I continue safely (though a bit shakily) along the path; with the security that there are at least a few situations where what may be called my 'actions' are yet reconcilable with an ultimate Act-er. Thus the proposal of an ultimate Act-er is not yet deducted from the option list; leaving the branch of not-atheisms intact--perhaps with a point in favor of pantheism--as opposed to the branch of atheisms.

Very well: if I take seriously the value of my judgments (that value which transcends the question of whether I am correct or incorrect on any given judgment) then I must be able to initiate action--or, at least (keeping in mind the problem from my most recent chapter) initiated actions exist and are exhibited through me. I have discovered it is contradictory for me to claim this value or property of my judgments is produced by a reality that at bottom does not itself initiate actions.

Furthermore: the actions this reality at bottom initiates, must themselves exhibit (at least) the property I assign to my own judgments. It is useless to say that these ultimate actions

are somehow 'initiated' and nothing more; that would be merely to use 'initiate' in a reductively metaphorical fashion. An atheist might perhaps claim that Nature 'initiates' events at the quantum level, for instance; but she would deny this means that Nature can 'think'--or (really) even 'act'.

Yet as I have discovered, while this could perhaps be the case, such a situation would still result in a reality where only non-rational events ultimately take place; leaving me with no rationality of my own to properly judge the cogency of proposals, including the proposal of atheism (of this or any other sort). Any attempt to propose something different along the branch of atheism, eventually requires that I justify my ability to justify: an intrinsically impossible requirement.

This leaves me with the branch of not-atheisms to consider: God exists. But what does this mean? What are the properties of God? Once again, I begin to deduct propositions which I find to be contradictory: which either cancel themselves out, or else deny positions I have previously deduced to be necessary.

At this stage, I would begin to import a series of arguments parallel to the ones I already covered in Section One.

Let me point out, before I am misunderstood, that I began my attempts at positive deduction in this Section without formally requiring the positions I will shortly re-present. Here is where they would fall if I had started with this argument instead. In the protracted argument of Section One, they

obviously fell in a different place, for that was a somewhat different line of reasoning.

This 'God' I have discovered: how shall I speak of it? Is it a personality, or not? The answer to that question depends on the answer to this question: does it make sense to claim that an initiating thinker exists and yet that it has no personality?

The only answer I can effectively give is this: to claim an initiating thinker has no personality, is a non sequitur. What would it mean "to have no personality"? As far as I can tell, it would mean the entity in question does not contribute actively (and thus willfully uniquely) to its reality.

But that is exactly what this sentient Independent Fact does. Indeed, it contributes more actively and intently to reality (even as the foundation of all reality, including itself--thus being the Independent Fact) than anything else in reality (if anything else does at all). To that extent, at the very least, I should consider it to have a real personality; and I may yet discover further parallels, as I ponder the topic.

Then should I speak of this personal entity (i.e., a 'personal-ity' or 'personality') as an 'it'? Or should I use personal pronouns?

The answer seems obvious the moment I ask the question: I should use a 'personal' pronoun set when speaking of a 'person'. Not only is this proper in English when speaking of a person, but (rather more importantly than the mere politeness) to insist

on speaking of the entity as an 'it' (even with a capital 'I'!) can only tacitly reinforce in my mind a characteristic of the entity which I have already decided is false: that 'It', despite its active rationality, has no personality.

I am a person writing in English, and I do virtually all my speaking in English. The English language does not, at this time, have a personal pronoun set for a neuter entity; for the very practical reason that we do not commonly find ourselves in recognized contact with entities which are truly personal yet are neither male nor female. We therefore must default to a masculine or feminine pronoun set if we wish to discuss personal entities whose status in this regard is either unknown or not applicable; and for various sociological reasons, in English we use the masculine pronouns as the default or 'neuter' set.

In lieu of further data regarding this entity, I therefore would find it fitting to speak of God in English with nominally 'masculine' terms: He is a person. To say instead 'She is a person' would entail a level of specificity which at this stage I have no grounds to introduce; for in traditional English usage, a 'she' is never an unknown or unknowable quality when speaking of a real specific person.

English-speaking sailors, for instance, often use feminine pronouns to speak about their ships; but nominally the ships are not real persons so it doesn't matter which set is used, except in an aesthetic sense. I will not utterly deny the concept that

a nominally non-sentient object may in some fashion be granted a real though derivative sentience--after all, that is what I will end up proposing about the relationship between God and us humans--nor that God may have granted, to us derivative entities, the ability to bestow a rudimentary but real sub-consciousness on such objects through what amounts to our wished love and affection. I might, in other words, accept that ships whose crews truly act to love them could indeed develop a rudimentary sentience and can therefore be truly spoken of with personal pronouns. If that sounds supernatural, I remind you that the relations between God and ourselves might also be established as supernatural (depending on whether or not pantheism is true); thus the implausibility of the concept could vanish from that quarter. Whether other conceptual barriers or inconsistencies might prevent such an occurrence is a further question, and at any rate lies outside the scope of this book--although I find the topic very interesting!

My point, is that even if this was true, the personality would be conferred by us persons, and thus to that extent the personal gender would also likely be conferred by us if there are no biological considerations to force the issue. Put another way: I have been told that Russians typically speak of their ships using masculine pronouns; and tend therefore to ascribe masculine attributes to their ships. If this process did develop a rudimentary and double-derivative sentience--if the ship did

somehow receive a real 'spirit' through this process--then I would expect the 'spirit' of a well-loved Russian ship to be masculine in its thought-and-behavior matrix, and an American ship to be feminine. But we would be the ones creating this characteristic in the artifact.

God, by contrast, is a person Whose existence and basic character precede my (or our) relationship with Him. It is my task to discover those characteristics if I can, not create new ones for Him (as if that was possible).

Thus, lacking a masculine/feminine relationship criterion, I must default in English, so far, to the neutral pronoun set; and for us, that is the masculine.¹⁷⁹

But am I restricted to using the masculine set only because I lack a proper set? That is, if I learned to speak another language which actually has a distinctive neuter pronoun set (or

¹⁷⁹ You may have noticed I switch genders when speaking of hypothetical people in this book. I do this so you (and I!) can more easily distinguish between certain 'characters'. I would also be satisfied if my readers understood this to mean that men and women both may have varying opinions about philosophy; but again I am speaking of derivative entities who really must be male or female--or else discussed as neuter and thus, in English, as masculine.

I know there are well-intentioned people who would also relegate the female pronoun set to neutral equivalence, in order to overcome the naturally bigoted associations we humans can easily fall prey to: if we use the masculine as the default pronoun set, it is sadly true that some people will tend to hear 'men' as 'men' rather than as a convenient placeholder for 'humans', leading to (or more probably reinforcing) a view that only males can or should be thought of as relating to such matters.

I do understand and have sympathy for this problem; yet I question whether the reduction of the feminine pronoun set to neuter equivalency is the answer. In a culture where people rightly wish to help protect the status of women as recognized people, it seems to me dangerous to take words specially distinctive to women and drain them of that distinction. I do not want to treat women as ciphers in any sense, even linguistically. (I always imagine my fictional examples in this book to be persons, just like literary characters.)

if we developed such a set for English), should I stop speaking of God as 'He'?

I think there is at least one more reason why God should be spoken of using masculine pronouns. However, I shall have to defer this reasoning briefly until a few other points are established.

The form of my argument so far indicates that this entity is the ground of all existences: it (or He, rather) is the Final Fact, or the Independent Fact (the IF). It is no use postulating an intermediate entity for purposes of providing basic action or for grounding my potential reliability at making judgments. An intermediate entity would be a derivative entity, and would (to that degree) be as subject as I am to the properties of the Final Fact. If an ultimately non-sentient, reactive reality either does not provide me with active cognizance, or leaves me with a requirement that I justify my own ability to reliably justify claims; then a proposed intermediate sentience would be in the same boat I am. What I am discovering is that the IF is God, with no backdoor hatches into a qualified atheism.

But I think it is worthwhile to consider briefly certain counterclaims--or, rather, to re-consider them (since I have already made these arguments in my first section.)

For example, there is no point attempting to evade the conclusion "God exists" with the postulation of a cosmic infinite regress. Such a postulation says that absolutely

everything can be reductively explained in terms of something else with no end; yet if that was true, then the distinctive claim 'reality is an infinite regression' could itself be effectively reductively explained as being something which is not really an infinite regress. The proposition slits its own throat, although it appears to offer a comfortably ambiguous approach to philosophy.¹⁸⁰

Also, although cosmic dualisms have a long-standing and significant place in the history of religions and philosophies, I find that dualisms fail the self-consistency check at their foundational level--or alternatively, they collapse as a practical matter into a single IF philosophy.¹⁸¹

Do these proposed Independent Facts share an effective reality, or do they not?

If they do not, then why would a duality (or otherwise multiple IF) be proposed at all? Proposing that an entity has absolutely no bearing to our own reality, is the same as proposing the entity does not exist: for even 'existence' would itself have some bearing to our own existent reality.

Yet if they do share an effective reality, then because they are proposed to be Independent of each other, one does not exist within, or dependent upon, the other; and thus both must exist within the boundaries of a third, for they share an effective reality. That third, overarching reality is revealed

¹⁸⁰ More details of this argument may be found in Chapter 7.

¹⁸¹ My other discussion of dualisms may be found in Chapter 8.

to be the true Independent Fact. It is this Fact which my argument primarily concerns--and it is about this Fact that I have concluded sentience must be an intrinsic characteristic.

Perhaps there is a sentient sub-entity whose reality is on a par with Nature yet the two are separate from each other; what is that to me? It provides an interesting hypothesis, perhaps, to be investigated and ratified or refuted later--but my business now is with God, not with speculative relations between the archangel Michael and Nature. Or perhaps our Nature is transcended by two personal beings of equivalent power but opposing characteristics; again, what is that to me? My business now is with God, not with the relationship and struggles between Michael and Satan. Maybe I shall eventually discover that a Most Powerful Rebel exists; but that is not a cosmic dualism. It is a more detailed theism.

I am speaking now of the Independent Fact; and by recognizing that my sentience can only depend on Its sentience (and by recognizing that without my presumed sentience 'my' 'ideas' about anything, including the IF, must be counted as effectively or literally nonexistent), I am recognizing and proclaiming the existence of God.

Furthermore because God is "the Independent Fact", I find that this apparently impersonal term ironically gives me strong grounds for speaking of God not merely as a person, but with a

gender description that is something other than an arbitrary feature of my English language.

In philosophy, there is a relationship that may be described as agent-to-patient. The 'agent' acts; the 'patient' receives the action. When philosophers of old described this relationship, they quite naturally put masculine pronouns on the side of the agent, and feminine on the sides of the patient. This reflected the most basic of male/female relationships: biologically speaking, when a child is conceived, the male gives and the female receives.

'Action', in this human situation, does not necessarily have its full philosophical rigor: it might only indicate one very particular cause/effect relationship.¹⁸² Yet true actions do still exhibit this relationship. If I act, and you react, then for that interchange, I am the agent, and you are the patient.

Notice, however, that if God is the Independent Fact of reality (and I think the IF must be God, for reasons I have already given), then God's fundamental relationship to all other things (if any not-God entities exist at all!) must be that of agent to patient. If any other relationship exists, it is because God chooses (or has chosen) to allow it--thus the original agent/patient relationship would still exist. And the

¹⁸² It is, of course, entirely possible for a woman to initiate her own 'actions' during conception, and a man could in his own turn be whelmed into merely reacting. The interinanimations and combinations of these roles are generally recognized to produce the most satisfying lovemaking--as is also recognizably true about the art of dancing, and not coincidentally!

easiest way of describing that relationship in terms of personal pronouns, is to use the masculine for God.

Perhaps I can illustrate this if I look at the proposed alternative: what if I called God "She"?

If I only lacked a genderless pronoun set, and if the female pronoun set was somehow established as appropriate for such neuter use in my language, then I suppose I would be just as willing to call God "She". But when it comes time to talk practically about God, then I run into a problem.

I am aware there are well-meaning people who speak of God as "Goddess" with appropriate modifications to pronouns. Very well, let me try that for a while. Goddess is my creator.¹⁸³ This naturally brings up the following association: Goddess (as my creator, or at least as the One Who generates me) is my heavenly Mother.

But a mother is a person who has had something happen to her (in the net sum, at least) to bring me to birth. What happened to Goddess to cause me to be? Put bluntly (though metaphorically) how did She become impregnated? That seems to beg the question of another entity. But Goddess must be the IF; if anything could do that, it would have to be something She created. Yet that puts the question one stage further back; what is the relationship between Her and that entity, then? It might be feasible to say that She begot of Herself an entity which, by

¹⁸³ This can sound a bit odd, because our society has long been comfortable with using 'God' as a proper name, not merely as a term--another issue I'll touch on shortly.

Her grace, then proceeded to beget other entities through Her-- then perhaps into a third entity which She had also created (Nature), as a receptacle for further derivative entities like us.

The notion becomes rather convoluted from there;¹⁸⁴ whatever else may be true, the traditional role of God the Father allows a simpler notion. God creates Nature, and through Nature He begets derivative entities such as ourselves; Nature can be spoken of (either metaphorically or literally, depending on whether Nature is itself a derivative sentience) as our mother.

This view is so fitting to the concept of a creating sentience that it has a rich history into the deeps of pagan antiquity: Mother Earth and the Sky-Father. I find it also cleanly fits the character I am (on other grounds) discovering of God.

I will gladly admit, on the other hand, that if pantheism turns out to be true, then it might well be better to speak of Goddess the Mother: the IF would not be using a derivative entity to produce us, because the natural level of reality around us would itself be the ultimate level and itself Divine. This remains to be seen; so perhaps Goddess the Mother will be a metaphysically accurate description after all.

But there is another role whereby God has been symbolically described, related to gender. Actual religions which promote the

¹⁸⁴ Though not yet strictly self-contradictory: if we ask where the first begotten of Goddess came from, there might in fact be a self-consistent answer--which I will address not many chapters from now.

idea of Goddess as our Mother may go the next step (mirroring their masculine alternative) and describe Goddess as our Bride.

And this is a concept I reject.

I do not reject it out of distaste: I find the idea very attractive! But this immediately alerts my suspicions: why do I find such an idea so attractive?

I think the idea implies, that at a fundamental level I can reverse the agent/patient relationship.

If I do have derivative action capability, then in a sense the IF could indeed choose (and in fact will have already chosen, by giving my current existence with action ability) to allow me such a privilege. God in humility could choose to submit to letting me make real contributions to the ongoing process of creation, such that God might then consequently make other choices based on the results of my input.

Yet the underlying fact would still be that the IF is choosing to do this, and my own ability and privilege would be the result.¹⁸⁵ I still remain the patient, and God still remains the agent.

But to speak of the IF as being the Bride (as I might speak of Her as the Mother) carries with it the implication that She is the patient to me at the fundamental level of Her reality;

¹⁸⁵ I have not forgotten the potential problem I raised in the previous chapter, though: is action-to-derivative-action a contradictory notion?!

and this idea must be contradictory, if She is the IF and I am derivative.¹⁸⁶

I can understand (for instance) the Christian Church, or the Jewish Nation, as a corporate body being metaphorically described as the Bride of God. That keeps the agent/patient relationship established properly. But Goddess as Bride does not seem to me to do this.

For these reasons, then--and there are others I may bring out later--I think it makes most sense to speak of God, through a useful and practical analogy, as 'He Himself'; as the Father, the King, the Husband. I do not claim this is a deductive necessity, but it fits better with what I am discovering elsewhere.¹⁸⁷

I recently mentioned that we Westerners have grown very comfortable using the word 'God' as a proper name for the Personality Who grounds all facts.¹⁸⁸ I am content to continue this usage; it may be that God has revealed to us names which He

¹⁸⁶ A human bride wouldn't be subordinate to me in this fashion, either; I would be furious at the thought of it! But neither is a human bride being proposed as the level of reality to which I have the most fundamental possible relation. The Divinity is acting to generate me, and therefore is causing effects upon me. Analogical 'bride' language would imply that the fundamental relationship between Goddess and me, is my action to Her dependent response. I think this agent/patient relationship is extremely untrue--it essentially implies that I am the creator or inventor of 'Goddess'--so I will not use such language about the ultimate creating Divinity.

¹⁸⁷ Although, again, if pantheism turns out to be true, I would be inclined to use the opposite analogy, at least insofar as Mother and Queen. I think I would still be obligated to reject Bride. Goddess Herself would be the Holy Virgin giving birth, I suppose.

¹⁸⁸ I highly recommend Marianne Meye Thompson's The God of the Gospel of John for (among other things) a detailed introduction to the use of God's name in Jewish, Greek and early Christian texts; since these have heavily influenced Western use of the term-as-name.

Himself would prefer we use of Him, but this would beg the question of scriptural inspiration and attendant doctrines--a topic I am certainly not yet in a position to discuss! To the sceptic, then--that is, to the person who, it may be, only now is coming to accept the bare existence of God or who does not agree yet with certain historical and metaphysical claims about Him which I profess as a Christian--to that person, I willingly accede to a middle ground, and so shall use God (and only 'God') as a proper name.

And to the believer (of any type, including my own) who rightfully (but with a touch of naivete) wishes to guard the attribute of God as a Person and thus insists on a proper name, I say this: I challenge you to produce a proper name of God that means more than God. You may give me words of any description; yet I ask you to notice that these words (exotic as they may sound to us moderns who very probably speak another mother-tongue than the people who originally coined, or received permission to use, those titles) are themselves mundane descriptions which borrow divine importance by being applied to God.

You may insist, for instance, that Yahweh is His proper name. I would agree (although you should charitably remember that many of my other readers would not) that He has taught us to call Him this--or, rather, that He taught us to call Him something, but thanks to historical factors 'Yahweh' is perhaps

the closest we can now come to the pronunciation of that lost name. But what does Yahweh mean? It doesn't seem to mean anything, unless perhaps an abbreviation for the phrase "I AM THAT I AM"; and in Jewish scriptures it is often replaced with (the plural form of) "Lord". I agree, He is the Lord. But lords exist who are not God, don't they? He is the King of Kings, yet there are kings who are not He. If I called God "King" throughout my discourses of Him, would you say I have denied or underplayed His Personhood, by using 'merely' a title and not a 'proper name'? Yet 'Lord' as such is also 'merely' a title, and not a 'proper name'. Indeed all of our names, to the best of my knowledge, are 'merely' titles if we insist on reducing them-- and the person who insists on marginalizing God will insist on reductions of this sort no matter what you or I call Him. My own name could be transliterated to mean 'healer in the grassy meadow', or 'babbling thin bookish man'! This is what happens if we place too much weight on the name of God.

If I think it worthwhile to preserve and ratify the concept of the personhood of God, and if I am told that I must do so through the acceptance of a name which itself means less than God (as if that name was not itself a titular recognition of some aspect of His personality), then I would shut myself in a tower of contemplation and leave the field unchecked to the sceptics.

No; you may depend upon it: God's 'personhood' will not be ratified nor guarded by a name less than God (however applicable and lovely and pertinent and divinely sanctioned such a name may be); and a name equivalent to God might as well be God. I am told that Jehovah is not a real word, being a transliterated mush of Latin, Hebrew, Greek or whatnot. I say: by God Himself, Jehovah is a real word and means God, if I honestly and seriously and reverently use it for that purpose, no matter its origins! Am I supposed to think that God, Who in Hebrew Scripture alone gives us dozens of purportedly legitimate ways to name Him (most of them adjectives and gerunds which can be legitimately applied in lesser standing to many other subjects), cares overmuch whether I apply another batch of syllables to name Him, as long as by doing so I keep in mind Who He is and follow Him to the best of my ability to do so? I follow God, not (merely) His Name; I am not spending years writing this testimony in order to give sceptics better grounds (or believers clearer grounds) for joyfully receiving and following merely His Name!¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁹ Even the name/title 'God' is derived originally from a pagan word for deity--along with our English word 'good'. But the word itself originally meant something fairly mundane (as mundane as an ancient word for 'good' can be); as do all of our names for God, even the ones I think He has used of Himself. As I argued in chapter 11, if we despise metaphorical language when speaking about God, we will only end up using metaphors of a type perhaps significantly different from our best ideas of Him.

Besides, while I am certainly not adverse to using names which mean 'King' or 'Lord'--as I frequently do in my own devotions to Him, and contemplations with Him--I have my own reasons, to be given later, for preferring to use a name that means 'Good'.

(And for preferring to use a name that means 'The Lord God saves'...)

All this being the case, I will continue to speak of God as "God" throughout this book; and I will continue to use the traditional masculine pronouns.

And having cleared away a few minor (but possible) stumbling blocks to the best of my ability (and having spliced into their proper place some earlier arguments of mine in my first section, in order to smooth out some rather more serious wrinkles), I now find myself free to proceed along my path--and perhaps to begin unraveling the problem of action-to-action which I detected in my most recent chapter.

SECTION THREE -- CREATION AND THE 2ND PERSON

CHAPTER 22 -- The Aseity

I have discovered (if my argument holds water) that the fundamental ground of all reality is active and sentient, and thus is a Personality. He must, at the barest minimum, be sentient to the degree that I require my own active and sentient properties to be distinctively real. What more He may be, remains to be discovered, if possible.

Let me look at a potential problem that many readers will now have. Where did God come from?

In one sense, the answer can be deferred; for no matter what philosophy we espouse--atheism or pantheism or theism or anything else--we will fetch up eventually with a reality that just is.¹⁹⁰ The naturalistic atheist who rejects God is still left with an entity--Nature--that just is; if she seriously asked where Nature 'came from', other than from Itself, she would be tacitly denying naturalism. She might thus become a supernaturalistic atheist; but then she would fetch up at a new irreducible stopping point.

Yet, although the question ('Where did God come from?') could be deferred, I would rather not. I think the question

¹⁹⁰ Even if an infinite regression could be possible, it still would finally be an infinite regression. Such a finality, of course, is contradictory to the whole notion of an infinite regression...

leads directly to a highly useful understanding about the characteristics of God; and simultaneously ratifies, in a minor way, my developing argument that a non-sentient Independent Fact is not the end, and source, of reality.

Whatever the IF is, It cannot have 'come into existence from nowhere', for that is a contradiction which owes its shreds of fictive plausibility to our inability to properly imagine a true 'nowhere'.

We think of a black space, and then of Nature (for instance) 'banging' into existence; but the space of Nature evidently already existed for physical material to expand into, and thus physical Nature does not have its true origin in that fashion. The blank slate may be self-existent, or it may have been created, but it is a slate and therefore exists; it is not nothing.¹⁹¹

¹⁹¹ I am not saying Big Bang theories must therefore be false. I am saying that such theories either propose an eternal physical universe after all, into which new physical material became existent (during the 'Bang'); or else those theories propose a real beginning to this physical universe based on the behavior of a causally predecessory reality. It seems also possible and plausible that we are calculating things wrongly in trying to describe the behaviors and properties of primeval reality: if time behaves differently under different physical dimensions, then our calculations of timing for the expansions could be very wrong; or else the universal-speed-limit of light was grossly violated during initial moments of the bang (or somehow established afterward).

Otherwise the theories are contradictive rubbish, and should be discarded. I have seen a lauded astrophysicist attempt to argue--explicitly for the purpose of denying that Nature was created by God, a notion he described as being intellectually infantile--that our physical Nature 'banged' into existence literally 'from nothing'. His argument, however, relied on treating 'nothing' as exhibiting the properties of a vacuum--despite having soberly reminded us in another part of his argument, that true pre-physical 'nothingness' cannot even be a vacuum!

Perhaps sensing in some dim fashion that he could not have it both ways, he then proceeded to claim that he was not violating the traditional first expression of the law of noncontradiction ('from nothing comes nothing'), by

Now, if I had no other (and prior) grounds for being logically confident that God exists (that the IF is rational and intentionally active, and so indeed even personal in some ultimate way) I would still strongly edge in favor of accepting theism, against an atheistic reality, by considering the question of whether fundamental reality, the Independent Fact, merely statically exists, uncaused, or whether the IF eternally causes its own existence.

In technical terms, this is called the question of "aseity"; "privative aseity" means the IF merely exists uncaused, "positive aseity" means the IF self-existently causes its own existence. In no case does the IF receive existence from anything else; otherwise we wouldn't in fact be talking about the Independent Fact!¹⁹²

arguing that the matter/energy balance of such a closed naturalistic, non-active (thus non-sentient) reality, comes out to a literal zero-sum--thus 'nothing' is still all that exists!

Strangely, the popular science magazine in which I read this amusing exposition of modern physics, did not entitle their article, "Physics Professor Claims He is Nothing (derides theists as credulous simpletons)"...

¹⁹² To give a well-known religious example, Jews, Christians and Muslims may recognize and even venerate "angels", such as Gabriel or Michael, but are not supposed to worship them: only God Most High, creator of all things, including angels, should be religiously worshiped. For an angel to claim to be his own creator, would be rebellion against God.

This becomes an interesting technical problem for Jews and Christians (Muslims would say the texts have been tampered with to produce the problem!), because in the Jewish Scriptures an angel often shows up, in obscure and very famous stories alike, who not only claims to speak for YHWH Most High but to actually be YHWH Most High (while yet sometimes recognizing the personal distinction of YHWH Most High), including for purposes of religious worship. This figure isn't always recognized as YHWH at first, although when characters (famous and obscure) figure this out, they often panic: they have seen YHWH Most High, Whom no man can see and live! The prophets typically go on to agree that these people were not mistaken, they did indeed somehow see YHWH Most High. Jewish theologians, ancient and modern, have various ways of accounting for these texts; and Christians took up this problem in a special way when a man showed up making similar claims.

You may have already noticed that one option, privative aseity, means that fundamentally the IF does not act (or even behave), whereas if positive aseity is true then the most fundamental reality of the IF is action (or at least behavior). That's an important distinction, and I'll be discussing it soon. But before then, I want to point out a major technical and formal problem with one of those options--a problem the other proposal doesn't have!

This strong formal problem occurs due to a special property the IF must have in order for any argument we make to be relationally valid; and this time I don't mean action ability (although I'll also be discussing that issue in regard to aseity soon.)

For any argument of ours to even exist as an argument, much moreso for it to be worth anything, it must be caused and grounded. The argument must exist as the effect of a cause; and it must also have the property of being a logical consequent to a ground. Without being an effect of a cause, the argument wouldn't exist at all; but without being properly consequent to a ground, the argument is invalid and so is worthless for understanding the truth of the topic being thought about.

The Cause/Effect relationship and the Ground/Consequent relationship are not necessarily the same thing--in fact at our

The point is that both (closely related) religious groups agree that they aren't supposed to religiously worship creatures, only the Creator; so what are they supposed to do with these examples? Reject them? Accept them--and if so, how? This leads to a number of variant solutions, especially in Christianity.

level of reality they are categorically different things!

Philosophers call this the fact/value distinction; you may have heard of a special version of it called the is/ought problem. The factness of an event, even though real, doesn't have the same kind of quality as the value of an event, so merely appealing to a fact doesn't necessarily establish the value of a fact.

I'll be discussing this particularly in regard to ethics much later (in Section Four). Right now I'm talking about logic more broadly. As I discussed back in Section Two (and even back in Section One, at Chapter 4), the rationality of our behavior is something different from its logical validity; but for an argument to be worthwhile as a tool for understanding truth, it also has to have logical validity! If I make a mistake, I may still be acting rationally, but the mistake will mean my argument is invalid. Indeed here we may see there are (at least!) three categorically different qualities to what is happening: the event of the argument, as an effect of a cause; the validity or invalidity of the argument, in regard to the ground/consequent relationship; and the rationality (or not) of the entity doing the argument.

In short: if any argument of ours is ultimately uncaused, then it cannot (and never did) happen at all; and if any argument of ours is invalid (even allowing for different kinds of invalidity, whether inductive, abductive or deductive), then

it is worthless for arriving at a true understanding of the facts of the topic. And our rationality is not a guarantee in itself that these other two qualities will also be true about our argument.

And here comes the first ontological problem with privative aseity: if privative aseity is true, then all our arguments are ultimately uncaused, because all reality (including our arguments) is ultimately uncaused!

I am willing to grant that due to the paradoxical and unique properties of the IF as such, it might be that the IF can (in various ways, directly and/or indirectly) provide causation for our arguments, despite the IF having no cause.

But existence is a different category than the ground/consequent relation of an argument. You may be able to see that the IF must somehow combine the qualities of cause/effect and ground/consequent, if any of our arguments are going to be worth anything: we have to be able to trace logical relations back to a grounded foundation. But if privative aseity is true, then the IF is ungrounded as well as uncaused--the IF does not even exist as Its own logical ground: there is ultimately no reason for the IF's existence either way!

This isn't quite the same problem as the first metaphysical corollary to the law of noncontradiction--from nothing comes nothing. If privative aseity is true, then by the terms of the proposal there is no question of the IF coming from anything

(even from the IF). The IF simply statically exists, and from this Something comes Everything Else (if there is anything else other than the IF--which I haven't really established yet, remember.)

But if privative aseity is true, then we have every reason from its proposed characteristic of ultimate non-behavior, much less an ultimate lack of action, to believe that nothing else exists other than Itself, and that unlike us the IF does nothing. Moreover, there can be no logical relation between propositions, no consequents to grounds. Put another way, if privative aseity is true, we have every reason to believe that we cannot possibly have any good reason to believe anything, including that privative aseity is true!

If that sounds like my critique of fundamental atheism from the previous Section, there's a good reason why! If the Independent Fact only statically exists, then behavior of any kind, even merely automatic and systemically reactive/counterreactive behavior, is ultimately foreign to It. And I say "It" because, consequentially, if privative aseity is true, the IF could not be personal either. It would be the very deadeast type of atheism: a mere singularity of existence with no detail other than mere 'existence' as such; for if it had any other properties besides mere existence, those properties would be relational at least to one another, implying logical grounds-

-and a privative aseity reality does not have logical grounding even in regard to Itself.

As I argued in the previous Section, though, we don't only need for our behaviors to come from an ultimately 'behaving' reality; we need for at least some of our behaviors to have the property of active rationality, in order for any arguments of ours to be even possibly "rational"--and we are going to necessarily presume that our arguments can be at least possibly "rational", involving special property claims for ourselves (even in denying the existence of those claims!) Proposing that fundamental reality is non-rational, in other words that atheism is true, immediately introduces a necessarily solvent sceptical threat to the reality of our own rationality--a threat that we cannot even try to resolve (regardless of whether we think we succeed in resolving it!) without first proposing that the threat is not necessarily solvent. Put shortly, we have to necessarily assume that the sceptical threat of atheism isn't necessary, in order to combat its necessary fundamental threat to the reality of our rationality.

While theism has some potential problems of its own, in regard to our rationality, the threat isn't necessarily immediate; there are at least a few ways around it from the start (as I discussed back in chapter 20, and will be discussing throughout this Section), and there may be more. Theism at least

proposes the same kind of our own necessarily presupposed rationality for sake of any argument.

Privative aseity turns out to have similar formal problems to atheism, with regard to being an immediate and necessary sceptical threat to our rationality; and also turns out to have ontological characteristics much more in common with atheism, indeed with the most 'atheistic' atheism conceivable (aside from sheer total non-existence of anything perhaps!)

And yet again, privative aseity runs directly foul of the Golden Presumption, that you and I can act. For if privative aseity is true, then the core foundation of all reality, including all our own behaviors, is non-action. Our rationality cannot be defended by rational argument against that kind of fundamental conceptual threat; we will only end up tacitly presuming something contradictory to the reality of that proposal, in order to acknowledge at least the possibility of the responsible rationality of our own arguments.

Positive aseity just doesn't have any of those problems. We don't have to deny key tenets of positive aseity, nor of theism, in order to operate as responsibly rational persons. True, we would have to do so if an atheistic version of positive aseity was proposed--if the IF is proposed to be an eternally self-generating system of reactions and counterreactions. But leaving aside the question of what kind of behavior, positive aseity doesn't have the fundamental anti-rational problems of privative

aseity: putting it a little over-simply, we cannot have any good reason to believe that our reality fundamentally exists for no good reason.

All this being the case, and assuming for purposes of further argument that my prior arguments are sufficiently valid and accurate, I will consider the topic in terms of an entity that I already believe (on those other grounds) to certainly be active: what does it mean, for God to be self-existent?

Chapter 23 -- The Unity

Recently I have been talking about what it means for foundational reality to be self-existent. And for various reasons, I have concluded I ought to believe that the foundational reality, the one Independent Fact of all existence, must not only be privatively self-existent, but positively self-sustaining--especially if (as I have also concluded) I ought to believe the IF is rationally active.

If, therefore, God (the rationally active Independent Fact) is self-sustaining, then I conclude that the most fundamentally basic action of God is His own 'upkeep', so to speak. Without this action, no other actions of God would be possible. Because this action remains eternally successful, all other actions of God are possible. If God acts in any other fashions than this, then He can act in those fashions only because He continually acts in this fashion.

'To actively cause to be' is 'to create'. God is His own Creator, as well as ours and everything else's.

But many languages (including my own) have a distinctive word for a certain type of creation--the type wherein the creator creates (or the producer produces) something of its own kind.

In English, we call this special variation of creation 'begetting'. A man begets men; but he creates a chair. We say he creates a statue, even though the statue is in many ways like a man, because the statue is nevertheless not the same kind of thing the man is.

When God creates Himself from all eternity, what He creates obviously is 'the same kind of thing' God is, in the deepest possible sense of the phrase: for what the self-existent God eternally creates, or generates, at the most primary possible level, is Himself God.

I may therefore metaphorically (though usefully) distinguish this special action from other actions He may take, and say thus: God begets Himself, and He creates everything else.

Putting it another way around, God is not 'created', but is self-begotten; whatever is 'created', is not-God (if anything not-God exists at all). This is how I will typically limit my use of 'creation' and its cognates, hereafter.

Now notice a unique feature of the Self-Existent: we have in plain view before us a conceptual action line, with a cause and a result on either 'side', although the cause and result are effectively the same at this (necessarily) irreducible level. If we wish to recognize the two sides of this action line, we may cogently do so by saying that in this way God is the Self-Begetter; and in that way God is the Self-Begotten.

And because I should not forget that God (as an active sentience) is a Person, I should simultaneously affirm that a Person is the Begetter and a Person is the Begotten.

I may therefore metaphorically (but usefully and adequately) describe God as both Father and Son.

Now let me see to what extent such a characteristic of Him is necessary, and to what limits I can develop this doctrine, along lines I have already established.

Is it necessary that God must be Self-Begetting and Self-Begotten?

Well, it is necessary that God (as the intentionally active, Self-existent Independent Fact) must be self-generative; and it is necessary that what He self-generates must be fully and completely Himself. This might only mean, that as part of an increasing knowledge of God's aspects, we could treat this aspect of God (a Unity of Persons) as being something of a "useful legal fiction"; as we might consider a self-consistent equation to be two 'different' formulas, because the formulas (although they are ultimately the same) 'look' different. For certain purposes we might use the formula on the left side of the equal sign; while for other purposes, we might be better served by using the formula on the right. The statement of principle would in either case be ultimately the same, but we might find different valid uses for different expressions of the statement.

To this extent, enriching my perception of God by recognizing a 'unity in multiplicity' might be quite useful; but by itself that doesn't make it necessarily more than a convenient description. Theologians may recognize this to be a doctrine of modalism--so far!

Yet there is a philosophical problem (more than one, actually) that requires a fully robust characteristic, beyond this mere 'modalism', in order to be solved.

Philosophers (theistic and non-theistic, Christian and non-Christian) have occasionally debated the question of whether it makes sense to say that God is 'conscious'. The argument runs something like this: we theists say (for various reasons) that God is rational, sentient, active, and so forth. This indicates consciousness. Yet we have discovered that it is inconsistent to claim that someone is 'conscious' if that person has no perception of an 'other' for purposes of distinctive comparison.

Put another way, how could I possibly claim to be 'I myself' or even cogently perceive myself as 'myself', if I do not recognize something which is distinctively not 'myself'?

You may think this would be easy to overcome; I know it certainly feels easy to me! But I think our ease at overcoming this conceptual problem stems from our inability to even adequately (much less accurately) imagine a state of absolutely nothing that is not nevertheless distinctive from our individual 'selves'. Our picture-thinking here defeats us; I can easily

picture myself floating in a disembodied state in the middle of a void. But the void is not myself, and is very easily distinguished from my conception of 'self'. In simplest terms, it is 'there' and I am 'here'.

You should notice that a similar problem quickly arises when we try to 'picture' God and only God existing. We tend to think of God hanging in a void somewhere, and then (perhaps) 'banging' the physical universe into existence with an explosion in this void.

But whatever creation 'ex nihilo' (or 'from nothing') means--and I will be returning to this topic soon--it cannot quite mean that. The void itself must either be a creation of God (putting the problem of picturing God as existing only by Himself one stage further back for no gain); or it must itself be an Independent, and that reintroduces all the intrinsic problems of cosmic dualisms. If I decide that cosmic dualisms are functionally impossible, then I am required to expunge even this image when I try to think of God existing only by Himself--even literally by (as the self-Begetting) Himself. I think this state of existence must be unpictureable, rather like many mathematic or sub-physic truths are unpictureable.

Either way, we return to the problem some philosophers, especially some atheistic or agnostic philosophers, have raised concerning the cogency of claiming that God is 'conscious'. Yet, as I have already demonstrated, if I take my own rationality

seriously (and if my specific argument along this line remains valid), then I will fetch up sooner or later at the necessary existence of a sentient Independent Fact: God. It would be inconsistent (I agree with the atheists here) to say that God has these properties and yet is not conscious at that fundamental state of His existence. And I further agree (again with the atheists) that without a distinctive difference of states, it is nonsensical to say that God could be 'conscious'.

A pantheist, of course, could say that I am begging the question against pantheism here; but if pantheism (naturalistic theism) is true, then there is no 'creation' per se; the evident system of Nature around us is itself God.¹⁹³ But God is God alone under pantheistic systems; and my problem here is that sentience implies consciousness, my previous argument concludes the IF is sentient, and consciousness requires a distinction of 'other'.¹⁹⁴

If naturalistic theism (pantheism) is true, then God has no distinction of 'other' (which is required for consciousness); yet even if supernaturalism is true, then God's own 'nature' is not fully accounted for by a created non-eternal 'subordinate' 'Nature'. We might perhaps say that something God has created is 'eternal' although subordinate, and that this would supply the necessary distinction of 'other'. Perhaps; but the most

¹⁹³ Or the evident system of Nature around us is completely illusory. Either way, God is God alone under pantheistic systems.

¹⁹⁴ Not surprisingly, a number of pantheistic systems imply that God is and is not sentient; or that God isn't really sentient at all--perhaps has even no existence at all (even as the IF). I have previously (in Section One) rejected those types of pantheism, due to argumentation on other grounds.

fundamental thing God creates (or perhaps I should say 'generates') is Himself, self-existent as God: that which (as the self-existent Independent Fact) is truly eternal. This action on God's part must be more fundamental than the creation of anything not-God.

Therefore, I think I can necessarily conclude that if God necessarily exists, then God has never been in a state where there was only 'sheerly' God with no distinctive differentiation. And the begetter/begotten distinction satisfies this requirement in the most basic manner possible; for differentiation requires some type of action by the IF, and there can be no more basic action than self-generation.

Thus I conclude that God's most basic action, the action of Self-generation, eternally introduces into His own most basic level of reality a true distinction of some sort; one which is intimately connected to the relationship between God as the cause of Self-generation and God as the result of Self-generation which is He Himself God.

The simplest possible way of stating this would be: God the Begetter is in some true sense one distinctive Person, and God the Begotten is in some true sense another distinctive Person.

Modalism is refuted--the theology where differentiation of Persons in the Divine Unity is only apparent not actual. Or rather, modalism is only false insofar as modalism is only modalism!--God does operate in conceptual modes, but at the

level of self-generation the mode of operation involves real multiple persons. The Father/Son imagery turns out to be increasingly more accurate.¹⁹⁵

Does this mean these 1st and 2nd Persons of God are completely distinct? No; what God begets, in self-generation, must fully be Himself. The unity is preserved; and indeed without some distinctive-yet-interlocked relationship there can be no unity, per se. A sheer One is not itself (or Himself) a 'Unity'--in union.

(Ironically, the so-called "unitarian" Christians, while they may in a way profess some kind of unity between God and man, cannot consistently profess a "unitarian God" per se at God's own level of existence--not without shifting meanings of "unitarian" to mean absolutely not a unity of persons, but instead a mere singularity of person.)

This union of the Divine Unity is another necessity, which for us must necessarily be unpictureable. Lewis (among others) suggests that our difficulties in drawing a balance between these concepts can be illustrated in the following fashion.

¹⁹⁵ Why am I not using Father/Daughter as the analogical way of describing this relationship of God to God? Because what God is 'begetting', in self-generation (remember my term 'begetting' here is analogical), is fully God's self, the chief possible agent; and the Daughter-imagery-language would tend to implicitly deny this aspect for the 2nd Person. See my last chapter in Section Two for a short discussion on the generally accepted masculine/feminine agent/patient descriptor relationship in philosophy. Still, in some ways it would be a little more philosophically and poetically proper to use feminine language for the 2nd Person than for the 1st. And if pantheism turns out to be true after all, it might be better to speak of both Persons in feminine language!--though see again, from that chapter's discussion, the problems with doing so while keeping the concept of primary agency.

Let us suppose that a 3-Dimension man attempted to explain (or even to describe!) a cube to a completely 2-D man. The 2-D man (per this example) has no 3-D perception: he can only perceive (and thus mentally picture) height and width, not depth. He can therefore perceive squares and rectangles (for instance)--but not cubes.

On the other hand, you and I, as 3-D people, can easily understand (but still not at all perceive, in its fullness!) six squares united to comprise one solid cube. The faces of the cube are distinct and, in a way, have their own distinctive properties; but they comprise a unity of the cube.

However, if we try to explain this to a 2-D man, and give him pictures to understand, we can (in principle) only do one of two things. We can either draw a "cube" for him, where the six sides are completely distinct and not intimately united; or we can draw a "cube" where the six sides are intimately united, but overlap too much and lose their proper distinctions.

Perhaps our best hope would be to draw both sorts of "cube" as correctives for each other, and try to teach the 2-D man that a "cube" is something other than these two representations: something that shares some of their positive properties while transcending them.

I do not think we could blame the 2-D man for not understanding, nor for rejecting, the concept of a 3-D cube; or

at best going with one or the other of the representations.¹⁹⁶

Nevertheless, the cube does still exist.

Similarly, as I speak about the Unity, you and I will be more-or-less in the position of the 2-D man. We cannot easily (if at all) picture such a concept mentally. That doesn't mean such a Unity cannot exist, for physicists will tell you that our concepts of chemical arrangements and atoms and sub-atomic particles and their interrelations are also unpictureable--the physicists can at best provide us with two or three different sorts of picture, to try to get across some aspects of the reality. Yet the combined (and unpictureable as combined) properties of those entities still (as far as we can tell) are true--and can be understood to be true.

Therefore, if I have discovered that God, at His most fundamental level of reality, is first and foremost a Unity of Persons--one distinctively Begetting and one distinctively Begotten, both of them constituting a common 'substance' (so to speak) of existence--and yet I cannot quite picture this adequately in my mind, I am not overly concerned. Having reached this position by deductive logic, I am not worried about a lack of totally accurate mental imagery, as long as the underlying precepts remain self-consistent. The Father/Son imagery, as far as I can tell, is adequate; if God is not quite this, then He is more not less--but He will be 'more' along those same lines.

¹⁹⁶ Not coincidentally, most Christian 'heresies' propose one or the other of the "2-D cube" pictures (so to speak), either in their Christology, or at the level of God's own existence.

And this brings me back to my potential problem from Chapter 20. A very large part (perhaps even the most important part) of my rationale for deducting atheism (and its subordinate branches) out of the philosophical option list, involved my recognition that the general atheistic claim 'actions are produced ultimately by reactions' (or 'initiations are ultimately produced by noninitiations') is nonsensical; whereupon I found myself logically obligated to wonder whether the general theistic claim 'actions are ultimately produced by actions' is also nonsensical.

Specifically, I found I should ask whether it makes cogent sense, to say that derivative actions (such as what my behaviors seem to be) ultimately are produced by independent actions (such as what God's behaviors as the IF must be).

While puzzling this over, I decided that one solution would be to conclude that there are not in fact such things as derivative actions--in other words, what might seem like my derivative actions are in reality God's direct actions. The problem would then be mooted; because the only behaviors left over would be the actions of the IF, and perhaps blindly automatic reactions (such as Nature's)--leaving aside the question of how Nature fits into the scheme (a topic I will be returning to soon.)

That type of solution might provide us a pantheistic universe or a supernaturally theistic one, depending on whether

the field of Nature turns out to be, itself, fully God. But the disadvantage to this sort of solution is that 'I' would not exist, per se. This lack of distinctive existence on 'my' part might not necessarily invalidate the logic-train by contradicting the Golden Presumption, because the action involved in this solution remains the IF's. Yet, such a tactic succeeds by removing one of the 'actions' from the proposition 'actions produce actions'.

It now turns out, that whatever else we say about God, He Himself (speaking of the Unity of Divinity as a single and personal entity) must necessarily be taking a certain action that results in His ability to take actions; which is how self-sustenance works for an ultimately Independent active entity. Thus at the most basic level of activity (and existence) in reality, I find that action can in fact be produced by action.

So my dilemma from Chapter 20 begins to unsnarl a bit: action-into-action is a viable proposition--even if by itself this does not yet cover the proposition of action into non-Independent action.

Having established the transpersonal unity of God, and having worked out a few corollaries, I now will consider the topic of actions other than begetting--if indeed such activity by God should be said to exist.

CHAPTER 24 -- Creation or Creator?

I have been discussing the application of principles of self-generation, which must be the most basic possible action of the Independent Fact. By such an action, God begets Himself; and because His property characteristics include rational sentience, which implies consciousness, then I think it must be true that the begetting and begotten unity of God must be a unity of distinctive Persons.

This is admittedly a rather difficult concept to picture, but I think it can be most usefully analogized by saying that God the Father eternally begets God the Son, Who eternally submits in self-consistency back to the Father. The Son is of one mind with the Father and does the Father's will, and indeed does nothing except what the Father does, being the very action of God Himself. The Son may be said to be dependent upon the Father, but only in the sense that God is dependent upon Himself for His very existence.

Doubtless, if the analogy is pressed too far, it will break down; there can be no such thing as a 'full' analogy, for the fully similar would be the thing itself. This is why other analogies can be devised which help illustrate the basic principles involved; the multi-sided cube, for instance, can help us to understand the unity of something which in some of

our other experiences we only find utterly distinct or altogether smeared.

But it is important to recognize the limitations of an analogy, in order to ensure the analogy is serving to illustrate the principles without superseding the principles. To require that the two Personalities must be utterly (even physically) distinct at their most fundamental level of existence--as a human father and son would be distinct--would be an error of arguing from the analogy, rather than letting the analogy be informed (and limited) by the principles involved.

Be that as it may, I am now faced with this concept: reality consists of at least two distinctive states--Maker and Made--yet at the most fundamental level these two properties are 'proper' to one Reality, as they must be for the self-existent IF. So where do I, and/or the things I find around me, fall into the picture?

I conclude that I must presume I can reason; and that I must exist; and if I am arguing to you, then I must assume that you (and the medium of our communication) must also truly exist in some fashion--although it may not be quite the fashion I am inferring 'at first glance' from my senses.

As entities who (and that) exist, we must be caused. And at the most fundamental level of reality (which is what I am currently considering) it is God Himself Who is caused, by Himself.

So: am I, are you, is the medium between us, or any combination of these three, the 2nd Person of God? Am I God the self-Begotten? Are you? Is what we call Nature actually God the Begotten, the 2nd Person of God? In short, I will now begin to consider the question of whether--or to what extents--pantheism can be true.

If I began by hypothesizing as a presumption that pantheism (theistic naturalism, or naturalistic theism) is true, then I would proceed by studying the interrelations of Nature (including those of men) throughout history; and thus I would proceed by inferences from my examinations, to conclusions about what characteristics God must have.

One conclusion I might reach almost immediately, is that if all things are fully divine in status, then God must either be both good and evil, or must be functionally amoral--and I might state this amorality in terms of God being "beyond" good and evil, which qualities I would then consider to be subjective illusions.

This is a fairly simple inference from the premise "Everything is God" and the observation "A large percentage of Everything seems to me to be what I call 'evil'." Since it is contradictory (on the face of it) for a single entity to truly be both good and evil in full measure, insofar as these are treated as exclusive terms (I perceive, mistakenly or not, that I am sometimes 'good' and sometimes 'evil' myself; but we are

now talking of the sum total of everything which cannot be said to go through transitory states in the same way I do in my partiality), then I might logically conclude that my perception of good and evil must be faulty. And since I must presume that my perceptions nevertheless have a certain amount of relevance to what actually exists, I would (in such a case) conclude that what I am perceiving when I judge something to be 'good' or 'evil' must be something real, yet the quality of 'good' and 'evil' which I detect in it must be an perceptive illusion based on (and only on) my current circumstances.¹⁹⁷ Not surprisingly, many pantheists say something very much like this.

I might also decide that God (being Everything, per the premise of pantheism) seems to be both sentient and nonsentient, because I perceive that many events take place which fit both categories. I might therefore proclaim God to actually be both sentient and nonsentient; as some pantheists do claim.

However, I doubt I would actually draw and defend this conclusion myself, for such a position is inherently contradictory.¹⁹⁸ Instead, I would probably take the next step and, rejecting the contradiction, proclaim that every event (whatever its appearance may be) is really the direct result of fully divinely sentient guidance (for if I went the other way, I would be espousing atheism, not pantheism). And, once more not

¹⁹⁷ I am not really now considering the questions of ethics, however. I will return to that topic later, in my next Section.

¹⁹⁸ Here I would refer to my arguments from Chapters 5 and 10.

surprisingly, I don't think I need to look hard to find similar positions within pantheism.¹⁹⁹

These are, I repeat, some positions I might come to (or pass through) if I started with pantheism as a necessary presumption.

However, I have not done that; I have reached where I am now by another route. Therefore, my task now is not to consider which pantheistic tenets are or are not intrinsically possible and/or supported by evidence; but whether pantheism per se is viable. Can it withstand being deducted from the option list?

I don't think I have salted the tea (so to speak) by reaching this topic in this fashion; up until now, pantheism can (I think) still be considered 'in the running'.²⁰⁰ Whether pantheism can stay in the running depends on the extent to which I can possibly maintain pantheism without necessarily presupposing it; and that depends (at the moment) on whether or not I can find something which must not be fully divine.

Throughout my book, I have begun my lines of argumentation at the only place where I really can start: with myself. So,

¹⁹⁹ One of the interesting qualities of pantheism in general, is its tendency to exhibit drastic variations within the general branch of philosophies which posit or conclude it. I think this comes, among other reasons, from the attempt to reconcile the behavior of Everything in a fully divine fashion.

²⁰⁰ Even when (at the end of Section Two) I was considering the (relatively minor) question of how to speak of God genderwise, I granted for fairness that my conclusion to use masculine personal pronouns might best be reversed if pantheism turned out to be true.

here, I will also start with myself. Do I exhibit any qualities which necessarily indicate that I am not fully divine?²⁰¹

Remember that the Person of the Begotten God shares every characteristic with the Person of the Begetting God, except the distinctively willed action of self-generation. And even then, the existence of the Begotten Person depends on willed submission to the Begetting Person of the Unity--so both by His own action and by virtue of sharing substantial final reality with the Begetting Person, the Begotten Person (as the living action of the Begetting Person) has eternal self-generating Life in Himself. The Persons, including the Son, are fully alive and active within the total Unity of their substantial reality.

So I ask myself: am I omnipotent, omnipresent, omniscient, in relation to my own reality? Or again, am I in any way self-generatingly Independent, even as the only Begotten Son of the Father?

It does not seem to me that I am any of these. For example, there are actions which are intrinsically possible but which I obviously am not exhibiting however much I might wish. I exist in one place and not another. And my knowledge is very limited. Moreover, I find that whether I live or die is not ultimately dependent on my voluntary choice, even in union with something that is not personally myself.

²⁰¹ This topic obviously has links to the notion of Incarnation. I am deferring such questions for a while, but I will return to them later.

To be fair, many pantheists would, I think, agree not only with the form but with the content of these observations; therefore (these pantheists would say) I should try to escape my limitations and fulfill my destiny by becoming one with the Absolute, so that I can partake in the properties of full Divinity.

If I was presuming from the getgo that pantheism is true (or if I had already established it on other grounds), I might accept this. Then again, I might not, either. Such a solution only puts the problem one stage further back: if I am fully divine, why am I in this state and why would I be capable of choosing to stay in this state?

A pantheist might now (with some real justification) say I am being contrary, even needlessly contrary.

Exactly.

And the fact that I can be contrary raises a serious problem with the proposal that I am, in reality, fully divine.

If I am honest with myself, it seems to me that I willingly choose to do things which furthermore I seem to know deep down I should not do. If I began with the presupposition that I am fully God, then I might eventually conclude that whatever I happened to want to do was after all fully permissible; but then I would be faced with the question of why I thought those actions were not permissible in the first place.

Put more succinctly, there are times when I seem very clearly to be in rebellion against something; but under pantheism every 'something' is equally God, including myself. God cannot be in rebellion against Himself at a fundamental level. That would mean God is not self-consistent: more simply, that reality is not self-consistent. More strictly speaking: the Son cannot rebel against the Father, or the Father betray the Son, and still exist as the self-generating God. Their personal faithfulness to one another is necessary for their substantial existence.

Perhaps reality is not ultimately self-consistent; but as I argued earlier in Section One, if that is true I can have no way to tell. I must presume reality is self-consistent; therefore I conclude that the IF (which I have discovered to be God) is self-consistent; therefore I further infer that God does not rebel against Himself; and if I rebel against something or even if I am deluded into seeming that I rebel against something, then either way I am not behaving consistently with the fully divine.

Therefore, I conclude: whatever else I am, I am not the fully Begotten of God; I am merely created.²⁰²

This puts a huge dent in pantheism's intrinsic possibility. A pantheist could reply that I am not fully divine, but rather

²⁰² I will also be developing this same argument in a bit more depth from another direction soon.

partly divine. I might agree with him; but a partly divine entity is not the Self-Begotten God, ground of all reality.

Something distinctively exists other than the Begettor and the Begotten (Who, though distinct Persons, are still the same single personal entity): me.

The Unity of the IF may be considered one level of reality, despite its Personal multiplicity, because the Begetting and Begotten aspects of the self-existent IF must be fully united and (in substantial essence) equivalent. But with the recognition of something other than the fully divine--myself--I necessarily introduce at least one more level of reality into the theory.

With (at least) two levels of reality, I have now concluded that some type of Nature/Supernature relationship exists--and a self-consistent pantheism is ultimately a one-level reality claim.

But some notions distinctive to pantheism might perhaps be salvaged if the physical world within which I operate turns out to be the ultimate reality (and therefore God "Incarnate" in many senses of that word)! To this topic I turn for my next chapter.

CHAPTER 25 -- Supernaturalism

By comparing my behaviors and characteristics with what I have discovered about God so far (and despite the wide-reaching implications, the actual number of details I have developed is still quite limited), I find that one way or another I must not be an entity with fully divine status. I am not God. I may perhaps be partially divine (whatever that means--and it's a topic I will get back to), but even the concept of being 'partially' divine necessarily indicates that a distinctive level of reality must exist which is not itself God.

This means a distinctively real supersystem/subsystem relationship exists; and I seem to be representative of the subsystem. As I explained last chapter, this strikes a serious blow, in a technical sense, against pantheism.

Either everything is equally God (including the distinctive Persons of divine unity in multiplicity, which must be the case with the begetter/begotten status of God Himself as the self-generative Independent Fact of reality); or something exists which is not fully God.

If the first situation is true, then there can be only one level of reality (however multifaceted the aspects of that reality may be). Although philosophers often use 'naturalism' to conveniently mean 'atheism', strictly speaking the terms are not

equal. A person could maintain that multiple real but substantially different distinctive levels of reality exist, with one most fundamental level upon which all other substantially different levels of reality depend for their own existence (not upon themselves)--and that person could still be an atheist! She would be a supernaturalistic atheist. Or, a person could maintain that God exists (the IF is sentient), and that only one level of reality exists; he would be a naturalistic theist--that is, he would be a pantheist: only one level of reality exists, and that is God; therefore God is everything and everything is fully God.

However, my recognition of myself as being either compelled to be under an illusion (whether or not I am expected to try to 'escape' from it is irrelevant), or else of being (at least occasionally) in an actual willful rebellion against reality, indicates that I do not share fully divine status. The Begotten aspect of God is still God Himself as part of the Unity of the self-existent Independent Fact, and so shares fully divine status.

I thus conclude that whatever else may be true, there are at least two distinctive levels of reality: the fully divine (such as the 1st and 2nd Persons of the self-generative God) and the not-fully divine (such as myself). And if there are at least two substantial levels of reality, then technically speaking no pantheism can be true.

However, some of the propositions of pantheism might still be valid (and thus some sort of 'pantheism', using the term metaphorically for purposes of historical distinction, might be accepted) if the field of reality we commonly recognize as 'physical Nature' turns out to be itself fully divine. This would be an unusual approach to theology: a fusion of technical supernaturalism with practical pantheism.

Its distinction would be this: historically speaking, philosophers have generally argued or assumed that physical Nature either is the only level of reality, or else is the subsystem of an ontologically fundamental supernaturalistic reality. The option I am now considering inverts this: physical Nature would turn out to be the "Supernature", and my derivative reality (whatever that means in both principle and practice) would be the "Nature".

Or, put another way, instead of Nature/Supernature (such as the field of physical Nature and the supernatural God, respectively) we would have Subnature/Nature (entities such as myself and the physically natural God, respectively).

Let me suggest, therefore, that one philosophical option in front of me at this point, is to propose that I reflect one level or system of reality, and physical Nature reflects a supervening, or higher, system. By discussing my properties and the properties of physical Nature, as system/supersystem

(respectively), we can perhaps avoid misunderstandings attached to terms such as natural/supernatural.

The question before me in this chapter is: can such a state of reality be true? Is God--the Sentient Independent Fact--physical Nature? Or, put a little more accurately, is physical Nature itself God? If this is true, many corollaries of historical pantheisms will suddenly be validated, even if we can no longer consider 'pantheism' in the technical sense to be the reality (thanks to the existence of system/supersystem relationships).

Whatever properties physical Nature may have, virtually everyone of any philosophical stripe agrees that my body is composed of (at least) physical materials. We may disagree drastically about what precisely this means about me, if we disagree about the properties of physical Nature;²⁰³ but we will at least agree upon that fact.

Furthermore, we have discovered that whatever else may be true, it is also true that the physical status of my brain affects my ability to effectively think. These correlations have been experimentally established; and thus we can infer, to a certain degree, the mechanics of my thinking process. Under the theory I am currently considering, these physical events and

²⁰³ To give an extreme example: a person who says that the units of physical Nature possess the characteristic of 'being an illusion', will have a dramatically different opinion about what this means about me, than the person who says the units of physical Nature are not an illusion. But their disagreement will be about what it means for my body to be composed of physical materials.

characteristics are facets of the ultimate level of reality (which is Nature). Also, thanks to the arguments I derived in Section Two, I should conclude that the ultimate level of reality is itself sentient--that is, capable of thinking in at least the manner I understand 'thinking' to be--and this means that the theory I am currently considering should factor in this characteristic as well. Finally, as usual I must presume that ultimate reality is self-consistent.

What all this boils down to, is the conclusion that physical reality (under the theory I am currently considering) always (self-consistently) thinks (being sentient) true thoughts.

Put another way, although perhaps non-physical behaviors may exist and be fallible (such a non-physical subreality might account in some fashion for my 'not-fully-divine' status), physical behaviors must consistently produce correct thinking, under this theory. This would be one of the necessary corollaries to the proposition that what we generally recognize as physical Nature is itself the Sentient Independent Fact.

Now, my first observation is that as a practical matter, the vast majority of us (including, as far as I can tell, virtually all pantheists) reject out of hand the notion that physical behaviors automatically produce (when left to themselves) fully accurate thinking. Indeed, we reject this so strongly that if a particular bit of human thinking is ascribed

to fully physical behavior, we typically count that fact against the possibility that the thinking could be correct!

However, I might be told that this by itself only indicates how deep our declension from the Absolute runs. (Remember that such a declension is itself indicative of a system/supersystem reality, despite what pantheists have often otherwise said.) I might accept this answer as a rebuttal; except, we also have experimentation to consider now.

We have experimentally discovered, that whatever else human mentality may be, it is intimately related (at least currently) not only with the physical structures known as 'nerves' in my brain, but also to certain physical states of those biophysical structures.

Don't misunderstand: my forthcoming argument is not that this means only those types of nerve structures can function as a vehicle for active sentience. My point is rather different.

Let us say my task is to add up two numbers: 28 and 42. Let us also say someone has killed the nerve in which was stored the bit of information meaning 'I should carry the one when adding 8 and 2'. Instead, a new nerve has been wired, so that the memory of the taste of butterscotch is accessed instead. In principle, this type of result is possible. The physical interwiring may or may not account for my raw active intentions, but it did

restrict what I was capable of accomplishing with those intentions.²⁰⁴

I thus add up 28 and 42 and get 60, while gagging a little (I hate the taste of butterscotch). What has happened?

"You forgot to carry the 1," I might be told.

What does that mean? It means (under the terms of this example) that the nerve fired at a completely natural time, but not so that the correct number was produced. Does that mean I made a mistake?

"Yes, there's the wrong answer."

But that rather begs the question: Yes I made a mistake, because there's the mistake. Granted, but what was the mistake?

"Not carrying the 1."

And so we're back in a circle with nothing accomplished.

Here is the crux of the question: does 28 and 42 really add up to 60?

"No, it adds up to 70."

²⁰⁴ I should clarify here that my primary discussion and conclusion in Section Two was not that physical matter, per se, could not produce intentional events; but that fundamentally non-intentional events could not, of and only of themselves, produce intensitive events. Most atheists are also philosophical naturalists, and it seems to me as well as to them that physical nature is fundamentally reactive, which is how I treated it in Sec Two for illustration purposes. I concluded that I must presume that I am active in my reasoning, and that therefore I should conclude that the IF must be active; which has led to a further consideration of whether Nature is the IF after all, except ultimately sentient instead of non-sentient. If Nature is God, then my physical interwiring would account for my raw, active intentions after all.

But I just added them up and reached 60. In what sense does 28 and 42 really not add up to 60?

"In the realistic sense."

Does that mean my behavior did not correspond to reality?

"Yes it did not correspond with reality, otherwise you would have reached 70, which is the number of oranges you will have in a box if you put in a bag of 28 oranges and a bag of 42 oranges."

But isn't this odd? A bit of matter interacted physically in my head with other bits of matter, the result being that I was prevented from coming up with a total other than 60. Did this not correspond with reality?

"No, it did correspond with reality; the reality of what would happen when those bits did that sort of thing."

Then 28 and 42 can really add up to 60.

"Yes, they can really be added up like that."

So that answer is just as valid and just as real as any other answer?

"Taken as bits of interacting matter, yes."

Would you give me \$28 and \$42? I will give you back six ten dollar bills.

"No!"

Why not?

"Because you'd be shorting me ten dollars!"

So? Taken as bits of interacting matter, that result is just as good as any other result, isn't it?

"No, it isn't a true result."

So the mere fact that a physical event takes place (even when comprised of multiple physical events), turns out to be no guarantee that any ideas consequent with the event correspond correctly to reality: physical results can and do in fact hamper my successful thoughts about reality.

And yet, if physical Nature is the SIF (the Sentient Independent Fact), those events should utterly correspond with no disparity: if physical Nature is ultimately sentient, then I think I would have at least first-glance grounds for expecting physical interactions to remove obstacles to thinking most of the time--yet instead most of the time the opposite seems true.

The conceptual weight of the evidence thus seems to me to point away from physical Nature being itself the SIF.

However, I will say this: as I leave this chapter and continue onward, I do not think I have (so far) deductively removed the option from the possibility list. That being the case, I will be careful to watch myself throughout the next chapters, to ensure that any conclusion I draw about God and His relationship to creation does not require (without first

properly inferring it) that He must not be equivalent to what we call "physical Nature".

Fortunately, my line of argumentation can leave this question to one side for a while; it will remain to be seen whether 'practical pantheism', so to speak, can be deductively removed. I have registered here only a strong conceptual strike against it.

CHAPTER 26 -- God's relationship to Nature

Although I was unable (yet) to deductively remove from the option list the concept that what we call 'physical Nature' is God, I will remind you now that my own status as either a rebel (even if only occasional rebel) or as a deluded victim of illusion, indicates (even if nothing else did) that I am not fully divine in and of myself; and this indicates that at least two levels of reality, or two substantially different systems, exist: God and (in one way or another) not-God (namely myself).

Therefore, although I could only give a conceptual strike (not deduction) against 'practical pantheism' in the previous chapter, I do think I have deductively argued that pantheism must technically be false: not everything is fully God, because--as far as it is possible for me to tell--I am not God. Some type of relation that we may call Supernature-to-Nature, must therefore exist (even if, as might still be the case so far, what we call 'physical Nature' happens to be the 'supernatural' part of the relationship between the systems). The time has come for me to discover what necessary corollaries can be drawn from this position; and this will require thinking about the question: how can God effectively create something that is not-God?

To say the least, this is a tall order! It may also be my most controversial discussion; the implications somewhat unnerved me when I began putting together the pieces I had already uncovered. Yet, the more I thought about it, the more I began to see that (despite the 'radical' look of the developing theory) it does hew, in the end, as close as I could wish to the doctrines of traditional Christianity (as well as those of some other theisms, to a certain extent).

Indeed, once I had picked over the implications more thoroughly, I began to see how some very traditional Christian mysticism statements could properly relate to a supernaturalistic theistic Unity; which has helped me reconcile, among other things, certain mysterious statements in the New Testament.

I realize (no one better!) that this sounds as if I am about to dive over the line into heresy; I can only beg the patience of my Christian brethren for a chapter or two, so I can show (in hindsight) that in fact I am ratifying some traditional Christian doctrines more strongly than ever.

Let me recap what I have established up to now:

The Independent Fact of reality is actively rational: God exists. Being the IF, God must be self-generative; and this necessity leads in turn to a conclusion that God must be a Unity of at least two Persons: the Begetting God (the Father, the God Who makes Himself) and the Begotten God (the Son, the God Who is

made of Himself). Both of these Persons are distinctively real, not only modes of God's operation; yet they share the full attributes and singular reality (other than their conceptual position on either side of the self-generative action line) of ultimate Deity, including unity of mind and purpose. Except for a few special (although important) cases, if I talk about either God the Father or God the Son, I mean God Himself, fully God.²⁰⁵

Now, how did God proceed in making something (such as myself) that is not-God, or not fully divine? As I have explained earlier, it is no use (as comfortable as we find the mental image) proposing some sort of void 'outside' God, into which He can create. That is not creation 'ex nihilo'; and if we seriously introduced it, we would find ourselves back to a cosmic dualism, and thence (as I have argued earlier) further back to a full theism anyway--and back to being without such things as an equally self-existent void for creation. Put another way, such a picture of 'a void' implies eventually that God has already created something that is not-God: the void. And the principles of such a not-God creation (although not necessarily creation of a 'void') are exactly what I am asking about now.

I think the conclusion is inescapable that if we insist on picturing some sort of 'history outside of history' (which frankly may be contradictory, but which recognition in turn may

²⁰⁵ I remind my reader, that I am not yet talking about an Incarnation of God, when I discuss this transPersonal unity-in-divinity of Father and Son.

only mean that God is never not-creating--as He is certainly never not-generating, since He is ever and always generating Himself at least), then we must admit there was a 'time' (metaphorically speaking) when pantheism was true. Everything was God and fully God. But my own existence and properties as not-God indicate that this description 'no longer' (so to speak) represents reality accurately.

But if God was once Everything and Everything was fully God--and/or if it is nonsensical to state that something eternally not-God and not produced by God has always existed--then He can only have created not-God things by one method.

God's basic action must be to generate Himself fully. And I have concluded much earlier that it is nonsensical to propose that something eternally not-God existed for God to 'create into'. Yet I exist as evidence that something distinctively not-God can exist and thus was created.

God must therefore have ceased to generate Himself fully within a part of Himself.

This sounds immediately like an inconsistency (within a 'part' of God?--the Independent Fact can't be comprised of 'parts'!), so I will explore and refine it piecemeal.

Does this 'ceasing' count as an action, per se? The intent to do so certainly flags it as an action. But it is a very special type of action. Remember the created boulder from one of my earlier discussions (in Section One): God could choose not to

lift it. We need only examine this type of event from the perspectives of our own minds to see that this choice is an action; but the action is a choice to not take some other action. This may result in a paradox, but not a contradiction.

Neither (and this is unspeakably important) would such a paradox be an utterly new thing within the self-consistent system of the Unity!

From eternity the 2nd Person of the Unity--God Begotten, or 'The Son'--must, as a Person, make a constant corollary choice whether or not to surrender to the Unity as the 'Unity'. It is utterly necessary for this Person to make such a submission, in order for anything else to be accomplished, and even for God's self-existence to continue; because to refuse to submit in Unity to the 1st Person (the Begetting Father) would mean the breakdown of the self-sustaining Unity of God, and God Himself would cease to exist.

From all eternity, then, God plunges Himself (I am speaking of both Self-generating Persons in the Divine Unity singularly considered) in a sort of death-to-self which is nevertheless entirely necessary for God Himself to live--and so for anything else produced by God to be created and maintained.

Let me point out once more that to make this argument I am not appealing to mystical authority and/or 'scripture'. I am using some of the language of certain scriptures, and of centuries of subsequent documents about theology; but I am

trying to show that this language can be applied to the concepts, having been developed out of the concepts, for usefully understanding fundamental reality in a logically coherent way that is also factually accurate (so far as I have been accounting in facts). For all intents and purposes at this point, the Christian New Testament (and subsequent documents, and the events within our history which all these documents claim to attest to) need not even exist. If you, my reader, are sceptical of those documents, then set them aside, at least for a while. How much fairer can I be? I am only asking you to check my logical math, to ensure I am adding up conclusions correctly on grounds which, in principle, are accessible to anyone.

To continue (and to repeat): because I am obligated, in order to avoid contradictions, to avoid proposing multiple separate Independent Facts (such as God and the Void); and because I am obligated to nevertheless recognize the existence of God and not-God entities (with myself as one example of a clearly not-God entity); then I therefore conclude that God must willingly choose to cease doing something in regard to Himself, thus in effect submitting Himself through death, in order that something distinctively not-God (yet intimately bound to God) begins to exist as such. For such a proposal to be true, it must not be inconsistent with God's most basic action as God; but on further consideration, one Personal aspect (not a 'part' in the sense of distinctly existent components, but still a

distinctively real Person) of God does in fact already enact a death, a submission: the Son willingly and always chooses, as part of the ground of all possible existence, to submit to the Father (God Self-begotten to God Self-begetting).

So for God (and specially in and through the Person of the Son) to sacrificially act in self-submission for the sake of generating something not-God, would be a logically coherent though distinctly different action, too. Although of course, being a distinctively (not utterly) different action it will be done to a distinctively different degree (and in a different 'direction', so to speak).

My initial way of trying to put it, that "God ceases to generate Himself fully within a part of Himself", is certainly not accurate in saying "within a part". But a real yet unified distinction in the single Independent reality of God is the key not only to God's active Self-existence but also to active creation of that which is not-God.

This being the case, I conclude that this deduction does not entail the intrinsic inconsistency of a contradiction: God must have chosen to stop doing something within the fullness of His fully divine and active infinity--thus creating a part, a not-God partition (one might say), from Himself, which would no longer be fully divine.

This willed abdication by God (different from, but related to and provided for by the Son's eternal abdication to the

Father as a function of God's singular self-existent interPersonal Unity) I have described as partial. But why should I say that God has chosen to cease doing something (not ceased doing everything) within this selection of Himself?

Simply put, if God ceased to do everything within this proposed subsystem, the burgeoning subsystem would not continue to exist at all! God's direct activity is still required to maintain this new subsystem in existence; the subsystem is intimately and ontologically dependent upon Him. Whatever positive or negative properties it has, is due to His willed choice. He could choose to re-assert the totality of Himself throughout the 'region', at any or all points, to any extent--and thus, several generally pantheistic doctrines are (or could be) quite correct. I could be resolved utterly back into the Absolute; and I would at that point lose my own distinctiveness (as some pantheistic teachers correctly point out the result to be--if that ever happened).

If this happened, however, 'I' (per se) would cease to exist--which would negate the whole point of my creation to begin with, and would certainly not benefit 'me' in any conceivable fashion. Nor would it benefit God, either: if I add 1 back to infinity, the result is still infinity with no change in infinity's property characteristics. Still, it could happen.

But such a creation as I have deduced is not pantheism; because this created 'region', whatever properties it may have,

is not 'fully' divine: God is acting in such a way for not-God entities (for example myself) to exist.²⁰⁶

Would it be possible for God to do this throughout the whole of His infiniteness? No: there must remain something of God (and this 'something' would, by the way, remain infinitely 'large') that is not any kind of willed declension. Something must remain fully divine, Self-begetting and Self-begotten, to sufficiently ground this derivative partiality.

So, for all practical purposes (up to and including the purposes of God Himself), this new region must be considered to be something 'not-God'. It is created; not (self-)begotten.

If this creation could choose to abdicate itself in a manner similar to the 2nd Person (the only God-Begotten), then all sorts of wonderfully (even 'terribly'!) good things might happen, within this creation and to this creation; but the results would not and could not be exactly the same as the chief primary result of God's chief primary action. This creation could, quite simply, be (or come to be) eternally only like the Son. But that is a consideration for later.

That God can do this, I am in no doubt whatsoever. That God has done this in some fashion, I can attest to by my own existence as 'not-God'.

²⁰⁶ The created region shares some characteristics with God, of course; existence (though not self-existence), for example. It cannot be absolutely and altogether different from God, or it wouldn't even have existence--and so wouldn't exist to have any relation to God at all!

But can I go further? What type of creation can I deduce that God has created? In my next chapter I will consider the relations between myself and God, and perhaps between myself and this subsystem or 'Nature'.

CHAPTER 27 -- My relationship to creation and to God

Let me pause to re-establish a previous point from a slightly different direction, before I continue.

If my arguments are to be worth anything, either I must be considered to be capable of thinking; or at least someone must exist who can judge the worth of what seem to me to be my arguments. However, what I call thinking doesn't affect me as if something is knocking into me. True, I can mention some mental behaviors of mine which do behave like this: automatic psychological associations, for instance. But the interesting thing is that I can (and do) form a conceptual, and even a merely perceptual, distinction between the two states. My recognition that some of my mental behaviors happen automatically without truly willed intention on my part implies tacitly that I can distinguish between these states: intentionally willed and unintentionally automatic thought.

If this perceptual distinction is itself an illusion, then I (as myself) cannot have a valid argument; yet even this position requires that I can make a distinction between two notions: illusion and reality.

It may be possible for an unconscious and purely reactive creature to be mistaken or deceived by an illusion (although it would only be a 'mistake' as a sympathetic externalist

projection by someone like you and I who can actively reason!—we would be mistaken, so we consider the unconscious creature 'mistaken'). But that creature will 'consider' (to whatever extent it makes sense to say such a creature can 'consider') the deception to be reality. The dissolving of the sensory phantom would merely be the replacement of one set of physical sensations (with appropriate automatic responses to the sensations) by another set. The differing automatic responses may be more or less efficient at a given task (reproducing, finding one's way through a tunnel-maze or a desert, getting food); but the unconsciously automatically reactive entity cannot ever be properly said to truly perceive the deception as an 'illusion'.²⁰⁷

Yet, I can do just that: I can tell the difference, conceptually, between an illusion and reality. I may not be able to specifically detect the difference at a given time for a given particular bit of data, but in general I am capable of recognizing that such differences can and do exist.

This is part of what I call the 'argument from disparity'. Though not as far-reaching in itself as the 'argument from

²⁰⁷ The corollary to this, would be that if we detect entities other than our human species who do seem to be perceiving the illusion as an 'illusion', then we might conclude they are also active entities and not merely unconsciously reactive entities. This would be a highly interesting discovery, which we may have already made; but it would not be at all useful, of itself, as evidence for this-or-that theory of how such action ability came to exist. If dolphins or pigeons or cats are active to some degree, then they are in the same boat I am, for I am active, too, to that-or-a-greater degree; therefore, nothing is gained by referring to them, rather than to myself, as a source of data about the implications of true action capability.

reason', it does have some interesting contributions to add to my synthetic apologetic.

God, the actively rational Independent Fact of all reality, would see what I call 'illusion' as being what it 'really' is: an exhibition of certain facts about the universe, not as a 'deception' (whether intentional or accidental) for He could not be deceived. If at His fundamental level of existence He could be deceived (or even mistaken), then He could not be the IF; it would mean that something other than He Himself can affect Him without His permission. (There is a special case exception to this, which I will mention soon.)

Having established this brief point (the importance of which I will explain in a moment), let me return to where I had reached at the end of my previous chapter.

God's creation of something other than God (and I must be in some fashion 'other than God', because one way or another I do not share full characteristics of the Divine) indicates that God willfully chooses to act in such a way that a selection (so to speak) of His actually (not abstractly) infinite self is not fully divine. This type of act is, in effect, the next distinctive step from self-generation; if God acts in any way that produces something other than fully He Himself (and I must be something of that sort), then the result of that action must be at best only like He Himself--and not necessarily much like Him! Similarly (though remember this is at best an analogy) '1'

is 'like' infinity, insofar as both are real numbers and can be described and used mathematically, and both share many mathematic 'characteristics'; but the specific properties of infinity, above and beyond those it shares with the '1' (or any other finite number), are unique to itself.

This procedure I have deduced concerning God's creation, immediately yields a number of corollaries. There is no part of this derivative reality that is (at bottom) separate from God, conceptually speaking. God is eternally present within all points of this subsystem, for the subsystem resulted from God partially (but only partially) 'killing' (a selection of) 'Himself'--yet God is infinitely more than this subsystem.

Would God be fully locally present at all points of this subsystem simultaneously? Yes; but God would also be choosing to abdicate Himself throughout that region, in a way similar to how God Self-Begotten abdicates Himself for God Self-Begetting, although in a different 'direction' (so to speak): the result being something not-God instead of the eternal fulfillment (still occurring apart from creation) of the Self-existent interPersonal unity of God.

Let me take a moment to clarify, before I am misunderstood: I am not thereby saying that God had to do this creation of not-God reality. Rather, I have to say that God did (and does) this thing, in order to reconcile the implications of what I am discovering. I am only discovering what God has, in fact, done

(assuming my arguments are correct). That does not mean God 'had to' create. Such a doctrine could tacitly imply that God was under some external necessity to do what He did--which would be the same as saying that I am not really talking about the IF. But I am only trying to find out what He does (and has done, from the perspective of my existence within a timeframe).

I may recognize necessities through this process of deduction, but they will be necessities of God's self-consistent existence and actions; I will not be discovering, nor could I ever possibly discover, that God has (for instance) created a boulder too heavy for Him to lift. That would be self-contradictive on the part of ultimate reality, and thus I will necessarily never be discovering that. I might put the logical math together and find that God definitely has created a boulder which He chooses (so far) not to lift: that would be a necessary (and self-consistent) conclusion if I find that God created a boulder and yet has not lifted it. And indeed, what I am deducing about the properties of divine creation, indicates that this type of choice not-to-act must happen as an intrinsic part of the 'creation' process, although I have not yet come to specific examples.

Let me take a further moment to settle another possible (but, I think, minor) problem that may here arise for some readers. I am in essence saying that this subreality is not really what it seems to be; and some people may find this hard

to accept. But, then again, even if you go back to a purely atheistic naturalism, physical Nature (assuming for the moment that it corresponds to the subsystem I am otherwise speaking of in my conclusions) still will not be quite what it seems to us to be, at virtually any level of perception we choose to consider.

Nor am I saying the subsystem is unreal. It is real; but a derivative system is, by being 'derivative', not quite as 'real' as the supersystem from which it derives. God is 'more real' (if you want to put it that way) than the derivative subsystems He creates; they are also real, but 'less real'. If you consider the analogy of a story you have created, you will have an advantage here of grasping the concept; there are many ways in which the story you wrote is 'real', but nevertheless it is not as 'real' as you are, nor as 'real' as the reality you inhabit. In God's case, the reality He ultimately inhabits is Himself; and any subrealities He invents could be fantastically more complex and also 'more real' than our (doubly derivative) inventions--yet, the subrealities created by God are not real in the same way, or to the same degree, that He is real.

Moving along: the argument from disparity, with which I began this chapter, indicates that I am not merely suffering an illusion about the derivative status of my existence. I am something that can be deceived, because I find myself deceived; but I am not always deceived, because I can tell the difference

conceptually between a deception and reality. Yet God is something that, in the fullness of His ultimate reality as the ground of all existence, cannot ever be deceived--neither about His own ultimate infinite characteristic, nor about the characteristics of any subsystem(s) He creates (for then He would not be self-consistent, and as the IF of reality He must be self-consistent).

Therefore I once more establish this point, although from a slightly different direction: if it seems to me that I am not God, I must not be God. (Though, of course, if I did perceive I am God, my perception wouldn't necessarily make it so!)

You will have already seen, perhaps, that if creation is (in a sense) God's "play-acting" (although to the nth degree compared to our play-acting, and also ontologically more real), then it might be feasible to say that I and the things I do must be the play-acting of God. But thanks to the argument from disparity, I should put a very sharp limit on how far I carry that doctrine!

If God chose to act within His creation as if He Himself was a creature, then we would have some form of manifestation or Incarnation; and God might further choose to abdicate His omniscience and knowledge-of-self within that Incarnation to certain degrees for certain ends (a topic I will take up later). But whatever else God might do as this Incarnation, He would be inconsistent to have this Incarnation directly deceived about

what kind of entity he-or-she is. At worst, God might prevent this limitedly active expression of Himself from thinking about the issue at all--assuming such a prevention was necessary for some reason.

I, however, am certainly not in that boat. I have been allowed to ask the question; and I find my perception to be that I am not fully God. I am either correct, or I am mistaken; but if I am mistaken, then I still must in fact be correct about being not-God: for it would be inconsistent for God to allow Himself (or for one Person of God to allow another Person) to be mistaken about this topic.

Relatedly, and putting the issue a little differently: a Person of God, specifically the Second Person, might in some circumstances exhibit less than full omniscience, because the Second Person, the Son, God Self-Begotten, receives whatever knowledge He has as God from the Person of the Father (as the Son receives all things from the Father). If the Father doesn't under some circumstances reveal things to the Son, the Son would have to make do with whatever properties were being allowed to Him by the Father--in which case the Son might under some very special circumstances make mistakes. (Obviously I have some circumstances in mind, which I'll be talking about later where appropriate.) But the question of ontological identity is not one of the mistakes the Father would allow the Son to make; at

worst the Father would only prevent the Son from considering the topic.

Therefore, beyond every other argument I have marshaled on this particular subject, I can deduce confidently (it seems ludicrous to have to say this, but I am trying to be complete in my argument!): I am not fully divine: I am not the (or even 'an') Incarnation of God--nor any other kind of manifestation of God Personally.²⁰⁸

Yet, I find that one way or another I must presume that I nevertheless exist as a person. Also, because I am arguing to you I must presume that you are a real person as well. If only one other person than myself existed within the evident system I exist in, I suppose I might be stuck wondering if you were yourself God Incarnate; but as it happens there are billions of us, thousands of which I have met and seen interacting, and I can see that we do not all get along cohesively and properly and efficiently; so at least some of you-all (again, I know this sounds ludicrous to have to say) are also not God Incarnate.²⁰⁹

Since at least some of my potential readers cannot be God Incarnate (no more than I myself), let me simply assume for

²⁰⁸ For purposes of my current discussion I am treating Incarnation and manifestation as being the same sort of thing broadly speaking. I'll be distinguishing between Incarnation and (mere) manifestation later.

²⁰⁹ If all my actual and potential readers were somehow God Incarnate, then you-all would interact cohesively, properly and efficiently, in order to avoid a reality-destroying breach in the Divine Unity. To put it mildly, this obviously isn't happening...!

purposes of argument that you, my particular reader, are a person of this sort: one who is not God Incarnate.²¹⁰

Here you and I are, reasoning together. The fact that we two derivative entities are doing this, leads me to conclude that one way or another this must reflect some (probably very many) true intentions of God when He created.

Specifically: what would God have to do, in order to get us into this position? The answers will tell us useful truths about the reality that overarches and encompasses you and I.²¹¹

Whatever it means for me (and for you) to be an act-er, and yet be apparently derivative, and however God managed to accomplish this (which I am setting aside again just a little while longer), I am here. Thus God intended (at least generally speaking) for me to exist and to be a creature of this sort.

I must be in one of two exclusive states, though: I must be within the direct Unity, or I must be within some type of mediating subsystem.

If I was in the direct Unity, then I would have to be the 1st or 2nd Person of God, and so equivalent (except for my particular Person-ness) to the singular (trans- or inter-)Personal God; for there is no consistent way that God could create a derivative entity without deriving (that is, abdicating) in some sense. But I have already decided, that one

²¹⁰ If God Incarnate happens to be reading my book after all, I am entirely certain He will not hold this prudent working assumption against me, all things considered!

²¹¹ Notice, by the way, that I am once more applying the Golden Presumption, looking to deduct propositions which conflict with it.

way or another I must be not-God: I am neither the 2nd nor the 3rd nor the 23rd Person, if such Persons exist further than the 2nd, and I am certainly not the Father (or 1st Person)! The argument from disparity of illusion, along with other prior arguments, sinks that as an option for me.²¹²

Very well: I conclude that I must be either part, or the whole, of a mediant subsystem. Am I the mediant subsystem itself (or, rather, need I conclude some sort of 'mediation' even exists)?

Here I will reach a very interesting conclusion about the property of what might be called the First Created Thing: it of itself cannot be such that it takes actions.

Actions are first and foremost a property of God-as-God at His ultimate irreducible level of reality; and as I have already shown, God's action in creation involves choosing (paradoxically) not to do something, or (put another way) choosing to cease doing something. Certain actions of God do not take place--it is a sort of death, similar to yet distinctive from the eternal self-abdication of God to God which is His primary action and self-grounding capability.

²¹² I will mention here that I could have gone directly from inferring the existence of a Second to a Third Person of God, for reasons I will get to in the next Section of chapters; but I will defer that until I have settled some other topics first as far as I can--not least of which is the lingering formal issue left over from Section Two! Namely, to what (if any) degree can it make sense to say that derivative act-ers can be produced by fundamental Action? I have made numerous strides along that line, but still more has to be done.

If the first creation must be distinctive from the Begetting, then the chief distinction must therefore be that the behaviors of this created 'region' are reactive, not active. There can be no existent distinction more 'distinctive' (so to speak) than that. (Non-existence would be more distinctively different, in a way, but of course a non-existent entity does not exist to be distinctive.)

This means I cannot be the First Created Thing in and of myself: for I must presume I can act as part of the Golden Presumption, and if I postulated that I was non-sentient Nature (so to speak) then I would be contradicting the GP.

This also means, in passing, that Nature cannot be itself an unmediated sentient creature of God. The analogy of 'Mother' Nature turns out to be not quite as accurate as (and thus somewhat less adequate than) the analogy of 'Father' as God.

This does not mean there cannot be a feminine spirit indwelling our planet, or even some other large-but-non-total scope of the created system, so perhaps to that extent 'Mother Earth' may be feasibly personal; although of course establishing the truth of such a proposition is another question altogether! But, for the record, I have no problem with such a hypothesis. It is the 'cosmos' of our Nature that must be completely reactive, not the particular portion of it (however non-totally large that might be) upon or in which we live.

Yet this also means that a deductive strike has (I think) finally been leveled against even 'practical' pantheism.

Remember that I have already discovered, that with the real existence of sub/super-system relationships, pantheism as a branch of not-atheism was struck a deductive blow: because pantheism requires that only one system of reality exist, and yet I myself (if I take my behaviors seriously) illustrate the existence of at least one substantial subsystem. But, I speculated, perhaps what I call 'Nature' may still be fully divine and my derivativeness involves some other factor--this would be a 'practical' pantheism. At the time I did not think the evidence pointed that way, but those were abductive, not deductive, arguments. Now I find that a contradiction will spring up if I propose that there is no reactive mediatorial 'system' between 'my' sentience and God's. Thus, the field of Nature around me (which anyway seems to behave arbitrarily and thus non-rationally at its most particular) cannot be the fully divine.

Even if God did somehow raise the totality of a Natural system to personal rationality, she (applying gender language philosophically) would still be only a derivative creation produced and maintained by the substantially different self-existent superior (and philosophically 'masculine') Independent Fact. And this increasingly less-pantheistic theory of 'practical pantheism' would still need to involve a mediating

system of reaction between the newly raised person of Nature, perhaps one she would be reborn into after some kind of death. God could, speculatively, continue expanding His kingdom (in a quite applicable way of speaking) without end in such a way (as well as in some other ways involving parallel created natural systems, not ever-increasing nested ones). But these total-system persons of Nature still would not be pantheism!--for pantheism, or naturalistic theism, must involve one and only one system of reality as the Self-existently rational Independent Fact. And these systemic Natures, even if raised by God to personhood eventually, would not be IFs, much less Self-existent in themselves.

A Mother Nature (or even a Mother Earth) being raised to rational personhood by God after creation, is highly speculative, of course. But I did need to follow out the logic of the concepts, once raised, to consider whether any qualitative difference could be made. The short of the matter (in more than one sense of that phrase!) is that God cannot create a pantheism; even if God created something that might feasibly be mistaken for a pantheism, the principles involved would be no different from what I must and should non-speculatively consider to be true about myself (quite literally 'for sake of argument'). So back to considering myself I go.

For me to exist and be not-God (which both must be true), requires then at least that God (and especially at least a

binitarian God) exists and a mediatorial system of reactive Nature exists; and that I exist within this Nature.

What else can I say about this Nature? It must be self-consistent to its own degree, for it is an expression of the intentions of God. In other words, I should expect to be able (in principle, at least) to discover real and distinct properties of Nature as Nature, which means that the relationship of the various reactions and counterreactions within it should fall into intelligible patterns. Furthermore, those patterns should (by being self-consistent) be reliable.

Yet I should not expect Nature to be impermeable to divine action; for it is only maintained at any given moment as 'Nature' by a deeply intimate divine (given!) action: its substance is formed from the active self-death of a Being Who from all eternity exhibits characteristics of self-willed life and death as part of His self-sustaining Unity.

Still, if such a Being wills this distinctively different kind of self-death (not the self-death of completing the 'circuit' of the Begotten to the Begetting), then there can only be self-imposed limits to how far He would choose to reinstate life into that new distinction. He could certainly choose at any time to fully reinstate divine life, in its infinite totality, throughout the distinctive subsystem--but that would be the end of the subsystem as a distinctive system. If God chooses to maintain His Creation as a distinctively created entity (not as

He Himself), then He will not be re-assimilating the subsystem back into Himself.

Yet if God does not choose to reinstate that level (the ultimate level) of action within the system, still the channel remains open. And a channel that yet allows for such an ultimate reinstatement of action within the system, shall by default also allow for partial or lesser or more limited actions, by God, within that system, at any point and to any (self-consistent) degree He chooses. Indeed, as I have already pointed out, the very existence of that system as a derivative subsystem requires such a self-limited action on God's part, at all points within the system.

I know that such a doctrine runs somewhat counter to what we are commonly taught in our Western educations; but that is because we are heirs to a legacy founded on a number of cascading subtle conceptual errors. If we discount the notion of a Creator Who has created a self-consistent Nature, we nevertheless are left with the belief of Nature's self-consistency as a presumed (or at best merely induced) residuum. Furthermore when we work our sciences along the lines of this belief of ours about Nature, we gain many startling and impressive successes; as might very reasonably be expected, given Nature must be self-consistent (to its own degree, whatever that is).

It does not take many more steps, each focusing more narrowly on the subject and thus each discounting, for entirely practical purposes, the wider scope of truth, to reach a sort of culturally habitual tunnel-vision, where the mechanistic properties of a self-consistent (yet non-rational) Nature seem, thanks to the efficiency of natural relationships (which is only what one would expect from a self-consistent system, much more a well-designed one!), to be not merely self-consistent but self-sustaining. And once that perception of Nature is reached, God/Nature dualisms and naturalistic atheism (which each propose, in somewhat different yet similar ways, the outright impermeability of Nature's mechanism from 'outside') are not far behind. Even a dedicated theism may be devolved (with all good intentions, and even with some good reason) into a merely nominal deism.

My point is that there are not, and never have been, any good grounds for requiring this sort of exclusion of divine action within Nature. It is a conceptual illusion, rather like the following classic puzzle. Imagine you are shown a series of nine dots in three rows of three, each equidistantly placed from its nearest neighbor. (In other words, pretend that you have drawn a tic-tac-toe board and penciled in a dot at the center of every slot where you would otherwise drop an 'x' or 'o' to play the game.) If I ask you to draw four straight lines, in connected sequence (that is, without lifting your pencil between

the drawing of each line) so that you will have passed through all nine dots by the end of your fourth line, you may fall prey to a conceptual illusion. Very many people, when given this challenge, will declare it to be impossible. When the solution is shown to them, they discover that to meet the challenge they must draw some lines out past where the dots are located.

"But that's cheating!" these people often exclaim. "You went outside the square!" No: there never was any square. There were nine dots, which our minds perceptively arranged, as a sort of convenient mental shorthand, into the general shape of a 'square'.

And the limits which, in the past 250 years or so, have very often been attributed to Nature (in terms of 'tampering' from 'outside'), come from a very similar type of (otherwise quite well-intentioned) misconception.

In today's society, we can use computers to help illustrate the same principles. A very complicated computer program (perhaps with similarly complicated computer hardware) can do very effective work with minimal tampering on our part—once the system has been set up. Yet, any computer system designer whose design results in the hampering or outright inability of his (or the operator's) intent to 'tamper with' (or 'manipulate') the system, would very likely be laughed to scorn--at best!

Imagine a system has been designed and set up to robotically mix cake batter. Due to unforeseen circumstances by

the designer (for after all this designer is not omniscient and omnipresent!) the robotic arms end up eventually dumping flour and egg-whites at the wrong time in the wrong places.²¹³ The designer is sent for, and asked to fix the problem.

"Well, I can't", he replies. (I am told this is a real-life example, but this part did not happen in real life, fortunately.)

"Why not?" his customer asks with a dangerously flat glare.

"Because I didn't leave any way to input correctional commands."

"Okay, so rewrite the program code."

"I can't do that either; I didn't leave enough leeway in the code so that it could be altered without crashing."

"Our lawyers will be in touch..."

In reality, the better designed and more stably self-consistent a computer system is, the better it shall handle input from outside, in terms both of efficiency and detail of the input. Effective complexity of the system, far from being a necessary barrier to input, can invite input.²¹⁴

Let me explain again, before I am misunderstood: this most recent illustration is not an argument on my part that, because

²¹³ There was no mistake, however, at the level of the computer's behavior; it was effectively accomplishing what, sooner or later, its program would automatically entail in relation to its environment--dumping cake mix on the floor.

²¹⁴ There are, of course, special types of effective complexity--such as protective codes for privacy--which hamper some kinds of input; but these are consciously intended from the first to do so within certain prescribed limits and for certain prescribed effects.

of Nature's effective complexity, God must exist, or must be capable of actively affecting Nature. Those would be fallacious versions of the Argument from Design. I am only drawing parallels to illustrate the working-out of principles which I have already derived from a different direction. I am already persuaded, due to the metaphysical arguments I have been building since the start of Section Two, that God exists, and can affect Nature as sovereign Lord (so to speak). An illustrative analogy to help readers picture the application of these principles is not a further (much less the chief) argument in support of that claim.

Would God add effects to Nature, though? It is possible that God could have intended and designed and implemented a subsystem which goes through its own distinctively reactive processes without anything more than God's constant existential upkeep. I can even imagine an artistic delight on His part in doing so. Such a plan would also be in keeping with God's general character of self-abdication, which grounds (in several different-yet-related ways, going back to God's own self-existence) creation altogether.

However, merely because such a concept is not (as far as I can tell yet) inconsistent with what I am discovering of the divine character, does not mean it necessarily must be so. He could do something like that; or He might have other intentions. Either way, if God creates a reactive Nature, it will be

automatically self-consistent; but that does not mean it will be inherently impermeable to His further effects, nor that He will necessarily never introduce more effects into the system.

Some computer designers create systems which run with minimum upkeep; but very many designers intend to do some type of work within (and by) that system themselves. If I load a digital video disc (DVD) into my computer, I can watch a movie; and that can certainly be a good thing, even though I do not contribute to what happens within the movie as such. Or the DVD may contain a game within which I can play. Although I do enjoy (merely) watching movies, I also recognize the game-playing to be potentially a much richer experience.

What God's intentions for Nature may (or must) be, I have not yet discovered through my argument. Until then, the question of God's possible 'interference' (if you like) in Nature remains open.

What I can say, at this particular point, with certainty, is that God will not interfere in a way that is inconsistent with His own character. Exactly what this can (or must) mean, remains to be discovered.

Having uncovered a bit more about the relationship of God to me--namely that the relationship requires a mediatorial and reactive Nature of some sort--I am in a position to begin accounting for some interesting paradoxes, and solving some dilemmas. Also, I have reached the point where I can further

uncover (and to some degree ascertain) God's intentions by
beginning to account for our (your and my) communal existence
within this Nature.

CHAPTER 28 -- principles of a commonly shared Nature

In the most recent few chapters, I have deduced that I must exist within a reactive system which is itself a declension from (not equivalent to) God.

I think this type--and source--of Nature accounts for many interesting features, not only of Christian doctrine (I'll get back to that later), but of science. Consider how Nature seems to be at once infinite and yet finite; no boundaries to a three-dimensional space are conceivable, yet we can measure the 'size' of the universe and wonder into what it is 'expanding'. When we try to figure out the 'age' of the universe, we are left with a series of paradoxes, which seem to indicate the universe had a beginning, and yet also that physical time cannot be calculated in such a manner at that point of space/time. When we study the properties of the very minutest parts of the physical world, we find paradoxes galore; as only one example, we find photons and electrons and other subatomic structures which not only combine particulate and wave-energy characteristics, but which seem to exhibit these properties (and behave accordingly) based on the intent of conscious observation! Mathematic formulae and increasingly fine observation seem to buttress each other in telling us that subatomic particles seem to pop into existence without apparent cause, then pop back out again. (Though of

course these microevents cannot actually be uncaused; that would be contradictory, not merely paradoxical.) The forced change of behavior of one electron (itself an entity with paradoxical properties) can be experimentally verified to affect the behavior of another electron at distance with no intervening physical link detectable.

In many ways, at the largest and smallest regions of this field of reality which we call Nature, we meet a series of paradoxical 'as if' behaviors: as if infinite, yet as if finite. Small wonder we have been very confused about the 'nature' of Nature!

I do not think I can honestly say, that if I had deduced my position before learning these things about Nature, I would have been able to predict these specific properties. But I think I can say that I would have been expecting something of this paradoxical sort. The form of the physical paradoxes might have taken me by surprise, but the existence of the paradoxes would not have.

Such 'hindsight predictability' for a theory may not, in the end, count for very much: many of these paradoxes might fit just as well into an atheistic reality. But for whatever it is worth, there the 'hindsight prediction' is.

If I was the only indigenous inhabitant of this mediatorial 'Nature', then God could, I suppose, have produced a field of reality that bowed to my every whim. Yet although this would be

a possibility, I doubt God would have actually done it; for such manifestation of obvious power on my part would run the serious danger of providing me a means to close my eyes to the truth of my position (assuming God granted me this knowledge from the beginning, which isn't something I have argued yet) and so to willfully pretend it was by my own inherent power that I so effectively manipulated Nature.²¹⁵ Or, if God had decided to wait until later to reveal my relationship to Him, then I would have been in even greater danger of self-conceited fatuity--for from the beginning I would have perceived myself to be what God in reality is: the ultimate master of reality.

No, I suspect if I was the lone inhabitant of Nature, it would still be a reality largely autonomous to my wishes--especially if God had chosen not to grant me a thorough perception of He Himself from my very beginning. God would thereby use Nature as a type of screen upon which I could begin to learn of He Himself--something not-me, greater than me, upon which I depend.

These are but speculations, although I think they are profitable ones and I may yet call some of these applications of principle into (a somewhat different) service. For the moment, however, I can set such speculations aside: I am not alone in this Nature. You (my reader) are here also; you and others, who

²¹⁵ Perhaps it is no coincidence that the Big Three Theisms claim the chief rebel against God was once the most powerful of His rational creations! I do not know a tradition that he was the lone inhabitant of his Nature, though: his rebellion affected, and hurt, more creatures than himself.

are like me--for I must presume you are like me in some critical respects, if I am to mean anything by writing an 'argument'. If God lets two of His creations interact with one another, what necessities must entail?

First, you and I must share a common overarching system that allows for points of contact.

It does not need to be exactly the same system--your system of Nature could be extranatural to some degree to my own, and even supernatural to my own (to the extent that some set of properties of your system could affect mine without being affected in turn). In that case, both systems must still rest within an overarching system that allows for common contact. This archsystem could itself be a reactive Nature (with God at least one step beyond it again), or the archsystem might be God Himself (literally 'allowing' the points of contact between subordinate systems He has created). I expect there are numerous possibilities here; but you and I could just as easily exist within the same common subsystem.

And I will here append, as a simple inference from sensory experience: it seems to me that I and (at least!) other human beings all do inhabit a common system of Nature--what we call the space-time physical world. For simplicity's sake (although not forgetting other possibilities), I will here assume that this is true--I suspect very few of my readers will insist that

they and I are metaphysically related to one another as angels or devils have traditionally been said to be related to men!

Assuming then (or better, inferring at least inductively from sense experience) that you and I share a single common system of Nature, which allows (by God's providence) our points of contact, I move to the second necessity. You and I must be distinctly separated enough within the system so that we can distinguish each other. Whatever 'space' happens to be, it fits this requirement very well; and whatever 'time' happens to be, it allows us to distinguish between persons who are no longer in, or have not yet arrived within, this system proximately to us. Our Nature, which physically separates us, also allows us to contact one another.

In these modern days, we can use internet computer access as an illustration of the same principle: you and I can meet and interact distinctively within a common 'on-line' environment, whereas without it we might never have been in a position to meet. I can think of several good friends whom I would never have had the chance to know (at least before my death) without the common on-line subsystem of the internet.

The third necessary principle for your and my common interaction within a system, recalls an earlier point of mine: if you and I are to inhabit a common system, what type of necessary relation should we have to that system in terms of effective ability? If every bit of matter and energy in the

system obeyed my whim and not yours, then there would be no way for 'you' to interact with me as 'yourself'. Your body might interact with me; but it would merely be as my puppet, not as a reflection or symbol of you yourself.

Again, our modern computer internet access allows us a very useful illustration. Some on-line games allow visitors to tour the gaming environments without participating in the game. This can be very handy for learning the game environment, or for learning how other people play the game; it can even be merely entertaining. But if I am only a spectator within an on-line game where you are playing, then I cannot possibly make myself known to you as myself. If I have absolutely no ability to manipulate the gaming environment, then you and I cannot meet. If I only 'ride along' behind 'your' eyes as you run and shoot (or whatever) from place to place, and 'listen' to what you say to your teammates, then you and I still are not meeting and interacting together.

On the other hand, if the 'visitor' mode allows me to type my own comments so you can see them, now we can interact, and even personally interact--because I can manipulate some of the environment myself. But it would still be a rather lopsided interaction.

The maximum ability I can have of interacting with you within a given system, is if we each share similar abilities to

manipulate the environment--I must be able to 'play the game' with you, in order to 'be'... 'with'... 'you'.

But playing the game means being bound by its rules, or very seriously accepting its rules in stringent (and charitable!) self-discipline, not only having access to its resources--and for a very good reason (in terms of our effective interaction): if we both have total control over the environment, only the greatest charity and humblest self-abdication will prevent our interactions from degenerating into a chaotic muddle. If any of my readers have ever participated in an on-line universe where almost everyone has 'god-level' abilities to affect the universe by writing code to alter its reality, you will understand the practical application of this principle very well. And, in passing, I would expect a true religious revelation of a future life where we are granted massive supernatural power, to also include requirements that we must learn to be as humble and charitable as possible.

Meanwhile, I am reaching the conclusion that if God expects you and I to 'live together' (to whatever degree!), then you and I need to be provided with a neutral playing field, so to speak; and our level of (God-given and sustained) authority within this system to affect it, would be more-or-less directly proportionate to what might be called our 'goodwill'.

God could, as far as I can tell, go about this any number of ways. He could bring us along from simple beginnings to grow

into whatever power we are fit for; or He might perhaps start us off rather farther along the scale, with the necessary provision that (if He wants to keep a stable 'game' going) the moment we begin to abuse our authority then our authority shall be drastically reduced. These, a combination of these, or perhaps even other scenarios are possible.

But our experience will tell us, that you and I currently inhabit a reality where our ability to manipulate the physical environment in a supernaturally efficient manner ends at our own brains, which form a sort of stopgate through which any other actions we take in our environment must (currently) be mediated.

And if we look at the abuses we and our forebears have wrought with what little power we possess, I don't think it will take much imagination to speculate why we currently have such limitations.

Why we have such limitations, however, is for the moment merely speculation of possibilities. Mainly what I want to establish here is that Nature as we find it, is the sort of self-consistent, neutrally reactive, largely autonomous entity that could be predicted from a deductive metaphysical argument.

But, I don't want to go further than my purview here. The specific Nature we find is, after all, only one possible result of the sort of Nature I have been deducing is necessary for you and I to interact most efficiently. I am not claiming I can deduce that this particular Nature is the Nature we should have

expected. But I think this is one of a certain kind of Nature that fits the bill.

The fourth necessity of a Nature in which you and I can commonly interact is, once more, a restatement of a position I have already established: the natural system should be reliable and, to its own degree, self-consistent. This could be (as before) an inference from the proposal that Nature is a derivative creation of a self-consistent God; it would therefore exhibit distinctive 'natural' properties. But those properties would neither exhaust nor fill the total properties of the infinite Independent Fact that (or Who) grounds and creates and maintains it. Miracles could happen within the natural system.

But if so, the miracles will be like actions taken by rational programmers, or users, within a computing system; a well-designed system not only shall not crash, but shall easily accept and react effectively to such input--indeed, it might not be a very well-designed system if it lacked this characteristic of manipulability! And in the case of God--the ultimate and rationally active expression of 'self-consistency' possible--the miracles would never be merely random (however they might seem to us), but would fit whatever plenitude of purpose God intended for that Nature and for its history.

If God for some reason wanted to be a revelatory God--to reveal Himself, for instance, to us in some effective fashion (although I have hardly established this yet)--then it is

entirely likely that those miracles will have that end (at least) in view.

But, then again, this is not entirely necessary. As far as my argument has gone, God has no obligation to intelligibly reveal Himself through the use of miracles: He might perform miracles for other reasons (entirely good enough for Him, though inscrutable to us), or He might choose to perform no detectable miracles at all. His creation of a boulder, and His maintenance of it in continuing existence (for however long that might be), would both count as 'miracles' in a technical sense--the creation of 'Nature', or of any effect within Nature from an outside cause, cannot in itself be considered 'natural'--but He might choose not to lift the boulder, letting His established Nature 'take its course' in its own systemic behaviors.

Be that either here or there, the system will exhibit properties which we can, analogically (but usefully), speak of as 'its own'. If you and I are intended (by God) to interact in it, it shouldn't 'crash' (to speak in computer parlance again), preventing the users from effectively interacting within that environmental system. If God intends for you and I to effectively interact, He will provide us as stable a Nature as necessary for our interaction to happen; and considering that He

is God, I think we can expect the system to work very well, to say the least!²¹⁶

As I have already indicated, I suppose it is not utterly nonsensical to say that God could have set up this subsystem of Nature differently. We might even, perhaps, discover that He did set it up differently, but then changed the rules at some point for some reason. And I suppose we have no assurance that God won't change the rules of Nature tomorrow.

But since God must be self-consistent to His own plans and desires and choices, I think we can safely presume that if He does change the rules, He will have good reasons for it. We might keep on the lookout for good evidence that He plans to alter the rules we know (which evidence He may or may not provide); but otherwise the most reasonable thing to do is to assume that tomorrow's rules will be the same as today's, because if they will be significantly different (and presuming for the moment we have no way of knowing they will be) then there is nothing we can do about it, really, except deal with it if it happens.

We ought, meanwhile, to be a little prudently nervous to consider that God could, at any time, "roll back the skies like a scroll"! Such nervousness at least acknowledges God's place

²¹⁶ This is hardly a new principle; the Jews, for instance, have from antiquity proclaimed that God's natural creations are 'true' in the sense of 'stable' or 'reliable'. 'Emeth' is their own word to describe the characteristic; to that extent the creations share a divine characteristic. Similarly, one of the verses of the Koran represents God as saying, "The heavens and earth and all in between--do you think that I made them in jest!?"

in, or rather as, the great scheme of things. That nervousness would be better than ignorance about God's existence, and miles better than a willful shutting of our eyes to the reality of things if once they begin to be revealed. The fear of the Lord may in fact be the beginning of wisdom: the beginning of the most proper and effective application of our intelligence.

With such principles on the table, I am now fast approaching the question of personal relationships between us and God, and between you and I as derivative humans. I am, in short, approaching the topic of ethics. For if a neutral and stable reality of some sort is a necessity for you and I to interact, you could choose to use a piece of lumber to build a house or to whack my brains out. What God could or would do about such a situation also begins to be touched on. And the shadow of objective ethical grounding begins to loom ahead.

Yet if we don't have free will, then the question of ethics is meaningless (as I will show later, to anticipate myself somewhat). Therefore, before I can turn to the question of the 'logic of personal relationships', I must finally, at long last, deal with the issue I have been putting off since the end of Section Two: the feasibility of proposing that derivative actions can be 'produced' by an ultimate Act-er.

CHAPTER 29 -- Resolving the Grand Paradox

During the previous few chapters, I think I have established many useful and true notions. One result of this process, however, has been to deepen the paradox I had already detected (as a potentially cataclysmic contradiction to my argument) back toward the end of Section Two.

Now it is time to resolve that paradox--if possible.

Let me begin, conceptually speaking, at the beginning.

One and only one Independent Fact exists; no other IF could exist along with or instead of It. Being self-generative and rationally active, the basic self-sustaining action of the IF is to beget Itself. This most primary of Its actions--and as a rationally active entity, the most fundamentally chief cause of any effects, we should describe the IF with a personal and philosophical 'He'--allows the IF (God) to take any other type of action. Only one of God's actions results in the generational upkeep of Himself: there is only one Son begotten of the Father (borrowing analogical language for describing something uniquely real that has no truly equivalent parallel), and so He is God Himself as a multi-personal Unity. Any other action taken by God than self-generation must be a declension of some type; for the logical math easily indicates that to 'do' something other than 'to generate the infinite self' is to 'generate something other

than the infinite self'. (As noted previously I could in fact infer the existence of a Third Person of God here, but I am waiting until the next Section to cover that topic. The existence of this 3rd Person of full substantial deity does not contravene the principles I have discovered and related in this Section, nor previously so.) Nothing exists, or can exist, 'outside' God (the Independent Fact) into which God can 'create'. If He chooses to create, therefore, He must do so using Himself as material (so to speak).

He cannot do this throughout the totality of His infinite being, for this would leave no fully active God; and only that type of God can ground Himself. He must therefore do something to a part of Himself. More precisely (for the IF is not constituted of 'parts' per se), He chooses not to do something within Himself; in effect, and to a degree, He subjects Himself to a death, not entirely unlike the way the Son chooses self-abdication in order to maintain the Unity of the self-generative God--and indeed it would be this Person of God, the Son, Who abdicates for sake of creation (even though both Persons, as the single God, are acting to create. The Son does not create apart from the intention, authority and empowerment of the Father). God acts in such a way that He ceases (to one limited degree or other) to act--thus creating (not begetting) something distinctly not-He.

I can be sure He has done this, because I do not perceive I am God; a perception that either must be true, or a mistake, or a willfully intransigent self-delusion. God, however, would not be willfully intransigent with respect to Himself--that would be the end of Himself and all reality. And He would not intentionally delude Himself, for much the same reason. The Son, in other words, would not rebel against the Father; and the Father would never at bottom (or as 'the bottom' or 'ground' or 'foundation' of all reality, including the Deity's own reality) disown the Son.

Thus, one way or another, if reality must be presumed (literally 'for purposes of argument') to be consistent, and if God is the ultimate reality, then I cannot be God. I would either know that I am God, or at worst God would never let me consider the question and reach a wrong answer.

Taken altogether, I find I myself am my own strongest evidence that God exists and has created, not only begotten.

The first thing God creates (not self-begetting) must be something which, as 'itself', is reactive and not active--for action (specifically self-generation) is the most primary and basic attribute of God upon which He Himself and all else is 'based'; and His first creation must be fundamentally distinctive in characteristic from Himself, else He would not be creating. A reactive Nature of some sort is therefore a necessary component of a reality that includes not-God (i.e.

created) entities. If God creates, at least one 'Nature' must exist, and it must be (considered as itself) reactive.

Thus God limits Himself within His infinite particularity.²¹⁷

Yet (as I have already explained) He retains by default the ability to reestablish direct control to any degree at any and all points of this Nature. Even so, the Nature considered as itself is not-God. It will have its own particular not-God behaviors; ones which fit the intentions of God Himself, and which He can still supersede and add to at any 'time and place', but which taken as themselves are still "Nature's" behaviors, not God-behaviors.

God, in other words, is committed (in at least some degree), to "let Nature be Nature"; otherwise nothing is or can be actually accomplished by His 'creating' it. To that extent, God must allow Nature some leeway to "do its own thing". This does not mean that anything Nature 'does' will take God by surprise; for He has access to all points of this subsystem

²¹⁷ An infinite particularity, by the way, does not mean that mutually exclusive facts will be true about it or within it. I only mean that God, as an actual entity, is one positively real thing--the Most Real Thing--with a particular character that can be at least partly defined.

I know theologians, including Christian ones, have often claimed that God is undefinable--but even that claim is itself a defining characteristic. Plus, the same theologians who say this, usually have no reluctance about going on to say God exists, is just, is loving, is the Creator etc.: they provide a list of particular characteristics, and often quite a long list, which they expect to be accepted. When (to avoid such lists of particularity) they resort to negative theology (or to an unrestricted positive theology), they end up saying nothing at all about God. I consider this to be a well-meant but deadly addiction to the pleasure of contradiction.

Theology should go somewhere--to God, for God, about God. Even an atheology goes somewhere, away from God; and so, to that extent, may respect God more than a so-called theology that goes nowhere in regard to God!

Put another way: some theologies prefer the equivalent of an autoerotic fantasy--even if the fantasy has 'God' for the subject. I say rather it is better to be the spouse of a true Husband.

(points we would describe and perceive as 'space and time'). But neither must it mean that God determines every little movement of every particle of matter and energy at all times and places within the Nature. He could do this, but that would moot 'creation' per se. He could and can precisely determine the character of very many events that happen within Nature--He can work miracles; but in a way He lets His self-imposed rule of how 'a Nature should distinctively behave' be its own controlling factor within, and for, that Nature.

Computers once more provide a useful analogy, though not a specially close one: what happens within a game reflects (or at least should reflect) the intentions of the designer, both specifically and generally; yet the designer has no wish to be constantly doing every little single thing himself within the game--not first and foremost due to a lack of energy, time and attention (problems which are real for human programmers but which would not be limiting factors for God), but because otherwise there would be no point to making a game.²¹⁸

To that extent, then, I think a process that may be called 'luck', must be a real contributor to what happens within Nature. I know this seems a bit heretical, but unless we supernaturalistic theists wish to deny the creation altogether and propose that Everything is fully God (that is, unless we

²¹⁸ By 'game', I don't mean the events are necessarily petty. I doubt anything is truly 'petty' to God, anyway. Call it a living and growing story. (...and don't those make the best 'games'?)

wish to propose pantheism after all), then I think we need to take seriously the idea of 'creation' as 'creation'.²¹⁹

When I say 'luck' is a contributor to Nature's history, however, I am not yet talking about any active sub-contribution. What I mean instead, is that in terms of Nature-as-Nature, God has chosen to 'percolate'.

That doesn't sound very dignified; but then again God has, in some ways, evidently abandoned what we might call 'His dignity', by creating at all! (Certainly this divine abdication of dignity for creation has long been a common position among Christian theologians and devotionalists!)

I know from my own experience that I, as a presumably rational entity, can intentionally disassociate my consciousness from my behaviors, while at the same time modifying and 'shaping' the flow of those behaviors. Although I was never a drummer in school,²²⁰ I have some percussive talent; and to amuse myself I occasionally will 'turn myself loose' while driving or walking or thinking on other subjects, and so produce a complex percussive rhythm. Any rhythms or series of rhythms I thus produce are certainly not randomly chaotic noise (at least I don't intend them to be) but fit such-n-such patterns. I am listening and approving, but I am also modifying 'on the fly',

²¹⁹ And I don't think pantheism holds water anyway, as I have already indicated; although I think I can grant that such a state is potentially true, in a way. God could act pantheistically, and/or could reestablish such a condition; but either way would be to moot creation.

²²⁰ ...bass clarinetist and tenor saxist, actually...

and I am also the originator of the intent to do this in the first place.²²¹

But I think it would be incorrect to say I am pedantically acting directly from scratch at every moment within that rhythm. A jazz artist--including during a vocal 'scat'--works much the same way, and produces what many people consider to be very fine art. It is true, in one way, to say the jazz scat-er is consciously producing her music; it is also true, in another way, to say she is merely guiding something she has willfully unleashed from within herself, which now has its own 'character'.

If I, a mere man with limited resources, can accomplish this type of creation, then I do not find it very difficult to grasp the notion of God doing the same to-and-for Nature as a whole.²²² It would be a working-out of the same general principle, on an unimaginably vast scale. Aside from the plausibility I see in it, I run into outright contradiction if I try to go down other paths; so up to this point I am satisfied with the outworking of the principles.

God, if He creates, must first create Nature. Let us say Nature is now up-and-running. It does not have to be exactly our Nature; it could for instance be a Nature inhabited by angels or elves or whatever--but, since I am searching for an explanation

²²¹ I would, in this fashion, be analogically manifesting the aspects of the Trinity, according to the British dramatist and theologian Dorothy Sayers in her book The Mind of the Maker.

²²² But keep in mind, I am not arguing to this enactment of God's, from analogy of my action (or that of a jazz artist).

that deals with you and me and our behavior and qualities, let me stick with what I know best: this Nature, the one you and I obviously inhabit in some fashion.

The first not-God thing God creates (per se) must be reactive, as distinct from His active character, so that He has created and not begotten (nor generated a Person of God Who has nothing to do with God's own self-generation--but that's a topic for later). If God wishes to introduce further effects into this system, above and beyond the effects that this system of itself produces (along its groundrules which He instituted and maintains), how will He accomplish those effects?

By choosing to cease choosing to cease acting.

Analogically we could see this as the injection of action into the system, the way computer designers inject their input into the systems they create (or, if you distrust that metaphor, the way accountants inject money into the accounting system they have established for a company). But I don't think this is the best way to see it, for in the case of the computer programmer or accountant, they have not quite created their subsystems via the method God must have created Nature. They did not sacrifice themselves in order for something 'other than their self' to come into being, nor do they maintain their systems as utterly as God must maintain Nature. In many ways, what the accountant and the computer programmer have done is discover how the world on which they are already dependent operates (to one degree or

other) and are recognizing and manipulating those facts. But that is not what God does.

The better answer, I think, is this: to create further effects within Nature, God brings a bit of Himself back to life.

Within His general choice to cease certain action, thus creating limitations within a particularity of His infinitude,²²³ He could choose to reinstate certain actions. And He could do this in a number of different ways.

At the most basic natural level, I conclude this would entail a partial 'vitalism'. It would not be quite the same 'vitalism' as that philosophy has historically been presented, but it would be similar in several fashions; rather like pantheists weren't quite incorrect after all, either.

Classical vitalists say the basic units of physical matter are alive and have purposes but are non-rational.²²⁴ In a way, they turn out to be correct; but correct in an unexpected, less contradictory fashion--turning the contradiction into a legitimate paradox with an equally legitimate solution. It is also a solution that avoids falsifying our perception of Nature's mechanistic character (taken as itself) being a true fact; rather like our understanding of quantum mechanics, although transcending Newtonian physics, leaves Newtonian physics still very adequate.

²²³ Subtracting and thus creating a real '1' from a real 'infinity', to speak in mathematical parlance.

²²⁴ Also, they typically either deny the existence of a supernature, or are philosophically unconcerned with the concept.

The basic units of matter are, in essence, dead; yet they once were alive (not in the sense of chronological sequence, but in the sense that God self-abdicated a portioning of His infinitude to create something not-God), and could be, in a word, resurrected. It could be a full resurrection across all time and space, the re-absorption of Nature into the totality of Deity; but that would nullify the creation, and as I have concluded that I am not-God myself, then God is obviously not doing that.

It must therefore be a partial resurrection, within a partial declension. God could, in this fashion, bring into existence any particle of matter or energy, or any mass of them at any state of coherence and degree of 'excitement', as a sort of miniature creation within the creation. He could at that point, having created these new pieces and set them into motion within His Nature, immediately tamp down or withdraw that basic Life back to (what we would call) its 'natural' level, so that the new situation begins to react and counterreact with Nature-as-already-established.

For what it is worth, I suspect we see this type of event happening in our sub-physics observations. (I use the term 'see' loosely, of course, for our detection of such events has nothing to do with 'sight' in the common use of that word.)

If God maintained His direct influence (or re-established, rather, a stronger influence) on these particles, rather than

withdrawing it again after sub-creating them, then He would be manipulating a clump of natural material directly; driving the material directly, so to speak. But this would still be a limited re-ascendance, for it would be in one place and not another, and might be subject to any number of limitations which God deemed fitting for His purpose in manipulating the material directly in the first place.

So, God could create a bush that burned yet was not consumed, and speak from it; or create a whirling column of fire that moved in many ways according to His direct will and did not naturally dissipate (although its subvenient swirling might at the same time be movements according to the laws He had previously willed into Nature).

These examples would be manifestations of God. Such willful 'driving' of physical material on God's part would not be the creation of derivative sentiences by God; but as possibilities (hypothetical or actual) they do provide some illustrations of important principles to keep in mind. A physical manifestation would be limited in comparison to the totality of God's infinitude--it would be at least in one place and time and not another; yet it wouldn't be limited in quite the same ways (although still in some of the same ways) as the field of Nature.

I have argued that, for God's creation to be a true creation (even if a merely reactive one) and not simply a

pantheistic illusion of creation,²²⁵ God must have 'woven' the fabric of the reality so that when basic supernatural energy is fed into it in a specially self-abdicating way, then at those levels it behaves in a random fashion. God never needs to worry about Nature 'behaving' in a surprising manner, for His perception of His creation is not limited by that creation's own limitations (time and space)--the randomness is unpredictable to us, but God transcends the entire natural system. He doesn't "predict" something happening: if He chooses for it to happen, then it happens; and if He chooses for Nature to react in a random fashion, then He perceives at all points of space/time the events and results of Nature's reaction.

Yet this randomness allows Nature to behave with its own self-consistent character, under the aegis of God's upkeep. Thus a real creation, not a mere seeming, is accomplished. This is, in effect, a type of 'freedom' for Nature. It is not a freedom that is (necessarily) action, nor a freedom that 'produces' (in the total sense) action. But it is a freedom as a result of particular actions of God. It is one, but not necessarily the only, type of derivative freedom.

It is also the sort of freedom that I think must exist, prior to qualitatively higher types of derivative freedom. If that matrix of randomness is not provided within a Nature

²²⁵ I realize that "pantheistic illusion of creation" sounds derogatory to pantheism; but many pantheists do propose the evident Natural system to be only an illusion. They certainly, in principle, deny the creation of Nature per se--Nature would be the IF itself, not a creation of the IF.

created by God, then only hard determinism can result in that Nature--indeed only a type of pantheism could be true after all!--and there could never be free derivative actions at all within that Nature.

What I am tempted to do here, is suggest that God 'added up' or 'glued together' in aggregation certain physical structures which exhibit this special matrix behavior, thus creating a free-willed creature (in one day by cataclysmic creation, or through billions of years of evolution, it would make no difference in principle).

That, however, doesn't seem to me to be quite the right path. Certainly, I am an aggregate (physically) of particular matter/energy states; but I have already decided that an aggregate of non-rational behaviors merely produces a more complicated set of non-rational behaviors--and for my argument to work (in many senses of that phrase) I must be doing rational (active) behaviors.

Then again, the behaviors of Nature turn out to be not quite completely non-rational! They are effectively non-rational by God's choice, by His self-abdication; but (so to speak) bits of His rational choices still adhere in many ways to the material.

This is verging too close to an argument by analogy, though. I will try to propose this idea in a slightly different

way, so that the eventual analogy will be informed by the principle, not vice versa.

Every bit of reactive Nature has, behind it, an action of God. At the most primary of levels, the action of God is God Himself (in other words the self-begetting of God); but once Nature is in existence (I must speak metaphorically about the 'timeframes' involved here, quite literally 'with respect to the Eternal'), I am no longer considering the most primary level of reality anymore. Within the created subsystem, the actions of God are no longer coterminous with God Himself; this is another way of saying that there are some consequences which are not-God to actions of God, or that God has created a distinctive 'something' along with begetting Himself. Yet, those actions of distinctive creation also remain connected to the natural events, primarily by means of God's continual direct active upkeep of this self-abdicated system of creation.

Thus, within the perspective of a subsystem 'nature', there will be reactive events with actions of God as grounding, yet without those actions of God being fully coterminous with God Himself. And by tautology, something not coterminous with God is not-God.

This is not quite the same as a situation where God acts directly within Nature; in that case, the results of His actions will be limited by the fact that He would be manipulating a system that is itself 'limited'.

For instance, it would be inconsistent, as far as I can tell, for Him to create a boulder that is, at the same time and place within that Nature, also completely and fully the entity we know as a 'cat'. It could look like what we call 'a cat'; God could even make it behave similarly to what we call 'a cat'. It might even be an interesting and viable creation, going about 'its own business' without God constantly pulling its strings for every behavior (the way Nature must be able to go about its own derivative business, to one extent or other, or else no 'creation' has actually taken place). But the boulder would still not be utterly coterminous with the biological entities we know as 'cats'. This remains true even if God did not let it run on the leash of Nature but constantly moved it directly Himself. The results of His actions can be limited; must be limited, or else there is no creation.²²⁶

But those are direct manipulation events. Although Nature, at bottom, is directly maintained by God, and even is made 'out of' God by God Himself, as a viable creation,²²⁷ it is not utterly

²²⁶ I have often found it interesting, by the way, to contemplate the evident importance of movement as an intrinsic aspect of this Nature we live in. From the atomic and subatomic microscale, out to all levels of the universal macroscale, everything in Nature is moving. The most evident 'illusion', so to speak, in Nature, is the notion that 'stillness' involves 'not moving'. I think the reason 'stillness' often seems so precious and right, is because 'stillness' is an exquisite unity of movements--as lovers often experience their sharpest, deepest love with each other, in mutual stillness.

²²⁷ This is what 'ex nihilo' rightly means; not that God took 'nothing' and fashioned 'something' out of it--that is contradictory--but that God did not shape a pre-existent reality other than Himself. 'Ex nihilo' is a denial of multiple IFs: Nature is not an Independent Fact, Chaos is not an Independent Fact; and it asserts God's status as the Independent Fact: God's creativity ultimately does not depend on anything other than Himself. (I say

directed (even though it is upkept) by God's full intentions at every moment; just like a jazz scat is certainly created by the jazz artist at every moment, and guided by her in a complex pattern of its own created 'flavor' or 'character', but is nevertheless not sung with the directness that the same woman might sing a Bach hymn. I think we can reasonably expect God to be capable of a creativity similar to the jazz scat-er, except to the nth degree.

God thus initiates created events which each have a sort of shadow of action: real action, God's actions, but a self-limited type of action. Indeed, such events would quite literally be 'types' of God's direct actions, technically speaking.

And now I have reached the point where I can safely return to all those interesting observations naturalistic atheists refer to when attempting to explain how we humans came to be rational thinkers in an atheistic reality.

You may have noticed I have often insisted throughout my book that opponents are not entirely wrong, but rather they're not entirely right; that they do have some good points, but they're taking them a bit too far or not taking them far enough or putting them together the wrong way. I have recently granted this in the case of pantheists and vitalists, for instance.

In the case of atheistic naturalists, I think they are actually on the right trail when they discuss aggregations of

'ultimately' because so long as He treats His creation as a creation, not as Himself, then He will respect its existence as such and will work to some extent within its created and limited 'not-God' character.)

natural events as the source of our rationality. Their pivotal error, as I have deduced, is that they put these observations and conclusions into service of a nonsensical proposition: that non-initiation produces initiation ability, that reactions produce actions, that the non-rational can be rational.

The atheists don't only mean this as principle relating to us personally; they mean this as a principle of all reality. An atheist is, by being an atheist, proposing sentience to be the derivative from the Independent reality that is itself non-sentient--a proposition that sounds less nonsensical the fuzzier and more vaguely we consider 'sentience'. (That's "the ability to perceive" right?!) Proposing that the mental actions (not only automatic reactions) we all insist, tacitly or explicitly, that we ourselves are exhibiting were-and-are produced by an ultimately atheistic reality, is somewhat like proposing that the temperature of the universe at the instant of the Big Bang was absolute zero: if that was true, then there wasn't in fact a Bang and nothing would exist with heat energy now either!

Thus I deduced (with rather more detailed arguments, of course) that basic reality must itself be sentient, personal, active; and that our Nature must furthermore be derivative from God and is not God Himself.

But the arguments of the atheistic naturalists have never been entirely wrong; indeed, one of the great strengths of atheistic philosophy is that it very often works quite well,

especially at the scientific level. Atheism really is quite plausible (inductively speaking), if one doesn't look too closely at some of the consequential conclusions or preliminary presumptions.

What I propose is this: to a limited degree the atheistic naturalists are quite correct. There is something, even a lot, to be said for human rationality being a (but not the) result of the aggregation of physical phenomena.

What atheism leaves out of the account (which it must or it wouldn't be this-or-that kind of atheism!) are the actions grounding such reactive behavior (as physical Nature) in the first place. I said earlier that I would not solve my action-to-derivative-action paradox by proposing that God created Nature, and then the natural reactions of themselves produced human sentience. Why? Because such an explanation divorces the intent of God from the behaviors of natural material, which aside from providing no better explanation for your and my sentience than atheism, simply cannot be true anyway: there cannot be a Cosmic Watch that a Designer winds up and leaves utterly to its own existence. That type of proposition is a result of the same fallacy borne by the imagery of God creating Nature 'over there' somewhere in a metacosmic vacuum.

Instead, God's "percolation", so to speak, permeates and underlies all natural events. Each reaction, as part of its reality, carries (from our perspective, although in reality it

is carried by) an action event; but there are different types of action events.

If God creates a neutron and sends it careening into a critical mass of uranium, for instance, the result will be a factor of God's actions at many levels. The natural system itself is produced and maintained by God's actions.²²⁸ The reactions of the uranium atoms and their constituent bits of energy/mass are following reactive principles which God instituted for Nature to 'run' on. The neutron (in this particular illustration) is created directly by God; and the uranium mass (by contrast) is the result of a staggering number of reactions which have taken place within the natural system once God instituted it (including the reactions of a bunch of other neutrons). Both situations are results of God's actions, but there are subtle and real differences. The recently created neutron was given a vector impetus by God to move within the system; or, God could have driven it directly around every single molecule in the critical mass. Even these are subtly different sorts of actions, but both are still actions on His part: they are not (of themselves) reactions by Nature.

What I propose is that the various and variable actions of God which underlie the behavior of reactive material, can themselves fall into such-and-such a pattern or shape, within that reactive Nature. This shape would not have existed without

²²⁸ Yet even such a production and maintenance involves a limited number of actions out of God's infinitude; for Nature is not itself God Himself fully Himself, but a real creation.

the reactive Nature: but this composite shape is itself God's intentional creation and has such a property also intended by God from the first (for of course nothing takes God by surprise).

As it is, the shape is not God. It will have its 'own' behaviors, informed to one degree or another by the field of created Nature within which it manifests. It will have its own 'character', also informed to one degree or another by its environment within the history of that Nature. Its character and behaviors will also be informed and shaped by the will and action of God; but not directly. Indirectness--the indirectness which only a Nature created by a direct and foundational Intent can provide--allows this burgeoning entity to grow within the Nature, and to grow proportionately more and more individual from God without being separated from God by any sort of 'big ugly ditch'.

I think this is what a rational soul is. I think this is what you are, and what I am. We are (almost literally) born from the union of Nature and Supernature; of the created Earth-mother and the creating Sky-Father.

We are the children of God.

.....

Although I think I am on exactly the right trail here, let me pause a moment to clarify: I am not claiming this particular

part of my argument is entirely deductive. It requires many previous deductions in order to be set up, but I am not convinced that I have done anything here other than hypothesize a solution to a problem. The solution does not 'crash', as far as I can tell, and so by its self-consistency it allows for the increase of argumentative clarity later.

That my soul has certain properties, I am deductively certain; and I will attempt to deduce even more applications of principle from those earlier deductions. But to keep my argument going at this juncture, I only need to give a plausibly self-consistent guess as to how such a proposition could be satisfied. It is not (or at least should not be) deductively important to my further arguments in this book, that I have been created in exactly this manner; and I will watch myself carefully to ensure that further claims of deductive certainty hinge on previous deductions and not on this particular theory of method.²²⁹

Still, I will understand if oppositional critics decide this is the weakest point of my whole argument. I may even agree with their reasons for rejecting it. Hopefully when this part of my argument comes under fire, I will be able to refine it properly to reflect the truth better.

Meanwhile, I am rather pleased with the 'shape' of this proposal! It allows as much real credit as possible to certain

²²⁹ I may later argue inductively from this position, of course; although I will need to be careful not to hinge deductions on those subsequent positions, either.

observations championed by my opposition; and this is important, for if truth truly exists (so to speak), then even errors must be grounded on real truths, and even partially successful (much more largely successful) theories in science and philosophy must in proportion reflect some aspect of real truth.²³⁰ My proposal keeps rational grounding at many different levels, yet allows for real distinction in the derivative entity. It even gells very well with certain statements about man and his relation to God in my own tradition, although I did not apply to those traditions as necessary presumptions for building the argument.

In my next chapter, I will examine this proposal more closely in terms of practical questions and answers; to 'flesh out' (so to speak) this doctrine of derivative spirit.

²³⁰ Ironically, many opponents would just as soon never allow any real credit to people on my 'side of the aisle'.

CHAPTER 30 -- the doctrine of derivative spirit

In this chapter I will mostly take a break from progressing in a developing argument, to spend some time picking at the proposition I have just developed, concerning the relationship of derivative spirits to Nature and to God. In the process I will be considering some questions I have asked myself, and which perhaps I can anticipate from you, my reader. I will also try some illustrative analogies (although with an eye to the limitations of the analogies).²³¹

I have three stories in mind, each of them variations on the same theme. Two of them may perhaps be mutually exclusive of each other in regard to particulars, but this indicates the range of possibilities left open by my proposal as to precise means. These are, for various reasons, the three 'most popular' 'creation stories' in Western Civilization for the past thousand years or so, concerning how people came and come to exist. So it behooves me to see how my developed results compare, and to what extent it fits with them: I will try mixing my results with each 'story' and see what happens.

²³¹ Keep in mind, however, that I am neither claiming nor requiring this particular theory of mine concerning the process of instigation of the soul, to be certainly correct. It does, I think, fit the bill, and is not self-contradictive; but that doesn't exclude other methods of getting to the same result. On the other hand, I have argued in previous chapters that some other categories of proposed methods exclude themselves.

My mother and father marry; and in the fullness of time a microscopic bit of physical matter with such-n-such chemical properties passes from his body into hers, where another almost-microscopic bit of physical matter with similar (yet distinctive) physical properties absorbs it. As the egg and the sperm begin reacting and counterreacting to each other within the form of the egg itself, very many chemicals (along with atomic and sub-atomic particles) are moved around into configurations different from what came before.

One result of these developing configurations, is that the egg--now a zygote--begins to absorb other nearby chemical groups which before it could not absorb. These new chemical groups provide the necessary ingredients for further and quantitatively different reactions to take place; and the zygote becomes increasingly more complicated in both function and structure.

All of this follows general 'rules' set up by God. God, being the eternal mainstay of this (and any/every other) Nature, sees and knows what is happening. He may even 'nudge' the material directly here and there--but He has a prior commitment to letting Nature be a real creation, not merely ('merely' is correct although it seems strange to say it) to be God Himself. Therefore, He lets Nature 'take its course' in many respects. Nevertheless, behind even this choice, lie actions of God--His self-abdication, and His maintenance effects for the upkeep of

Nature, for instance. And also, the scope for God's direct manipulation within Nature-as-Nature remains very wide.

As the chemicals begin to be ordered into progressively different structures, there is a sense in which the 'shape' of God's self-abdicating actions (underlying the existence and 'nature' of Nature) also collect together into 'shapes' which did not exist 'before'.

This results in a composite behavior for the new entity, dependent on both Nature and God, which is nevertheless not God and also not entirely natural.

It is a synthetic entity.

God could, of course, re-assert direct control over this new entity at any time and place; but that would destroy its uniquely derivative character. Instead, He continually self-abdicates, letting this new entity get along, not indeed 'without' Him, yet indirectly.

The processes involved are similar in many respects to the ones that take place inside the bodies of, for instance, sharks. The difference is that in those cases God maintains a tighter leash, or ensures that the supernatural/physical shapes don't get (or haven't yet gotten) into quite the right configuration, particularly within the organ known as the brain. The result is (as far as we can tell, anyway) a purely reactive creature: alive, insofar as it behaves in a way that distinguishes it from other physical entities (although even the shark isn't purely

physical, technically speaking), for it will behave in a fashion that allows it to repair pieces of itself into the membership of its body and also to generate more of its kind. It swims; and eats; and makes little sharks. And that's all it does.

I fully grant, that in its own reactive way, the shark's behaviors and existence could serve a very wide number of purposes within God's general (or even specific) plans for our Nature's history; but it is also quite likely that an individual shark's chief purpose is to take its place in the upkeep of a stable biological environment, ever developing along lines instituted by God and still monitored and upkeep (and influenced) by Him.²³²

But the entity inside my mother could have quite a different future ahead of it. Not that this is entirely certain; again it depends on how much leeway God allows, such as leeway for the vagaries of Nature and for any derivative actors whom He has already put into the system such as my parents and the people they come into contact with. (I happen to know, for example, that once upon a time there was another little baby in my mother's womb with me, but he or she died early due to a malformation in the inner lining of the womb--a malformation that killed off most of her unborn children except for myself and eventually my brother.)

²³² And perhaps also influenced by other supernatural entities, although I have argued nothing concerning them yet.

Anyway, for this story I will ask you to take my word that this entity does have a qualitatively different future awaiting it than the shark does! The little entity, developing into an embryo, is not an act-er quite yet, but the synthetic structure is coming together into the proper shape for allowing this.

The little entity (which is steadily becoming not-so-little) has been reacting the whole time, of course--otherwise nothing at all would be taking place, not even decay! These reactions become more and more complex, in thousands and perhaps even millions of ways, many of which, in turn, allow for greater development to occur. They also soon begin to resemble reactions the entity will exhibit later in life, after it leaves the womb. Sometimes these behaviors are similar to behaviors the entity will actively initiate, but the entity need not be truly acting yet.

When is a soul invested into this entity?--this baby? The soonest, of course, would be whenever the synthetic (natural and supernatural) structure of the baby has reached the stage where consciousness is a practical capability. I do not know precisely when that stage is reached, but I think some useful clues can be gained by looking at the parts we can scientifically examine: the physical parts.

However, I don't think it is quite right to say that this soul--my soul--was 'invested into' this growing baby. My soul was grown: out of things it was not, out of things which (both

naturally and supernaturally) are more complex than it is, according both to general and specific plans of God.

The development of the body and the soul of this composite entity--me--happened in intimate connection to one another. On the other hand, the idea of what God wants for this baby, for me, is something that transcends time and space.

Meanwhile the capability of consciousness does not necessarily mean I was actually conscious yet within the womb; my soul could have been sleeping instead.²³³ But being intimately fused (at this stage, at least) with my body, my soul grew capable of being conscious.

And eventually, I was born.

Also eventually, before or after birth--and physical development certainly continues after birth--my soul began to specially respond to the stimuli bombarding it, part and parcel with being fused to physical structures which transmit that type of energy so efficiently. In a way, my soul had never ceased to respond to that input; but before this point, every response had been merely an automatic reaction. As a synthetic entity, I

²³³ A sleeping person is a person who, although at the moment unconscious, could be awakened without changing her state of existence. A non-conscious entity with no capability of being awakened due to current limitations in the synthetic shape is not, in terms of the body anyway, a person. What plans God may or may not have, for alleviating or positively developing this condition into an existent synthetic consciousness, is another question altogether. It is also possible the body has already provided a certain framework for the synthetic soul to grow; and now, although the body has deteriorated, God has transferred, or is in the process of transferring, that soul into a new framework of some sort. The underlying principles of what we may expect from God, in situations like this, will be discussed later.

gained not only the eventual ability to act; but I--even my soul--also automatically reacted to my environment.

As my soul grows (even today, even into the depths of the future), I may or may not become less reactive, partly based on the actions I take. But as a baby, my soul continued to take its shape from my surroundings.

Can God alleviate this process of environmental shaping (assuming this shaping could be a bad thing)? To some extent I conclude (quite gladly!) that He can. But given that He has set up this situation, I can only say that such alleviation will be "to some extent"; otherwise He would be disassociating the person in question from this Nature entirely. He may in fact decide to do this to me eventually; He may in fact do this for everyone eventually. But these are issues to be discussed later: having grown from a baby, here in this Nature, I can say confidently that God has not yet in fact disassociated me from this Nature. And by the inferences I draw from experience, this looks to me like His standard operating procedure for sentient entities of my species.²³⁴

So, as a baby, my soul responds in reaction to my environment--possibly before I am even born, but not certainly, for the synthetic 'shape' must reach a particular level and kind of complexity (just as the philosophical naturalists have always

²³⁴ I am saying nothing about how God works with other sentient species, either on this world or out of it, within this Nature or another. I think the general underlying principles will be the same in any case of derivative sentience, but the outworking could be significantly different.

told us, as far as they could account for it), and I for one do not know where that point is, or even if it is the same for every baby.

But as a supernaturally active entity--a shadow of God, not-God but made "in His image"--I will eventually begin (assuming a favorable supernatural and natural environment) to 'stretch' my will. I (quite literally) 'will begin', to initiate my own actions.

I doubt I have suitable imagery to help either you or I picture this event; much as physicists have no truly accurate 'images' of what photons (which transmit visual images to us) 'do' to sub-atomic particles. At best, I can merely ask you to think about how it feels for you to take an action, compared to a situation where you know you are only reacting.

How does it feel when a cat hair or grain of pepper makes you sneeze, compared to when you sneeze in a stage-play because you chose to do that for the sake of advancing the story? Admittedly, there is a wide field for error and misinterpretation in asking you to imagine this, but I can think of no other way. Acting, even derivative acting, is something that just isn't like anything else--or, rather, other events are at best merely like truly acting. (A statement that happens, by the way, to fit in quite well with the relationship of any created thing to the Ultimate Act-er!)

When I say that I, as a baby, began to act, I don't mean that I began to pump my legs and arms around by choice--that would come later. Nor do I mean that I began to draw what we would call 'formal inferences'. These types of actions (especially the formal inferences) are rather advanced ones. Once more, the best I can do to describe this action, is to ask you to imagine the difference between tasting a soft drink when you are thirsty (incidentally tasting it as you swallow) and tasting a barbecue for purposes of judging it at a state fair. Or perhaps it would be better to ask you to imagine trying to ignore a horrible taste.

Similarly, I began in very simple ways to 'taste' my environment on purpose. This is the simplest possible way an entity can begin 'understanding' the environment; this is the process of beginning to learn what the environment is (instead of only being reactively trained)--or rather, to learn what character the environment has.

I expect it would be extremely difficult--maybe impossible--for someone standing outside this process, observing it, to distinguish it from a mere reaction to the environment. (Not surprisingly, many scientists of a particular philosophical stripe interpret any such events precisely so that there can be no such distinction possibly taking place!) But you, my reader, have an advantage in your own case; for you don't only observe what you do: you actually do it! While you can be in doubt about

some particular instances, there should be situations where you are dead-level certain that you have acted or reacted, that you have initiated an event or have merely been part of the flow.

Then again, even when you do perceive 'I am merely part of this flow', you have to that extent rendered a conscious judgment, and thus have acted.

I suspect therefore (although I am not certain) that the state of being conscious does not appear until the baby (or otherwise sentient entity) begins to actively reflect upon (not merely reflect through reaction to) his or her environment. There is a sort of willful seizing, grasping, tasting. It's a qualitative difference. Parents in particular are always wondering and guessing when their baby is starting to do this. I suspect that in some cases it happens much sooner, or much later, than the parents themselves suspect.

(Almost two years after originally writing this chapter, I came to have private reasons for believing that the soul of one person I know, did become active in the womb more than a month before birth. I do not know how often this happens, and I won't discuss my reasons for believing this--they are not specifically religious or even merely philosophical. I won't base any arguments or positions on this belief of mine, either. But I thought you, my reader, might like to know, for sake of disclosure at least.)

I also suspect a very similar uncertain curtain of guesstimation hangs between our attempts to figure out when, or whether, animals other than humans exhibit those unique sorts of behaviors.

Almost the whole host of psychophysical sciences can now be imported into the worldview for which I am arguing--everything with the exception of any notions that, in essence, our thoughts (specifically your and my thoughts) are only non-rational reactions: the Golden Presumption must not be broken, at peril of nonsense.

One reluctance some people feel at accepting a theistic philosophy, is that they believe we would have to start all over again from scratch in our sciences. This is simply not true--despite what some insensitive and naive preachers (or atheistic propagandists) might lead you to believe.

It does not involve replacing the engine in the car. It involves defusing a bomb lurking under the hood, waiting for us to reach a certain mileage on the odometer--and then replacing that bomb with a supercharger! What I catch many philosophers doing, is ensuring that the odometer doesn't reach a particular milemarker in their studies, by surreptitiously resetting it when they think we aren't looking. And historically they have been quite successful at this. But it doesn't really deal with the bomb.

The story I have been telling has so far left out issues such as the effects of death on my synthetic soul; or the question of rebellion by me or of betrayal by God; or much of anything concerning direct interpersonal relationships at all--in other words, the question of ethics. I will begin dealing with ethics soon in Section Four, after this chapter. But for now, let me go back and retell my story again; from a different historical perspective but with (I think) the same principles.

God creates Nature, and allows it to go through a quasi-independent historical process; "quasi-independent", for Nature does not exist on its own resources, but upon God, and is meanwhile guided subtly by God. One purpose of God in making this Nature, has been to create derivative sentiences like (but merely 'like') Himself.

Billions of what we call years pass, as God slowly edges things into place, letting Nature be Nature. God is patient, because all time and space are in His hand. He is concerned with the final effect, but also with the methods He uses; for (please allow me to anticipate a position I will develop later) these new creatures are to be sharers in His creation: not only daughters and sons, but heirs and stewards and vice-regents of this Nature. Therefore, they should be intimately connected with this Nature from their beginning, and yet also they should have properties somewhat above and outside the natural flow.

On at least one planet (it might not only be this one, but it also may not ever have been another, even in what we think of as 'the vastness of space') conditions are edged to just the right proportions. The atmosphere and ocean are separated from their constituent phases over millions of years: are sifted bit by bit through the sieve of the natural machine, which was created by God for at least this purpose (among whatever others).²³⁵

Eventually the clouds begin to thin, allowing first sunlight, then moon and starlight, to strike the surface: visibly obvious day/night cycles begin on the planet, and in fact would do so long before the details of the skies were ever visible from the surface, although that day would also come.

The sunlight radiation creates particular reactions in the various chemicals. One of the chemical elements, carbon, works well at holding a complex matrix of chemicals. Another element, silicon, also does a good job holding these complex matrices--better than carbon, in fact, at least at the beginning, although perhaps not as efficient as carbon if carbon-based chemicals ever got going. One thing silicone-based clay does very well is accrue carbon-based molecules as they flow over the clay. Perhaps the carbon-molecules take on the shape of the clay; and through a neat stepping process, the carbon-molecules are

²³⁵ Some sceptics, and even many believers, have a tendency to protest against the idea that God would design and use tools, even though we do this ourselves. But I have no problem believing that the tools He chooses to create and actively use, would be entirely more mind-boggling in scope than ours. The sons, after all, are sons of the Father...

'taught' (analogically speaking, for by themselves they haven't the synthetic shadow-shape of action/reaction to be derivative thinkers) to not only hold but also replicate certain shapes. And some of those shapes are better at replicating than others. Also, copy variances in the replication process occasionally produce more efficient replicators, allowing for the establishment of stable carbon-molecule replicator environments, within which new minor variances of the proper sort can be supported.²³⁶

And so on. And so on. None of this, I repeat, takes God by surprise. The general type of shape of history is intended from the first; very probably, many particular events and results within the history are also intended from the first. More accurately, from God's perspective there is no such thing as 'intending from the first' in a merely sequential sense: God's intentions are not "from the foundation of the world" in the sense of the-time-since-or-before-He-founded-Nature, but rather in the sense of God being the ultimate foundation of the world--and His intentions come only from Himself.

God is present and active (in a self-abdicating way) at every point of space and time and has total interlocking Unity of self outside the space/time Nature. He doesn't "foresee"

²³⁶ This is obviously the Cairns-Smith theory of clay-stepping for producing genetic proteins. I know there is not really any evidence that this could happen naturally--or at least none I myself have heard of--and among other problems it leaves out a huge amount of process that would have to occur before carbon-based organic molecules could begin behaving even distantly like an RNA or DNA chain. My point is merely that something like this could easily be part of the process I am describing.

something happening in this Nature; He sees it happening, here-- and here--and there. If He Himself takes an action or observes a state (which, together with His 'knowing' of the state, entails an action in itself) at point x of our time and space, He is equally aware of that action and knowledge at every other point of His particular and actual infinitude--and this awareness includes all 'parts' of Nature. This can be hard to imagine, but it is not self-contradictory; it is only a paradoxical property of an actively sentient Independent Fact.

Indeed within Nature itself I can find a very interesting analogy: electrical currents running through a wire at given energy vector A will produce a magnetic field flowing from that current, at a right angle. If the magnetic field (now moving at vector-energy state B) intersects the proper materials, a new electrical (not magnetic) current will be set up within that material at vector-energy state C. Analogically speaking (and inaccurately, although perhaps adequately) when God acts He acts at right angles to the history of Nature.²³⁷

But one of the 'intentions from the first', is that the Natural laws will be set up so that with only some direct manipulation by God (maintenance is another issue), natural processes would eventually bring about a type of entity who

²³⁷ I could extend the analogy: '...and also parallel with our own derivative actions.' However, here the analogy quickly begins to break down. The new induction current would be more like a manifestation or incarnation of God within the natural system, than like a derivative sentience such as I; it is still too closely related to the (analogical) direct effect of the original current.

(rather than 'which') is intimately fused with the developmental history of this Nature.

'Fused': these entities (rational entities like you and I) are in a type of unity with Nature, but are not totally 'natural'. These entities--we ourselves--are new creations, not God and not Nature, but a little of each.

Because we are intended from the first to be in unity with the natural world, we must be provided with an ecosystem in which to live; and (for this story anyway) God allows the process of building this stable ecosystem, and the process of building us rational entities, to coincide with each other. Complex nervous systems thus evolve throughout the history of the planet along natural lines--and also along more-than-natural lines, although it would always be possible for us to look at the process in hindsight and see only the far-more obvious natural side of the process.

Eventually one (or at least one) species would be at the threshold of the metaphysical/physical shape God has been crafting on the spiral of the ages. With the last bit of mutation the synthetic threshold is crossed, and an individual person--our most remote ancestor--is born.

As he matures (and it might be a male first, for God's own good reasons, perhaps related to what we would call 'social issues' within the previously merely animal species community), he grows into the synthetic inheritance. And because God intends

for this man to be the father of a new (and qualitatively different) species, still united in synthesis to the laws of this nature, the man's mate comes from the man himself--she is like he, for she carries the delicately grown synthesis.²³⁸

Perhaps God did not originally intend for this new species to interbreed with its progenitors (with the possible exception of the birth of the first child of the first real 'man'), but I do not think this is a necessary supposition. It would be in keeping with the story so far--and in keeping with what some of us think other important elements of the story continue to represent and enact--if the children of these two new individuals were meant to lift up the descendants of their former species, as a species, to their new level.²³⁹

At any rate, whether God originally intended it or not, this interbreeding is what happened; and if these new persons had somehow, in the meantime, begun to reject their link with God, then such an interbreeding (whether originally necessary or not, whether necessary after the rejection or not) would bring special sorts of tragedy.²⁴⁰

²³⁸ One alternative would be for God to grow two derivative persons, male and female, separate from each other, and then to arrange their meeting. There are stories of Lilith, as well as of Eve, after all...

²³⁹ Technically speaking, they could not be a new 'species' and still be capable of functionally interbreeding with the species out of which they arose. I am using 'new species' very loosely here--the newness isn't that kind of new.

²⁴⁰ I will have more to say on this topic, and on ethics, in Section Four--here I am wondering more about the stories of the nephilim, than of the Fall of Man in general.

Again, I do not claim that I must be getting every detail of this story correct; but I think the principles of the story must be correct, in whatever fashion the modality of history exactly played out. It could have happened somewhat differently in mode.

It could have happened, for instance, in the fashion of a third story; although I will ask you to notice that if it had happened the way I just narrated, and these facts were presented to people who did not have our advantages of extra knowledge about the processes of our natural world--knowledge we might never have discovered if we had not begun with the higher assumptions which the descendants of these people passed on to us--then the facts could very well have been presented in the form of this next story. For this next story has still gotten across all the salient points, and even quite a few of the incidental details, to millions and billions of people throughout the history of humanity.

Here is the third story: which might in principle have happened 'instead' of the second, and which I think happened after all, even if the 'process details' related here could stand expansion and clarification. (Maybe lots of it!)

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the world. And the world was a blasted heap of formless rubble, and darkness was over the face of the deep; and the Spirit of God was hovering (or moving) over the face of the waters.

Then God said, "Be light!"; and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. And God called the light day, and the darkness He called night.

And there was evening and there was morning, day one.²⁴¹ Then God said, "Be an expanse (or a firmament) in the midst of the waters; and separate the waters from the waters." And God made the expanse and separated the waters below the expanse from the waters above the expanse; and it was so. And God called the expanse sky.

And there was evening and morning, day two. Then God said, "Waters below the heavens, be gathered into one place, and dry land appear"; and it was so. And God called the dry land earth, and the gathering of the waters He called sea; and God saw that it was good.

Then God said, "Earth, sprout vegetation, plants yielding seed, and fruit trees bearing fruit after their kind, in which

²⁴¹ The story I am thinking of did not originally have modern paragraph structuring; but somehow a nearly universal belief has arisen concerning the story, that the creation of heavens and world and light and darkness took place on "day one". Why this belief arose, I am not sure, but it has caused some needless mischief concerning the basic competence of the story's teller: surely even if he thought a literal day had taken place, he would know a day cannot happen without a cycle of dayness and nightness!

I think, whatever else he knew or didn't know, he knew quite well that "day one" couldn't happen without light and darkness. I also observe that the people of his culture have from antiquity traditionally begun their days at sundown--in honor of this story. What this tells me, is that the story has been commonly and pervasively misinterpreted. "Day one", in this story, doesn't start until sundown: which means the atmosphere creation is the work of "day one", appearances of distinct landmasses on "day two", etc. Most of us who know this story are consequently off by a day when we talk about it!

is their seed, on the earth"; and it was so... and God saw that it was good.

And there was evening and there was morning, day three. Then God said, "Be light-bearers in the expanse of the heavens to separate the day from the night, and be for signs, and for seasons, and for days and years; and be for bearing light in the expanse of the heavens to give light on the earth"; and it was so. And God had made the two great light-bearers,²⁴² the greater light-bearer to govern the day, and the lesser light-bearer to have dominion over the night; the stars also. And God placed them in the expanse of the heavens to give light on the earth, for the dominion over the day and the night, and to separate the light from the darkness; and God saw that it was good.

And there was evening and there was morning, day four. Then God said, "Waters, swarm with swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth on the face of the expanse of the heavens." And God created the great sea monsters, and every living creature that moves, with which the waters swarmed after their kind, and every winged bird after its kind; and God saw that it was good. And God blessed them, saying, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth."

And there was evening and there was morning, day five. Then God said, "Let the earth bring forth living creatures after

²⁴² "had made", as in 'already made', is implied in the grammar of the story I'm thinking about.

their kind; cattle and creeping things and beasts of the earth after their kind"; and it was so. And God made the beasts of the earth after their kind, and the cattle after their kind, and everything that creeps on the ground after its kind; and God saw that it was good.

Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." And God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.

And God blessed them... And God saw all that He had made, and behold, it was very good.

And there was evening and there was morning, day six.²⁴³

.....

All in all, the two stories mesh pretty well: the primary incongruity being that the events of the third and second days (fourth and third, in popular understanding) are inverted in the two stories.²⁴⁴ Another incongruity might come from a verse I left

²⁴³ To continue the story: "In this way, the heavens and the world were completed, and all their multitudes. And by day seven God completed (or perfected) His work which He had done; and He rested on day seven and made it holy, because in that day He rested from all His work which He had done."

By the terms of this well-known story, the sixth day is for God to work at bringing His creations to complete perfection (not for Him 'to create' generally speaking). By the time day seven comes, God has finished His work. Most believers of my tradition, certainly every penitent Christian, will agree that God has still been at work, and still is at work, on what He has created. This means we are in day six. The seventh day, the Day of the Lord, is still to come.

²⁴⁴ Or perhaps there is no incongruity there, depending on whether the first proto-plants existed before the greenhouse-effect canopy of clouds broke

out, regarding the 'herbivorousity' of the original created beasts.²⁴⁵

The details of the 'scientific' story were developed (rightly or wrongly) by examination and inference of natural evidence. The details of this 'scriptural' story were (rightly or wrongly) purportedly 'revealed' through a somewhat different fashion; the precise mode of revelation is still being debated.

One fact is certain about that scriptural story: someone didn't just wake up and find it on paper (or papyrus or parchment) one day. It was written down by at least one man, as is claimed by absolutely everyone who debates the issue. Perhaps the story is a result of God's filtering processes through our history, even of our literary history; or perhaps God dictated it to the man directly, instead. There are also different degrees and combinations of process possible, between these two extremes.

The people who most stridently would insist that the story was directly dictated to one man, who then copied it word for word into the exact form we have it today, would also be most

sufficiently to allow real sun/moon/star effects on the surface. On the other hand, the story does seem to imply that the first plants rose on land, whereas the physical evidence implies that plants first were aquatic. Yet the author had to know that birds are primarily terrestrial creatures, even--especially--if he was telling a merely invented story based on what he could see around him; despite which he mentions their creation on the day of the water-born (and water-borne) creatures. This should alert any reader, that the author probably wasn't thinking in terms of airtight compartments of creation.

²⁴⁵ Or perhaps there is no incongruity here, either. The author might have easily understood, even as an ancient, that plants are the foundation of the food chain; or he might have meant that God intends for animals to all be herbivorous someday. (When I say incongruous, I only mean the stories don't match up in content, at least at face value. Which story is more correct as to historical facts, is another question beyond the scope of my work.)

likely to insist that the second chapter of the scripture collection was also written by the same man under the same type of inspiration. I notice that the author of the second chapter, if he was the same man (or even if he was a different man--or woman?--who had heard the first story), felt quite at home altering some significant details from the first chapter, primarily concerning the order of appearance of animals, the first man, the wife, and plants.²⁴⁶

In any case, I am not concerned here with deciding which story I have presented is more or less accurate to what 'really' happened; although this scriptural story is, at least, rather more closely connectable with the 'scientific story' than any other story-of-origins from antiquity I myself have heard.

Either way, the important point I would like my reader to notice, is that both of these popular stories, ancient and modern, get very similar points across--once God is recognized as part of the 'scientific' story.²⁴⁷ God made Nature; Nature is not God; God used a process, and indeed a sequence of

²⁴⁶ This has led some of these same people to propose that a cosmic catastrophe (otherwise unremarked throughout remaining scripture and not even posited in these first chapters) wiped out all living creation including all men sometime 'between' the first and second chapter events.

I recognize much authority, both historical and metaphysical, in these same scriptures; but this looks to me like desperation to save a hypothesis, however well-intended the effort may be. Still, these catastrophists may be correct; certainly there is evidence of human life being nearly wiped out more than once in "pre-historic" times. It remains to go to the evidence to see if they have interpreted the scripture properly, or perhaps to discover the mode in which inspiration took place. (Or, to be fair, perhaps to discover this story isn't a revelation of information at all, even in poetic form.)

²⁴⁷ The controversial timing issues aren't relevant here; I'm speaking of principles now, not specific details.

interlinked processes, in making Nature; the living things of the world are linked intimately to the processes God used to create Nature; and this includes Man and Man's rational capability. Both stories culminate (but do not 'end') with God, in essence, breathing derivative spirit from His Spirit into our forebears in a manner that somehow passes to you and me. One story presents God as letting Nature help make Man, so to speak; neither story presents Nature and only Nature producing humans and human rationality.

If I was asked my opinion about these stories, I would say the scriptural story (and even its odd though important sequel/remake) is easier to understand and thus is more useful in terms of intelligibility--an Australian aborigine can understand and accept it on his own terms without needing wire-thin lessons on metaphysics, astrophysics, biophysics, etc.--and thus bears the mark of the truly divine. Then I would say the scientific story reaffirms and validates the basic information and many of the incidental details of the scriptural story, expanding our knowledge about what happened, and polishing the details somewhat (perhaps the order of two of the 'days', for instance).

If it is insisted to me that the details should not nor could not be polished by observation, I would reply that as far as I can tell, including from the details of the scriptural materials themselves, those scriptures are not the 2nd Person of

God, nor the 4th Person, nor the 70th Person, nor the 4th through the 70th Persons; and that therefore they are not co-equal with God; and that I therefore do not require them to incorruptable. Whereupon the discussion would quickly move to other matters of little use or interest to any sceptical readers, taking me very far afield from my present work.

Let me highlight again that the growing of derivative sentences by God,²⁴⁸ involves yet another process of self-abdication by God, in order to bring to existence and to active life something that is not Himself. I do not mean to say that because God has made me (and you) 'out of Himself' (and out of nothing but Himself) I am therefore God. No, I am not God, and neither are you: He has abdicated Himself to create rather than (only) to beget. Perhaps I should say that God did beget creatures after His own kind, but begot them (unlike the 2nd Person) through His created Nature, and thus the creatures are derivative and not-God, merely being 'like' God; always with room to grow as a species and as individuals.

Nor am I saying that God's self-abdication always results in something or someone not-God: the Son self-abdicates from all eternity in order to retain the Unity of the self-existent, self-begetting God.

Also, I once again caution that although I think my argument allows the easy reinstatement of such theories as

²⁴⁸ Something I have deduced must be true, whether or not I have yet told or found a story that gets the details exactly correct--my stories could be self-consistent and thus possible without being entirely correct in detail.

biological evolution and modern biopsychiatry, I should only recognize credit for any theories of this sort if they do not contradict the principles of the philosophy.

Really, this is not an abnormal practice, although it admittedly sounds arrogant. For centuries now, many people have been ignoring (and insisting that other people ignore) any implications in these fields which might just as easily fit into a theistic worldview, purely because those implications would contradict the philosophy upon which these people have been 'working' their sciences: a philosophy which goes beyond methodological naturalism, where the behaviors of Nature in itself are studied, into a denial that anything could even possibly affect Nature in its automatic reactions and counterreactions.

All I am saying, is that if you decide my argument is deductively valid (taking into fair qualification the merely suggested plausibility of these two most recent chapters, of course), then you should not backslide when it comes time to import the sciences into the philosophy. As far as I can see, there should be very little adjustment necessary in the mass of conclusions reached by these sciences already--although there could be massive adjustments necessary in what those conclusions mean, and how they should be applied.

This is the normal result of any shift in underlying philosophy. When paleontology was first promoted, most

scientists were theists of one stripe or another; shortly thereafter (and not really much due to paleontology), many scientists had become atheists or cosmological dualists (which for practical purposes amounts to the same thing). The interpretations given to the paleontology results not-surprisingly changed during this same period, much more sharply than the mere advance in the efficiency of the science could account for. When Isaac Newton wrote the Principia, many philosophers and scientists were still theists of some stripe or other, including Newton himself who was a devoted (though not entirely orthodox) Christian. They judged the meaning of the results of Newton (and his predecessors and immediate followers) according to the philosophy they held. Not long after Newton, many more notable thinkers were atheists or dualists or deists who denied that God acted in Nature: but Newton's scientific discoveries still fit in quite well. The mistake these subsequent thinkers made was in further concluding that the good fit exclusively validated their philosophy. Other men (especially Newton himself) thought the Principia fit into Christianity quite well. The mistake they made was their further conclusion that the good fit exclusively validated their prior philosophy.

I am not asking you to accept my previous arguments based on how well you think the details of what you think to be the most accurate creation story (be those the ones I've used here

or your own variations) fit my deductions. I am asking you to look at the logic and see whether I have made the correct deductions; and then I am also pointing out that either of the two most popular creation stories (in Western civilization anyway) fit in pretty cleanly. You can, and should, choose the one (or any other) that you think fits best with the observed facts in the world around us. If you do that, you will not be blaspheming against the Spirit of Truth, whether or not you go on to blaspheme against the Son of Man.

Meanwhile, let me emphasize once more that I do not consider this chapter to be part of my deductive argument, per se. That I am an act-er, I find I must presume; that I am a derivative act-er, I can deduce; that I am derived from the Independent Act-er, I can also deduce. I have deduced quite a bit, but I did not deduce the exact method of God's creation of my derivative sentience. Perhaps I will accomplish this one day (though that seems very unlikely); perhaps someone else will; perhaps no one will. What I needed here was a proposal that was merely self-consistently plausible, not certain; something to show that derivative action from independent action is not a nonsensical proposition. At the very least, I didn't use a presumption that derivative action from action is possible to ground an argument that it is possible!

Now it is time to return to the argument itself; because even in my speculative reconstruction of detailed processes, I

have begun to touch extremely sensitive, important and pertinent issues regarding God's relation to us, not merely as our Creator, but as Person to persons. Similarly, the time has nearly come for me to begin discussing the logic of personal relationships between derivative persons, such as you and I.

The next Section will thus be dedicated to the question of ethics.

SECTION FOUR -- ETHICS AND THE THIRD PERSON

CHAPTER 31 -- an introduction to the question of ethics

In the previous Section of chapters, I inferred characteristics of God's relationship to Nature, and of Nature to myself in terms of its necessary properties, to account for some of the situations I find myself in. And I took as the chief example of this, the Golden Presumption itself: I can act, and thus can think; and you my reader can do these things also, and thus we can reason together. But now that I have examined the concept of causal relations, I have progressed by necessity toward the concept of personal relations.

There is a personal relation involved in this very book: I am presenting to you an 'argument' for you to judge--not merely for you to react to (either arbitrarily or determinately), but for you to actively analyze and discern, and even for you to refute if you judge with your active searching that my abstract link of principles does not in fact 'link'. I am asking--I am expecting, I am requiring--for you to be a person when you judge my argument, for otherwise I would not bother presenting an 'argument' (as such) to you.

My own active estimation of possibilities and impossibilities might still take place--indeed, I must be active

in that fashion or else I would be implicitly denying any claim to even possibly being correct; although that denial would itself be an implicit assertion that I can act! But if you could not act, then I could not be arguing to you, per se.

I am willing to believe that you can act. It is a raw charity on my part. It is, perhaps, the most basic of personal relationships: I am willing to allow that you are a person, too.

Personal relationships involve active choices on our parts. Therefore, although they can be analyzed (to a certain extent) along the lines of automatically necessary cause/effect relationships, the raw choices introduce a special sort of indeterminacy in our descriptions of the relationships involved. We express this (in English) with an equally special group of words: 'should' and 'ought', which (for my present purpose) are more or less interchangeable. 'Should', however, is a word connected to the English word 'shall' which often has more to do with causes and effects than with the special indeterminacy of personal relationship logic.

If there are twelve apples in a box, and if I take two apples from the box, and if no other changes happen to the apples in the box (or 'all other things being equal', which is an important and usually unstated necessity for statements of this type), then there shall be ten apples remaining in the box. This is a description of a causal necessity.

On the other hand, if you personally have put the apples in the box, and if I have not received your permission to take the apples, then I ought (or should) not take two of the apples. There is no guarantee I will not.

Whether I take them or not, the physical relationship can be described according to mathematic necessity. But a different type of relationship is described in my understanding that I ought not to take the apples from you; even though the relationship is still judged using logical analysis.

The logic of coherent interpersonal relationships, is called 'ethics'.

There have been a very large number of attempts to explain what ethics are, what they are not, and how and why we think in terms of 'ought' and 'should'. Perhaps the most basic topic of the existence of ethics involves the question of what 'actually' happens when we behave 'ethically'.

Are ethics a set of rational behaviors we invented? Or is an ethical behavior something that happens to us irrationally which we explain and account for later if possible? Or are we discovering and putting into practice objectively self-consistent principles that retain their quality of 'ethicalness' above and beyond our own existence as a species?

Let me point out that all three of these general explanations of ethics entail that we perceive ethics subjectively. But the first two types of explanation involve an

ethical grounding which is itself subjective, although in two different ways. The third class proposes that what we are subjectively perceiving is nevertheless itself an objectively real ethical relationship.

Put another way: the first two types of explanation propose that the pool we perceive in front of us is a facade, whether it is one we painted, or whether it is heat shimmering on asphalt or sand so that it looks like water. The third explanation proposes that the pool we perceive in front of us is a pool, although how much of the pool we are seeing is another question. (Are we seeing it through trees? Are we seeing deep into the water, or only the surface? Are we seeing the streams or the rain or any other source for the pool?)

There are difficulties for each of the three general explanation proposals. I will mention here, however, reporting ahead a bit, that the three proposals, while describing mutually distinctive event types, need not be mutually exclusive as a total accounting for our ethical behaviors. All three types of event might, in theory, be happening--depending on what the characteristics of actual reality are.

Whether all or any of the three can serve as proper ethical grounding or not, is a different question; which must be considered as well in regard to each of them.

And that is what I will start in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 32 -- ethics and invented rational behavior

As noted in at the end of the previous chapter, ethics have typically been given one or more of three broad types of explanation.

In the first class, ethics are proposed to be an invention of us humans. This is one way that ethics are proposed to be rational. (But only so long as the underlying philosophy self-consistently affirms that we are capable of active reason.)

Notice I said an invention, not a discovery; a discovery would entail one of the other two options.

This proposal happens to be popular among atheistic naturalists, including (although not limited to, and not necessarily found among every variety of) secular humanists. I have already argued that atheism does not, of itself, self-consistently allow for human rationality. But I would be wrong to try to apply such a blow here. I will not argue that this type of explanation is accepted by such-and-such a philosophy, which I think I have already refuted, therefore this explanation is consequently refuted. On the contrary, I have already insisted (and I think even demonstrated) that a contention subordinate to philosophy 'A' might still be grounded by philosophy 'B'.

For example, this first explanation might also be given by a pantheist or by some types of supernaturalistic theist (such as a nominal deist). I myself even can, and do, give it in a way!--which I will discuss later. I am only using a secular humanist as a convenient example, not because this explanation is intrinsically linked to secular humanism. Some secular humanists attempt to appeal to a discovered actually ethical standard of rational behavior; and still others attempt to appeal to a discovered standard of non-rational amoral behavior instead. Moreover, in practice, secular humanists are just as likely to combine all three kinds of appeal into a total case as I am! So all three attempts are represented among them; but these other two kinds will be covered later in their own categories.

That being the case, for the moment I simply wish to examine this general class of 'explanation for ethics', as well as the other two afterwards, on their own terms.

The point--and the weakness--to a proposal of invented ethics, is that what we are describing and expressing by inventing these "ethical relationships" are not themselves, in fact, ethical relationships.

A proponent of invented ethics would probably grant, that due to ignorance of actual causes, and also due to traditional habits of expression, very many people might think that when they behave ethically they are referring to an objective

standard that is itself "ethical". In much the same way, most people think there is a centrifugal force (which pushes you left in your car seat when you sharply whirl your car to the right), although in fact there is no such force--the centrifugal force turns out to be the outer show or reflection of the real force at work, which is centripetal (pulling in toward the center of the arc, not outward at a shallow angle). But the centrifugal pseudo-force can be mathematically described and even used as if it was a 'real' force; and so for most people (although not for engineers) the difference is mainly semantic.

But in the case of invented (not discovered) ethical systems, the difference is not only semantic: it means that whenever anyone behaves as if an objective ethical standard can be applied to, her attempt to apply such a justification can be explained away; thereby removing the (only apparent!) justification she may have had for arguing that she (or someone else) ought to do something. Here are some examples:

'If we as Americans take seriously, as a principle, the idea that the American people should each shoulder their fair share of taxes, then the tax laws ought to be examined with an eye toward redistributing the current load, because under the current load about 60% of the tax income is provided by 1% of the American citizens.' -- 'You are only

saying this, because you fall into that 1% bracket,
and wish to pay less tax yourself.'

'If we as Americans take seriously, as a principle, the idea that the American people should be free to express their beliefs about religion, then we should have parity in the schools so that our children can learn tolerance and charity for other people, and can express their beliefs without fear of ostracization.' -- 'You are only saying this, because you are a non-Christian whose child is attending a school where the children and teachers are (apparently) 99% Christian.'

These are two thorny ethical claims. But the proponent of invented ethics avoids the thorns altogether: they are not actually ethical claims (as far as she is concerned), even if they seem to be ethical in quality; and therefore (as a quite reasonable tautology) there can be no moral justification or moral imperative for even discussing the questions, much more for attempting a reformatory action.

You may have noticed, by the way, that such a theory about the origin and subsequent weight of ethical behavior--that such descriptions mask a ruthlessly practical series of rational actions--tends to evaporate the moment the shoe is on the other

foot! This kind of secular humanist will argue just as strenuously as any person who proposes the reality of human-independent objective ethics, that the requirement for her child to be exposed to a theistic belief clause in a pledge of national allegiance simply is not fair; and she will expect her audience to perceive and understand the principles, and will castigate the school publicly (to great critical applause in the press) if the school refuses to change its policy of using that phrase.

In her theory of social dynamics, ethics are a socially acceptable and useful mask for the principle that 'power justifies action'; in her own social practice, she is very likely to stridently declare that the power of a group is not (more specifically should not be) the ground for the actions they take.

None of this, by the way, is an argument that this kind of secular humanist is incorrect about her theory of invented ethics. The fact that a given secular humanist does not actually treat ethics, in practical situations, according to how she thinks the ethics are accounted for, is nothing to the point; it is merely an interesting (and sometimes very amusing!) practical problem with the proposal that ethics are only a human invention.

This type of explanation does have some very plausible arguments behind it; and its proponent can very self-

consistently admit (before or after she herself tries to treat the ethical appeals as if they were really what they seemed to be) that she is only treating ethical questions as if they were really what they seemed to be--that she has to do this because it's the only way to get things accomplished.

She can even say, that although it may seem to you she is being self-consciously treacherous and deceitful to apply for justification to a notion she herself believes is merely invented (and thus purely arbitrary except with respect to the power of the groups who back the notions in question), in point of fact she is not being treacherous or deceitful: for those are themselves ethical judgments of her actions, which judgments (she says) are not actually ethical themselves but merely are actions you are taking to ensure society doesn't break down by her inefficient use of her knowledge of the actual underlying causes (for instance).

If you pointed out to her that in your opinion her actions in manipulating the illusion do threaten to subvert or undermine the power status quo, she would probably agree with you. But, so what? She wants something done, and so will play the game of ethical justification in any way she can, to get it done.

She might at first agree with you, that at least a working and stable society should not be subverted and undermined; but after thinking about the implications of the "should not" (once it becomes explicit) she would probably clarify herself: it is

simply in her self-interest--for the moment--that the current stable society shall stay the way it is. When her self-interest changes so that in her estimation her gain for herself is greater by subverting or undermining the current stability, then given the opportunity and ability this is what she will (very rationally!) choose to do.

She might suggest that her own self-gratification is not the primary, or only, scale by which she rationally judges which actions to take; she may say that she could be working for her children's gratification, or for the gratification of (one of) her distinct social groups. But if you ask her why she would work to gratify her social group, then if she honestly and self-consistently sticks to her own theory, she will say it is to her advantage (even if merely for her own enjoyment) to gratify that social group. If you ask her why she would work for her children, then she would say because it satisfies her to work for her children. If you ask her whether she would do anything for the children if it did not satisfy her... well, I don't know what she would say, other than no. If she said yes, she would not be self-consistent with her own theory of ethical behavior, and would then be applying--really applying, not merely for show--to another explanation for ethics (perhaps the second one, which I will get to in a moment).

If you claimed that you cannot trust her, because of this standard she has of judging which actions to take, she would

quite sensibly correct you: you can trust her to act in the way she perceives to be in her own best interest. Or if she has slipped by accident into thinking that a human-independent scale of behavior justification does exist, you can trust her to follow that illusion as long as she is under the illusion; whether you notice this slip and choose to take advantage of her or not, is your affair. She would of course prefer you didn't take advantage of her; and to protect herself and to ensure that social force is brought to bear against you if you try to take advantage of her, she will choose to put her defense in whatever terms of ethics the power-group she wishes to manipulate is currently using.

Interestingly, for her self-gratification to be maximized, it is to her advantage (whether she realizes it or not) for most people to remain confused (as she sees it) about the reality of what ethical behaviors actually are; because if everyone behaved as she did, then they would pay no attention to any appeals she makes in the language of ethics!

So in such a world: if it offended her for her child to be required by a school to participate in a pledge of allegiance that included "in God we trust", then she could tell them she was offended, and they would probably recognize it as a fact, but the child would still have to obey the rules and participate in some fashion, or suffer the consequences. If she threatened to sue them, in order to bring social force against them, she

would have no grounds upon which to base her claim except the raw fact that she does not want her child to (effectively) learn to pray to Someone she doesn't think exists. There would be no laws about this to appeal to (in such a hypothetical world); there is no reason why a majority should make exceptions for an individual's self-gratification, unless the individual has the power to draft (and ensure enforcement of) the laws, in which case appealing to the law would be a waste of time anyway--it would be better to merely apply the effective power directly to the problem! (If this description sounds like any number of supposedly 'democratic' tyrants in our world's history, it is hardly by coincidence...)

Still, 'invented ethics' can (at least in theory, and even in practice in some ways) be a self-consistent claim. True, the proponent of the theory won't come out and explain exactly what she is doing when she appeals to fairness or rights, while she is making the appeal; but that is only because she knows nothing would get accomplished if she explained what she was really doing. The duplicity involved does not mean her theory is false.

Let me also remind you that this notion is not restricted merely to secular humanists and/or other atheists/agnostics. It can also be applied by people who believe God exists and is amoral. And there are other ways to accept this theory, too, as I will show later.

This seems the best time to mention (despite not having covered the second and third category of explanation yet!) that a fourth broad category of explanation could also be attempted: ethics are a set of invented irrational behaviors. But this would be tantamount to proposing that humans in pre-history genetically or otherwise mechanically engineered ourselves to automatically knee-jerk react to environmental stimuli, and we have since forgotten that our ancestors did this to themselves. (Or aliens! Or some divine power...?!)

Invented irrational behavior doesn't work very well as a broad-base explanation for human ethical behavior, first because principally the behavior would actually be rationally invented ethics, even though the result is a left-over designed instinct (or habit) to which humans automatically react today, and so would really fit in the first category; and second because it presupposes a level of (what amounts to) brainwashing technology that can only be aspired to by modern tyrants!--which seems implausible as a historical explanation.

If that sounds suspiciously like the underlying principle of many attempts at proposing the upcoming third category of explanation--that such attempts are inadvertently proposing the first category of explanation after all--I agree, it certainly does!

I'll be covering this topic in some detail later, with a definite appreciation of this criticism. I will also later be discussing another special version of this first explanation.

But next I will discuss the second broad category of ethical explanations.

CHAPTER 33 -- ethics and discovered irrational behavior

In the second class of explanation, ethical behaviors are proposed to be irrational responses on our part to stimuli from our environment.

We may assign mistaken explanations to these behaviors later; or we may properly explain them later as irrational behaviors (assuming this proposal is correct) and discover as many links of cause and effect as we can. But the behaviors themselves are automatic reactions and counterreactions between our condition and the condition of the environment.

This does not mean they are unhelpful--on the contrary, the existence of these behaviors is usually explained precisely by their usefulness. Proponents of biological evolution thereby tend to explain at least some of what we call 'ethical' behaviors as results of evolutionary development. Proponents of philosophical evolutionism, on the other hand, tend to explain these behaviors entirely as a result of evolutionary development.

Let me clarify that last point: I happen to think that gradualistic biological evolution is a pretty good scientific theory which, although it still has some serious problems, has been refined to the point where it explains at least some natural processes rather effectively (especially so far as

natural selection goes). To that extent, I am willing to agree that some of the behaviors linked to ethics are produced by effects that are results of evolutionary development.

But I also think there are elements of ethical behaviors--indeed, the only parts that can accurately be called 'ethical', as I hope to show shortly--which are not accounted for by the reactions and counterreactions of non-sentient natural process. The results of the reactions and counterreactions are data upon which I think we are called to actively judge, and not the only data, either; although in a pinch these instincts can also serve as a basic guideline when we have nothing else to go on. (Plus the instincts themselves often serve well for our survival and for other results we might otherwise rationally agree with.)

For instance, everyone of any philosophical stripe agrees that we humans, as individuals, usually have a very useful instinct that compels us to jump away from sudden loud noises; and virtually no one will call such a behavior a rationally conscious choice (although by ignorance or miseducation or forgetfulness they may call it an action rather than a reaction). Also, almost everyone will admit that some behaviors are rationally conscious choices and not instinct, although they may disagree about how those behaviors arose--and, in the case of the few people who disavow any behavior but raw instinct, their own ability to distinguish the two states (even to disavow the second state) argues that they must have some standard of

measurement by which they are conceiving (or at least transliterating, for if they have nothing but instincts they themselves cannot be rationally conceiving) the concept of 'rational action'.

At any rate, I can be a theist and propose the existence of an objectively ethical reality that we perceive and relate to, while at the same time allowing for the existence of some related behaviors (functioning like shadows or useful substitutes for the actual ethicality) that have grown (or have 'been grown'!) within us through the process of biological evolutionary development.

But a philosophical evolutionismist (who of course also accepts a biological evolutionary theory, usually neo-Darwinian gradualism) is committed, as a philosophical evolutionismist (and not as, say, a creationistic theist) to the proposal that biological evolutionary theory completely accounts (at least in principle, whether or not the full process has been uncovered) for what we call our ethical behaviors.²⁴⁹ The instincts encoded

²⁴⁹ A philosophical evolutionismist can also propose that 'ethics' can also be entirely invented systems, as in my first classification, so long as the original underlying basis is the process of non-rational natural selection of non-rationally random mutation. The evolutionary process must be considered necessary for 'ethical behaviors', whereas the rationally invented systems must be accidental (in the philosophical sense of not having to exist.) While the two explanations are mutually exclusive if pressed as ultimate explanations for ethical behavior, much moreso as ethical grounding, as I will demonstrate soon, it is not impossible to accept both explanations so long as each explanation covers some behavior. In my experience, philosophical evolutionismists tend to accept, for practical purposes, all three categories of ethical behavior--just the same way I do; the difference being that they ignore or attempt to refute the third category when its metaphysical implications impinge on their philosophy. (I have also met correspondents who, virtually within the same letter, attributed ethics

in our genes by mega-millennia of mutation and natural selection, produce (under this proposal) every behavior we call 'ethical'. We may (easily) believe the behaviors to be something other than our unreflective response to environmental stimulus; or we may upon later reflection understand what the reality of our ethical perceptions 'really' are--either way, our experience of 'perceiving ethical principles in personal relationships' is, like the first class of explanation, a sort of gloss, a perception for convenience of use and expression, over what is really happening instead.

A well-known philosophical evolutionismist can thus explain to his readers that his love for his brother, or his feeling that he should love his brother, is actually and only a psychological impulse implanted into him by the replication of a very successful genetic code, to which he efficiently and automatically responds.

The strength of this class of proposal, is that it depends on events which almost everyone agrees are 'rawly objective', so to speak: brute existent facts, physical facts in this case, entirely capable (at least in principle) of either being quantified or at least being followed in quantifiable terms. The 'cause' of ethics is, under this theory, objectively discoverable, beyond the special kind of 'objective reality' which obtains in the case of intentional invention: the cause is

entirely to mere invention and entirely to mere instinct! I think this confusion is not uncommon.)

something real beyond our selves (whatever our selves may be) and our willful self-assertions. Indeed, the cause of ethical behaviors, for this class of explanations, is the same as the cause of our selves at all!

The weakness for this class of explanation, however, is the same as the one underlying the theories of merely 'invented' ethics: what has been objectively discovered, under this theory, is not in fact 'ethical' at all.

The theory carries a further weakness as well; one not shared by the 'merely invented ethics' theory: the behaviors we describe as 'ethical' turn out not to be rational.

In the 'invented ethics' explanation, the behaviors (or some of them) are recognized (or at least acknowledged) to be actions: rational, conscious, intensitive. But the only actions related to this second class of explanation of ethics, if any, are the (presumably!) rational explanations themselves showing that ethical behavior is at best irrational!--and at bottom, non-rational.

This might not seem like a very important weakness; until (once again) a self-reflexive system check is run on the behaviors the proponent himself is advocating. The well-known popularizer I mentioned earlier may accept and even stridently propose that ethical behaviors arise purely as a result of impulses (themselves non-rational) produced by aggregated genetic reactions. This same fellow, however, will turn around a

few pages later and castigate the abuse of, say, Australian aborigines by settlers; or he will loudly declare that people deserve to know the truth, and ethically denounce groups who (he says) promote ignorance among the people.

But if his theory about the actual source of ethical behavior is true, then these remarks from him are almost comically silly: the equivalent of passing genetic gas! He exhibited them, not because people really deserve to know the truth, but because his genetic structure was wired in such a way as to produce the effect.

The same goes for any other explanation that ethical behaviors are ultimately the result of merely automatic response. Cultural pressures, for instance, are sometimes brought into play as catch-all explanations for 'ethical' behaviors. But the behaviors are still rendered ultimately non-ethical by such explanations; and thus their justification force is rendered null and void.

Here are the two examples from the previous chapter, redrafted:

'If we as Americans take seriously, as a principle, the idea that the American people should each shoulder their fair share of taxes, then the tax laws ought to be examined with an eye to redistributing the current load, because under the

current load about 60% of the tax income is provided by 1% of the American citizens.' -- 'You're only saying that because, as a member of the 1% group, you have been sufficiently psychologically reactive to the cumulative social pressure inherent in protecting the status of that group.'

'If we as Americans take seriously, as a principle, the idea that the American people should be free to express their religious beliefs, then we should have parity in the schools so that our children can learn tolerance and charity for other people, and can express their beliefs without fear of ostracization.' -- 'You are only saying that because you are a mother perceiving a threat of some sort to your child, and you have been wired genetically to reactively respond in a manner which you perceive as resulting in "protecting" your child.'

These explanations might be quite true, concerning particular cases of fact. I am even willing to grant that such explanations do cover some of the facts of my own behavior (for instance).

But when they are proposed to cover all the existence of what we call 'ethical behaviors', then the quality of what we

call 'ethics' has been explained away to something that is not really 'ethical'. After this, there can be no (self-consistent) return to any kind of truly ethical justification. A mere physical fact is, in itself, no rational justification for doing something; except maybe in a purely self-centered way.

'That man is going to die.'

Yes, you're right. So what?

'If you don't help him, I will kill you.'

Okay.

The man's condition in itself has no rational weight to my decision; the threat to my own well-being is what I end up responding to, either by action or reaction. (In this example, whether the response should be considered the pragmatism of an invented ethical system, or a mere reaction to environmental stimulus, is not evident. It could be either one. The point is that to the extent reasoning is involved in the responsive result, the coherency of a interpersonal relationship is not the rational aim.)

Such theories of 'ethics' thus end by denying, at bottom, actual interpersonal relationships; either by denying the relationships are personal (merely non-rationally physical instead), or by denying the 'inter-' part of 'interpersonal' (it's all about me instead).

Once again: none of this means that these two theories are false. No one, even among their own proponents, consistently

applies them (especially to themselves), perhaps; but this doesn't mean they are false--only that it is easy to be ignorant of the problems, or easier not to think about them. The theories are internally self-consistent as far as they go.

Can the same be said about the third class of explanations for ethics? And if the same can be said about its internal self-consistency, can the same also perhaps be said about this third class denying, at bottom, that the behaviors are intrinsically 'ethical' after all?!

I will consider those questions in the next chapter--with some answers that not all proponents of the third class are going to agree with!

CHAPTER 34 -- Ethics and Discovered Rational Behavior

In my previous chapter, I explained why my argument has now led me to consider questions of interpersonal relationships; what we call 'ethics'. Generally speaking, there are three branches of explanation for 'what happens' when we behave 'ethically'. They are not necessarily mutually exclusive--I myself think all three branches put together account for my own 'ethical' behaviors.

But the first two branches are necessarily exclusive of the third branch in this fashion: they essentially deny that truly ethical behavior is taking place. In other words, what those two general theories claim, is that what looks like 'ethical behavior' to us is not actually 'ethical' behavior.

In the first theory, we humans invent qualities in order to justify the actions of the individual. (The actions may be taken to satisfy instinctive wantings, of course.) These invention-behaviors are actively rational (not reactively instinctive); but the coloring of 'ethics' is merely a useful mask worn, or a game played, by the participants: because otherwise there would in fact be no effective justification for the individual to claim rights over the group.

In the second theory, the behaviors are merely the automatic reactions we humans, as humans, have to our

environment, whether macroscale (the social level) or microscale (the genetic level). Like the first theory, a sort of mask is placed over the 'real' source of the impulses so that the individual has some power of justification within the social group.

Both theories, in essence, deny (so far as they go) that an interpersonal relationship is taking place.

For the second theory, the relationships have nothing to do with people as persons (merely as animals of a particular species or social group). For the first theory, the fact that other people happen to be producing the situation to be actively exploited or defended against by a person, is virtually a coincidence--in principle, the other persons (being exploited or defended against) might as well be fish or volcanoes.

I will emphasize again, as I did in the previous chapter, that this does not mean the theories are false (unpalatable though they may be). Nor shall I be arguing: "These are the typical explanations produced by atheists and philosophical naturalists; whom I have already refuted (I think); therefore, they are false." I don't think such an argument would strictly work; it isn't impossible that God (supernaturalistic or otherwise) could and would allow such behaviors to take place. Nor do I think the mere fact that no one (to my knowledge) who proposes such explanations actually applies them to their own selves consistently, counts against these theories being true.

I will say this, however: it seems to me that any proposed explanation of an effect which requires the explanation to be essentially ignored in order to accomplish anything worthwhile, is not likely to be capable of covering all the facts.

Here is what I mean. In a previous chapter, I discussed the fact that the centrifugal force does not really exist. It is an illusion, created by the centripetal force. For most people, this distinction is trivial: the centrifugal force can be described and used like a real force. Most children can be easily taught that if they whirl a pail of water on a string at a certain speed, the water will not fall out. It pools instead on one 'bottom' side of the pail. That is the 'centrifugal force'. The real force being applied, however, is the pulling of the string toward the whirling child, with the pail trying to pull away according to its momentum in a vector-direction at right angles to the pulling of the string. Engineers typically calculate their figures (in such situations) using this force instead, for it is the actual corrective force being applied to the inertial movement of the pail: the centripetal force.

But what if a teacher in a college class explained this to first-year engineering students, and then continued along this line: "Although the centripetal force is the real force creating the illusion of the centrifugal force, in order to accomplish anything useful we must ignore the real centripetal force and apply to the false centrifugal force instead. It isn't only that

using calculations of the false centrifugal force takes us less time to do, than what we could accomplish using the centripetal force; it's that if we apply to the real centripetal force as justification for our mathematic conclusions, it cannot be self-consistently accepted as justification, and what we are trying to accomplish will fail."

If I was the student of such a teacher, the first thing that would occur to me is: "This sounds like total drivel!" My next thought would be a reasonable suspicion: "Perhaps the centrifugal force really exists, but this teacher wishes to deny its existence."

Now, the situation isn't quite that bad with regard to the first and second explanations of ethics--the explanations that say ethics aren't really ethical at bottom--because a person might 'know the truth' and use that knowledge to effectively get results. But the use of that knowledge to effectively get results still depends on flummoxing the other people involved; the ones who do treat ethics as being objectively ethical.

As long as I think that you are merely inventing your ethical behaviors (and that I am also merely inventing my own), you will find it impossible to convince me of anything on 'moral' grounds.

Similarly, if you expect me to accept that my feelings about justice are only the result of automatic reactions to my environment, then you will find me laughing at you when you ask

me to accept that such-and-such should be done 'because people deserve to know the truth'. If our concepts of justice are only the result of genetically induced species bias, then it is only genetically induced species bias that prompts you to say 'people deserve' anything (including that you 'deserve' anything)!

Be that as it may: I repeat once more that such an observation on my part is no argument that such explanations are not true.

But considering the problems and limitations of the first two general classes of ethical theory, brings me more clearly to a consideration of the third general theory by comparison.

This theory, unlike the first two, proposes that ethics are, at bottom, objectively 'ethical'. According to this theory, when we behave 'ethically', then (at least some of the time) we are discerning, recognizing, and attempting to correspond to an aspect of objective reality that has the property of being 'ethical'. Ethics objectively exist (somehow!) to be discovered, and we discover them rationally by active reasoning. Ethics are discovered rational behavior, if this general class of theory is true.

A person who explains our (and his) ethical behaviors as being utterly ultimately produced by automatic reaction to non-rational causation, doesn't bother to say that cytosine and other genetic proteins are 'ethical'; and he doesn't bother saying this, because cytosine (as far as we can tell) is not

rational and so does not intentionally initiate actions. It merely reacts. The actual 'standard' of ethics under his theory is not itself 'ethical'.

On the other hand, the person who explains ethics as being rationally invented by humans, means that ethics are not intrinsically a part of fundamental reality--because humans haven't been around forever--and also means that if there are 4 billion humans, there are potentially 4 billion ethical standards. If those standards happen to fairly closely coincide with one another in practice, this is basically a fortuitous coincidence fostered by the common environment shared by groups of people. (There is a special and highly important humanistic variant of this, too, which I will be discussing a couple of chapters from now.)

The concept of murder, for instance, becomes a sliding average if the concept was only rationally invented: it means one thing now, it meant something a little different 100 years ago, it might have meant something rather different 1400 years ago in a different society; and if there happen to be unchanging characteristics to the definition of murder across these times/cultures, this is only a result of we rational animals not having changed our behaviors, tolerances or understandings during that slice of history.

Such ethics are purely subjective in reality, although in practice the mass weight of the floating average of opinion

about what constitutes 'murder' gives a sort of quasi-objective standard for purposes of comparison. However, the floating average is not itself objectively ethical. Its shape is, in essence, a coincidence of history; it could have been something else. In such theories, 'Murder is wrong' is not in principle a statement like 'The sum of the squares of the two shortest sides of a right triangle, is equal to the square of the side opposite the right angle'. It is a statement more like 'Currently the English word for such a shape is "triangle".'

Now, it is an objective fact that the current word in English is "triangle"; and it is an objective fact that at this moment there is such-and-such an average of opinion in the United States as to what constitutes murder. But it is also an objective fact that our English word for "triangle" is merely a subjective convenience, purely dependent upon superinducing circumstances of more-or-less trivial character; and under this ethical theory, so is our average opinion (or average opinions, in regard to disparate social groups) about murder.

The objectively ethical standard, if such a thing exists, therefore must be something personal, and it must be something at the ground of reality so that it depends upon nothing else but itself.

And those two requirements combined, are simply another description of God.

Very well. For most theists, this is plain sailing; and they may consider my discussion up to this point to be a lot of verbiage to get to what they already accept to be true. In fact, I haven't even quite "gotten to" this yet!--I have not yet argued that an objectively ethical standard, per se, must exist.

What I want my theistic brethren to understand, however, is why sceptics often have such a hard time with this.

Specifically, I find that it is important to understand why the mere existence of God does not necessarily entail an objective ethical standard--just as sceptics of theistic ethics have often tried to explain.

And that will be the next chapter.

Chapter 35 -- The Terminal Problem with Theistic Ethics

I have been considering the third general category of ethical theories: that ethics are something discovered and rational, instead of rational and invented, or irrational and discovered. I covered some weaknesses in those other two general theory types, in order to show how the third category is not only distinct from them but has a unique superiority: the third category, unlike the other two, involves a ground for what we call 'ethical' behavior that is in itself inherently ethical in quality. The explanation for ethics, in this category, is really ethical, not really non-ethical, in principle.

I will emphasize in principle: if I look more closely at proposed versions of this category and discover that the explanation turns out to be one of the other two categories after all, then at best I can't say I have identified an actual example of the third category yet! Which wouldn't be very useful for practical purposes, or even 'merely' for incorporating this class of ethical theory into a set of doctrines for a metaphysic or worldview.

I also noted toward the end of the previous chapter, that if a (or rather the) objectively ethical standard exists, it must be something personal and also something at the ground of reality so that it depends upon nothing but itself (so it cannot

be reductively explained away as really being something else, something really non-ethical.) And those two requirements, of personal existence as the ultimate ground of reality, are simply another description of God.

So, is that the end of the matter? God solves the problem? And is this a valid argument that God exists?

No. And yes but no. And no. Non-theists are exactly right to have problems with this category of ethical theory, especially as typically promoted by theists, including by Christian theists who of all people ought to know better than to promote this theory as though monotheism of itself solves the problem--yet who I regularly find doing only this.

That's a hint as to why I included a "yes" up there in my brief answers to that paragraph of questions. But I'll get to that later. Until then, I'm going to indulge in a nice solid appreciation of sceptical problems with theistic ethics (and, in the following chapter, a nice solid appreciation of a special non-theistic explanation attempt at discovered rational ethics as well!)

First: I emphasize again that the other two general explanation categories are not strictly nonsensical. The mere fact that none of their proponents follows his or her own doctrine consistently (perhaps?) is no conclusive evidence that they are wrong; and we Christians at least should be entirely aware of this principle, for we admit that we have been, and

even still are, sinners: we admit that we still do not always, consistently do what we ourselves think is objectively morally right--we do not follow the Law of God perfectly, although we believe we know what He thinks about certain principles of behavior.

Now, I do think it is nonsense when a philosopher tries to explain his rationality completely in terms of ultimately non-rational causation; because such a theory necessarily requires that he nevertheless is making a tacit exception to his theory for the sake of his theory. But a philosopher or scientist who attempts to explain apparently moral behavior in terms of ultimately non-moral causation is not doing something intrinsically contradictory. If he turns around and expects us to accept a truly moral justification for something (for example, "My theories about the ultimately non-moral source and character of ethics should be taught in schools, because people deserve to be told the truth"); then he will be doing nonsense with respect to his own proposition--whether he remembers to include that important qualifier of "ultimately non-moral" or not! But that is a case-by-case problem; it may be situationally serious, but it is not a root-fallacy.

Consequently, many sceptics are rightly unimpressed by arguments that God is necessary in order to ground truly ethical behavior, even when they realize that their own theories do not do this. It isn't necessary, as a fundamental property of

thinking (at least for humans), for real ethics to actually exist.

Even more importantly: there is a very serious problem underlying the idea that God is the objective moral standard of behavior. Why must we consider God to be 'good'? What is it that makes Him good?

That's a trick question, of sorts: nothing 'makes' God good, or He wouldn't be God!

But that just puts the problem deeper for many sceptics-- and still should for many theists! God, on this theory, decides what is considered 'good'; but according to what standard? If He uses a standard less than Himself, then it would hardly be an 'ultimately objective ethical standard'. If He uses a standard greater than Himself, then He is not actually God (merely a god). If He uses no standard, then this would only be like the invented ethics of the secular humanist, except that God (being more powerful than everyone else put together) has the ability to trump the majority, so to speak. 'Good' becomes only 'whatever God happens to do' or (worse!) maybe only 'what God wants us to do'.

Again, a lot of theists will have no problem with this. But let me point out, that once this doctrine is accepted, we are merely spitting (rather hypocritically) into the wind when we talk about loving God, and thanking Him for His goodness, and so forth. If good is merely what God does, then we worship mere

power, merely out of fear (or at best prudent respect) or merely because we think we will get something out of it (or perhaps will escape His displeasure). Hitler and numerous other dictators in our world have been followed for exactly the same sort of reasons; the only difference, ultimately, between God and Hitler would be that God is stronger and happens to behave differently--sometimes.

Following God could no longer be cogently said to be 'the right thing to do'. It merely becomes 'the safe thing to do'. And when our safety evaporates anyway, what happens? People fall away from God; or they cower miserably under their problems because they are afraid of failing God; or they encourage themselves with the mere promises of reward from God.

I don't think any of these three responses are altogether wrong--even falling away from God in times of adversity might be the right thing to do, if you really do think He has betrayed you. If you really think He might betray you, then you are either not yet following the real God (and should fall away from the impostor); or else the real God is a heartless demon which a true man would spit upon, even at the cost of his own soul.

Not coincidentally, there are plenty of apostates who have concluded this is true about God--not least because incautious theists have insisted that this must be true about God!--and who consequently see theists (of any faith) as great enemies.

If God exists (and I think I have deduced that He does), and if His grounding of our behavioral standard is merely a question of power exertion to cause effects, then it would be merely an academic exercise for me to convince anyone He exists.

I don't think I could even bring myself to say that they 'ought to' trust Him. I might perhaps suggest that they had better fall in line with His wishes to keep themselves (and maybe me!) from being zorched; I doubt I am brave enough to defy an omnipotent tyrant, even if (at the moment) He acts in my favor. For if His standard of interpersonal behavior is merely set up "BECAUSE I'M GOD AND I SAY SO", then we have no grounds for expecting Him to keep any promises He might make to us! His word would be just about worthless, except perhaps for the moment. The Bible, or any communications He sent/authorized/dictated/whatever, would be mainly a curiosity piece. Look, it's from God. So what? Oh, I guess that means I'd better make sure I'm not going to be zorched right now; because, after all, if His decisions about ethics are merely divine whimsy, there's no reason why He ought to keep His word later about anything He promised.

Yet again, if there is "a reason why He ought to keep His promises", then this would be morally binding upon God; and if there is something greater than God to which God is morally obligated, then the entity we are discussing would merely be a god, not the true Independent Fact upon which all reality is

based. At best we have to go back farther to the real IF--at which point we will also be back to the same problem again!

This is the dilemma many sceptics face. And I think it is a dilemma many theists need to face, too.

If I was a Muslim or a Jew, I might be doing well to be in constant fear of God; but once I understood this, I do not think I could 'love' Him. My soul might well be rendered 'contrite' (which means 'pulverized', by the way); but there could be no worthy resurrection for it. The attainment of Paradise would be no escape: God might arbitrarily decide later that I should not be there after all, and then cast me into torment when He changed the rules. It would be the mad scramble to please the all-Powerful again, except into eternity, with no rest, no peace, only (if I am skillful and lucky) a certain number of moments of respite or pleasure, tainted by the realization that it might all be yanked from me anyway.

As it happens, all righteous Jews and Muslims should now be standing up and vigorously denying such an infamy about God. They should, and would, be proclaiming instead: "God is good! He has not two thoughts about us! He is reliable, emeth, dependable! Although He slays me, He is worthy of my trust and my love, and I will trust and love Him, for I know that even if He slays me He does have good--truly GOOD--reasons for it!!"

Yes, I know. And I agree completely.

This is the truth about God.

But what I am trying to show at the moment, is that God merely as God does not allow this to be true about Him.

Yet I also affirm that nothing stands above or beside God.

Please take my word, this is a vast technical difficulty for many sceptics. It looks to be a contradiction--and so some have become apostate; not out of hate for God, but because they refuse to think nonsense about God. To think that something is in principle nonsense and yet is nevertheless true about God, is to blaspheme against God; it is not rendering Him honor. In that respect (quite literally!), some apostates are more faithful to God than very many believers: because those believers are themselves willing to accept what even they would otherwise reject as nonsense, as long as the nonsense is about God.

So what is the solution? Do secular ethicists have a better idea after all?

I will begin discussing this in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 36 -- a return to secular ethical grounding?

To put things bluntly: so far, no good.

Each of the three general theories of ethics have been examined, and found wanting. Invented rational ethics; discovered non-rational ethics; discovered rational ethics--none of these turned out to be objectively ethical in the end.

Objective realities were certainly connected to each of the theories--although in the case of God the objective reality was posited rather than commonly agreed upon. (Notice that in my recent discussion of theistic ethics, I didn't try to connect the proposition of God to my previously developed synthetic argument. There is a reason for that; but I will discuss it later.) To a sceptic, this could hardly be considered an advantage!--especially since the result was demonstrably no better than what a sceptic could do with the first two theories (specifically the first one, invented rational ethics). Which of course is precisely why many sceptics don't even bother with the proposition, but stick with the ethical husks they can derive from evident realities: the choices of people; the reactions induced by environment (internal, external).

There is, however, a secular theory of ethics still left over!--one being turned to by secular theorists in increasing numbers, because it seems to offer a way out of the vicious

dilemma of having an ethical base that is, itself, non-ethical in quality. To understand and appreciate the strength of this contention, we must first go back and re-consider: why did the other theories fail?

At the beginning of my discussion on ethics, I offered what I believe and find to be a commonly accepted notion of what ethics are, or would be (if they really existed), in principle. There may be polysyllabic variations, but for any practical purpose, I think this definition has to be accepted eventually.

That definition was this: 'ethics' is the logic of coherent interpersonal relationships.

The problem with the first two general theories, as I previously found, was that each of them in different ways denied or ignored interpersonal relationships as a fundamental base of ethics. Discovered non-rational ethics, aren't based on persons at all, much less on coherent interpersonal relationships. Invented rational ethics may be (or appear to be) grounded irreducibly on the actions of persons, but the type I discussed begins with self-centered pragmatism; it only becomes interpersonal at a later stage (if at all!), and need not involve anything other than forms of competition and domination, suborning all matters, including interpersonal relationships (as far as they go) to the selves of the persons inventing the ethics. Yet again, positing (or even discovering) that the Independent Fact, the ground of all reality, is Itself a Person,

does not of itself remove this problem: it only means you and I, the little tyrants, are ultimately trumped (even if we are all put together) by a Great Tyrant.

But, the secularist may fairly ask: may we not rationally invent a different kind of ethics? Indeed, may we not discover a different kind of rational ethics?

Given that persons exist, and given that persons as persons will be in personal relationships with each other, may we not observe that there are more and less coherent interrelationships of persons as persons? Observing these, we may then choose, of ourselves, whether we will facilitate these coherent interrelationships or deny or traduce them for our own selfish advantage. Those who choose to do the first thing, may then be accurately termed 'moral' people, behaving 'ethically'. Those who choose to do the other things, may then be accurately termed 'amoral' or 'immoral' people, behaving 'unethically'. Lines of demarcation, rationally discovered, can thereby be drawn and profitably debated with some hope of reaching agreed-upon resolutions (or cogently fought for if negotiations failed); and the basis behaviors for doing so would themselves be rational actions, engaged in by rational entities. And the icing on the cake, for many sceptics anyway, would be that we don't need God for any of this!²⁵⁰

²⁵⁰ Not that the sceptic need be denying God's existence outright; the sceptic could be a positive agnostic (a negative agnostic would be opposing God's existence outright, in practice, but should also be opposing other metaphysical positions such as atheism), or might be a cosmological dualist

The proponents of this view would doubtless need to continue further and provide a practical outworking of this view; but my interest is in the principle first. How feasible, or even coherent, is this notion in principle?

It should be noted first that this proposition picks up special strengths from each of the first and second general theories, though strictly I think it could be categorized best as being a special variant of the first theory (thus explaining why I foreshadowed a special variant back in my first discussion of it.) It emphasizes personal responsibilities and choices, while at least ideally minimizing (or even avoiding?) the problems involved with self-centered pragmatism. It also emphasizes rational discovery by rational entities, just like the second theory, while avoiding (completely?) the problem of non-rationality of the source of ethics under the second theory. And it coheres with our intuitions regarding interpersonal relationships being the basis of ethics, in a way that monotheistic ethical grounding simply fails to do.

Secular humanists (to give an example of one group) who have gotten this far in ethical grounding, are quite pleased and happy with the notion--and I think any accounting that doesn't

of various sorts, or might be a naturalistic theist, or might be a supernaturalistic deist (minimal or nominal), or possibly even some sort of polytheist. My working definition of 'sceptic' for this book has been 'someone who is sceptical of what *I* believe to be true', broadly understood to be 'Christianity': i.e., anyone who disagrees with my religious beliefs to a significant degree--though admittedly, I frequently have in mind people who are sceptical of the existence of a miraculously active supernaturalistic God. Most observant Jews, and I suppose all Muslims, would be 'sceptics' of my broad definition, but would be very far from considering this result to be "icing on the cake"!

recognize and appreciate the serious strengths of this notion, will be fundamentally crippled when it comes time to consider whether the notion should be opposed.

But, is this notion, of avowedly interpersonal human relationships, sufficient for objectively ethical grounding?

It may be noticed that this secular, humanistic theory is not in fact judged to be sufficient by any explicit proponent of pragmatic invented ethics and/or discovered non-rational ethics! But then again, is the mere observation of dissent among the secular ranks, something to be inextricably held against a particular theory among those ranks? I would instantly undercut any theistic theory of my own, on a precisely identical ground, if I attempted to appeal to such a mere complaint. For after all, there are religious disagreements as well, are there not?-- and far more in number of disagreements, too! Not that any mere appeal to numbers would carry legitimate philosophical weight in this regard, but the point is that the principle for the complaint would be the same in either case. Moreover, an appeal to such a principle could only escape being applied to all disagreements on any topic, by either ignorance, incompetence, or (to put it bluntly) cheating.

Still, neither should the disagreements simply be ignored as if they don't exist. Perhaps they exist because the proponents detect some viable problems with this special variant of the first general theory.

Indeed, I find, as I consider the issue, that as attractive as this special variant looks, it proceeds by ignoring some fundamental recognitions; especially insofar as the theory excludes reference to the ground of reality on which we depend for our existence.

If one is a naturalist, for instance, then the question can only be avoided for so long, as to whether our behaviors are not only and ultimately the amoral interactions of particles, elements, molecules, compounds, intercellular structures... how far up the chain of causation do we go before we can realistically state that a behavior is moral and not amoral?-- not amoral like all those other numerous foundational behaviors which not only underwrite but (on any merely secular theory of ethics) actually comprise the ostensibly 'moral' behavior?

A theistic naturalist might have some escape from this, perhaps. Or perhaps not, if theistic naturalism falls foul of the fatal problem with the third general ethical theory! But in practice I notice that theistic naturalism (i.e. pantheism) usually either ends up appealing to flat contradiction (for example behaviors are both fundamentally moral and also fundamentally amoral), which the non-theistic naturalist could propose just as easily (or rather as worthlessly), or else ends up proposing an ultimate subjectivism of apparent 'moral value' anyway. There seems to be no way out for the naturalist by this route.

Nor again, can the matter be simply indefinitely postponed by a positive agnostic. (A negative agnostic would be trying to undercut all theories, on general principle, and so would be unable and even unwilling to positively offer a solution anyway.) A choice is being made to leave certain ontological proposals out of the account; but whatever reality is, it really is affecting us! More to the point, the moment an agnostic avers that all we need to do is consider human interpersonal behaviors specifically without reference to grounding realities, a claim of truth is being implicitly (and maybe explicitly) made: whatever it is that we are dependent on, is not contributing to our 'ethical' behaviors in any significant way. But a moment's thought will show, that even aside from the numerous and grave implausibilities involved in denying that the ground of our behaviors is of no account in accounting for our behaviors, the agnostic will have had to have judged the underwriting ontological options already and found them to be of no regard in the matter (regardless of whatever option happens to be true.)

But if this could be done (and aside from immediate implausibilities at reaching such a conclusion, I will assume for purposes of argument that it could perhaps be done), the level of judgment involved would seem suspiciously deep--so deep that I would begin to wonder why the proponent was still an agnostic about the truth of any of those options.

In any case, I think a proponent of the second class of ethical theories, would join me in agreeing, that the proponent of this special theory of interpersonal human ethics can only be dodging the question of constituent dependency: what good (pun intended!) does it do, to either ignore that all our behaviors are ultimately amoral in constituency, or else to claim that that the actual ground of our behaviors isn't relevant to the quality of our behaviors?

'Admittedly then,' this special proponent may reply, 'we face the fact that our natural behaviors must at bottom be amoral (especially insofar as we who defend this theory are naturalists and/or atheists.) But that is precisely why we...!'

Why you what? Sheerly invent an ethical standard that you pretend to objectively appeal to?! The pragmatist can do that just as well!--but no one who understands what the pragmatist is doing will for a moment agree that the pragmatist's sheer assertion of what should count as right and wrong can carry any actual ethical weight.

'Admittedly that is also true,' the interpersonal secular ethicist may again reply. 'However, the fault with the more general first-theory proponent is that there is a discontinuity between his procedure, and what we agree to make the most sense as a definition of ethics: the logic of interpersonal relationships. As you yourself agree, the ethical pragmatist is only incidentally involved with inter-personal relationships.'

'But we are building this notion in from the first! And what we are building from, is not some sheer invention or posit of our own! Other people do exist; there is no real dispute between opponents about their existence (in Western societies anyway). Unlike the existence of God, not-incidentally! If ethics is to be accepted and applied as the logic of interpersonal relationships, then very well: we start with people and their interrelationships--people whom we are willing to accept exist. If their interrelationships are valid in a mutually supporting way, then the behaviors are moral; if not, then if by accident the behaviors are amoral, and if the invalidity is on purpose the behaviors are immoral. Where is the problem in this?!'

The first and possibly chiefest problem I can think of, is a problem that some of my readers may have been long complaining about since the start of this section of chapters on ethics:

Why exactly should we accept]that definition of ethics!?

'But....! Because....! Well, you did!'

True, and I was glad to perceive that this would be widely accepted as being a proper definition; but I have ulterior reasons for doing so, too--reasons I haven't yet mentioned, and which will become more evident soon. Meanwhile, your reasons for promoting that definition are... what?

'Well, it's just common sense!'

Not that I tend to disagree with this; I mean, I tend to agree that this position is (strictly speaking) common sense. But by itself, this doesn't really help the situation. 'Common sense' isn't always correct!--and not everyone agrees with 'common sense'. Certainly no atheist could consistently make a root appeal on this ground, for atheism has not been regarded as 'common sense', but rather some kind of theism, by the vastly overwhelming majority of humanity past and present! Or again, to give an example an atheist may better prefer, most of humanity including its brightest scholars considered geocentrism to be common sense for most of human history. But they happened to be wrong.

I don't mean to disparage common sense; and I can admit that there is a tantalizing inducement to specially accept it, in this special case: for after all, an appeal to 'common sense' must be closely related to exactly the ethical ground this proponent wishes to promote. What else is 'common sense', if not an interpersonal agreement?!--and one with some wide scope as well!

Even so, if the ground is the sheer assertion of a group of people, no matter how large, even if the group is a total of the population (which in this case it isn't, by the way), the ground is still only a sheer assertion. Is there a ground for doing so beyond the sheerly asserted will-to-agree of a group?

If not (and by the terms of the theory there couldn't possibly be such grounds), then what happens when another group, even if that group is only one in number of members, intends to will-to-agree another idea about what counts as morality?

It is still only the clan (in this case the intellectual clan perhaps) writ large; still only a might makes right philosophy. The only advantage is that this sheerly invented ethic would have the strength of group cooperation over-against a competitor. That may seem, and even be, reassuring in some ways; but it isn't a necessity of reality.

To which the second theorist (along with the third) may also add, completely aside from the whole question of whether it pays in the end to disregard (one way or another) the ontological ground that is underwriting our existence and behaviors: this first group of ethical theorists, whether the self-centered pragmatists or the group who is 'For The Greater Good' (in the sense of numerically 'greater'), had better more closely attend to the tacit claims they are making about themselves in trying to make this attempt at a root appeal. For, when they (the first theorists) make this appeal, it quite completely relies on their complicit recognition that they (and we as other humans) somehow transcend our environment, and not only in some convenient illusion. But this is an ontological claim in itself!--and yet the first theorists would have us ignore or discount ontology bases in our accounting of ethical

grounding! After a while, this can only begin to look as though the point to ignoring ontology is so the first theorists can set themselves up, to be treated as the ontological ground themselves by hidden default. This begins to look diabolic!--it isn't only unrealistic, it ends up being anti-realistic!

And so the deadlock continues. Or rather, the deadlock continues if what we attempt to do is start from the question of ethics. Which is what I have done in this section so far, and which is why I have done so.

But, I was doing something else, and had arrived at certain conclusions already, before I began this section of chapters. Now it is time to go back to where I arrived at the end of Section Three (the previous section), and continue with the progressive synthetic argument from there--but now with a clearer eye toward the issues at stake when the time has arrived (as it had at the end of the previous section) to begin discussing relationships between persons.

CHAPTER 37 -- returning the God of Justice

Even though I still ended with a deadlock on a proposal of merely secular interpersonal ethics, I will reiterate here that I believe it is important to recognize, respect and appreciate the special strength of that theory. Despite its weaknesses, I consider this to be the best secular ethical theory on the market today; and I expect this, in one or another variation, to be the best that secular ethicists can ever really do.

'And we don't need God for it!' the sceptic will emphasize.

Not on the face of it, no; but then again, as I noted in my previous chapter, there are aspects of the theory which, when followed out, might point toward our accepting the existence of God after all!

Which, in essence, is what I had done already, in the chapters before I began this section on ethics. So far, I have presented this section of chapters in a topical vacuum, without regard to arguments and conclusions I had already systematically reached; and I did that, in order to make clearer some of the issues at stake in the topic of ethical theory--far from least of which, were the problems involved in a theistic theory of ethics! Had I not proceeded in this fashion, those problems would have been far more difficult to clearly present. But then, neither could those problems be properly discussed without also

contextualizing the topic of discovered rational ethics (exemplified as theistic ethical theory) amidst a discussion of other ethical theories and their claims--and problems.

Yet, my argument is a progressing synthetic metaphysic. And now it is time to go back to where I had left off, prior to beginning this discussion about ethics.

To summarize pertinent points that I had already concluded, then: the Independent Fact that grounds and produces all reality is rationally, personally active. God exists.

Most importantly (for the next part of my argument), God is the source of all existence, including His own. He must be self-grounding, self-generating. In order to distinguish His own generation from anything else He generates, we may say that God begets (not creates) Himself; for 'to beget' is a special category of generation: to create something of one's own sort.

In the case of the self-generating ground of all reality, His active generation of Himself is the ultimate possible type even of 'begetting': when God generates Himself, what He generates is infinitely more than only 'like' Himself: what God most fundamentally generates is Himself.

Yet there is an action line here, at the most primary and basic and fundamental action of God: His own self-generation.

On one side (I don't mean physically so, of course), there is the intent of the action; on the other side is the result of the action, which at this most fundamental level is also

substantially equivalent to the action itself (a property and characteristic unique to the Independent Fact of all reality). God the Father begets God the Son; both aspects are Personal, and yet they are also distinctive. And they exist as the ultimate Unity. The Son, the 2nd Person of God, is the Action, the Logos, the Living Word of the Father; I do not even need to refer to 'scriptural authority' to establish this (although Christian scripture does also use such imagery-terms.)

Very well; but so what?

I reply: it makes all the difference in the world.

The basic ground of all reality and of all subsequent creation (including derivative persons such as you and I) is itself, at its core, an inextricably fundamental interpersonal relationship: that of God to God: Father to Son and Son to Father.

I established this (assuming I have done it correctly, of course) in my previous section; before I got to the question of ethics. And now, here I am with a sticky problem; and yet also with the perfect means of solving it, already established on previous grounds as being an ontological necessity.

By going this route, I have avoided the muddle of trying to decide which of the three general 'explanations' of our ethical behavior 'must be true'. In fact, I do not even need to discount the first two theories as contributors to our behavior!--nor do

I discount them, as contributors. But as non-ethical contributors.

Yet something does also exist that is objectively ethical, and that can be perceived and understood by us (even if imperfectly, for after all we are not omniscient ourselves).

God can be the reliably objective standard for our interpersonal relationships, because His own existence, as the ground and source of all reality, is itself an interPersonal relationship. The Father does not betray the Son; the Son does not rebel against the Father. These two denials must be true, because it would be suicide for God (and all the rest of reality) if either of those things happened. God, as the ground of reality, is eternally self-consistent: He must be, in order for any single section of our natural 'time' to exist. Therefore His interPersonal relationships (Father to Son, Son to Father) will also be eternally self-consistent.

We can trust God, not merely as a metaphysical fact, but as a Person, because His own self-existence grounds the standard of trustworthy personal relationships. Of course, what we think He is going to do, and what He really does do, might be rather different; nevertheless, once we understand this, we can understand further that He is also ultimately trustworthy insofar as personal relationships are concerned, including His relationship to us.

There is a further corollary to be drawn: one I am ashamed to say very many of my brethren, even in the ostensibly Christian Church, ignore or defy.

This willed giving and re-giving on the part of both of God's Persons--the willed giving of reality and the willing giving of loyal gratitude back to the the giver--is the purest, most basic, even rawest instance of the action of love. From all eternity, the love of Father for Son and Son for Father provides for the Unity of deity; and the willed choice of interpersonal loyalty, of fair-togetherness, grounds the principles of positive justice. (Not incidentally, the Greek word normally Englished as "righteousness" in the Christian scriptures, literally means "fair-togetherness".)

Love and justice are characteristics of God intrinsically, eternally; God is essentially love and justice; love and justice are indeed essentially the same thing at the most fundamental level of reality (love being the action and justice being the result); and neither one will ever, ever, ever be set aside!

God will never act in such a way that He sets aside His love 'to accomplish justice'; and He will never act in such a way that He sets aside His justice 'to fulfill His love'.

It is total nonsense to propose either sort of doctrine; that is, it is total nonsense for someone who accepts the interPersonal unity of God to propose such a thing.

Yet there are many doctrines, and interpretations of scripture, even in Christian Churches--the believers who are supposed to accept and understand and promote and proclaim the implications of God's interPersonal Unity, being baptized in the (singular) Name of the Father and of the Son (and of the Holy Spirit, multiple in Persons but singular in Name), and making disciples of other people in the baptism of that Name--which when followed out result in a claim that God (despite uniquely and specifically "Christian" doctrine) sets aside His love, or His justice, or both. (Or, many such doctrines begin with this schism as a presumption; and so reach such conclusions. The conclusions must be false either way, if even binitarian theism is true.)

I will not go into examples of those doctrines here; but here is the place to establish and announce the refutation of those contradictions. Whatever God does to me, even though He slays me, once I understand this, I can know to the marrow of my bones that God will not ever take an action that does not somehow satisfy, or does not lead somehow to the satisfaction of, both His love and His justice for me--and for you, my reader!

(If, as you read this, numerous evident injustices suddenly occur to you--very good! Keep those in mind; even if they seem like evidence against my conclusion here. I will be discussing such things soon.)

As I noted a moment ago, I am by this extension arguing that God must be the objective ethical standard. But must we be capable of detecting the principles of that standard in some fashion? Is it necessary that we are capable of doing this?

To go against the principles of this 'behavior of reality' (even if we wish to speak of it in such an impersonal way) would be to minimize our efficiency at dealing with reality, especially in terms of our relationships to each other as derivative persons: your and my relationship with each other as person to person, can only be a shadow or subtype of the interPersonal relationship that (or rather Who) created us in the first place.

Therefore, I think it would be necessarily contrary to God's love (and thus also to His justice, which is at least the positive enactment toward the fulfillment of interpersonal fair-togetherness) for Him to prevent us from perceiving something of the principles of love and justice. This would be doubly true if God decided to relate to us Himself, Person to person.

Would God relate to us as Person to person? I am not entirely sure that He could avoid it if He wanted to! His own interpersonal relationship is the cause of our being here at all; His omniscience guarantees that He knows what we think and know, as persons; His omnipresence guarantees that there is no mode of existence in which we could even possibly exist, where God would not be present with us.

(My reader may be aware that this doctrine is occasionally and strangely yet insistently denied, as a routine doctrinal matter, by some theologians, Christian and otherwise, who elsewhere would just as insistently affirm God's omnipresence! But I shall not deny it.)

To create derivative persons, and then refuse to deal with us as persons, would be for God to refuse to love, which simply will not happen. And to create us yet then refuse to ever relate to us as being a Person Himself, is even worse nonsense.

He might create us and then, for some reason, He might temporarily mask Himself, so that what we see of Him does not seem to us to be a Person at all. Considering the prevalence of religion throughout history, this does not seem entirely feasible to me as a historical fact; but I think I can allow the technical possibility that God might completely mask His personhood from us as a species, regardless of other factors. What I insist is that He would not do this forever. If any given person never came to know God as a Person, that would be a fundamental breach of love on God's part.

The person might of course decide to rebel against God, however much of Him she knows; but that does not change God's self-imposed (indeed self-existent!) duty to relate to individual people as a Person.

Besides, one cannot 'rebel' consciously against something without attributing personhood (merely imagined or otherwise) to

that something. We do not 'rebel' against impersonal Nature; we work within it and accomplish our goals. Impersonal Nature does not 'want' to keep us from flying; we figured out how to fly, but not literally "despite" Nature. We discovered more of Nature's character and worked within Nature to accomplish this (natural) goal.

But a person might decide that God would prefer such-and-such not to happen, and then the person might go ahead and do it anyway.

I assure you a person can do this, because I affirm that I am a sinner.

This immediately raises the question: why does God allow me to sin?

This is a version of the more-simply-put question: why does evil exist? I think it is a much more useful and helpful variation than the merely simple form, but I will be deferring the topic a little longer. At the moment, I wish to examine another potential problem.

Back in Section Three, I was inferring some of the relationships between you and I and Nature and God. At the time, I maintained that for you and I to interact as persons, we needed a common overarching system--which Nature does happen to provide. My especially perceptive reader may consequently have asked a very pertinent question: Does not God, as a Person, also require a common overarching system for interacting with us?

In other words, even if it seems necessary for us to interact with God person-to-Person, in order for God's love and justice to be fulfilled, doesn't the notion I used earlier render such a relationship impossible--thus sinking a whole hunk of my argument?

The answer to this question shall also provide a bit more information to work with, including in connection to the whole question of evil. So to this rather more obscure (but extremely important) question I will turn first.

CHAPTER 38 -- Inferring the Third Person of God

If we cannot perceive something of the principles of God's interPersonal love (the love between Father and Son that grounds all reality), then we will be working at dangerous inefficiency against reality. I think it would be inconsistent with God's love and justice for Him to prevent us from perceiving this (although we might ourselves choose to turn away from it--a topic I will be discussing later). It is not a mere fact about God that we need here, but a real relationship to Him, as person (you and I, individually and corporately) to Person (God--Who Himself is a substantial interPersonal unity).

Unfortunately, an argument I made some time ago may be returning here to nix me. I insisted, back when I was discussing your and my relationship to God and Nature, that you and I needed a common overarching system--specifically, you and I need such a system in order to relate to each other. This requirement happens to be rather nicely fulfilled by an impersonal reactive Nature. (This was not, however, my argument for the created and intrinsically reactive characteristics of Nature, though. I had argued for those conclusions already, before arguing that you and I need a common overarching system in order to relate personally with each other.)

But if an overarching system of commonality really is necessary for interpersonal relation, then it would also apply to any proposed relationship you or I have with God, as people to Person.

So: does God, as a Person, also require a common overarching system for interacting with us?

If so, this might be a serious contradiction: I have denounced many times as nonsense the proposal that the Independent Fact, including as God if theism is true, would at His most basic level be 'inside' an overarching system. On the other hand, if God doesn't require an overarching system to interact with us, then I may be endangering my earlier argument concerning the necessity of God's non-equivalence to Nature. If I avoid the question by stating that God would not have a personal relationship with us, then I not only void my attempt at establishing a practical doctrine concerning true objective ethics (they might still exist between God and God, but would not concern us); I also risk introducing an inconsistency in God's love and justice, neither of which can be set aside.

Altogether, it's a serious problem, although an obscure one! But examining it does lead to a very interesting conclusion, I think.

If God ever happened to Incarnate or otherwise manifest Himself within Nature (a topic I will be returning to in the final Section), then certainly Nature would serve the purpose of

being a common overarching system; but also the limitations of Nature would intervene, especially insofar as God Incarnate would be a specially distinct type of manifestation: the Incarnate God, by being manifested in that way, would be in one place (in that way), and not another, or perhaps could be in numerous discreet places. Yet the Incarnated God (as such) could not be everywhere within a Nature, all at once, as God Himself; or else Nature would be reverted to the status of God and we would be annihilated via absorption into the Absolute, which would negate any loving purpose to our creation in the first place. So, Nature would fit the bill as a proper overarching system in terms of God's Incarnation, even though otherwise ontologically subordinate to God. But due to the special limitations involved, I am not talking about Incarnation theories right now.

I am talking instead about personal contact of a somewhat different sort: the type of contact almost any theist insists that God either always has with every created person, or at least could have with a person, without God being Incarnated. I mean our contact with God as 'pure spirit'.

In that case, Nature cannot be the overarching system, for then it would be including God. This would be fine for an Incarnation, except I am not talking about that type of contact. An Incarnation would be a special case, a special self-abdication on God's part.

But I am considering God's usual mode of operation with respect to us; and Nature will not quite do as a mediant system for that. The question should be, rather: if persons do need an overarching system within which to communicate to each other as persons, what sort of overarching system normally encompasses God?

There are two answers. The first is that, since no system encompasses God, the consequent conclusion would be that therefore no personal communication between us as Person-to-person can follow. This would be another way of saying that on these terms such contact would be self-inconsistent, and God cannot be self-inconsistent. However, if I have argued correctly that some kind of personal contact with God must be taking place within us (otherwise there would be a violation of God's love, and perhaps also of His justice), then I think we should look at the second answer, for the first will not fit. It wouldn't fit even if we allowed for the existence of created supernatural mediators (existing in a reality supernatural to our own field of Nature, yet in contact with our system), for they would only put the question one stage further back for no gain: how did they manage to communicate personally with God? If there is some principle that would allow them to do this, I think we would be prudent to at least check to see whether we would fit under the same principle.

As it happens, I don't think I need to posit mediators to answer this question--although mediators could make contact with us for other purposes, perhaps. (I am not arguing against the existence of derivative mediators per se, whether "angels" or "demiurges" or other subordinate deities; only that their existence would not solve this problem.)

The second answer is to remember (if I am believing this correctly) that God is, Himself, a self-existent system: He is, at least, a self-begetting entity Who is a Person and thus (by being 'self-begetting') is at least Two Persons in Unity. Or, put another way, the answer to the question "What system encompasses God" is: God Self-Begetting and God Self-Begotten, as the Independent Fact of all reality, is Himself the encompassing system. Whether we consider the Father or the Son, all things are in Him (including all created things, "in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible", even if there are many so-called gods and lords) and through Him and for Him, and by Him all things continue holding together.

So: can God, the basic self-existent foundation of reality, serve as the overarching system for interacting with us? I think this must be true, if He chooses to relate to us as Person to person; and I think it would be self-inconsistent of God not to relate to us in some fashion as Person to person.

But for this to happen, somehow it must also be true that at the level of God's own fundamental reality as God, God must

exist personally in a way that God is somehow encompassed by God. A Person of God would have to exist distinct from (but not substantially separate from) the Persons of God Self-Begetting and God Self-Begotten.

This would involve a second discovered distinction in God's eternal--that is, time-transcending--action. God, in personally interacting, as a Person, with all created persons everywhere, distinctly proceeds as God from God the (overarching) Foundation, just as God the Begotten personally distinct from God the Begetter; yet at the same time this Inter-acter will still be God, fully God, in the same way that the Son is in Unity with the Father as the one single Independent Fact of all reality.

I am, in short, deducing the existence of the Third Person of God--and now the Unity has reached a Trinity!

A Third Person of God can thus be inferred as solving a special conceptual problem, that is sometimes (and I would say quite rightly) advanced against mere monotheism, on the grounds that God can be necessarily expected to interact personally with created persons (such as ourselves) and that God has characteristics which allow for the existence of a proceeding distinct Person of God Who exists (analogically) 'within' the overarching Self-begetting and Self-begotten independent reality of God (without being either the Self-begetting or Self-begotten Persons).

But I hinted back in Section Three, when inferring the interpersonal unity of God (as God Self-begetting and God Self-begotten), that I could have gone on immediately at that point to inferring the existence of a Third Person of God. At the time, I needed to focus topically on the relation of God to creation more generally, and then to persons such as you and I more specifically, so I moved along with a note that I would be getting back to this topic.

While a Third Person of God would solve my conceptual problem, and may be inferred to necessarily exist (if I have properly identified some other characteristics of God and some related necessities), the strength of this conclusion would be reinforced even further if I arrive at an inference of the Third Person's existence before arriving at the problem.

So, going back for a minute to that earlier place in my argument: we may ask what the first action of God would be if God ever acts at all beyond Self-begetting. To generate not-God reality? That would certainly be an obvious distinction in action: to generate 'God' and to generate 'not-God'. But that first category of generation needs a bit more detail: to generate 'self-generating God'.

If God generates that which is 'not-God, then of course God is generating systems and entities (including persons such as ourselves) which (and who) are not self-generating--there can be only one Independent Fact of reality. But if the Self-generating

Person of God generates a Self-generated Person of God as the corporate action of God's own intrinsic self-existence, it is at least worth asking the question whether it is nonsensical for God (the Persons of the Father and the Son) to generate a Person of God Who is not specifically involved in the self-generating action of God.

Such a Person would be not Self-begetting or Self-begotten, but would (for want of a better word) proceed from the Self-begetting and Self-begotten Persons, yet would still be God fully God in the ontological supremacy of God as the final ground of all reality.

Another way of looking at this proposition would be from the standpoint of the love of the Father and the Son for each other. The Father gives the Son Sonship, and gives the Son Himself as well; the Son gives the Father the Son's Sonship, and in eternally choosing to complete the Unity of Deity could even in a way be said to be giving the Father Fatherhood--the Father could not exist without the Son, no more than the Son could exist without the Father (even though the Son does not beget the Father). The fundamental action of love in the Deity is the giving of Persons to each other.

So we may say that the Persons give the Self-begetting-and-begotten God to one another. Anything else they gave would be generated by and in their Self-existent unity. That would certainly include not-God creation: the Father gives all things

to the Son, and the Son surrenders all things to the Father, each loving the other in their fundamental glory. But if they are giving 'God' to one another already, in the Persons of themselves, it would be coherent for them to give 'God' to one another in a Person of themselves Who is not themselves and yet is, like these Persons in fundamental ultimate unity, God Most High.

If this is not incoherent for the Independent Fact's unique capabilities and characteristics (compared to any other fact that might exist), then I may correctly expect this to be the next ontological action of God: the Father and Son would generate a corporate Person of God, as fully God as the first two Persons in the single substantial unity, to give to one another in love: "I give you Myself and also this Person, together with You" each of them would in effect be saying and doing.

I do not know (for now anyway) that I can infer that they would necessarily be doing this, at their level of existence, no matter what; but I would at least strongly expect it. And if I come to infer that not-God persons exist (such as you and I) in a not-God system of created reality, then I may consequently deepen that expectation into a certainty: if we exist, then (not causally from our existence, but inferred from evidence of our existence, in conjunction with inferred characteristics and capabilities of God) the Third Person of God must also exist.

God would have done that, and would be doing that (and will be doing that), ontologically first, before creation.

I would already believe in the existence of a Third Person of God, therefore, before arriving at my most recent problem; which the existence of a Third Person handily solves. But in order to address a more pressing problem at the time, regarding whether the concept of God's creation of not-God persons was intrinsically nonsense, I have chosen to wait until now to consider this issue (which also allows me to introduce this Person as part of a developing sectional theme.)

Inferring the existence of this Person is hardly the end of the matter, of course; it opens up many questions, some of which I have already addressed.

But beginning with a question of relevance to why I introduced the Third Person now: is more than a third Person needed for the interaction of God, as a Person, to us as persons?

If God did not transcend time and space, it might be so; but God is not limited to our temporal and derivative mode of being. If God could be a singularity instead of a unity, it might still be true--as I think educated Jews and Muslims, who profess merely the singularity of God, would agree--that He, not being limited to existing within our space and time, has all time and space to deal with us on a person-to-person basis.

In a (not entirely) similar way, I as author of a fantasy saga can deal with any person within my imagined realm at any point within that dependent system I have created. I can jump to book 3 chapter 152 and deal with one character, and then jump to book 1 chapter 23 and deal with another. I have to 'jump', because I am myself derivative and my saga does not proceed directly from me as a coherent reality. God has no need to 'jump around' like that in relation to his own infinite self-existent reality--although any supernatural agents whom He authorizes to interact in our world might perhaps 'jump around' space/time like this.

But even if God did have to 'jump around', such 'jumping' might still allow Him to deal with us personally, one on one, at any point of space and time we may inhabit. And if I somehow moved from one Nature to another, then I would find Him there as well, expressing Himself along the same principles of His character, to the same fundamental purposes, although quite possibly in different specific actions.

Yet as I said, I don't think God must 'jump around' like that. God eternally encompasses all subordinate realities (including any reality I might find myself in), and therefore needs only one distinction of Person to interact with me at all of my times, personally: but that Person must be within the overarching system of God's Unity, and is therefore distinctive (but not separate) from the Father and the Son. This Third

Person proceeds, from the unity of the Father and the Son, thus from the Father and the Son, instead of being begotten. But where one Person is in operation, all Persons are in operation, due to the substantial unity of the Persons: the 3rd Person brings us the Father and the Son; the Father and the Son send us this Person, this Spirit of the Father and of the Son.

But while this might solve a conceptual problem of relation between persons and Persons within an overarching reality, does God not relate to Himself as a Person? And if so, then does this not require an overarching reality as common mediator for His own internal relationships with Himself?

God the Father begets: God the Son is God Himself begotten of Himself, self-existent. God is rationally active, personally sentient; thus the Father and Son are personal. The Father and Son are distinct in God's action of Self-existence, although also in unity (else the self-existence would not be happening); thus they are distinct Persons. If God the Son had no relation with God the Father, the unity of self-existence would be broken and all reality would cease. God the Son is rationally sentient and not a separate entity from the fullness of the Divine Unity; thus, He must know God the Father, and so He must know the Father is a Person. Does this mean the Son knows the Father (and vice versa) as a Person? Yes, I think He must; for although distinct, the 1st and 2nd Persons comprise the Unity of the self-existent God--both are fully God Himself. This means that

the Father and Son must have personal--not merely causally self-existent--relationships to one another as Persons.

But does this require an overarching common reality for them to interact with one another? I do not think this is a necessity--for we are speaking of the unified ground of all reality. The active inter-relationship of the Father and Son is itself the self-existence of God as the Independent Fact.

God's existence depends on Himself. If it is not self-contradictive to propose this--and the coherent self-existence of something must lie at the bottom of any proposition about reality--then the personal relationship of God to God is already a given, the ground of His own self-existent facthood as well as of all derivative facts. The interPersonal relationship needs no overarching reality for self-expression; God's self-expression is, itself, the overarching reality: the overarching reality does not need an overarching reality in order to relate to itself.

Any subordinate realities and thus any subordinate relationships (including of God to subordinate persons) shall reflect this in a distinctively derivative fashion. The necessity of an overarching system for your relationship to me, or for my relationship to God, is the shadow of the final (and first) reality, and shall exhibit properties of a shadow or reflection. This should not be surprising; God can only create shadows of Himself, to one (out of an infinite?) degree or

another. He is Himself the ultimate of standards for the character of His creations.

So, no, I do not believe the Father or the Son need the Third Person (the Spirit) in order to relate to one another as the unified ground of all existence. But they would corporately generate the Spirit graciously as the first continuing gift of love to one another after the continuing gift of existential love to one another, and so that inter-relationship between the Persons actively exists in the total fundamental reality of God as God: the Father and the Son always and never-endingly love the Spirit together; the Father and the Spirit always and never-endingly love the Son together; the Son and the Spirit always and never-endingly love the Father together; and the Spirit cooperates with the Father and the Son in any further actions of their singular Independent reality together.

This concept of the Spirit cooperating with-and-as God, in creation of not-God entities, deserves some more consideration. If God stoops to create, and abdicates Himself, giving of Himself so that real derivative people such as you and I can live and relate to Him, then He lets us contribute to creation; and so (I can think of no other way to put it) God's properties shall in some way reflect what He 'has done'. If there was a 'time' that God had not created, where God and only God existed—which is another way of saying something I have found I must affirm anyway, that creation does not fill God's existence and

that God transcends His creations--then merely in terms of that sort of particularity it would be nonsense to say that God 'had experienced' creation.

But, I do not think God's "time" exists like that. God creates: this must be true, for here we are. Any relation of God to His creation will be part and parcel of God's infinitude. God may choose not to reveal specific truths to us--He is under no obligation to ever give us a full revelation, and in fact it must be contradictory to say that God could give us a full revelation of His infinitude, for we are only derivative. Only the Son can fully know the Father and the Spirit, only the Father can fully know the Son and the Spirit, only the Spirit can fully know the Father and the Son. But whether God tells us specific truths or not, including specific relational truths, those relations of God to His creation will be there, at all points within God the fully self-existent: for in Him we live and move and have our being, and it is by God's continuing eternal action that we even continue cohering together as derivative entities.

Given that God has created derivative people--and here we are--then the Holy Spirit of God's personal relationship to us, being itself as it must be fully God, will by being fully God be fully God: and so will be present as fully God from what we call the 'beginning' of our Nature, and will be present as fully God

even in those particularities of God's infinitude where (using language of spatial analogy) no derivative 'Nature' exists.

The Holy Spirit is eternal, for He is God Himself, proceeding forth from the interacted love of the Father and the Son, for our sakes (and for the sake of all subordinate sentiences), to us, in inconceivably intimate (yet distinct) unity with God the Self-Begetter and God the Self-Begotten.

So, what does this Holy Spirit do within us; this "3rd Person of God"? That will be the topic of my next chapter.

CHAPTER 39 -- The role of the 3rd Person of God

In the previous chapter, I examined a potentially damaging problem stemming from the requirements of some earlier inferences I had made. This problem, although subtle, was severe enough that it might have unraveled quite a bit of my previous argument. However, upon close examination of the problem, I discovered that after removing certain inconsistencies from the option list, I was rewarded, not with a conclusion that much of my previous argument would need to be trash-canned (or at best redrafted), but that there must exist a 3rd Person to the self-existent Unity of God.

I had, in short, deduced the existence of what Christians call "The Holy Spirit" or "The Holy Ghost".

So, what does this "3rd Person of God" do in relation to us?

The answer to that question depends on what it means for God to Personally relate to us as persons. Remember that I reached this point by deciding that for God to act in relation to you and me (who are persons), which He must to do in some fashion to create and maintain us as persons, He must act in a way that is self-consistent with the standard set by His own eternally self-existent interPersonal conduct: and this active interPersonal relationship, between God self-begetting and self-

begotten, is the ultimate standard of what we identify as 'love' and 'justice'. This means He must not merely relate to us persons as the Creator, but as a Person Himself.

Yet (if I may coin a phrase) this is obviously not terribly obvious--otherwise we would have many fewer atheists, and they would all be recognized as completely dishonest ones!

Note carefully what I have said here: I expect there are some atheists who maintain, and even propagate, their atheism through essentially dishonest means, even to the point of being dishonest with themselves. However, that is nothing special: I am dead-level certain there are people calling themselves Christians who maintain and even propagate the faith in a similar manner! Since I know, nevertheless, there are Christians who are basically honest in intent about their beliefs (I think I am one of these myself), I am entirely willing to believe there are plenty of non-Christians (including atheists) who fall into the same category.

And I think it would be better to focus first on the situation of these honest non-Christians: for the doctrine of the Holy Spirit is not something that 'only applies to Christians'. There are, admittedly, some operations of the Holy Spirit, which Christians do think specially apply (or have specially applied) to at least some Christians. But I am not interested in special cases at the moment.

Coming at the topic from this direction (i.e. of metaphysical derivation), the most I can say concerning occasional special actions of the Holy Spirit in individuals, would be merely that the possibility exists. I am not grounding any of my argument on the authority of 'scriptures', because I know that the reliability (and degree of reliability) of purported 'scriptures' is extremely difficult to establish: a problem that most believers don't appreciate the magnitude of, but that nevertheless is most often a stumbling block even for honest and respectable sceptics. Therefore, I will focus instead on operations of the Holy Spirit that are common to everyone, and in principle accessible to anyone, including sceptics.

So: if I am correct in deducing that God relates Personally through the Holy Spirit to every created person, including people who don't accept my own beliefs, what can (and/or must) this mean?

Once more, anything I propose must not violate the self-consistency of God's love and justice: the way He relates to Himself is the standard for how He will relate to us.

How do persons relate to one another as persons? Put another way, how do rational entities relate to other rational entities as rational entities? What does it entail for you, as a rational entity, to relate to me in such a fashion that you intentionally call into play my own rational faculties as an individual?

If you give me some bread, or give me a whomp on the head with a hammer, how are you relating to me? The mere events themselves do not entail that you are thereby relating to me as being myself a rational entity: you may feed plants and bacteria, or you could hit a nail on the head, with essentially the same behaviors (even intensive ones) on your part, and possibly even with essentially similar reactions on my part. But few people consider plants to be rational; and virtually no one considers a nail (in and of itself) to be rational. So, accepting them as a convenient example of the principle, merely doing those things to me does not necessarily require relating to me as one rational entity to another, no moreso than if you treated the plant or the nail that way.

And you would only be relating to me as a rational entity yourself if you purposefully initiated those events. Cataclysmic diarrhea while hiking will feed plenty of plants, but you might not have intended to feed them that way! If the head flies off a hammer and strikes something, it may produce results similar to a directed strike, but you might not have intended it. What you do before or afterward in contribution to those circumstances (for example, choosing to eat that second piece of seven-layer chocolate cake before the hike, and to hell with the consequences!) might constitute a rational action, but those particular subsequent events as such were mere reactions and might have entailed no conscious direction on your part.

So relating to me as a conscious entity yourself, requires active intention on your part: you decide to hit me on the head with the hammer; the hammer doesn't merely slip accidentally out of your grip at an inopportune moment.

But you could decide to hit me, or accidentally hit me, either one, without necessarily relating to me as being a rational entity myself.

There are at least three necessities, then, for you to accomplish the relationship of person-to-person: you and I must both really be persons; you must recognize me as a person, which means recognizing I am someone capable of actively judging the implications of an event to derive the 'meaning' of the event; and you must intend for me to receive at least one meaning from the event that you are (as a person yourself) initiating.

In short: to relate to me as person to person, you must at least attempt some type of communication.

Note that the intention of such a relationship is not constrained by success or failure on the part of either of us (although the factual success of the attempt shall certainly be constrained by whether both of us are persons or not). As the initiator of the action, you might be mistaken about whether I am a person (even if you succeed in obtaining a favorable reaction from me); or you might be incompetent to the task and fail in communicating your desired intent(s). Or I might by

circumstance or even willful intransigence ignore or misread your intended meaning(s).

In the case of God, of course, He shall not be mistaken about which of His creations is or is not a real person; and neither shall He be incompetent to the task. But He is dealing with entities (you and I) who as active creatures (even derivative ones) might willfully ignore or misinterpret Him; and there could also be other self-imposed limitations to God's efficiency in communication, depending on what other plans He has put into effect as well as other conditions He considers to be important.

(One obvious example of the latter reservation would be, that if God considers our existence as derivative act-ers to be important, rather than our being only the biological equivalent of sock-puppets, then He will not override the free will He gives us to simply make us respond to His communications the way He wants--indeed, there could be no real point to calling such an event a 'communication' at all!)

Putting together the implications of what I have argued since the beginning of Section Two, I think this must be true; and it would still be true, whether or not our failure to understand and properly respond to Him was an accident (from our side of things) or intentional intransigence. If God wants free-willed derivative creatures, then He will have to live with the

risk that at any given moment those creatures might rebel against Him or simply misunderstand Him.

So if God will be self-consistent according to His own standard of interPersonal relationships (and He certainly shall be self-consistent as the one self-existent Independent Fact); and if we are rational entities ourselves (per the Golden Presumption); and if we, as such entities, have been created by God (as I have previously inferred); then He will communicate with all of us: God will be the Light Who is enlightening every one who is coming into the world.

Furthermore, this communication will not be limited to any Incarnational contact He has with us, nor limited to any messages He might send to other people for them to pass on to us. An Incarnation, by being an 'Incarnation', can only be in a limited number of places and times 'at once' [see first comment below for a footnote here];²⁵¹ and inspired messages might themselves be misperceived or misunderstood or intransigently perverted by the receivers, or might even suffer normal textual corruption through subsequent copy transmission (even though God would be expected to choose people for special communications of this sort who were as reliable as merely derivative people could be, within the boundaries of any other specific plans of His,

²⁵¹ An Incarnation takes place within a natural system subordinate to God, and makes use of natural system properties. The rational action of God does exist 'everywhere at once' (the action is what creates an 'everywhere' and an 'at once' to exist!); but the action Incarnate (or more generally manifested) cannot exist everywhere in a natural system at once without the system reverting to pantheism, thus undoing the creation of the system as such.

thus minimizing--yet not necessarily eliminating!--initial problems in communication.)

Moreover, and more importantly for my current analysis, communicating through 'ambassadors', so to speak, still does not entail communicating with everyone everywhere at all times, even in the case of documentary communication. (It is worth asking why God would bother at all to use special communication routes of this sort if He can reach us through interaction of the Holy Spirit; but I will get to that later.)

So His relation to us as Person to persons will first and foremost be through the communicative operations of the Holy Spirit, His own 3rd Person acting within the overarching foundation of the self-generating Persons of God. This does not mean that every action God might take concerning us personally would be only communication; but it would at least be that. (I mean 'at least' in regard to us being people ourselves; insofar as we are creations, God's action of creating and sustaining our existence would be more fundamental, of course.)

Moving along then: what kind of communication can we expect from the Holy Spirit to anyone at all, in any time and place?

It might be suspected that this would mean all people at any time and place would hear God talking directly to them in an unambiguously clear and constant manner. However, this obviously does not happen. Why this does not happen is certainly worth consideration eventually, because it would seem to be one of the

most effective means of communication--perhaps not useful for every contingency, but useful enough to be a common occurrence.

So we know from experience there are evidently some limitations to His communication with us, even at the most fundamental level of communication (through the Holy Spirit). Setting aside (only for the moment) the question of why the limitations exist, let me ask instead what the 'limitations of the limitations' would be, so to speak. In other words, what is the minimum of necessary communication we can expect from God?

This minimum shall itself be contingent on some other factors, of course: a woman in a coma might not be in any condition, while in that condition, to receive a personal communication from God. This is not because God has abandoned her: He is still there or even her body would cease to exist altogether, and He would still care about any personality that had developed before the coma or which might still develop afterward. But while she is in that state, then (as far as we know) she cannot herself relate to anything as a 'person'.²⁵² If God cares about her as a person (and He will), then we can be assured that He will not let her stay in that state forever; which is another topic worth coming back to later. All I am saying at the moment, is that special cases have special qualifications, and should not be considered the rule of thumb

²⁵² I qualify myself here, because our ignorance currently puts up a wall behind which her personality might be sufficiently intact and capable of interpersonal communication; and God would certainly also still be with her in that state. "When I go down into the pit, you are still with me O Lord..."

for gauging the normal relations between God and man. (Although, we should expect even the special cases to be dealt with on the same principles as the normal cases, even if the application may be significantly different.)

Therefore, by 'norm' I mean the state of rationality in which most people find themselves, at greater or lesser efficiency, throughout most of their lives. Barring special case-by-case circumstances (even in otherwise 'normal' individuals), what is the minimum necessary communication from God?

To answer this question, I think it is worth asking: what is the minimum necessary characteristic of existence itself?

If we look back to God, what shall we find as the 'lowest common denominator'? What are the properties of God's own interPersonal relationship?

I find at least two properties: self-consistent rationality; and self-consistent mutual service (the Begetting of the Son and the Abdication back to the Father forms the 'circuit of Self-Existence', so to speak).

Is one of these two qualities perhaps the characteristic I am looking for? I don't think so--although they shall certainly be the standard toward which God will expect us to attain. Yet each of these two qualities shares another quality: that of 'self-consistency'.

Literally speaking, the English term 'self-consistent' might mean the same as 'self-existent' (i.e., something 'consists of itself'); and self-existence is certainly a property of God. But I have been using 'self-consistent' somewhat more distinctively, to mean that these relationships entail no contradictions. They could not possibly entail contradictions, for no contradiction ever actually exists--if it could exist, it would not be contradictory.

An actually existent reality can never under any possible circumstances exhibit contradictions; even an atheistic reality, if it could exist, would be incapable of exhibiting contradictions.

I conclude therefore, that under even the barest minimum existent conditions, a communication from God to us shall inevitably consist, at the very least, of a reminder; an impression; an urge; something; to the effect that we should not ever accept (or even prefer) that a state we perceive to be contradictory actually exists.

Notice I have qualified myself here. Certainly, we would be constantly reminded by God ('in our hearts', so to speak) that contradictions should be rejected. Yet we ourselves are fallible, non-omniscient beings: we make mistakes. It is entirely possible that you or I might think that something is a contradiction when in fact it is not; or, we might think a

proposal is cogently self-consistent, when the proposal is actually contradictory.

We can expect God to know the real truth of these situations, and to work to correct such impressions of ours. But assuming for the moment (as our experience certainly gives us grounds to conclude) that not every communication of God to us has effects immediately recognizable by us, then it follows that God knows quite well that in any given case (maybe even in most given cases) there shall be a 'lag-time' between His attempts at instructing us and our success in perceiving, understanding and accepting the instruction.

So, what should God expect from us during that 'lag-time'? By definition, during the lag-time we shall not have perceived and understood that what we thought was contradictive really is not (or vice versa). Shall we accept what we think is contradictive then, in the meanwhile?

I do not believe God would expect this of us. Our willing choice to reject contradictions in principle, is a far more primary act on our part than the correct estimation of any given proposal as a contradiction or not. If we get into the habit of accepting what we perceive to be contradictions, even as a makeshift, it will be a bad habit that can only cause trouble later--even if it happens that what we accept despite our perception of contradictoriness is in fact not contradictory.

Even in our thoughts about God Himself, shall we say, "I believe such-n-such proposition about God to be truly contradictory, but I say this is true of God anyway"? This either means saying nothing at all about God; or it means denying the reality of God.

Even if the honest person avoids this through sheer force of willed loyalty to God (for example, perhaps she doesn't yet understand that if contradictions could be true about God, we would never possibly have any reliable knowledge either of God or of anything else), how shall she distinguish misunderstandings and misinterpretations later? She has learned to accept propositions as true, which she perceives to be contradictory; and misunderstandings and misinterpretations are inevitably contradictory at some point (although that 'point' may be very subtle). She would be willing to accept authority over what she perceives as being cogent; or even to accept her own wishful thinking over what she perceives as being cogent.

This is a dangerous state of affairs for her; one that shall spill over into her 'non-religious' life as well. Because sometimes what she will judge to be contradictory really shall be contradictory; and yet she will have learned to accept perceived contradictions as being possibly true and useful anyway (while remaining definite contradictions).

That route leads to disaster, for her and for others.

So, I think the very most primary notion God would want to communicate to that person, if He could communicate nothing else, would be: accept reality--do not accept contradictions.

He would know that due to her fallibility, this could mean she might reject something that He knows she needs to know, something that in fact (despite her misjudgment) is not contradictory. But better for her to do this, than for her to embrace apparent inconsistencies; for at least she shall be learning good habits. And God will not let her stay in her error forever; that would be inconsistent on His part. He will work constantly (even if He must lay ages of groundwork before His work succeeds) to help her understand the truth.

Such a basic communication lies at the ground of any further possible successful communication from God: whether His method is a divinely whispered ethical suggestion, or a metaphysical revelation, or even a historical document. It leads to more efficient clarity of thinking in all topics, secular or religious. It leads to more efficient interactions with God, and with God's creation. It transcends philosophies; it transcends particular ethical codes; it transcends languages, cultures, and ages. The youngest thinking person can make use of it to learn more, even if he cannot quite state it; the oldest thinking person can use it to pass her wisdom usefully to younger generations. It lies at the root of what it means to 'think' in the first place; and it lies at the root of honesty.

It can also be willfully denied.

And if it is denied, then eventually the denier shall suffer the consequences of the denial; not because God is spiteful, but because if people do not efficiently interact with reality then they shall end up 'bumping heads' against something greater than they are, to their detriment (like charging a locomotive straight on)--and because if people willingly choose to accept and propagate what they know to be contradictive, they do not leave themselves in a position to learn better: the two willed possibilities (accept what you have honestly judged to be falsehoods or reject them) are mutually exclusive.

To set one's will against contradictions, then, is to strive with (not against) the Holy Spirit.

But to actively embrace contradictions, means not merely to speak a word against the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit (that could happen by honest accident): but to blaspheme against the Holy Spirit--to prefer, analogically speaking, the darkness of obscurity over the light of clarity and efficient accuracy. It means to willingly shut out what little light you have within you; "and if the light within you is darkness, then how great is that darkness."

I do not conclude that this urging is the only action the Holy Spirit can and does do in a person. I only conclude that this urging--to refuse what we discern as contradictions--must necessarily be the most basic, fundamental action the Holy

Spirit does within each of us, in relating to us as Person to person. Only persons can have real intent; only persons can actively perceive and judge a proposition to be 'contradictory'; and certainly only a person can choose whether or not he will act as though what he perceives to be contradictory is nevertheless the truth.

God does not choose to accept what is contradictory; if He did, the unity of His self-consistency (and thus of His self-consistent existence) would be broken, and then all reality would cease--including our past, present and future. You and I are still here, so we can be assured that God never does this! At the same time, experience shows that we are entirely capable of preferring contradictions which we recognize to be contradictions.

But contradictions are not real, and are not reality. God, on the other hand, is the root and ground of reality--He is, so to speak, the 'most real' of things.

To choose as a principle to accept contradictions, therefore, eventually means going against reality: and God is the most real.

How and why is this possible? And what are the implications? In the next several chapters I will be discussing these questions.

In other words, the time has come for me to discuss 'sin'.

(In case readers feel apt to get panicky about the discussion moving hence to 'sin', especially by context 'the sin against the Holy Spirit', let me reassure you I mainly mean to discuss my sinning, not other people's. Which may be un-reassuring in other ways perhaps!--but I mean that I won't be launching into finger-pointing about the sins of my-opponents-and-you-and-you-and-them-over-there. No need to do that; my own sins are quite sufficient enough for discussion of the principles.)

CHAPTER 40 -- an introduction to the concept of sin

One especially important part of a discussion about ethics involves the question of 'evil'. If ethics are only a human invention, or if ethics are only a perceptual illusion based on irrational response to our environment (micro or macro), or if ethics are only some combination of those two general explanations, then any discussion of 'evil' is rendered somewhat moot. 'Evil' would mean only what you and I have been automatically conditioned to treat as 'evil', and/or only what you and I happen to reject (whether for self-practical purposes or aesthetically).

Learning 'what is evil' would mean learning what we have been automatically conditioned to treat as evil, and/or learning what other people have opportunistically chosen to treat as evil. We could still discuss something we (or other people not ourselves) call 'evil', and perhaps even make some rational choices concerning our own perceptions of it. But under those two theories that's as far as the usefulness of the concept would go.

Remember: the shared distinction of those two explanations for ethics, is that what is being either discovered or invented (or both) is not really 'ethical' in an objectively qualitative sense. Ethics, according to those theories, are only what we

personally want them to be, or are non-rational reactions to stimuli (or perhaps are a combination of both behaviors).

Consequently, 'evil' is put into the same boat.

This can lead to some amusing inconsistencies from advocates of those two theories: I once again recall the popular atheistic naturalist who explains our concept of justice to be a mere species bias similar to racism, but who goes on later to vent against British settlers for mistreating the Australian aborigines. He expects his readers to agree that the settlers' racism was really unjust, aside from his own mere opinion about it, and thus should be decried!

When I first discussed the general kinds of ethical theory, such inconsistencies might be neither here nor there. But based on what I have argued since then, I am now in a position to fit them into the shape of my metaphysic.

So far in this book, I have argued that God exists; and subsequently I have argued that because God has certain properties necessary for His self-existence (much more for the existence of anything else, such as you or me), He also intrinsically provides the objective ethical standard.

Furthermore I have argued that it would be self-contradictory (and indeed the incurable suicide of all reality) for God to ever set aside His own internal interPersonal standard of behavior--the Personal behaviors that constitute the

ultimate standards of what we call 'love' and 'justice'. God's behavior shall, will, remain self-consistent.

Consequently (I have argued), God would communicate an internal witness to all thinking people in all times and places. This witness would, at the minimum, consist of a request or reminder or urge that we as individuals should not accept what we judge to be contradictory as being nevertheless true.

Can God force me never to accept nor to intentionally propagate contradictions?

In a way, yes He could; but it would not any longer be 'me' who was 'refusing to accept' or 'refusing to propagate' contradictions: it would only be God Himself directly manipulating (at least my body's) matter and energy to produce an effect that happens (by His choice) to take place through my body. 'I' would have no say in the matter, unless and until God ceased doing this particular action through my body; at which time I might revert back to conscious perception and action. God would have 'short-circuited' "me"; but that proposal also short-circuits the question of whether He could 'force me' to 'act honestly'.

God might also manipulate my body in such a fashion that He takes actions through it, while still allowing me to retain consciousness of what is happening; but in that case, my consciousness would include my ability to have personal opinions about what is happening. He could 'make' my body do something

'good'; but so long as my consciousness remains, then I myself might not be choosing to agree with the 'goodness'. If God overrode that part of my self completely, then it would no longer be 'me' choosing to do anything, including having an opinion about the situation. Relatedly, God could find a way to mentally constrain me to certainly behave in certain ways; but then He would not be treating me as a responsible person.

So, God could act "honestly" through my created form, but it would not be 'me' acting "honestly": it would not be 'me' acting at all!

In such a situation, God would also not be relating to 'me' as Person to person: only as Personal Creator to His creation. I acknowledge that God could do this, if He wanted to; and maybe He even has, to some people, at some times, in some circumstances. But I have argued many chapters ago that He must not do this through me constantly (and also, from what I can perceive, He must not do this through me very much at all, maybe never); because I do not get the impression that I am God. Consequently, either I am God and God is lying to Himself (which is impossible, as it would break the Unity); or I am God and God is mistaken about being God (which is similarly impossible); or I am not God, meaning that I sometimes am responsible for initiating my own (though derivative) actions 'myself'.

So, can God force me, personally, never to accept nor to intentionally propagate contradictions? Ultimately, the answer is no: He cannot force 'me', per se.

Does this mean God does not care whether I would intentionally propagate contradictions? No, for that would violate His own interPersonal and eternal standard of justice--and probably such a lack of care by Him would violate His love, too (keeping in mind that in God's unique self-existence love and justice are ultimately the same thing considered from somewhat different 'directions', analogically speaking.)

Well then, is it impossible for me to willingly accede to contradictions?!

Now we are getting very near the question--and the problems--of evil. Perhaps I should put it the other way around: is it possible (and can I figure out how it is possible) that I am capable of willingly acceding to contradictions?

The Golden Presumption (without which any argument by anybody to any conclusion cannot even begin, much less succeed) states that I can act. I have argued that this necessarily implies the existence of God, and that God's existence in turn does not necessarily require that I cannot act. Now, however, I am examining a proposition that seems to entail my capability to do something that, in principle, God cannot do. How feasible is this proposition; and if it is not feasible, what corollary implications does that conclusion entail?

I can distinguish between willingly and accidentally acceding to contradictions. 'Accidentally acceding' means making mere mistakes, perhaps through lack of skill, or perhaps through ignorance of data conditions. This is not something God, in His transcendent omniscience, can do; no more than He can create a boulder too heavy for Him to lift.

But not only does it seem to me that I can make accidental mistakes (I certainly can testify that I do!), it deductively follows from my existence as a non-omniscient derivatively active creature that it is possible for me to make mistakes.

The strength of this particular contention obviously rests on how successful I have been at arguing that it is not contradictory for me to exist as a derivative act-er; but if that property of my existence is not contradictory, then no absurdity would follow from proposing that I can possibly make mere mistakes. As an entity who (or even 'which') is less than God, then my abilities would as a corollary be less than God's. No absurdity follows from a derivative creature possessing capabilities less than God; an accidental mistake on my part, is not a positive capability I possess.

But making a mistake by accident is not the same as willingly embracing what I know to be incorrect.

God, as the final fact of reality, must be presumed to be necessarily self-consistent. Consequently, God will neither produce nor advocate contradictions. God can produce and

advocate situations that we fallible humans may currently consider to be contradictory; but this is not the same thing as being contradictory. A paradox is not a contradiction; it invites us to discover the properties that resolve and account for it. Again, God can produce a boulder that He chooses not to manipulate in particular ways (for instance He may choose not to lift it); but He cannot produce a boulder that is 'too heavy' for Him to lift. God can produce a derivative creature like myself, and grant me derivative action ability; but He cannot give me free will and at the same time totally manipulate me like a puppet. Nonsense confabulated out of the grammar of language does not suddenly becomes feasible merely by affixing to it the words 'God can'.

Now, it is also utterly impossible for me to do plenty of real actions, including actions God Himself can do. Due to my physical limitations, I cannot reach out and touch the Statue of Liberty from where I am sitting. God can touch the statue from where He 'is', but that is because natural space and time utterly depend upon Him for maintaining their existence. If God incarnated Himself, He might still be able to touch the statue from anywhere in space/time (while retaining the Incarnated form) by opening a wormhole in space/time and sticking His arm through it. Of course, such a solution might depend on a loose definition of what it means for the Incarnated God to be in one place and not another: His arm would be in New York Harbor,

while the rest of Him stood in Palestine or Tennessee or wherever. And I expect God could make a space/time wormhole that allowed me to accomplish the same feat--but that wouldn't be something I can do of my own derivative power (at least as far as I know). (Also, it might be contradictory after all for God to be able to create a situation where I can spatially stick my hand through a warp without having it sheered off or various other effects.)

But I am considering a different question: is it possible for me to willingly--not by accident--accede to contradictions?

Let us say that I know--or at least I think I know--that I cannot possibly, with my own inherent abilities, reach the Statue of Liberty from where I am sitting. Is it possible for me to assert to you that I can? Is it possible for me not merely to assert this to you, but to do so in a persistent manner with the intention of convincing you that I can reach the statue, when I know I cannot? Is it possible for me to willfully blind myself to the fact that I cannot, until through habitually active intent to ignore the fact, I delude myself into such a condition that I eventually become ignorant of the fact?

These answers may be discovered by experiment, and by experience. And I find that I certainly can act with the intention of succeeding in the first two examples; and I suspect I am entirely capable of accomplishing the third example. I am even willing to risk an assumption that you, my reader, are

already very familiar with examples of this sort. The whole recorded history of the human species is rancid with act after act of intentional outright misstatement of known falsehoods as fact, including examples of pervasive self-deception.

Is God capable of any of these things?

If my earlier reasoning is true, then such actions, if God did do them, would be a breach of the interPersonal relationship that establishes God's self-existence and also grounds the existence of all other facts of reality. Such a breach would destroy the self-existent Unity of God's transpersonal reality; God would either no longer beget He Himself fully Himself, or else He Himself fully begotten by Himself would become something other than Himself, and thus incapable of further self-generation. Either way, it would be the suicide of God at the most foundational level possible; a suicide from which there could be no recovery. And with the total self-annihilation of God, all the rest of dependent reality would cease to exist, including all of what we call the past, present and future of our natural space/time system.

Yet you and I are still here.

I therefore conclude that God never has, nor never shall do this.

But does that mean He cannot do this?

Is it (at least technically) possible for God to utterly and completely kill Himself?

I have inferred that it is possible for God to enact one kind of death, and indeed that He does enact this: the submission of the Son to the Father (while maintaining the distinctive existence of the Person of the Son) in order to complete the circuit of the Unity and thus actively maintain self-existence.

I have further deduced from this that it is technically possible for God to partly kill Himself in other ways, so that true creation of not-God entities and systems may be instituted; after all, here I am, a not-God entity.

It is therefore not in principle impossible for God to subject Himself to several sorts of death.

I conclude, in extension of this principle, that it must be possible that God could take actions that would result in the breaking of the Unity and His consequent self-annihilation.

And at least one of those actions would be, on His own part and with full intention, to willfully embrace contradictions.

Don't misunderstand me: I am absolutely certain that God never has and never shall act that way; for if He did, all reality would cease, including our past and present--and yet here you and I are.

Yet God is not 'good' through some merely static or automatic necessity of His existence, much less as if some attribute of Him was imposed upon Him from an outside contingency. Instead, His existence (and the existence of

everything else) depends on His raw, eternal, personal and active choice to actively maintain His self-existent reality-- and this raw, eternal choice also happens to establish the most basic and most powerful objective grounding for 'morality', for it involves an eternally self-consistent interPersonal relationship..

God's "goodness" is not like the color of my hair; it is not something imputed to Him which He may or may not have some ability to modify. It is His most basic possible action, constantly and intentionally chosen by Him--and the implications of that choice must be fully known to Him.

I seriously doubt that you, my reader, ascribe any 'character value' to 'forced charity' among other people. But God's charity, even to Himself, is never forced by causal necessity. He actively and fully chooses it, constantly; and always has; and always shall.

His charity may take forms, commensurate with the fulfillment of justice, that you or I may not immediately recognize as charity, of course; but we should be ready and willing to look for the charity involved, as well as to reject doctrines which suggest that in principle God takes actions for uncharitable reasons.

Let me speak personally for a moment. To know that God exists, is very interesting to me. To know that He created me,

is also very interesting to me. To know that God is a transpersonal 'trinity in unity' is not only interesting, but gives me grounds to feel quite a bit better about 'backing a particular horse', so to speak. To know that God's characteristics must be such that He provides an objective standard for true ethics, is somewhat reassuring and somewhat useful to me. (I say 'somewhat', because there are times when the existence of an objective ethical standard can be very annoying--for instance, when I want to make use of someone else for my own selfish gratification!) To know that I can rely on God's goodness eternally, is extremely reassuring to me.

But to understand that God eternally, actively, consciously chooses never to act against fulfilling interpersonal relationships, whether His own or others, even though He technically could, but always and forever acts toward fulfilling and reconciling those relationships--this gives me the first truly ethical reason to gladly stand and proclaim:

"I choose to serve that King!!"

To serve God because He exists, or because He has this or that important intrinsic characteristic, is admittedly prudent; and (I suppose) I would still do so out of that logical prudence if that was all there was to knowing God.

But this goes beyond mere logical prudence--although not beyond logical understanding.

If I am correct about God's existence and His causal relationship to us, then you, my reader, are also a servant, and more than a servant but also a son or a daughter of the King Himself!--whether you know this idea or not, whether you accept it and enact it or not, whether you even merely believe it or not. This is a primary relationship, and although it can be denied or acted against, it can never be superinduced. We have no need to be adopted as if the Lord Above was not the Father of our souls; it is only a question of whether we choose to be good or rebellious children: will we love each other and our common Father, together? Nor need we fear that our Father will need to be somehow made aware of us; no, He must be already acting toward us constantly, and will know if we, you and I, are being worthy of the inheritance of His family. The sheep, the mature flock in the parable, were surprised to be inheritors--apparently they were expecting a rather different reception! As did the baby-goats--who still needed cleaning. (Which is the word in the Greek, by the way.)

In much the same way, if I am completely wrong and non-sentient Nature turns out to be the Independent Fact, then nothing I do or say shall be able to change that Fact, or my fundamental and even foundational relationship to that Fact, whatever my various attitudes and beliefs about the topic may be.

But, the truth of God's eternal, active commitment to be fulfilling the fair-togetherness of persons (which we call 'righteousness' in English--even when we don't really know what that word is supposed to mean!), is something I can know, and even accept, as a logical fact--and yet I could still choose to decide that it shall effectively mean nothing to me.

The merely factual character of God that I have inferred up to this point, does mean quite a lot for you and me; yet in a way it means so much, and touches our lives so intimately, that God almost seems something like gravity.

But this is the first aspect of God I have deduced, that begins to give me a solid understanding of God's character as a Person.

Still--perhaps by itself it is no great thing after all.

The sceptic may say, in a sense quite truly, that there is nothing specially impressive about God choosing actively to behave a particular way throughout eternity, if to choose otherwise would be utter suicide for Him.

As far as I have gone, I think there is some reasonableness in that attitude; it seems to me to be at least a self-consistent way of thinking about the topic.

All I can say for the moment, is that my heart tells me I ought to be able to appreciate some significant personal difference, between a God Who is 'good' by (a sort-of) accident,

even an accident of His self-existence, and a God Who is good because He chooses to (quite literally) 'be'.

And I, for one, am willing to appreciate that difference.

But I admit that such a choice on my part has little or nothing to do with any merely academic conclusion of analysis. I can only record my willing response to this notion, which seems to me to be the proper one I should have as a person.

Moving along: so God could do something of the sort I have mentioned. He never chooses to do it, never has, never shall; but technically speaking, as the ultimate entity with 'free-will', He could attempt to foster a contradiction.

This means that if I myself am capable of actively seeking--or even succeeding--in deluding myself or others through knowingly embracing contradictions, then I am not capable of doing something that is technically impossible for God. I am only doing something that, as it happens, God never has nor never shall choose to do. And there is no contradiction in that position.

Furthermore, I ask myself: why would (or why do) I do these things? Why would I ever insist on treating reality as if it was one way, when I know that it is not?

Let me emphasize that I do not consider actions such as 'dramatic creation' or 'playing make-believe' of any sort to fall into this category. A person playing 'make-believe' knows she is playing 'make-believe' and is not really obstinately

demanding that reality shall be one way when she knows it is another. The intent is completely different. To 'make-believe' in play is to be subordinately creative. It can be a conscious paying of proper homage--or even an unconscious homage--to the true Creator of us.

I do not say there are no ethical responsibilities in such subordinate wish-creations--that topic is a whole other kettle of fish! All I mean to say here, is that such actions are not necessarily similar in intent to a demand for reality to be something different than what it is known to be. When dramatic actors (for instance) begin behaving in that sort of way, we say they are being irresponsible, even though they may still (by happenstance) be going through the motions of otherwise innocuous 'dramatic acting'. (This is true about other creative actions as well, of course, such as story writing.)

No--I am talking about times when, for instance, I know I am supposed to be fulfilling a promise I made to someone; and yet I tell myself 'one more minute writing this book won't hurt anyone'.

I know that isn't true--one more minute writing this book will defraud my side of my promise by one more minute; but, dammit, I want one more minute of writing--preferably thirty more minutes--and I am occasionally willing to tell myself, or other people, whatever will do the trick!

When I do this, I am demanding to deny the responsibility that I (nevertheless) recognize to exist.

My demand does not make my responsibility go away. But even the intent to try, by force of will, to get my own way despite reality, makes all the difference.

It doesn't matter whether I succeed or not--the electrical power may go out one second later, leaving me no ability to fulfill my wishes, or I may be forced to leave my writing by the one to whom I made my previous promise. Nevertheless, I willingly wanted to do this thing that would result in going back on my promise, and I intended to do it if I could.

It doesn't even matter whether I am correct about my responsibilities or not--maybe I wasn't paying attention when I made the promise, and so missed the part where she said I had plenty more time to write. I don't know about that provision, if it exists; but I still willingly insist on doing what I want to do.

Therefore, I intend to breach what I think is the responsibility that I recognize to exist.

In this, and in other ways, I know that I ought to do something because I think reality (especially interpersonal reality) is such-n-such a way; but I nevertheless sometimes choose to do the other thing, if I possibly can.

Essentially, I want to be the person who defines what is and is not the actual principles of interpersonal relations (or

what is "good"), and to be the one who defines what is and is not true.

In fact, I do not merely want to define them (since that might involve discovery and categorization of them), but to change them from what I know (or think) them to be.

At those times, I do not merely want to be God with the authority of God.

In essence, I want--and more importantly I am willfully trying--to be God over against God.

Christians, along with many other theists, call this 'sin'.

And in the next chapter, I will consider some of the deductive consequences of this behavior of mine.

CHAPTER 41 -- the consequences of sin

In the previous chapter, I began to discuss the concept of evil--not in the abstract, nor for potential special-cases (such as particular individuals who may honestly not recognize any responsibility they have to actual reality)--but in the most concrete and personal way I could find.

I began examining the concept of evil, by examining myself.

The person who thinks ethics are something we humans have created, says that good and evil are what we personally define them to be. I have noticed that such a person rarely, if ever, admits, "What I have done is evil". Usually, the gist of this sort of person is that we define 'good' as whatever we ourselves want to do, and 'evil' as whatever someone else wants to do (or wants us to do) that threatens our desires. Or he may perhaps say, "Very well, I agree that what I have done is 'evil', taking the average of human opinion into account. Nevertheless, it is what I wanted to do. I may be sorry I got caught, but if I could do it without getting caught (and especially punished) I would. I don't consider it to be something I should not have been doing."

(A more objectivistic secular ethicist wouldn't go this route, I think, but would recognize instead that the violation of coherently fulfilling interpersonal relationships would be

objectively evil in some sense--including when they themselves do it. I discussed this, including with important critiques, back in Chapter 36.)

On the other hand, the person who thinks ethics are our irrational responses to our environments (natural, social, whatever), will say that our understanding of what is 'evil' is merely an irrational response that we happen to be suffering at the moment--qualitatively similar to having a headache. Such a person may find herself saying, "What I have done is evil"; but (if she sticks to her theory) she will probably eventually tell herself, "All that happened was that I reacted to the herd instinct, or to the parental instinct, or something of that sort." She will probably figure that if she can get a good night's rest, the feeling (being only a 'feeling') that she has done something wrong will go away by morning; and if not, then she may need to see a doctor.

But the person who thinks there is an objectively real and truly ethical standard that we may possibly willfully violate--for example, we Jews, Christians and Muslims (and that special sub-class of secular ethicists, too, to be fair)--shall in theory, and even sometimes in practice, say to ourselves:

"What I have done is evil. There may be excuses for other things I have done, but there is no sufficient excuse for this. I willfully chose to do something I should not have done, and I knew at the time I should not have done it."

This person--a person like myself--may easily agree that there are times when one of the other two explanations for 'ethical' feelings or 'ethical' behaviors do in fact apply. But we also maintain--and at bottom the proponents of the other two theories will also maintain--that those sorts of behaviors were not in fact good or evil.

Except: we ethical objectivists are likely to decide that there is never any such event that falls into the category of 'active ethical subjectivism'--the mere choice to define what is good and evil according to our whim.

We might agree that if such behaviors were possible, then those behaviors (still) would not be good or evil at bottom. But typically what we will infer, and say, about such willful ethical finagling, is likely to be this:

"I did try to set myself up as the final authority for what really is good and really is evil, despite what I knew deep down to be true--and that is precisely where, and how, and why I did the evil thing."

In previous chapters, I have deduced that even though there may very well be 'ethical' situations which (merely) seem to be 'ethical' but are explained by one of the two subjectivistic theories; an objective ethical standard does nevertheless exist--and the standard is God's own behavior toward His own transPersonal self-grounding Self from all eternity.

God (Father, Son and Holy Spirit, in unity of deity) does not act against His own active self-existence--otherwise all reality would cease to exist, including you and me. Therefore He must also prefer for us not to do--not even to intend to do--that sort of thing to each other and/or to Him: to act in violation and non-fulfillment of interpersonal relationships. If, or when, we do so, we are acting against the grounding principle, even the grounding action, of all reality, including our own derivative sentience.

But when God created free-willed derivative creatures--such as I must presume myself to be, or else I cannot legitimately claim any argument or even mere assertion of mine to be reliably worth anything--then He willingly set up a situation where it remains possible for these creatures to actually choose to do what He always shall always refuse to do.

The existence of creatures who are not-God and who are not mere sock-puppets for God, entails the necessary possibility that to a limited extent, these creatures might thwart God's intentions.

I say 'to a limited extent': it was God's wish for them to exist and to have this potential capability. Their--our, my--misuse of that capability does not ultimately defy the power of God. My misuse defies a subordinate wish on His part, His wish being subordinate to the fulfillment of the greater intention on

His part: that you and I shall exist as free-willed creatures who are not merely Him.

God set up a special situation, where a limited set of His wishes was within our power, by God's own grace, to grant or deny.

That was the honor and dignity God granted to us: He put us in the position where we had some power to complete or deny His wish that He might have true sons and daughters.

I, for one, have denied that wish.

I have, at times, acted in ways which I knew then--and still know now--to be wrong.

I didn't want it to be 'wrong'. I wanted it to be 'right'--without wanting the character of my action to be changed.

I wanted to be the one who ultimately defined what was true and what was good.

That may not have been the exact 'form' of what I was telling myself when I resolved intently to do those things. But that is what it boils down to, at bottom.

I wanted not only to be God, but to be over against God.

And, in a way, I got my wish.

God has made it possible for me to do just that.

Not to the degree that I wanted, perhaps; but He made it possible for me to act toward myself, toward other created

people (such as you), and toward Himself, with intentions God never chooses to have toward me, toward other created people (such as you), or within the unity of His own transPersonal Self.

The way God treats me is based on the principles of the way He (as the substantial unity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit) treats Himself. His application of those principles, toward and in regard to me, must be somewhat different because I am not one of the Persons of God's Unity; but the principles themselves must still be the same, for God will be self-consistent. It is not intrinsically necessary for Him to do 'good' to me; but He (and everything else) would utterly die if He did choose to do 'evil' to me. Because He grounds all reality, and because I am still here, then I can be certain He never has nor never shall behave that way.

But: what happens to me, if I behave that way!?

What happens if, unlike God, I do decide to be false to my own best perception of what is true; or if I do decide to put my own desires first at the expense of giving love and justice to you? What happens if I willingly break the derivative unity that binds you and I together as people, and that binds God and myself together as people--the unities which are shadows of the self-existent Unity of God-to-God that grounds all reality?

If God shall die if ever He chooses to do this--then what shall happen to me?

If I choose to breach my relationship with God; if I choose to turn my face from Him; if I attempt, insofar as I can, to cut myself off from the ultimate source of my life and power--then what shall happen to me?

Then, I shall die.

It is logically necessary, as a function of the relation of things, that I shall die.

It is ethically necessary, insofar as I have breached the principles of the Personal relationship that grounds the Life of God and of all other lives, that I shall die.

Look at me, you who are my reader. See me: the sinner.

Do you understand, now, the extent of what it means for me to sin? Do you not agree that I should and shall die for what I have done?

Well--I understand, at least.

And the 'size' of my sin does not matter.

Whether I even completed the action I hoped to undertake--but perhaps was thwarted in achieving (by God's good grace!)--does not matter.

I have violated the principles of interpersonal relationships: the principles which root and are rooted in eternity, by the God Who begets Himself in self-existence, and Whose action of self-begetting serves as the preliminary necessary causal ground for all other actions of God, including the creation of you and me, who are derivative creatures with our own interpersonal relationships--and what sort of relationships should those be, but mirrors in their own derivative degree of the love and justice which ground all of reality?

I will not say here that this-or-that particular expression of the relationship--this code or that law--is less or more accurate than others. I am certain there are less and more accurate ones; and I think I know which one is most accurate, although I am willing to allow plenty of credit to others.

But establishing such a comparison, is not presently (nor really ever be) my goal. You yourself know some part of The Law; God would not leave you without at least the internal (and eternal) witness: you should choose to reject contradictions and actively work to foster interpersonal relationships of love and justice.

But only you--and God--can answer the question: Have you always done this?

Or have you even once willingly chosen to disregard the light you think you have?

I know what the answer is, in my own case.

And so I will proceed; hoping that if your honest answer to yourself is qualitatively like mine, you will find the remainder of this book to be of more than merely intellectual interest.

I am now in a position to explain why I, myself, am not remotely disconcerted by the anti-theistic argument from evil.

For many people, this is a powerful argument, if not against a supernaturalistic God altogether (strictly speaking it couldn't be against that anyway), then at least against any kind of ethical God Who also holds an ontological position traditionally accepted by proponents of various religious theisms (primarily Judaism, Christianity and Islam in modern times). The problem then, is not with God or God's supernatural character per se, but with the combination of these properties plus ethicality. Eliminating one or more of the properties, eliminates the problem--or so it seems to many people.

Thus, eliminating the morality (tacitly or explicitly) could leave the theism and the ontological claims in place--but not a trinitarian nature. Even some Christian theists, accepting the argument, but wanting to keep the ethicality (and the trinitarianism?), are led to abandon one or more of the ontological tenets--they will deny God's omnipotence, or God's omniscience, or God's omnipresence. Some theists regress into an emergent pantheism, a naturalistic theism where the system of Nature, as the Independent Fact, is slowly becoming God--thus it

starts out amoral, and slowly 'learns' morality. (Why it would be learning to be more 'moral' seems to be something of a mystery. I will add here that I am not entirely against the notion of Nature becoming progressively sentient and learning to be moral; but I certainly don't have to be a naturalistic and/or emergent theist in order to accept this possibility!)

Furthermore, I can understand why the argument would be so influential to so many people. Injustice and suffering are daily parts of life for many of us, perhaps even for all of us; and such things are highly important to us--myself included! Since these are so readily obvious and at hand, it isn't unreasonable for people to begin with evil and tragedy and grief.

(This in itself refutes the facetious attempts of some sceptics, even ones who ought to know better, to paint theists, Christian or otherwise, as if we thought we were living in some kind of bouncy rainbow vacuum where nothing hurtful or scary or unfair ever happens to us or to those we love. This ridiculous tactic becomes even more worthless against a Christian, of all people: the guy nailed up there on the giant plus sign reminds us every Sunday that Bad Things Happen To Even The Best People!--in case we somehow manage to forget.)

Or again, even if an ethical theism manages to be proposed first (for after all someone has to go first in an argument), sooner or later (and probably sooner) the evident power and prevalence of injustice has to be and ought to be raised as part

of any responsible accounting of the situation; and when that happens, the ethical theism may be so incomplete, or so incompletely established, that it becomes proportionately vulnerable to this objection--which is likely to be the first objection, even if not the first ground for decision. (It certainly doesn't help when the ethical theism being proposed turns out to not be even ethical in character! Refer back to Chapter 35 for my discussion on this.)

"If God really existed, and/or really was the sort of God you say He is," I am occasionally told, "then evil as we all recognize it would not exist. Yet, it does. Therefore, He must not exist, one way or the other."

I think there is a reasonably noble attitude that can (and I am willing to believe often does) underlie that argument.

But, because of the way in which I have approached the topic of evil, this argument is in no position to undercut my conclusions.

First, I am already entirely certain on other far more primary grounds that God nevertheless does exist (or at least that, as a question of logical responsibility, I should believe God exists), and has the character and characteristics this anti-theistic argument attacks. That doesn't mean I have to discount or disrespect the factual reality of injustice--on the contrary, I am in the process of factoring it strongly into my developing argument! But this factoring will be done within the

shape of the metaphysic I have been slowly and carefully developing throughout the course of my book.

A little more bluntly and directly: in order for this anti-theistic argument to have any chance of success at all, first I would have to presume that I can actively evaluate the argument as a responsible agent. Once I do that, however, I discover there are corollaries to this presumption which... well... eventually lead me here!

So while this won't necessarily be true for other analysts, I am going to be supernatural trinitarian theist before I get to the argumentative threat of injustice anyway. Even if I started from injustice, sooner or later I would be looking to discern logical priorities in argumentation, and once I do that: here I will be again! At which point, although I wouldn't (and shouldn't) discount the reality of injustice, I would be (and am) slotting it into a coherent, developing, progressive metaphysic, in light of positions developed through logical priorities.

Second: I also notice that for this argument to have even a chance of working, the anti-theist must be making an ethical judgment based on his adequate (and reasonably accurate) perception of an objectively real and foundational standard. It must not be merely his (or our) own wishful thinkings, nor an irrationally produced delusion (nor some combination thereof).

But such a standard must be ethical in quality at its source, and thus requires an eternally foundational relationship of Person-to-Person.

If the God Whom I think exists does not exist, then that judgment of the 'evil' quality of behaviors cannot be objectively grounded (not even by the objectivist secular attempt, as I discussed in Chapter 36). But then this particular anti-theistic argument cannot possibly lead to a valid conclusion that God does not exist.

If God, the orthodox trinitarian God, does exist, then the evil, the intentional misbehavior of derivative personal entities that gives this argument its strength, can also exist; but then the argument using the existence of such evil against God's existence or character, must nevertheless reach a false conclusion.

Ironically, it takes God's existence as a Trinty in Unity, for such an argument against God's existence-and/or-character to have any real strength: the Independent Fact, the ground of all reality, must be active and sentient (at least 1 Person); the IF must be self-existent and thus Self-Begetting and Self-Begotten (at least 2 Persons, which also establishes the foundationally objective ethicality of reality); the IF must be relating to us as Person to persons, so that we can have some perception of the ethical standard; and this relationship must take place within the overarching reality of God's Self-existent existence--thus

at least 3 Persons, with the Third Person in at least basic communication with the spirits of derivative rational creatures such as ourselves. (In a double irony--or perhaps reassurance!--this conclusions implies that the anti-theistic Argument from Evil must still somehow some real strength. I will examine the real and proper strength behind the argument, and its implications, soon.)

Third, and perhaps much more personally to the point: I know, and am willing to admit, that in my own degree I have on occasion willingly contributed to the injustice and sinful hatred which, when recognized, give this anti-theistic argument such apparent power.

So, you think such an argument has some force, do you? Very well: what was God supposed to do with me, to prevent me from adding to the evil? Or do you think that a little evil on my part would be okay, but a lot of evil makes the difference?

No--the principle works in principle, or not at all. My own 'little' evils must be part and parcel of your argument against God.

So, what was God supposed to be able to do, to prevent me from acting in such a way? Not create me at all? And if not me, then how many others? Everyone except yourself? Are you sinless? If not, then should God not have created you, either, and so not have given you the opportunity and ability to breach the most

fundamental of principle relationships in reality? Or, would 'you' be better off if 'you' did not exist? But how could that be?! Yet if God allows you your freedom, shall He not allow others? And if He allows other people freedom--other people like me--how shall He be absolutely certain of preventing me from mistreating you? By making me a sock-puppet? Then I am not 'me'! Shall He nix every potentially harmful physical effect that might flow from my intentions? I have news for you: that would not stop my evil, for the possibility of my actively evil intent would remain, even if no notable result, no suffering, followed in the physical world.

Oh, so perhaps it is not the evil per se that powers the argument, but the suffering that exists!--the suffering that forces reactions and so reduces us as persons, whether that suffering is pain or pleasure. (Proponents of this anti-theistic argument do not always remember that pleasurable suffering may in its own way be even worse than pain; for at least pain allows us to know that something is wrong. But pleasurable suffering is addictive and encourages whatever is happening wrongly to continue and increase. I don't hold a forgetting or ignorance of this against such proponents; but I do recognize it myself in a careful accounting.)

The anti-theistic argument then becomes:

"If God existed and/or had the characteristics you say He does, He would take more steps to minimize or even eradicate

suffering. But suffering exists, and in great quantities.

Therefore..., etc."

I do feel the same way, too, on occasion--including when I suffer! So I can sympathize with the emotional power of this revision of the argument.

But then I am obligated to ask: how am I, who am non-omniscient, supposed to know whether God has not in fact minimized suffering insofar as all His other plans allow room for?

There is no way I can possibly know this; I am equally certain that you cannot possibly know this, either. Whereas, on the other hand, the argument to God that I have already developed, gives me solid ground for trusting that God is in fact minimizing suffering insofar as all His other plans, goals and intentions allow room for: a conclusion of principle that doesn't require omniscient polling.

The emotional power of the argument admittedly remains in force; but its logical validity requires us to be capable of knowing what God knows about the necessary interrelationships of everything in creation, so that we have a useful standard by which to validly draw such a conclusion. This is impossible; consequently, the argument fails.

I presume (as I have said before) that you, my sceptical reader, would not accept from me as reliably valid an argument for God's existence, based on my feelings of awe on a mountain

or in a cathedral. So if we are down to discussing a mere feeling, no matter how noble in character, then I think the same principle must still hold: whatever credit this feeling reflects of you, it does not effectively ground the argument by itself.

But still: you may maintain (if you are someone such as I myself) that the suffering in our world cries out for a justice that you are not perceiving. And, have I not said that God shall never set aside either His justice or His love?

Do you, my reader, perhaps feel--or even think--that God should be held accountable in some fashion for this suffering? That He should pay for allowing you and me and other entities to introduce and maintain and propagate suffering in the world? That no matter how I juggle the bill, God ends up being responsible for the meal--and He should be held responsible?

Do you think this?

Good!

I think you are quite correct. And I will ask you to remember it, later.

Meanwhile, if you do think this--and I imagine at bottom most honest sceptics who care about justice do think it, because I also think it!--then make sure your sauce cooking the Gander cooks my goose as well.

If you think God deserves to pay for setting up this situation--what do you think I, who am a sinner contributing to the situation, deserve?

Do I not also deserve to pay, for the contributions I have directly made to the misery of the world? What do I, a sinner unlike God, deserve?

Well, perhaps you are feeling a bit charitable toward me. Perhaps you will say that (unlike God??) I have excuses.

I think you are right: I do have excuses. And I think the excuses do 'excuse' me--as far as they go.

But, if I tell you that there have been times when I just flat decided to sin; that I can honestly look at myself and see at least one time when I had no excuse for my behavior, no explanation other than my willful intent to do what I knew to be wrong--

then, my reader, what do you say I deserve?

I will tell you what the logic of the position I have developed, requires that I deserve--not only what I deserve, but what I shall receive.

I have said it before already, and I will say it again now:

I deserve to die.

I must die.

I shall die.

Well... What else remains to be said?

Quite a lot, actually!--so on to the next chapter.

CHAPTER 42 -- Death

I ended my previous chapter by noting once more what the logic of my position leads to:

I not only deserve to die, I shall die.

Perhaps you think I am being rather hard on myself. And perhaps you are right. Then again, perhaps I deserve to be rather hard on myself!

But then again (again!), it is worth considering the question of what it means to die.

What happens when I sin? I essentially set myself up in opposition to the principles of interpersonal relationships--not merely in this or that form (about which I may be mistaken concerning their accuracy at reflecting the ultimate principles), but I set myself intently against them in principle.

I think it is also possible to sin by willfully resolving to delude myself as to the state of reality--again, whether my perceptions of reality are themselves particularly accurate makes no difference. If I resolve myself to believe something that isn't true, then it might be an honest accident; if I resolve myself to insist on believing that what I think to be true is not true, then I am rebelling against the truth (regardless of whether I happen to be correct about what I think

to be true), putting myself up over against it--and so I am acting rebellion against God Himself.

I do not mean the legal form of rebellion. That sort of rebellion might be 'good' or 'evil' depending on its object. If Satan is the prince of this world, then to rebel against the greatest of rebels may well be to seek to become a servant of God! Or, to 'rebel' against the 'greatest rebel' might mean only to set myself up as the greatest rebel instead!

But again, it is not the mere form of rebellion that I am talking of--as if God is only a king, merely Someone Who has massive power, against Whom it would be (consequently) merely dangerously imprudent to rebel.

The rebellion I am speaking of, is an intent to go against however much I can discern of what reality is.

And ultimately, at the top and bottom of things, God is reality.

To insist on embracing what I perceive to be inconsistencies, for the sake of my own wishes, is to set my face against reality, to go against it insofar as I possibly can.

And this will be true, whether I am pagan, pantheist, atheist, agnostic; Hindu, Buddhist, Jewish, Muslim--or Christian.

There is nowhere I can safely be a traitor to reality.

So, if I treat you, my reader, as if you are not a person-- as if you do not have your own qualities intrinsic to being 'a person', the same qualities I recognize myself having as a person--while nevertheless realizing (or even seriously suspecting!) that you have those qualities; then I would be resolving to set myself against however much of the principles of interpersonal conduct I am capable of recognizing.

To put it simply, I would be refusing to love you as I love myself.

But the simplicity of that saying, especially in times and places when terms such as 'love' and even 'person' have become so malleable as to be useless, obscures the depth of the breach that my willed intent involves.

If I set myself against you in this fashion, then I set myself against the foundational principles of reality itself-- for reality itself proceeds according to the necessary principles of a Personal relationship, the relationship of the self-existently begetting and begotten God, Who in His Unity is the Independent Fact grounding all reality, including Himself.

The relationship of God to His creation is utterly self-consistent; and so for me to actively intend evil against you, my reader, entails ultimately that I am sinning against God-- trying to break away from Him, trying to be what I am not: for I am not self-sufficient, nor do I have any right or even power to

be the determinant of what is 'right' (either ethically or 'merely' factually).

I may discover, perhaps, what is true and good; or at least I may resolve to discover, if I can, what is true and good. There is no ultimate harm to me in this; for one way or another it is the path of seeking the Father (even if the path seems to lead away from Him at first).

But to intend to command what shall be or what should be?

That would be to push myself away in rejection from that which is--or more accurately, from He Who Is.

Let us say as another example, that I have an intuition within me (however it came to be there) that no matter how hard I try, in the long run I shall always lose money to the casino. Perhaps I decide, "Very well: it is my money, it is entertaining to experience the ups and downs, I understand the limitations: I will play anyway." This is not necessarily a sin, at least taken by itself. (It would be a sin if, for instance, I was using money that I knew should be used for something else!)

Or perhaps I decide that I will test and learn and understand the mechanics better, to see if my intuition is correct regarding the futility of playing against the house edges. This is certainly not a sin, by itself: it is seeking better knowledge, and more light than what I have.

But let us say I discover I was correct in my first intuition; or, let us say I never bother to work for the

verifying knowledge, so that either way I am back where I started: I have an intuition within me that in the long run I can only lose money at the casino. And let us say I resolve within myself this intent: I do not care what I feel, or what I think, or what anyone may possibly say--I am going to play that casino, and I am going to beat it.

What am I doing?

It doesn't matter that I might technically be correct; perhaps there is a way, in some circumstances, to beat the casino. But I have no real grounds (in this scenario) for believing this; I merely want, and insist on being able, to beat the casino, despite what my reason and/or even my feelings are telling me.

Furthermore, let us say that as I begin to fulfill this intensive resolve, I run up against observations or otherwise reliable testimony, which I recognize to be reliable in principle, and which go against my intensive resolve. And I say to myself, "I am not going to listen to this. It shall be the way I want it to be!" And so I continue on.

Now what am I doing?

I am going against what little light I have, and I am not honestly trying to seek more light; neither for proper verification nor for correction.

I am not merely refusing to accept the reality I recognize--such a refusal, by itself, might lead to a proper discovery of

more accurate knowledge about reality: a better recognition. No, I am actively enforcing a resolve to selectively interpret any data I get or to ignore it if I cannot interpret it 'favorably' to my wish. I am setting myself up over against reality, in principle.

But I am a derivative creature. If I do this, what shall happen to me?

I shall (metaphorically speaking) bump my head against something that has the full mighty force of reality in its favor: in this case the house edge of the casino, combined with anything else the casino is doing to thwart me.

I shall hurt myself, and badly, and more badly in (probable) proportion to how far I insist on deluding myself.

This is a minor example, of course. But even in this case, I would be resolving myself to go against whatever reality happens to actually be--not to discover and then work with what reality happens to be.

It is the same as if I had decided to trample underfoot the relationship you and I have, as person to person.

The attitude I have just described involves, ultimately, a breach on my part against God--for God is reality, and even if I did not know Him to be reality, I at least believed something about reality that I insisted on nevertheless redefining according to my own mere willful preferences.

God may not expect me (on a case-by-case basis) to treat Him as God, if I do not know Him as God: He, being altogether and ultimately fair, would not expect me to do what I am currently incapable of doing (although He will want me to learn eventually to know Him).

But I had still better treat reality a particular way: I had better not set myself in principle against whatever reality happens to be! There ought to be a small, still voice inside me saying: "this looks to be a contradiction, and you should not accept contradictions."

I may check whether what I perceive is a contradiction or not--there is no harm in that.

But to resolve in advance to weigh the scales of my judgment so that I will learn to treat as 'reality' whatever I merely wish to be true--maybe even what I think I know to be false?

That is a blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.

But I do not want to emphasize, at the moment, the personal rejection God has of such an attitude of mine that I am describing. You, my reader, may still be thinking in terms of mere 'king' imagery: as if God was only a 'king', who might only be peeved that I am not obeying him.

God is not that way. I am talking of the ultimate fact of reality; and I am talking of the sorts of actions I could take to set myself in opposition to reality. It is true that God,

being personal, will have a personal displeasure in my doing these things; but I will suppose that my sceptical reader may not yet have a grasp of just how deeply God roots reality.

So, if you wish to have a mental image of my intransigence, perhaps you should think in terms of what shall happen to me if I insist on holding my breath. If I hold it long enough (perhaps in a fit of pique, perhaps out of pride), then naturally speaking I shall lose consciousness and then my autonomic reflexes shall take over and I shall begin to breathe again (circumstances permitting).

But to willfully set myself in principle against whatever the truth may be, is to hold my breath against God, so to speak. God is the source of my life and existence.

If I push myself away from life, what shall happen to me?
I shall die.

But the imagery I am using here is still faulty; there is nowhere I can push myself to, so that God is 'further away' than before. It is not as though I refuse the air and dive deep into the black water, seeking the cold and the fire of the rock below, stifling and suffocating myself in my pride. There is no 'cold water' into which I can push myself, where the 'air' does not exist.

Hell is not a place or condition entirely separate from the omnipresence of God; although the greatest of rebels, as the greatest rebel, would certainly wish (and wish for us) to think

that!--thus to deny God's omnipresence and so to deny God's existence as the fundamental and sole Independent Fact of reality: allowing the rebel room to promote himself as being equal or superior to God.

So to 'die' as a result of my sin does not mean I would actually succeed in reaching somewhere or some state of existence 'free from' God. To claim otherwise would be to deny the omnipresence of God; and I have learned that God is omnipresent. (Ironically, then, to insist on such a separation happening, whether for myself or for someone else, even though I know and affirm the omnipresence of God, will be to... what?)

However, such a death could mean that I would blink out of existence altogether in some way (at least as a person, perhaps even as a corporate physical entity). Perhaps; but that could only happen by God's permission--I cannot 'force' Him to do that.

But would God let me do that?

I suppose it is technically possible that God might choose to let me utterly 'win' as a sinner; not merely to win a battle here and there (although a Pyrrhic victory it would certainly be!), but to win the war I instigate against Him. I push myself away, or even clamor to be over against, the source of my life; and God could possibly say, "Fine, if that is what you wish, you may have your wish"--at which point I would cease to exist, for I am not the Independent, and it is intrinsically contradictory

for there to be more than one Independent, and therefore even if He wanted to, God could not grant me that scope for my wish. Much less could I ever attain that scope in any other fashion.

But I do not think He would ever choose to allow me to reap annihilation, either. That would be the final renouncement of any possible fair-togetherness between me and any other entity (including God). So God, in even allowing such a thing to happen (much moreso in actively annihilating the person), God Himself would be acting to complete non-togetherness between persons: God Himself would be acting against His own intrinsic eternal action of self-existence! It would be God, then, Who was being non-righteous! This couldn't even be justice; not the justice of any kind of true, Godly righteousness (if trinitarian theism is true.)

It certainly couldn't be love. God Himself, Who is love in His own trinitarian fundamental existence, could act to delay the fulfillment of love to me until a later time (since all natural times are present to God, and so the eventual fulfillment of love would be present to God the eternal--Who might even prophecy about this 'ahead of time' from our temporal perspective.) But act to deny (not merely delay) the fulfillment of love to me?--to actually, even if sovereignly, choose intentionally against such a fulfillment ever happening? What worse contradiction of theology could be imagined?! I might as well deny the reality of the orthodox Trinity at once and

convert to Islam, or perhaps to Christian Arianism, and be done with it! [See an extended footnote below on Arianism in the first comment.]

Much less would matters be theologically improved if God was outright defeated by some other entity, whether by me the sinner or whoever, resulting in my annihilation. Such a position does not even rise to being supernaturalistic theism.

Or: would God, being essentially love, be respecting my derivative personhood in gracious love, to allow me to freely choose to utterly destroy my personhood (and thus also to utterly destroy my freedom, not incidentally)? The question practically answers itself: of course not.

If I stop existing, then it will be impossible for God to act in such a way that His love toward me should be fulfilled; nor could His love toward me be fulfilled, without my becoming a true and good person--a true and good son.

No: I conclude that God would choose to refuse any such wish from me. I might intend to cut myself from His apron-strings, so to speak--or rather from my dependence on God's life-support!--but it would be contradictory to think that God would let me fully succeed. It would not be consistent, in all of several ways, with a fulfillment of His love; and God shall, God will, be self-consistent.

Moreover, I can test this experimentally, if I dare--or rather, I can draw conclusions from past experience that I can treat as 'experiments'.

I have sinned.

Yet, here I am.

Yet I must and shall die; it is a necessary consequence of cutting myself off from Life.

But then again, I have not (nor apparently ever can, nor ever shall) cut myself off totally from Life. So the death I shall face is not of that sort. And this is a grace of God; for how could 'I' benefit from achieving non-existence!?

What sort of death remains?

It must be a partial death--to some degree, perhaps even to an extreme degree, but no further. And it must be a shadow of something that God Himself can, or does, accomplish.

So, what sorts of divine 'death' have I covered so far?

If I start from where I am, and work backward through creation to God, the first divine action of death I find (although not the most basic) is the death God willingly undertakes in order to create from Himself not-God entities--such as Nature and myself. (This notion was inferred and more extensively covered back in Section Three.)

Here, God willingly but partially kills Himself, making that which proceeds from this action to be something without His full divine characteristics--making indeed a 'portion' at all, a

not-God creation distinct from begetting (or proceeding). This creation does retain some shadow of His characteristics--existence for example! But derivative not independent existence; the characteristics of creation, unlike the characteristics of God, are literally "attributed" to creation and so are "attributes". The creation retains partial characteristics of God, which to the creation (so far as it is rational) seem to be positive characteristics (and relatively they are, insofar as they are functionally distinctive attributes); but compared to their Origin they must be negative attributes, for they are less--and result in less--than God.

When God created me, He would have created me (in absence of other factors--and I will discuss this later) in as perfect a union with Himself as I could be, while yet still being distinctly a 'me'. I would have attributes proper to God's intentions for me; perhaps not immediately all the attributes He intends for me, especially if I have some processes of growth to undergo, but still as much as possible for my condition at any given moment. And because I am an intensive (although derivative) creature, some of those aspects would be linked to the state of my intentions.

So, if I choose to shatter my relationship with God in any fashion, then there would occur by necessity (and the necessities would already be fully known to God, and certainly planned as such, 'in advance' from my perspective, in case I did

choose this) certain consequences contingent on that partial severance which I (unlike the Persons of the single Unity of God) have rebelliously enacted.

Although I don't know whether I can establish this deductively, I suspect the consequential state would involve a partial loss of the infusion of divine Life into me, as well as some sort of loss of my effective ability to do sentient activities: basically, my ability to love and to think would be crippled. The actual results might be any number of things in particular; but I notice, in point of fact, that my ability to think rationally and to interact personally with you my neighbor, and the emotions related to these events, are very often at the (non-)mercy of mere physical reactions.

Furthermore, it seems to me that more often than not, people who continually choose to abuse their relationship to reality--whether or not they 'know' God--end up hampering whatever abilities they would otherwise 'naturally' have in this regard.

A person who, for instance, insists on drinking harmful amounts of alcohol into her body for pleasure, shall sooner or later face frightful physical consequences, including emotional instability, interpersonal incompetency, and rational ineffectiveness.

A person who insists on treating other persons as mere tools for his or her own sexual pleasure, shall sooner or later

become psychologically and even physically addicted to the thrills involved--leading again to increased emotional instability, interpersonal incompetency, and rational ineffectiveness.

A person who insists on cheating to get his way, sooner or later ends up unable to effectively discern what is true and what is false; unable to build effective relations between himself and other people; and unable to control the increasing paranoia of his emotional life.

These are merely some examples to illustrate the principle. I presume that you, my reader, once you understand the principle, will be able to discern your own examples in your life around you.

(Assuming, of course, that you have not already poisoned yourself physically and psychologically until you yourself can no longer reliably discern reality with some effective rationality and empathy.)

There might be, as I have said, other consequent effects involved for me in this kind of 'death'. God does not exactly suffer this kind of death (although He could--as a fatal consequence for Himself and all subordinate reality if He did!); for His creative death is willingly enacted for the sake of the creation itself. Thus He retains full effective authority as well as active effectiveness within the results of that death. His is a death to-and-for life; except the resultant created

life is only a shadow of God's ultimate Life, as is only proper and indeed as is only possible. The horrible results of this shadow of death in me, come from my intransigence--and from the intransigence of others, although I will defer that issue until a little later.

Yet even if I was not somehow required to 'put up with' the results of other rebellious self-deaths which affect me (results which might even take place 'within' me), I would still probably be in much the same position once I had enacted my own rebellious self-death.

But I am not interested at the moment (and will never be primarily interested) in assigning portions of blame to persons other than myself. I am trying to keep my discussion as simple as possible: for I know that I am a sinner.

If I continue in this rebellion, what shall happen to me?

Inference from natural experience shows me quite well, if formal logic did not already suggest it: the death shall continue to increase in me.

It is a tautology: the more I choose to hamper my ability to interact with reality, the more hampered I shall be!

I mean that this shall happen if God chooses that my actions shall have a real bearing on the outcome of my history (and thus, within my own degree of effectiveness, on the outcome of the history of the natural system in which I live). I do not know the extent to which God negates the harmful results of my

willful mistakes; but I do know that He chooses not to rescind the dignity He has given to me and to every other rationally active creature (including you)--the dignity of causality. The things I do, make real differences; they may not matter as much as I (in my pride or desperation) want them to matter, but they still do matter.

And one of those consequences is that if I continue to kill myself sinfully, I shall continue to cut myself further and further away from the source of life, and thus I shall continue to die, not to more life, but to more horrible death in me.

Let me point out that what we can describe as my 'physical' death may be part of this consequence, but it is not the final extent of the consequences. If that death ever ended the existence of 'me', then once again God would be allowing something to happen for which there was no hope of His ever fulfilling His love in me.

Yet, obviously physical deaths, including of rational sentients such as myself, do happen. I expect to die physically.

But, I do not expect to die spiritually.

What may possibly happen to me after my physical death is not something I have discussed or inferred yet; all I say at the moment is that whatever it is, it must not violate God's love nor His justice in His relationship to me--and my non-existence after my physical death would, I think, violate at least His

love and justice, permanently non-fulfilling them. So I can rule that out, at least.

What we normally call 'death', then, is not the end.

But, it might perhaps mean that in a particular way, I shall have finished dying!

On the other hand, perhaps I will choose to continue that sort of dying after my physical death occurs.

If I can and do choose this, then the horrible results shall continue as well; and I expect (as here in this Nature) those results would increase in intensity against me.

But--is there perhaps another sort of death I might choose also, or instead?--a death that might even properly guide a sacrificial death of mine for the sake of other creations? And might I perhaps even now begin to choose that death instead of rebellion?--might I even now begin to choose that higher death, the holy death, and so submit to Life as well?

For there is another level of the divine death, that I have not yet discussed in relation to this topic. But it shall require another chapter.

CHAPTER 43 -- the highest death

I have previously decided that the consequences of my sin must logically, ethically entail that I shall certainly die.

And I have been discussing what kinds of death should take place in me as a consequence of my sin.

I decided that my utter annihilation was a technical possibility, but that it would be inconsistent with the hope of the fulfillment of God's love to me if He allowed the total fulfillment of the consequences of my wishful, willfully chosen intransigence. So although that type of death is possible for me--and even remains possible for God Himself, although He never has and never shall choose it--I think I can deductively conclude it shall never happen to me. My physical dissolution makes no difference: I, me, myself, shall by God's grace somehow continue.

And, perhaps I will continue rebelling and thus insisting upon the debased death of rebellion, against life and love and reality--abusing the ever-given grace of God.

I have been inferring these potential modes of death by examining the sorts of death which I have already discovered that God chooses to put Himself through, or might possibly choose. He might possibly choose self-annihilation, which would be the necessary consequence of intentionally fracturing His

eternal Unity of self-existent self-grounding. But you and I are still here, so He never has and never shall choose to do anything which results in that.

I also deduced (many chapters ago) that God does inflict a partial sort of death on Himself in order to create. After considering the principles involved in the relationship between that choice and its effects (the creation of a distinct not-God entity within the overarching reality of God as the Independent Fact), I compared my own situation as a derivative rebel and applied the same principles; with the conclusion that (as a continuing rebel) a horrible death-of-self would ensue in me, resulting in my partial loss of rational control and efficiency within this Nature: a loss and progressive corruption-death that would increase as I increased my rebellions, and that my physical death would not by itself terminate, for my willful intention ability is only conditioned by my physical composition; my intentioning does not arise solely from it.

Exactly what I would experience in that case, I am not sure I can imagine properly, nor have I properly examined the issue yet; but calling it 'a spiritual hell' seems to be reasonably accurate.

After all, I am entirely capable of going quite far in creating a hell for myself (and for other persons!) here within this Nature.

But this particular shadow is not the only death I can discern. There is a far more fundamental divine death that eternally occurs, beyond what God sacrifices in Himself for the sake of creation's own existence; and this higher, highest death would also be profitable for me to consider, even with regard to the death I should die as a sinner.

I am speaking of the death-to-self that the Son willingly and eternally undergoes so that the circuit of God's self-existence remains whole, and so ultimate reality, God Himself, self-exists.

God begets Himself as a Person. (I am not yet talking about an Incarnation, keep in mind.) But the Begotten Person of God is not the Begetting Person of God; so the Son could choose to break the Unity. He never has, nor never shall (for here you and I still are); but it remains a possibility.

This breach of the fundamental eternally active principles of the Holy Unity is something I have chosen (sinfully, rebelliously) to do; but God's eternally active grace (in and as that Holy Unity) spares me from the utter end of that action of mine. So the death that God never chooses, never shall completely happen to me, however much I might explicitly or tacitly wish for it.

But, what about the death-to-self eternally chosen by the Son?

I can see two possibilities for myself, here; both of which are a properly derivative shadow of that eternal death-to-self.

In one possibility, my self--the part that makes 'me'--ceases utterly to exist, even if perhaps its components (both natural and supernatural) continue to exist. But this is no different in principle from the utter annihilation that God never chooses; and I have already decided He would not let me go through that, for it would leave Him no possibility of fulfilling His love nor his justice to me--for justice must be intrinsically and inextricably connected to the righteousness of fair-togetherness (such as found in the interpersonal relationship of the Trinity.)

The other possibility would be for me to intentionally renounce my willful breach with God and thus kill (and suffer the death of) the willfully perverted shape of my 'self' which I have chosen and in which I currently exist. As it is, it would cease to exist; but it would 'cease' to be 'as it is', by retaking its proper shape.

This would not be a 'bad' thing to happen to me; it would in fact be my healing and salvation! Like the other sorts of utter death I might possibly undergo, which I have already discussed, I would not be capable of achieving this death without God's express permission and action. But, it would fulfill both justice and love to me; indeed, it would be the

reconciliation between myself and God!--by (and not without)
God's express permission and action toward that goal.

(I have to be talking for a while, due to the current topic, about my own responsibilities and responsible choices, for better or for worse, including in my redemption from sin. But I want to emphasize that this does not happen apart from God, much less over against God, and especially not without God seeking me first. Indeed, as I have been arguing, this seeking and exhortation is a critical, constant role of the 3rd Person in God's relationship to derivative persons, where those persons--such as myself--are rebels.)

Furthermore, this would be the death for myself that I should have been always choosing: the same death God constantly chooses for Himself to unite Himself to Himself in eternal self-existence. I am only a derivative creature, so that particular result is not possible for me (I cannot be God, fully God); but I am inferring that a shadow of that result is entirely possible for me. Moreover, it fits perfectly into the mode of creation, and finishes the circuit within the wheels of holy life-through-death eternally enacted by God.

God dies-to-Himself (the Person of the Son submitting to the Person of the Father) to maintain His intraPersonal Unity, thereby taking the basic action that provides His self-existence. This basic action also provides the ground and ability for other actions of God, entailing creation of some

type of not-God system and not-God entities--for example the evident system of Nature, and myself. But these new divine actions also require a sort of divine death, similar in ultimate principle to the highest death but different in practice: a death allowing you and me and the Nature we share to exist. Life comes from Life, and from the willing sacrificial submission of Life for the good of Life (and of life), at each stage.

And from the descent into the death-in-life of the natural (automatically reactive) system--although the system itself is constantly overseen and upkeep and partially manipulated by God, even if not totally manipulated lest it be no true creation--rises life again: derivatively, as fragile as froth within the infinite sea of the Living Power, guided and crafted gently and subtly by God; until this shadow of life reaches the synthetic shape, natural and supernatural combined, so that derivative sentience may come into existence.

And so the extended circle comes closer to completion. Yet these lives may choose to do what God never has and never shall do: they may rebel. If they don't, they must still eventually be brought to die-to-self, as younger siblings of the Older Brother (I must speak analogically here); for they themselves are begotten in their own fashion of God, even though they (including me) are not the only truly Begotten of the Father Who is God Himself.

And so by learning to understand truths (even subordinate ones) and then choosing to live in harmony with what they understand, they undertake their own willed death-to-self which increases and actualizes their very 'selves', until God accomplishes His stages of revelation (using whatever means He deems fit, in general or in particular) and they know God as Father and choose to love Him; choose to learn from Him personally; choose to think the way He thinks; choose to love the way He loves.

When the children do this, when they even strive to begin to do this, when they are even seeking what shall ultimately lead them to this personal relationship with their Father; then they are in the midst of fulfilling the role for which the Father created them.

Then they are feeding on their food, which is God Himself, Who is Life eternal.

Yet just as their condition is based on several sorts of holy and necessary death-in-life, what they must choose to accomplish (whether or not they rebel) is also death-in-life. Like the Son, to accomplish this they must willingly commit: 'Father, we choose to work in harmony with You, at the expense of at least one thing we could possibly try to claim for ourselves.'

What is this one thing these children have willingly given up? Only the consequences of simple 'death'; only the

consequences of trying to push away from the source of their life and power and happiness.

But, they shall still retain the ability to choose this other path.

And they may choose it, if they really wish it.

Admittedly, any who choose eternal death may not get it, thanks to the graciousness of the Father Who refuses to let the hope of His love also die--for then would the Unity be fractured as the Father sets aside His own reality of love and justice, and all reality would cease.

No, they may not receive the eternal death; but they shall receive as much cessation of life they can ask for while still remaining persons.

How much cessation that can be, only God and the greatest of rebels can know; and perhaps such a rebel is still perversely plumbing new depths. Yet it is not infinite death.

But the higher death, the holy death, the death-in-life not simply death, is the death I need to die; the death I should have been dying all along in order to live.

Shall I have this death as well? Only if God chooses never to set aside His love and His justice--and here you and I still are!

So I may rest assured: this holy death and (consequently) that holy life, are still available to me. Somehow, God will be working to fulfill it.

But it cannot be consummated, until I also choose it.

And, even if I choose it, the restoration may require a process--indeed, considering all the other processes instituted by God in the first place in order to create me, and considering all the processes I see in the derivative world around me, I think I may at least bet on the intuitive probability if not the certainty that some process shall be necessary: because I am a derivative creature who must move through a derivative time.

It may be necessary for me to fulfill the lower death as well, the consequences of my rebellion (as well as perhaps the consequences of the rebellion of other persons), so that justice and the other self-consistencies of reality shall not be broken.

And unless I expect God to set aside His love, there must be some aspect even of simple death that, perhaps by humbling myself to suffer it, shall also fulfill His love in me.

But what type of process may I expect? And is it really quite fair that I must suffer the consequences of sin?

Perhaps, you may allow, it is true I ought to complete the fulfillment of that suffering for the things I have done wrong; but you are entirely aware of plenty of instances of suffering which do not seem to be aids to humility, or anything of that sort. What, you may say, of victims such as the little girls raped and murdered by the Nazis (or, perhaps you will point out, by the Crusaders and other ostensibly 'holy' soldiers of the

church)? Shall I stand here and claim that all suffering comes as a direct result of the sin of the people who suffer!?

No, in fact I do not. I have had my own share of victimization during my life, but it shrinks to invisibility compared to what other victims have suffered, and I will not use my own puny sorrows as an example.

Still, I am also a responsible adult person, who thinks he has some idea of what he himself has contributed to the world's undeserved suffering (again, thank God, not quite as badly as it could be, but any amount is bad enough), and who thinks he has some idea of what he himself deserves and could use for humility should God decide to allow it. So although I cannot say I look forward to being victimized and to suffering, and although I can defend myself in good conscience from such suffering insofar as I can, I think I can say that I myself will resent it less, relatively speaking, when it does occur--so long as I remember that such results are a price to be paid for the world in which I live, and in which I myself am allowed to be free enough to work my own injustices (wrong though those are) if I choose.

Yet my sceptical reader is quite right: there are too many people on earth who seem to suffer out of proportion to whatever they apparently deserve--and even one such person would be 'too many'. How or why would God allow this situation to exist? Where is this justice that I keep insisting must be fulfilled? And

what can I possibly say that will begin to account for these horrors?

I have stepped around this issue long enough. The time has come to address it, and I think it must be addressed before I consider what God must be doing about it, or at the least what we can reasonably expect Him to be doing about it. So I will continue in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 44 -- The Fall

In my previous chapter, I probably sounded as if I was waxing rhapsodic about death, and how great it was, and how much I need it.

In a way, I was doing precisely that. But I agree it seems specious for me to sit here in my comfortable chair, sniffing over whatever puny sins I have committed in my life and trying to resolve myself to Face Death Like A Man; when all across our planet tonight vicious rapes and murders and grotesque physical and psychological violations are being performed by human fiends upon people whom I cannot possibly have definite grounds for saying 'the victims deserved that'.

No, I refuse to argue that each and every victim of atrocity is receiving the just deserts of their own sins. There is no way I can possibly know that, and I staunchly insist that it certainly doesn't look that way to me--as it doesn't to most sceptics (as well as to most believers).

Then again, agnosticism on a topic tends to cut both ways: if I cannot possibly know that every victim is (thereby) getting what he or she deserves, then I also cannot possibly know that they aren't (thereby) getting it, either. That may not be a very palatable thought, especially to a charitable heart (such as I

presume honest and righteous sceptics have); but that is the way the logical math goes--at least, from this direction.²⁵³

This is why I started with the one person I have any real chance of deriving the most accurate information about: me.

I know I do things I think are wrong. I know (especially after factoring in the arguments I have been developing throughout this book, concerning the existence of God and the properties of His relationship to me) that I deserve at least some of the sufferings which happen to me--not only as part of the self-consistent chain of cause and effect, but ethically speaking as well.

But: am I inflicted with sufferings I do not deserve?

It seems to me that this happens to me; and I think I can safely presume that you, my reader, also have had sufferings that you think you do not deserve. I don't mean sufferings for which you or I merely cannot happen to see why we would deserve

²⁵³ For what it is worth, the scriptures I consider to be authoritative affirm that sufferings do not always happen to people who specifically deserve those sufferings. The entire Book of Job in the Hebrew Scriptures stands as testimony to the real tragedy of undeserved suffering. Job is quite correct: the story verifies from the first that he is not being punished in any fashion through the terrible events happening to him; and his three main friends are wrong, for they keep insisting that he is lying and there must be some secret sin he has committed which would provide ground for his sufferings being divine justice. At the same time, Job through his perseverance does become (apparently) a better person--so some good ultimately comes to him from his suffering.

Meanwhile, in the Christian New Testament, Jesus affirms that some calamities, such as people crushed by a falling tower at Siloam and a man born blind, were not judgments against the sins of those people.

However, I understand that my reader may not accept those scriptures as authoritative; I have not been using them to justify positions earlier in this book, and I won't start now--even to justify a position that I think most sceptics agree with: sufferings occur which people do not particularly deserve (no matter what good may come to those people, or others, later through the sufferings).

them--within such a vacuum of understanding, such sufferings might (after all) also be something we deserved and perhaps even were sent to help us.

No, those inscrutable sufferings are not what I mean, although those are still important and worth considering in themselves.

I mean that I (and I expect you) have had sufferings happen which, as far as we can tell, we should not have had to suffer. We are not only doers of injustice, we are also victims of injustice. And not only are we victims of injustice, we are beset by intense sufferings driving us to react impersonally.

In my own case, the sufferings were not that great--not in retrospect, although emotionally they were intense at the time--but that does not change the fact that as far as I can tell I was truly a victim of the sufferings, and was not receiving them as part of a punitive and/or purgative process related to particular sins of my own. (I do think I have also received, and am still receiving, some intense sufferings that serve a purgative purpose. I expect to receive more, too.)

I am presuming that at least some of my sceptical readers shall have had experiences of the same sort, and have drawn the same inferences about them: you did not deserve what happened to you as part of some punishment or purgation related to a sin of your own. Beliefs such as this (which I remind you I share) can

legitimately be severe emotional, and even logical, stumbling blocks toward accepting certain types of theism.

Nevertheless, another piece of information should also be accounted for, when discussing the problem.

I might think sufferings happen to me, which I did not particularly deserve in relation to some sin of mine.

But I know that I have inflicted troubles on people, which as far as I can tell they did not deserve!

They may or may not have 'deserved' the troubles after all--I don't know that; but I do know that I was inflicting those troubles either in total disregard for whether the people might deserve it, or after essentially deciding that I was going to do it even if they didn't deserve it--because I wanted to!

Once again: however terrible the problem of suffering (and evil) is, I find that when I take my own actions into account the problem becomes, not less terrible (I think it becomes even more terrible!), but far more coherent, explicable and understandable in principle.

The question "Why do people suffer things they apparently don't deserve?" is not only difficult to answer, but any attempt to answer it can look as though the scholar is some sort of monster who advocates needless suffering.

But when I ask the same question from the perspective of myself, matters begin to smooth out:

"Why am I allowed to be some sort of monster who on occasion can and does instigate suffering which as far as I know is undeserved?"

I think I can say that the sufferings I unjustly instigate are (and so far have been) relatively small: but the fact of the unjust suffering I instigate, is the important point in principle; just as the fact that my own (apparently) undeserved sufferings are really quite minor, makes no difference to the problem in principle.

I do not know what you, my reader, think of your own actions. Perhaps you think that every single action you have ever taken concerning other people, or even concerning yourself, has been completely justified--not merely by your own flat wish that they be justified, but justified objectively.

But if you can think of even one action you have taken, that you not only didn't know whether it was justified but you didn't care whether it was justified, and you also know that the receiver of the action suffered because of your action--then you are in the same boat with me.

I have a ground for thinking that virtually all humans are in the same boat with me here; but it is not a ground I have 'grounded' yet, so to speak, and I may never be able to ground it sufficiently for you, so I do not apply to it. If you recognize that you are in the same condition I am, then perhaps you can follow along more closely; but if you do not, then I

think it is still technically possible for you to understand why I am drawing the conclusions I will draw.

I am not basing my conclusions primarily on whether you or some other person actually must be instigating undeserved suffering. I don't have to talk about the sins of other people, to make this point. I know suffering exists which is to some extent undeserved--and that is the only fact necessary in principle for my argument to continue--because I know that I contribute to it myself. I am guilty of not basing all my own actions upon the constant resolution that I will never induce undeserved suffering.

Notice, by the way, that it doesn't even matter whether you and I agree over definitions of what sorts of suffering are or are not 'undeserved'. I admit, as shameful as it is, that I am occasionally willing to induce suffering, even if only very minor suffering, that I think is undeserved. This sort of admission of intent establishes the principles adequately.

Also, I will point out that if I constantly resolved to treat all actions I take as automatically justified, that would most certainly not solve the problem. It would perhaps fit into a reality where the only 'ethics' are intentionally invented in an individually subjectivistic manner; but I have already deduced that objective ethics exist which are independent of derivative reality--and my own wishes would count at best as part of that derivative reality.

This being the case, even though I could resolve to insist that whatever I choose to do is automatically justified by my mere intention of doing it, such an intention on my part would eventually entail resolving to set myself over against the objective standard of final reality--an usurpation which is not only impossible to ultimately succeed at (I cannot ever be the final standard for what is ethically right and wrong) but which in and of itself is just the type of action on my part I have been calling 'sin'.

I have deduced in previous chapters that I can possibly be, and actually am, a person who sins. Even if I disregarded that I am a rationally active person, and that God is a rationally active Person, then I could still account for the severity of this breach by describing it as a fundamental inefficiency on my part in relation to basic reality.

If I partially factor back in my sentience, the situation becomes even worse: I am intentionally acting in such a way that I am inefficient in relation to basic reality.

If I factor God's own rational sentience back into the situation, then I am describing a treachery which, in its own minor(!) derivative fashion, mirrors the cataclysmic results that would follow from the breaking of the divine Unity.

Now--would it, in any cogent sense, be love or justice to me (much more for any other people who have to put up with me!) for God to have created me in this condition originally?

Well, what is my condition?

I can willfully choose to sin. It makes sense for this capability to exist in me originally (or at least originally in concurrence with the development of my cognitive faculties), because the risk is a necessary corollary of my free will. If God creates a derivatively active entity, such as myself, it always remains technically possible that I could choose to personally transgress against the personal standard of basic reality, thus bringing upon myself the consequences of my actions--consequences which would reach deep into my relationship with basic reality, including my person-to-Person relationship with God. And if my relationship with basic reality becomes dissonant (it cannot ever become separate, for there is nowhere 'outside God' for me to successfully reach), then I shall obviously suffer something sooner or later.

To put it bluntly (and mechanically, in a reductive metaphor), this was not how I was designed to most efficiently behave.

It is therefore justice to me, if negatively so--it is another way of saying that some types of consequences necessarily follow from some types of events--that I should suffer for my transgressions.

Would it be love to me for God to allow me to suffer for my willed faults?

I think it would be love to me.

If I did not suffer from my willed faults in some fashion-- even if the fashion was merely an ache of emotional conscience-- then how could I possibly know I was doing something wrong?

In the Sam Raimi movie Darkman, the hero has lost the ability to feel pain, and is struggling to retain as much as he can of his humanity. At the end of a montage of frantic months-long research, he is so weary that his attention wanders while warming a test-tube over a bunsen burner. Without realizing it, his hand drifts over the burner, and he bursts into flame. But he doesn't feel it; he only realizes later that his hand is burning from the sound, and perhaps from the increase of light from that direction.

The scene is pitiful: the man, as a man, deserves to know he is burning his hand--so that he can do something about it!

In much the same way, I deserve to know that I am doing something ethically wrong; because without having some way to know it, I can never be in a position to responsibly do something about it.

Perhaps a mere warning 'of the conscience' would be sufficient?

I do not know about you, my reader, but I can testify that it is entirely possible for me to feel such a warning in my conscience--and then choose to smother it so I can get on with doing what I want to do! That smothering actively cuts off my

relationship with even what little personal relationship to God trickles through that channel.

What should happen to me then?

If you think I should be given more direct, and harder-to-ignore warnings, then I quite agree with you--but is it merely your uncharitable barbarity that prompts you to wish this for me!?

Or is it, in your own degree, a perception on your part of what it would take to fulfill love and justice in me?

I, at least, in my moments when I am simultaneously rational and willing to take responsibility for my actions, say: such a result to me, such an increase of intensity of warnings, fulfills the principles of both love and justice to me.

So provisions must be built-in to me, so that it is not only possible for me to suffer to greater and greater degrees, but so that the suffering follows necessarily upon certain cause/effect sequences (be they natural, or supernatural, or any combination of the two).

But these things could be true in potential even if I have never done anything to 'realize' that terrible possibility. Would God originally create me, so that I was already in the state I would otherwise willingly choose to reach by wishing (in essence) 'to hell with reality'?

No, I think this would be contradictory to His own standard of interPersonal willed intention.

Yet, here I am: in that condition of existence.

I conclude, therefore, that somehow, in some way, I have 'fallen'--fallen out of the ideal state God would have acted to create me to be in, and into the condition I find myself in.

Now, I can look at two different sets of data and infer my next conclusion independently from either of them.

If I was in total harmony with God originally, then I think my relationship to this Nature would have been significantly different than what I find it to be now. Yet, I don't ever remember being in that relationship with Nature. As far as my own memory goes, I seem to have been born in this condition.

But perhaps that is an illusion. However, I also have access to plenty of examples of other entities similar to my own type--other human persons, such as you, my reader--in all stages of life from cradle to the grave. All of them, or virtually all, are in the same relationship with Nature I am. There are some interesting hints of an improved relation here and there, among a few individuals or at particular moments in a person's life; but those hints invariably ratify the principle that to be in harmony with basic reality (in other words, to be in harmony, even if in ignorant harmony, with God) results in a significant and indeed marvelous improvement of our relationship with Nature.

Otherwise, the vast bulk of data suggests to me that human beings come into the world 'fallen'.

We come into the world in a relationship with Nature that seems to be the intrinsically hostile and dangerously inefficient relationship that would occur after we individually would choose to fall--the relationship, in short, that would signal to us something is drastically out-of-sync no matter how hard we're trying to ignore the implications of our condition.

At the same time, it seems a reasonably accurate inference from observation that humans other than myself 'sin'. For instance, a considerable fraction of the population is willing to admit that they sin; and a not-inconsiderable (yet different) fraction of the population is willing to admit that to behave in particular ways is truly ethically wrong even if they never admit to doing such a thing themselves--in other words, they testify to the principle even if they don't admit to transgressing the principle in practice.

Furthermore, it is not difficult to trace these same behaviors and states of being, as far back as the limits of recorded human history. With the first documents from the first civilizations, the condition is evident--often the condition, one way or another, has even provided the topic for the recorded communication!

The interpretations for why and how we are in this condition as a species differ formally--although they also often converge in surprising ways. This semi-convergence of interpretations, however, is not something I will use here as

evidence, for I am a metaphysician and not (primarily) a historian. I am only recognizing the existence of the general principle implied by the data.

So this observation, combined with the observation that the human species tends to increase its numbers on the average throughout our history, and combined with my deduction that God would not have created us in such a lamentable state, leads me to the following conclusion:

At some point in the distant past, a certain number of humans--probably a smaller number than we find in the first recorded civilizations--essentially rebelled against God (although they may have had different descriptions or pseudo-justifications for why and how they chose to do this), and fell out of whatever original state God had created us in originally.

These last few inferences have not necessarily been deductions. That I am in such a state, I think I have deduced; that God would not create me originally in the condition I find myself, I think I have also deduced. (It is certainly a position favored by many skeptics, since they often appeal to our current general condition as evidence for arguing against God's existence!) It seems to me a reasonably inductive further inference that humans in general are sinners, and also suffer some intrinsic result of human sinfulness from birth (even if they themselves have not yet rebelled).

If those inferences are granted, I can deduce (although it won't be stronger than any inductive argument in front of it) that we humans must have been this way for as long as we can (socially speaking) remember--the evidence necessarily entails this. From that point, I can inductively infer (subordinate to the prior sub-chain of inductive inferences) a further conclusion.

The condition seems endemic to our species, as far back as we go in history. But if my previous arguments concerning God's existence and personal character are valid, then we must not have always been that way. Yet at the dawn of recorded history, we all (as far as I can tell) are fallen. And the fallen state of our species can hardly be said to be more efficient at allowing us to live in the Nature God created, than whatever ideal condition in which He had originally produced us. (I mean the fallen condition in general must be less efficient. Granted, after the 'fall', we might still have increased particular sorts of efficiency beyond whatever we were capable of at the time of the fall. I don't think we could, or can, be more efficient than we would have been had we remained unfallen as a species.)

Therefore all the probabilities are against the fallen-ness having spread effectively throughout a general population. I am not talking of something like a virus--not at the beginning anyway--but of a willed rebellious declension.

Anyone who first did this would be an object of pity (at best) in the original population, and would serve as an object lesson to definitely not do this! Also, such a person would be highly unlikely to be successful at breeding with any of the unfallens; so any contingent and intrinsically physical inclination toward that condition (as I will discuss soon) would be unlikely to be passed on. Multiple fallen members could breed easily with each other, I suppose; but the population of fallens would still have an extremely difficult time competing with the more inherently efficient unfallens. (Again, I suppose that the fallens could perhaps achieve a superiority of efficiency faster than would otherwise be prudent for them--for us--as a species; and that this would allow them to compete effectively in some ways. The question is how likely the first such fallen people would be at surviving to pass along their ideas and any contingent physical condition. Remember, by the dawn of recorded history the whole population has evidently been 'infected'.)

The principles, along with the evidence, seem to me to point to the following conclusions:

The faster the population converts to a fallen state, the more likely the fallen population would survive to take over the species pool (so to speak). And given the conscious state of our ancestors (a condition necessary for anyone to be personally responsible ethically for their fall), it seems proportionately

unlikely that a larger original population of unfallens would ever (much less quickly) convert to a fallen condition.

The highest probability for our whole species becoming endemically fallen, therefore requires (as an inverse proportion of probability) the lowest original number of the species.

And the lowest original number of any known complex species (ours in particular) is two: male and female.

I suspect, therefore, that the existence of a mated pair of humans analogous to Adam and Eve can be inferred from the data--without even resorting to scriptural authority.

This is not a deductive conclusion, I remind my reader again. I think it is a reasonably good explanation for the data, but there may be other explanations. For instance, I cannot (at the moment anyway) see any way to deductively conclude that we are not in this condition now due to prior sins we committed in a different Nature. I think can conclude, on the other hand, that proposing a reincarnated state from evidence of being sinners in this Nature does not account for the original state of human sin, but only puts the question an unknown-number-of-stages back for no gain. (This is not an argument against reincarnation per se, by the way--that might still be true, as far as it goes, and in hindsight I am not sure I can mount a deductive argument against it on the whole.)

At any rate, I conclude that God would not have created us like this to begin with, and that at some point in history the

whole human population (however many that was) effectively 'fell from grace'.

And this Fall would involve horrifying consequences for the fallens; consequences which I shall discuss in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 45 -- a history of the Fall

In the previous chapter, I deduced that given the universality of certain observations (observations sceptics not only agree with but often use as grounds for their scepticism!), and given the validity of previous deductions on my part concerning the existence and character of God, the human race as a species is in a condition we must have 'fallen into' through the willful intransigence of (at least some of) our progenitors. I do not think I successfully deduced that there must have been only two ancestors to our species--an Adam and Eve--but I think I successfully induced that such a pair, falling either simultaneously or in quick succession, grants the highest intuitive probability of the condition spreading successfully throughout the whole human species so early, so prevalently, and in the face of what must have been so many inefficiencies contingent to the new condition. (The fewer the fallens and the more the unfallens in a population, the more unlikely the fallens would have superceded the species--yet the species has been superceded by the fallens.)

For sake of simplicity in the next stage of my discussion, I will speak as if there was an original pair who fell. I think the probabilities point that way, and it certainly gells with the religious tradition I am most familiar with (and even with

many other traditions); but I remind my reader that it is not strictly necessary to my argument. It is, however, the easiest way to speak for convenience.

Many chapters ago, back in Section Three, I went through some inferences from principle to principle, to conclusions about how derivative rational persons (such as you and I) must relate to God. I concluded that my ability to derivatively act must proceed from a synthetic supernatural/natural 'shape': a shape formed physically, and also formed (superordinately to the physical) by God's own actions.

This must have also happened to the first rationally active humans (and I provided two 'stories', one traditional, one more modern in form, which more-or-less described the process). This was the shape God intended for them to be in--they were 'made in His own image'--and I think that even many sceptics would agree (for they use this argument themselves!) that God's love and justice would not be such that He would make us as we are now. So there must have been some significant differences, as well as similarities, in these first rational humans; including differences concerning how well they interacted with Nature.

Potentially speaking (and perhaps even in original actuality) they would have been far more powerful than you and I. Having been (one way or another) 'grown' into Nature, this power over Nature would have been a factor of the synthetic shape. These first rational humans may or may not have been full

masters of Nature, but that was what they were being groomed for. God, working in a process, might have created them in such a way that they were still incompetent in some, or even many, aspects of life and action; but no love or justice would have been shown by God if He had made them automatically fatally incompetent. These people were people: not merely another preliminary organism sharing Nature's intrinsic characteristic of purely automatic reaction to stimuli. They were, within this Nature at least, something, or rather 'someone', new.

How long they lived before they discovered God, I do not know; how long they could live in this Nature, I do not know. But in principle, God would want to relate to them as Person to persons, as soon as possible. And so, sooner or later, one way or another, communication must have been established. Perhaps it was only through urges in the conscience as to right and wrong, or perhaps it was much more articulated--God would certainly have wanted it to be much more articulate eventually. And perhaps they had even gotten to that later stage.

At any rate, I deduced several chapters ago that the primary base of communication from God to man would at least be related to man's acceptance of discovered reality, and man's rejection (in principle) of contradictions.

This, in some fashion, must have been part and parcel of any communication God established with these people. But to recognize that I should reject contradictions in principle,

entails the corollary recognition that I can attempt to embrace contradictions.

And so this also must have been a consequent to the first rational humans' communication with God. This, I emphasize, is at the least: the potential for treachery, to themselves, to each other, and to God's reality, might have been greater to almost any degree.

Here is only one example, that I draw from my own tradition, and that I present, not as being authoritative, but because it is popular, simple yet also deep with nuance, and gets the principles across.

God tells the first rational humans of this Nature--these first persons of our species--Adam and Eve--that they have permission to eat almost any of the fruits in the garden. There is only one tree of which they must not eat the fruit: the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. If they do so, He warns them, they shall die.

Now, there are several things worth noting already, in order to avoid spurious interpretations of this story. It is not 'knowledge' in and of itself which God forbids to Adam and Eve--although admittedly, and very unfortunately, this is how the story has often been interpreted, even by acceptors of this tradition, especially in the last several hundred years when the great heresy of faith/reason disparity was being most prevalently spread. Why would God forbid His children knowledge

in total, when there cannot be much point to being rationally active without accruing and using knowledge? Indeed, to be actively rational is to be such that accruing some kind of knowledge is unavoidable!

No--God forbids them one category of knowledge: the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Does He forbid this permanently? Not according to the story I am familiar with!--and such a knowledge would be necessary for them eventually in order that they should mature as people.

The 'tree', after all, was not poisonous--its fruit was "good to eat"; and moreover the 'tree' was representative of something that God, in the Persons of the Unity, also does and possesses. But God would not have wanted them to get that knowledge one particular way. He was forbidding them to get that knowledge in a way that would hurt them.

Perhaps God meant for them to be properly exposed to this necessary knowledge through the next step that happened. In my tradition, Satan now enters the story.

I haven't said much (and have argued nothing, yet) concerning the existence of a supernatural chief rebel. And metaphysically speaking, he isn't a necessary feature of the story, at this point in my discussion. I can assure my reader (in fact I have done so already) that there are times when I willfully transgress against what I myself think is 'right', without needing the excuse of a tempter. That does not mean a

tempter doesn't exist. All I am saying is that the tempter is (in a way) incidental to the story here. And since I am speaking of the Fall of Humanity, not (yet, anyway) of the fall of entities prior to humanity, I think I can functionally ignore the tempter for the moment. (Notice for example that within this same tradition of mine, the tempter needed no tempting to rebel!)

Let me go back a little, briefly: taking into account what I deduced about our creation as a species, and taking into account God's existence and characteristics (also previously deduced), and taking into account the condition in which I find myself and humanity-in-general now and throughout recorded history; I am trying to work through what must have happened to the first members of our species. God would have made them (within a range of parameters) 'this' sort of way; and (again within a range) He would have communicated to them in 'that' sort of way; and I know how this portion of the story must historically end. It is rather like solving a complicated math equation: fill in the variables (whether with ranges or determinant integers), and deduce the character of the missing pieces.

Our first ancestors, one way or another (the story in Genesis 2 represents one way to 'solve for the ranges'), would have been presented with some permissive restriction to their behavior, once they began to communicate with God. I think it

would have been necessary for them to be presented with this choice, and I fully expect God would have given it to them in as concrete a form as possible, as soon as He considered it prudent to do so.

The basic choice I am speaking of, is this: God has said I should not do something, and has even given me at least one cogent reason why I should not (for example, 'If you eat this fruit, you shall die.')

Apparently I can do it, though.

Shall I do it?

This is the most basic form of the choice for or against rebellion. We see it happen in our own children, too, when they are very young. In the story of Adam and Eve, there is not one good reason (either ethically or in 'mere' logic) for disobeying God.

It is not like some of the ethical dilemmas you and I face today, where we may be required to choose between a number of options that all seem to involve some sort of 'necessary evil', and we agonize over the choice because we don't want to do the wrong thing.

The fruit (in this story) is good to eat--the Knowledge of Good and Evil is something good to have: whatever God forbade to our first ancestors must have been something which, in and of itself, they would not be naturally repelled by. The forbidden

act must have been something for which there could be no justification--something which would involve their willing embracement of unreason.

I know God, I know (something sufficient of) what and Who He is, and I know I can trust Him; yet, I will convince myself that I cannot trust Him, purely so that I can do what I want. What He says I should not do, knowing Him as I do (however far that is), must be what I should not do; but I choose to do it anyway, to satisfy my self. What He says shall happen to me is something I certainly do not want and, knowing Him however far I do, it must be what shall happen; yet I want to do it, so I will choose to do anything I can to convince myself that the consequences shall not happen--that God either lies, or is mistaken.

I have every reason to accept that something is true; but I don't want it to be true. Therefore, I will refuse it to be true to the utmost of my ability. I will decide what is true, and it shall be whatever I want; even though every ounce of real reason says otherwise. Reality shall be the way I want it--no, the way I will it to be. Not the way I know it to be.

I shall supplant objective, ultimate reality.

I shall be God Most High.

That is the choice, whatever form it was presented in; and it is the same choice I am faced with today--and at which I sometimes still fail.

But 'fail' is too safe a word.

It is a choice at which I sometimes still fall.

Had our first ancestors refused to act that way, logically they would have indeed still received the Knowledge of Good and Evil after all. They only wouldn't have gotten it the wrong way. They would have received it, instead of taking it. And that makes all the difference.

But I can spend twenty minutes paging through a newspaper, or flipping across television channels, or surfing on the internet; and I can discover pretty easily how they must have chosen to act.

Putting it analogically (perhaps it even happened literally): our first ancestors decided to take the fruit.

Now what shall happen to them?

The first sinners have breached the derivative unity between themselves and God, insofar as it was possible for them to breach it. If God did that to Himself, if the Persons of God did that to Themselves, utter death would immediately entail for God, and for all of reality. We humans can only have been designed along similar, if derivative, principles. These creatures with great power and responsibility have chosen to rebel against the reality upon which they nevertheless inescapably depended.

As I reach this point, I remember something I deduced earlier: humans are 'human', to whatever degree, due to what I have called the synthetic shape. This shape is itself the most fundamental relationship to God that we have: all our other relations to Him, including our personal relations to Him, depend on that shape. In fact, all our relations to anything depend upon that shape. (Before I am accused of putting too much value on that shape, let me redress the balance by reiterating that the shape itself depends ultimately on the intentions of God, including the actions of God which are subsidiarily a part of His primary action of self-existence.)

But our first ancestors must have decided to intentionally push themselves away from God, to change the relationship from one of harmony to dissonance. They had the capability to do this, and that is what they chose.

And one consequence to choosing that act, would be the changing of the synthetic shape.

The intensive actions grounding that shape are God's, but He has partially disassociated Himself from them, so that His 'wooden puppets' can be 'real boys and girls'. But this means we (or at least our ancestors) have had some ability to help shape our individual relationships to God.

When our ancestors willed themselves into opposition against God, not out of some accident of calculation or ignorance, but consciously setting themselves as people against

the conscious Person Who was grounding their whole existence (including their ability to take such actions), then one result must have been a change in that synthetic shape--the relation, even the physical relation, of their wills to the underlying will of God. They might as well have said: "We want the shape to be like this instead of like that."

And in essence, that's what happened.

But the shape of that synthesis also grounded their ability (and still does for you and I today) to interact with other aspects of reality--and what they had been synthesized into existence within, was the automatically reactive field of Nature.

Their choice would consequently involve immediate reactions within them at the natural level--because that is the way 'Nature', as 'Nature', works.

Whatever those results could be, one thing at least must be true: the results could not possibly have granted equal or better efficiency (considering the overall sum of our efficiency) in our first ancestors' relationship with Nature.

But I think I can go even further than that. God would have created them to be masters of Nature; but now their relationship, not only to Himself but also to Nature, must change. They have demanded that it shall be so; their demand in and of itself would make it so.

This was not a situation where they could make their demand, and then God could say: "Petition refused, and for your own sakes I might add!" I do agree that such petitions and such a response would have been possible then (and still are now): our first ancestors might easily and excusably have asked for something out of ignorance or incompetence (they cannot be omniscient, for they are not God), and God might have then refused it for their own good.

But this demand was something that, by being what it was, necessarily (as a result of the situation of our creation and our relationship to God and to Nature) entailed the granting of their wish.

There were other actions even of that particular sort which they must have been capable of (and of which we still are today), but those actions would only be something of a joke: "God, I wish I could make wishes!" "No problem!"

But to wish to rebel against God, is not a joke. It is itself the first act of rebellion.

The action has been taken, and consequences of some sort shall follow, must follow. God gave them the ability to contribute to the changing of derivative reality, including themselves and their relationships; they chose to change; change

must follow, or else God did not actually give them that ability to make changes.

But remember that none of this would (strictly speaking) have taken God by surprise. Our history is brought into existence and given the divine contribution of shape as (quite literally) part of one infinitely complex act of God. The infinitely positive efficiency of God's Unity is present at all points of our space and time: what He sees us doing in one place and time, He knows elsewhere and elsewhen.

This does not compromise our freedom to act: if I see you act, does that mean you are not free to act? If I saw you act five minutes ago, and see you act now, does my seeing you now somehow compromise the freedom you had five minutes ago when I was also watching you?

No. It is because God sees us and knows us at all points of space-time that we (or even space-time itself) can exist, and also that we can act within each of those points of space-time which we individually intersect.

So no, these results are not surprises to God in any way. Moreover, we should expect the result to be part of God's design: if God creates derivatively active creatures intimately linked to their natural environment, then it makes sense to design into them what shall happen to them if they rebel against Him.

God will have built in safety valves.

A servant assigned to be a steward with power and responsibility over a kingdom, cannot be allowed to exercise all that authority and power once he has rebelled. Disruption in the kingdom shall already follow; but God will minimize it as far as possible--within the boundaries of other plans of His.

So, for instance, to minimize the disruption absolutely, God could have simply annihilated Adam and Eve on the spot. But that hardly fulfills love and positive justice, or even a merely punitive negative 'justice', to Adam and Eve--for they would be completely gone, and so would not exist any longer to be recipients of God's love and justice! Since God never has nor never shall (on peril of reality's self-destruction) set aside His love and justice, then I think annihilation must necessarily be out of the question. Some other plan must have been put into effect by the 'Fall'.

Would it be love and justice to our first ancestors to let them stay forever in the misery that they shall necessarily engender by their attempts to refuse the source of their own lives? God created them as purposeful creatures; but they cannot fulfill at least some of those purposes (His and theirs), because in their current condition they are in dissonance against God (and thus against His creations also) to one degree or other. Nor would it be love to simply let them stay that way forever--and God, Who is intrinsically and essentially love (if

trinitarian theism is true), will never set aside His love for us.

Yet, justice must not be set aside, either; not even the negative justice that follows from committing injustice. Consequences must follow contingently upon those specific actions, as part of the fulfillment of fair-togetherness (i.e. of righteousness), even when that fulfillment must be against unrighteousness; consequences these newly fallen sinners shall have to face, one way or another--and, of course, how they 'face those consequences' is itself an action, entailing more consequences, which they must also choose how they shall meet, and so on, and so forth.

One of the consequences that must follow is, as I have said, the changing of the synthetic shape. Shall God merely 'poof' it back to normal? No; He gave those people power as people to help choose how that shape shall be, and for God to merely 'reset them' (the way I might reset a computer if one of the computer-controlled pieces does something that threatens to ruin my game) would be for God to cease treating those people as people. If they had not already become people, then God might have chosen to 'reset' them--it is certainly possible for Him to do this. But they had already become real people, or else they wouldn't have been able to rebel in the first place.

So the new shape must stay, even if the people must be removed to another part of the playing field (so to speak); and

whatever God may choose to do with that new corrupted shape, He will not infringe, for love's sake, on the personal ability and responsibility of those people to keep contributing to the shape. Surely He will have tweaked, and will continue to tweak, the synthetic shape as much as possible within the parameters of what else He wants to accomplish; but that is still a limit, even though a self-imposed one on His part.

So the synthetic shape remains--but in a new and necessarily more inefficient form.

Yet, once they realize the penalties they have brought on themselves, can Adam and Eve choose to put the shape back exactly as they found it?

The first sinners might want to put their corrupted synthetic shape back to its uncorrupted state, and that would be a good thing, as far as it goes. Indeed, love and justice on God's part would suggest that He will institute ways for them to know they have made a serious mistake that should be fixed.

It might be purely self-serving for Adam and Eve to want this; but the problem to be fixed is the result of their intentions to be self-serving. This cannot be fixed by being merely self-serving again. To truly want to fix it, must involve at least a partial negation of that intention. It is the first step, or one of the first, on the road of repentance.

But can they do it?

Basically the question is: once they have hampered their connection to the source of their knowledge and power, can they have enough knowledge and power to put themselves back?

Either they can, or they can't. If it had been flatly impossible for them to be saved from this, God would have annihilated them. More to the point, God would not have designed them so that rebellion was necessarily unfixable, precisely because He would not have wanted to annihilate them if they chose that choice.

God certainly would know how to help, and would want to help them. But one of the things they have hampered is their communication ability with God--and they have hampered it from their own 'side' of the contact.

Let us say I take a razorblade to my own eyes, and slice them badly. Then I prudently say, "Opps! That was a bad idea... um... I need to fix this. Someone show me how." But it shall be rather difficult to 'show me how', with my eyes all sliced up!

The situation of the Fall, however, is far more fundamental than that. Although some change to the synthetic shape (which I think I can conclude would involve some type of subordinate change at the natural level) has been accomplished, it is not simply a matter of our ancestors 'wanting' to put that shape back right, if they could. The shape is already the result of their willful (not merely instinctive) wanting.

(Wants aren't always merely instinctive feelings, as I can personally testify. The Fall of our first ancestors would have been predicated not by instinctual wants, if any--I don't know whether God would have allowed them to have wants of that sort, although I suppose it is quite possible--but rather by choices on their part to intentionally defy what they believe to be true. Actions tend to have feelings consequent to the actions, and so the action of wanting something tends to have consequent feelings as well; but I am not speaking of mere feeling.)

Okay, but can they not just sit down and transcendently meditate, or something like that, and fix the problem?

I fully admit that this might help to fix the problem! But the problem, is that they have intentionally hampered their relationship with God. It might be somewhat helpful to meditate on how to re-achieve that relationship. But merely meditating on the abstract issue of the problem, won't solve the problem, even if they managed somehow to find the right answer. They have messed up their personal relationship to God as a Person, and to fix the problem that personal relationship is what they have to fully re-establish, not some intellectual theory or emotional feeling about the relationship.

(Many meditative operations are not about generating feelings or contemplating notions, of course--although I have found such meditations to be helpful as a tool, myself. In many cases, the meditations are a focusing operation designed to help

get rid of 'clutter' in the mind. These can certainly be helpful, too. I am basically in favor of many different forms of meditation; but I question some of the goals. Any meditation that involves a depersonalizing goal, should be avoided-- 'personality', per se, is not the problem. The breach of personal relationships, especially with God, is the problem.)

So, to sum up: they need to get back in unity with God's character as a Person. But they have hampered their communication with God, so they have hampered their ability to discover or understand what that character is. Nearer is certainly better, but they should be right on the dot to achieve a full and proper unity. And remember, this is not like searching for a page in a book, or even quite like tuning a radio: what needs to be fixed is a personal relationship between active people (God and the individual). A magic codeword or passcard, or even knowledge about some metaphysical doctrine, won't fix the problem. A personal relationship isn't like that.

Will God help them? Of course! But, again, a magic codeword or passcard (or even some kind of forceful shifting of the synthetic shape by Him) cannot possibly accomplish the cure. God will work to help them, as people themselves, to understand Him as a Person again.

He will try to communicate with them.

But part of the problem is that they have messed up the 'radio' (so to speak) on their side. ('Tuning the radio' would

not fix the problem by itself--but it is certainly part of fixing the problem.) His means of communication shall be more limited now, thanks to their own actions.

But God will still take every advantage He can of the newly limited channel of communication. He always has at least one foothold: He Himself continually acts to keep up their existence as active entities themselves. Whatever their own opinions or beliefs, He Himself still will relate to them as Person to persons. The Holy Spirit, the 3rd Person of the Divine Unity, still operates with the bare (yet still crucial) remnant of divine communication: find and accept truth, reject falsehoods. God would not have designed our predecessors so that any possible shifting of the synthetic shape could excise this contact of Person to persons--for this contact is what keeps the persons in existence.

No matter how far I try to harden my heart, to resolutely set my face against reality, reality still shall affect me. Reality is Personal; and I am a person. One way or another, that communication shall still continue, whether I recognize it as such or not.

So, if I choose to deal with truth to the best of my ability (however poor that ability of mine may be), then I am to that extent working with the Holy Spirit.

But remember that Truth is not itself abstract. Truth is Reality--more specifically, 'truth' is the relationship of a

person to actual facts, and at the deepest level of reality this means that Truth is the actual relationship of God to God.

Our perceptions and communications of Truth may be abstract to one degree or another--I myself have had to use abstractions to try to communicate to you, my reader, what I have perceived to be true, even concerning the relationship of God to God.

But the foundational Truth itself is not abstract--it is actively real.

Consequently, while contemplation of truths (or even Truth) may be helpful in some ways, it is wasted without subsequent actions taken by us upon the truths we discern.

And those subsequent actions need to be taken with an intentive choice on our part, to remain true to 'the truth'--not necessarily to what we think is true; because our thoughts about what is true might be obstinate self-delusions, or they might simply be in error. Neither condition can possibly be healed unless we choose, as a goal, at every moment, even if beginning right now, even if we stumble and fall and pick ourselves up to try again--to be consistently for the Truth.

You, my reader, may not agree with me about the specific characteristics of ultimate Truth; but that is less important than whether you and I are actively committed, by our own choice, to pursue the objectively real truth--at the expense of our own preference-feelings, if necessary.

The first sinners would be in the same condition as I, in this respect. Would they, or would they not, as individuals, 'repent'? Would they change their willed intent back to embracing the truth?

Perhaps they would; perhaps they wouldn't. Even if they didn't, God would still be pursuing them, for the sake of fulfilling His love and His justice to them.

And the extent to which He would pursue them (and to which He does pursue you and I!) will be discussed throughout the remainder of this book.²⁵⁴

²⁵⁴ Due to the topical development of this book, I have had to approach salvation from sin from the perspective of human will first; but that does not mean I believe human will to be the most important factor. I will be emphasizing this as a I go along, and I hope the reader has noticed that even though I have had to discuss notions of 'salvation by works', my conclusions have been that we cannot save ourselves by our own works. I very intentionally chose that analogy of slicing up our own eyes and then wanting to 'see' how to be healed.

The Judeo-Christian scriptures sometimes strongly emphasize human responsibility in salvation (even occasionally to the point of not even mentioning God's role in salvation); and sometimes they strongly emphasize God's responsibility in salvation (even occasionally to the point of not even mentioning any role for the sinner in salvation.)

But at the end of the day, whether we go the route of scriptural testimony, or the route of metaphysical analysis, the answer comes out the same either way: as children of God we do have responsibility in our salvation, just as we have responsibility in our sin, but God is primarily sovereign and responsible. If God did not act first toward our salvation, there would be no salvation for us, period.

It is by God's grace (and I mean by God's active grace here and afterward, not by some passive permission) that we even exist and continue to exist, including as persons. It is by God's grace that we continue to exist at all as persons despite our sin. It is by God's grace that we are empowered to know right from wrong, or even to be able to seek to know right from wrong (and even to want to seek to know right from wrong). It is by God's grace that we are judged wrong in our sins. It is by God's grace that we have any ability to repent of our sins. And it is by God's grace that He leads us to repent of our sins. It is even by God's grace that we are sooner and/or later punished if we refuse to repent of our sin! (A position that may be controversial as to scope, but which all Christians and even some non-Christians would agree is true in regard to at least some people.)

Whatever our responsibilities are in our salvation, even those are given to us first by God for our salvation. We cannot earn God's salvation of us;

Meanwhile, complications arise.

These first sinners, our human progenitors, do not exist in a vacuum. They exist within a reactive and vast Nature, which shall be busily going about its 'business' over time, even over mere moments of time. And they exist for some purpose; a purpose (or set of purposes) that must have been very important to God: for He let them do something quite astonishing, given their current rebellious condition.

He let them breed.

I will discuss the implications of this, in the next chapter.

either He acts to save us from sin, or He does not. If He does not, that is the end of it. If He does...?

Then there will be more to the story.

CHAPTER 46 -- the children of the first sinners

I have argued that recorded history--even the history recorded by people who do not follow my own tradition--indicates that the tendency to act intransigently, in willful rebellion against what we perceive to be true, has been a perennial characteristic of our species. Because God would not have created us automatically in rebellion against Him (or against as much of Him as we could perceive), then our progenitors must have fallen into this state; and I think I can argue that the number of these progenitors must have been small, and the percentage of 'fallens' within that number must have been large: for the whole human race, as it stands now and as it has stood throughout history, exhibits the characteristics of sinful rebellion.²⁵⁵

Such a rebellion would have changed the synthetic shape of the original sinners--the shape synthesized by God out of a combination of His own intensive actions and the mediation of a neutral 'playing-field' of reactive Nature, itself also actively created and upkept by God. This synthetic shape would have been

²⁵⁵ I am not arguing this from the worldwide prevalence of stories that suggest humankind was once in a better relationship with God, heaven, Nature, and/or each other, but have since 'fallen'. These could, I suppose, be explained as the result of an innate human resistance to our actual state of being. (The Fall must be only a fable, because so many cultures seem to remember it?) Even so, such a resistance is interesting. In fact, any 'resistance' to what would otherwise be considered a 'natural' situation, is significant. At any rate, having arrived at this conclusion on other grounds, I do pause here to acknowledge the existence of such stories.

linked interconnectedly between spirit and body; and consequences to the relationship between that unity of spirit and body would have followed from rebellion. This degradation of our physical and mental status would have been allowed by God in order to minimize the abuses of power which would follow from the rebellion--abuses God would restrict insofar as possible while still fulfilling both love and justice to the sinners.

The Unity of God's own transPersonal self-existent love and justice, entails that God shall choose to act eternally to fulfill love and justice even to His enemies--and this concept has massive implications for any subsequent theological conclusions I will (and ought to) draw.

But one of the more unsettling implications faces me now.

These original sinners, having rebelled against God, would find themselves existing as, in effect, a new species--perhaps related to prior species from which they had been previously raised (if that was how God accomplished their creation), but still distinctly different as derivatively active entities from those close relatives.²⁵⁶ Yet they would also be distinctly

²⁵⁶ Technically, a species is distinguished by its lack of breeding with other creature-groups, although two species of the same genus could theoretically produce viable offspring. In this case, I don't know whether the fallen or unfallen humans could or could not breed with any other similar creatures from which they may have been raised--or even whether they were raised from a previously existent creature-group at all! The face-value meaning of my own scriptural tradition is somewhat confusing on this point; even if we were raised directly from mud, there is some question about whether the first such humans are interbreeding with each other in the story, or whether they are interbreeding with other similar creatures. Fortunately, I can set such questions aside for the purposes of this book.

(Although I will also say that I become humorously annoyed at direct creationists who rhetorically complain about how under evolutionary theory we

different from the sort of entities they had been before the 'Fall'. As creatures in a created unity between active spirit and reactive matter, that unity would still hold: for they would still be derivatively active (and thus personal) creatures, yet also would still occupy the space and time of material Nature.

The relationship of this derivative unity of ours to physical Nature, to matter and energy, results in a physical shape to the organ through which the unity is most acutely focused: our brains. Our fall as a species would have consequences for that shape. Yet what contributes, physically speaking, to the shape of our brains?

We know now that the chemicals of our genetic code serve this function. New cells replace or grow onto other cells throughout our natural life, even in our brains, according to processes governed at least in part by the constituent 'shape' of that genetic code.

The change of the synthetic shape at the moment of the first rebellion would therefore entail a corresponding change, either directly or indirectly by God's will, in the functionality of our genetic code, so that our unity as a living and efficiently functional organism would be preserved. (The change might be progressive over a lifetime, or even over successive generations; but there would also be an immediate change somewhere that would make the crucial difference.)

were all raised from slime. Oh, no, of course not, we were raised from clean dirt! Slime, dirt, I'm good with it either way...)

Also, such a pervasive change would be a signal even to the most stubborn of original sinners, that something drastically wrong had occurred--something that could be compared to an ideal state--something that needed to be corrected for their own good.

But whatever affects our genetic code, also affects our children.

The natural result would be that if these original sinners began to breed, they would produce more creatures of their new sort--creatures with a synthetic shape twisted by the choices of the first progenitors.

This, I repeat, would be the natural result. But speaking only of the natural consequence leaves the actions and choices of God out of the account. The next question is: would God allow this to happen?

In a way, the answer to this question is obvious: for here I am, a creature of this type who inhabits a world filled with similar creatures.

Given this, and given that I have already decided that God exists and has certain relationships to the natural universe, then I conclude that God clearly would allow the results of the 'sin of Adam' to be passed on to future generations.

But a recognition that this in fact has happened, does not of itself explain why God let it happen.

Some people may be satisfied with the mere idea that God let it happen, and so we should not bother ourselves further

with questions about it. I would reply that this attitude hardly reflects a personal relationship with God as a Person.

Other people may say that since God has let it happen, He must have had a good reason, and since they trust Him in other regards, they are willing to trust Him here, too. I think this attitude is very much better! Yet I also think it still falls short of the mark. To honestly wonder why, and to seriously want an answer, and to not have an answer yet, is one thing. But to give up wanting to know why, as a choice on our part--even as a choice apparently based on a real trust in God--is to set aside our share of the responsibility in maintaining a personal relationship with God.

Such a closing of the eyes is, instead, a sign of a lack of faith in God: it is a sign that we do not trust God to do His part in relating to us. To wait patiently, keeping an eye out for solutions to a problem, with all resources at our disposal, ready to act and searching for light meanwhile, is to have an active faith in God as a Person. To shut our minds to problems because, deep down, we do not ever expect an intelligible answer, is to believe that God does not care what we think about Him.

"We shall understand by and by" has long been stripped of its meaning in merely 'popular' theology, and a totally opposite meaning has been perversely grafted to the phrase: it now effectively means, to many Christians, that we shall never

understand--therefore, we ought not to look now. And it is just as faithless to maintain that we ought not to expect any worthwhile or useful answer until we reach 'heaven'--for that attitude reinforces a tendency to be lazy servants here and now.

In some ways, the sceptical unbeliever can represent a most faithfully prudent attitude: for such a sceptic may detect a discrepancy in the love and justice of God, and so may refuse to follow or sanction a belief in such a deity.

"How could God let that happen!?" such a sceptic demands, with a righteousness that is faithful to God in truth, while others who claim to have faith in God dare to be content with the vague suspicion--or worse, the outright claim!--that the God Whom they follow is not just!

Let me therefore face directly the implications of my own existence, as a person who was born with the mark of the sin of Adam.

Could God have prevented the children of the original sinners from being born in a 'twisted' shape?

I see no intrinsic contradiction to this proposal, so I conclude: yes, He could have--either through sheer miraculous power, or else by forbidding, through decree or through exercise of power, that the original sinners should have children. Similarly, He could have prevented me from being born in this condition: the condition of being a 'fallen man'.

So why would God have allowed fallen humans to be fruitful, and to multiply? If my own tradition has accuracy, why would God even command us to multiply our numbers, and yet not fix the problem from the outset?

That God could not 'fix' Adam and Eve (the original rebels of our species, although technically they need not have been only two in number) through a sheer act of His power, I have already deduced; for their problems stemmed from willed actions of their own, and their cure would require their own active repentance--a 'change of mind' which itself would be hampered by the change they had already effected in themselves by their rebellion. But as for their children, from 'Cain and Abel' down to you and I: none of us chose to be in this condition from our birth.

Let me remind my reader that I confess myself to be a willing sinner--I know I have made choices to flout love, justice, and other characteristics of ultimate reality, in favor of my own wishes at the expense of people. Insofar as that goes, I am no better than the original sinners, whether they are human Adams and Eves or the archangel Lucifer.

But that type of perversion is not what I am discussing here. I want to know why God allowed the sin of our human progenitors to affect the rest of us consequentially, in our bodies and in the relationship of our bodies to our minds.

As usual, if I speculate as though these original people existed in a historical vacuum, then I do not know if I could ever find an appropriate answer. But when I remember, that whatever perversions I may have been saddled with I am still a willing sinner also, then I have a standard by which to proceed.

Let me turn my question back upon my own head, then. Why is it that other people suffer thanks to my sin? Why does God not negate the harmful, baneful results of my own actions, sparing those who find themselves standing in the paths of effect?²⁵⁷

The first answer I reach is: I do not know that God does let every possible baneful consequence from my actions affect other people. On the contrary: I know I find myself thanking Him, that by providential circumstance other people have been spared from suffering which might have followed from some sin of mine.

This does not, by itself, provide a solution to my question, for if even one minor suffering of a victim resulted from a whole history of (otherwise silent) human sinning, then the question of why God would allow such an effect would remain viable. Yet I do find it to be of some comfort to recognize, from my own experience, that other people are sometimes (or even often) spared from the results of my sins.

²⁵⁷ I remind my reader that the relative innocuousness of my own sins, makes no difference to the principle which I am considering here. So far as the direct fact of my active rebellion goes, I am no better off than people like Hitler.

I next notice, that such consequential suffering depends not only on God's permission, but also on the characteristics of Nature. You and I live together within an essentially neutral playing-field; indeed, I concluded many chapters ago that such a field is in fact necessary, given your and my existences as people. Nature, as it is, exists by the will and power of God; and God retains the capability of introducing effects into Nature.

But I also concluded that there would need to be some self-limitation on God's part, to how far He would act within Nature. If God manipulates me totally, then I am only a sort of sock-puppet, and not a true creature. If God does not let Nature be Nature, then by tautology Nature is not Nature. Yet Nature (not necessarily this Nature, perhaps, but some Nature) is necessary for you and I to be as we are. God can only introduce effects 'into' Nature by usually letting Nature be itself. And as a creation of God, self-consistent to its own derivative degree, Nature exhibits cause-and-effect relationships. These can be modified by God, up to and including the annihilation of Nature to any extent; but so long as God intends Nature to be Nature and to serve His purposes (including the purposes related to you and I as derivative individual people), then God will, by His own choice, only modify Nature's behavior to some degree.

I repeat: by itself this conclusion does not solve the problem I am now considering. It could only do that if I knew

(which I do not) that God's negation of any external effects from my sinful choices would require such a massive uprooting of Nature on His part, that Nature effectively (or usefully) would cease to exist. For what it is worth, I do think it likely that given today's situation--the situation of human intransigence that has existed for all our recorded history--God would be unable to stop all pernicious results of all our sins without simultaneously unraveling the portion of space-time our species currently inhabits.

But in the case of the original sinners, who almost certainly had to be few in number (very likely as few as two individuals), I do not see that such a danger to Nature (localized or not) would have been forthcoming. I think God could have allowed their children to be what their parents no longer were. Indeed, if God grew us organically through the mediation of a biological process, then He would already have acted at least once in such a fashion, when He created the first sentient humans. And if God raised our first progenitors directly from the clay, or somesuch similar action, then He would have already accomplished the same type of reorganization even more dramatically!

Either way (or along any variation of two such extremes of subtlety and outright power), for God to do so again within the seed and/or womb of the first fallen humans would have been no more dangerous to Nature's existence as Nature, than the

creation of the first humans themselves (and probably no more dangerous to Nature's viability than any other tentative act God can take within the natural system).

So, there must have been further reasons why God, in the case of the original human sinners, did not spare their children the fate of being born as 'fallens'.

Still, the general principle involved here is worth remembering: in order to preserve the character of Nature as Nature, God allows Nature to react naturally to actions introduced into the natural system.

If God allows Nature to retain its character, then what about my character--or the character of my distant forebears? We are derivative actors; we are people who are people, and who have our own personal character. If God second-guesses and immediately abrogates everything I do which happens to displease Him, then would He be treating me as a responsible person?

Here, I arrive at a frightening and humbling realization.

God's love and justice are never set aside, even for sinners.

I am a sinner. God loves me and does justice to me, sinner though I am. If He only let results He personally preferred to follow from my choices, then He would not be showing love to me, nor would He be acting justly to me, myself. It would be worse than my being a mere sock-puppet who only seems to be a real

person: I would be a real person under slavery to a tyrant Who grants me only a useless legal fiction of freedom!

Yet unless He enslaved me in this way, then sooner or later someone might suffer for something I do, that they had not done.

It is because God loves me, a sinner, that the innocent suffer for my transgressions.

Thank God, I have reason to believe that God does spare some creatures, to some degree, from the evil I choose to do. Yet the underlying principle remains in effect--because God loves me, He lets some of my evil actions produce results imprinted by the character I have given to those actions.

Should you be angry at God for allowing people to suffer for my wrongs? Or should you instead be angrier at me for taking advantage of the love God shows to me?

And dare I suggest you remember that God shows you the same love, by letting your actions also have consequential effects--even if those effects are ones God would have preferred not to happen?

Persons who have not done a particular evil action, nevertheless suffer the results of that action--because God loves the sinner, too.

The innocent suffer for the sake of sinners such as I.

There is a further terrible purpose in such consequences for my sake--the results stand as a reminder to me, if I will only open my eyes, that what I am doing is wrong! It is love and

justice to me, that I should be given such opportunities,
despite my willful intransigence.

Is it love and justice to those who suffer? No; but that is
my fault--not God's.

I therefore find no intrinsic inconsistency in the
conclusion that God has allowed other creatures to suffer by the
sin of the original sinners. It is certainly terrible, and even
horrible--I think it is something every person needs to
contemplate for herself, so that the full cost of our actions
may be understood more clearly; for we sinners are all still
contributing, even today, to the sin of Adam.

Yet when we are speaking of the first children of the
original sinners, then still a mystery remains. If Adam and Eve
should somehow suffer for the sake of Satan, that is one thing.
But for God to allow the first human sinners to beget victims of
their sin, who are then born as victims from birth--that is
something else again. Where is the justice in this?!

A moment ago, I noticed that those who suffer from our sins
serve as living examples to us that sin has consequences. A
woman who sins in her pride may, in her pride, still find it
easy to discount or disbelieve the damage done to her own soul
(or even to her body) in consequence of her actions. But it can
only be harder to deny responsibility for our actions, when the
results of those actions are staring us in the face. The sins of

the fathers may be made manifest in the next generation, for the sake of the fathers' understanding of sin and its results.²⁵⁸

Even so, this purpose would be served only by the first children of the first sinners--not by further generations, who can only make the point redundantly. So, if the effects of the first sinners on themselves are passed in some measure to their children, why not stop the effect at the second generation?

Whatever natural consequences followed in the wake of the shifting of the synthetic shape, those natural consequences still could have been halted by God at that point without (probably) undue risk of abrogating Nature itself. Yet, God let it continue.

And, I admit: even the allowance of one subsequently twisted generation seems rather suspicious. Would the sinners not have been better off being saved by God from sin first, before breeding later?

I think there is a double-answer involved: two answers, which turn out to be connected. If God should let a fallen Adam and Eve have children--if more than this He outright commands it--then humanity as a group must have a task God expected them to try to perform, even in their fallen state. Yet common sense tells us that the fallen state of Man must be more inefficient than our original unfallen state. It makes more sense for God to

²⁵⁸ As I write this, I think of babies born with deformities and addictions, thanks to the abuse of the bodies (and souls) of their mothers and fathers. How can any man or woman see this, and not resolve to render justice and charity to each other and to their own bodies!? How?--by refusing love and justice when these seem to be leveled against themselves...

restart the species in an unfallen state, as soon as feasible, than to allow it to continue in such a state.

Yet, here we are. Adam and Eve may have needed a salvation that did not consist of God sheerly 'fixing' the problem, but their children could still have been started correctly themselves, to fall or not to fall later upon their own choices as responsible entities.

The point is this: whatever genetic damage resulted from the twisting of the synthetic natural/supernatural 'shape' of the original sentient humans--whatever natural consequences resulted, to the fundamental units of their bodies, from the Fall of Adam and Eve--God must have had the power to fix it for the next generation; and a contemplation of God's love and justice indicates that He really ought to have done so.

Since He evidently did not--and since I am already convinced on other, prior grounds that God exists and has certain characteristics--what shall I conclude?

There must have been--there must still be--something else involved in the problem.

Something not merely reactive, like Nature.

Something making its own choices to affect our offspring.

Something actively sentient and with intricate power over Nature.

Something able, and willing, to rebel against God.

Something--or, rather, someone--other than the original
human sinners.

And that is who I will discuss in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 47 -- the sinner before the first sinners

I ended the previous chapter inferring the existence of something rather more disturbing to modern Western tastes than the existence of God--namely the existence of devils. While most people across human history (and even today across the world, even a majority in North America) will already be comfortable believing such things exist, my book is after all primarily written for sceptics. So let me go back and retrace how I got to this point again.

If I have inferred the Fall of humankind correctly, then I am left with the strange and frightening question: why in the world would God have allowed these first fallen progenitors of ours to breed??

Closely linked to that question, is this: even if these first human sinners had managed to dig their species a hole into which their children would now be born, why would God not have corrected the problem within one or two subsequent generations by miracle?

In previous chapters, I argued that God lets me myself sin, and lets the consequences of my sin be played out in the world, even if it hurts myself and other people, due to the love He has for me, a sinner: a love for me as a derivate personal creation, though not a love for my sin! He will treat me as a person, and

He will treat my contributions to history--to His story-- seriously, even if I mess up the story.

This principle might be enough to explain why God would allow our first rebellious progenitors to set the synthetic standard for future generations. Yet, I still find myself with problems concerning such a theory.

That the first children would be allowed to be born with a twisted synthetic shape, might be allowed to help hammer home the necessity of repentance to the first rebels. The innocent would suffer for the sake of the guilty--not so that the sin of the guilty will continue, but that the guilty may have all reason and opportunity to repent of their sin.

But further twisted generations would make this point redundantly. God could have fixed the problem at birth at any point. And it does seem to me that He ought to have fixed it by the second generation at the latest. Yet history, even the current history of this very moment in which I write, shows that this did not happen.

God allowed us to breed--to breed twisted men and women-- including myself, and the people I love!

Why in the world would He do that!?

'This shows He does not exist; or at best He is not "good"', my non-Christian opponents will say. But I have already

deduced on prior grounds that He does exist, and is good, and moreover is even essentially love and justice (as the interPersonal unity of the Trinity). Perhaps my logic is incorrect on those prior grounds; and this would be a time to check. But if my logic is correct, then I am faced with a strong discrepancy now. It is either a contradiction--or a paradox. If it is a contradiction, then I have made a mistake. But if I have not made a mistake (and I don't think I have), then I should search for a solution to the paradox.

Is it fair that I should have been born like this--that the people whom I love should be born like this? My logic says, no. God shall always be just and shall always work to fulfill love even to sinners; this is clear from previous logic. Yet here is a clear injustice--upon whom can I blame it?

Our original ancestors? They have some blame, but they do not exist alone in reality.

Upon God? He could have fixed the problem, but the problem is not fixed. And He is always just and loving: therefore I conclude that He would have fixed the problem within the first or (at latest) second generation after our original ancestors.

But He did not. Why would He not?

And so I turn the question again back upon myself, the sinner. Why does God not instantly, or very shortly afterward, fix everything sinful that I do? For my own sake, to remind me of the consequences of my rebellion; and again for my own sake,

so that my actions and choices will have importance in history--
in His story.

But of course, I can repent and try to work with Him to fix the problem: this is something I have not yet discussed, and I will not go into particulars yet, but I do not need to go into particulars merely to recognize that I have free will and so I can try to atone.

And if I try to atone, to be 'at one' again, God will help me to fix the problems I have created. In fact I could not even possibly choose to atone with God if God did not in many ways empower and lead me into atonement with Him first. God first loves us, sinners though we are; without that there would be no salvation, for we have no ground of appeal beyond God Most High (nor any way to be led to repent and seek atonement beyond God Most High.) It is not God Who needs to be atoned to me, the sinner: God first acts in reconciling me, and so acts already toward (as the term meant when originally coined in English) at-one-ing me to Himself. It is I, the sinner, who needs atoning to God--and so who needs salvation from sin.

But further twisted generations would be redundant for such a reminder to atone.

And let me admit, when I do try to atone with those I have sinned against even now, consequences do not instantly snap back into better circumstance. I have seen some striking examples of

change through working with God to atone, even in my own life;
but there are limits to the effect. What can cause those limits?

To a degree, the prior commitment of God to let Nature be Nature (the common neutral field of endeavor for you and I--and for God when He works with us), must serve as some self-constraint on God's part. Yet intuitively, it seems to me that a wide scope for correction easily still exists, where correction has not (yet) taken place.

I think a sceptic would also see this quite clearly: we (the sceptic and I) can both, without too much trouble, imagine situations where God could have mitigated more of the evil effects from our actions than what we see from our repentance, even accounting for the continuing viability of Nature per se.

Now, I can also easily see one factor that would, by its character, further hamper any attempt to fix the evil I do.

If I fly an aircraft off course, then I can work with ground control to help fix the problem, at the cost of fuel reserves and other resources (such as time) that would otherwise not have been spent on this. And of course the help of God in such an 'atonement' should be much more great than that.

But--what if I keep trying to fly the aircraft off course?

If I am continuing to contribute to the problem--even if I stop contributing, and then start again--then I am creating new situations. God could just make me a sock-puppet (if even for a little while), and fix the problem without my further

interference. And God could shut me away from the situation to prevent me from contributing further to that particular situation--which, I testify, sometimes He does!

But God does not make me a sock-puppet, because that would not be showing love to me as a person. And although God can (and sometimes does) shut me away from the situation, it may be better for me not to be shut away. My best opportunity to really learn to try to do better, could possibly require that I stay in a position where I might still ruin the situation.

And, I testify... sometimes God has given me this situation, too.

He often lets me stay where I can further ruin a situation--and sometimes I have further ruined it.

So, putting these principles into play:

At the dawn of human history (not merely our recorded history, but the actual history of our existence), not too long after 'daybreak' of that 'dawn', our first ancestors rebel, and so fall into a condition that may be considered essentially analogous to our own condition today.²⁵⁹ They are allowed to breed; and their first children are of their sort--God has not miraculously fixed the problem from the womb, as He created our

²⁵⁹ There would likely be some physical differences between us and the first fallens, as well as spiritual ones, depending on any alterations contributed by the choices of future generations combined with natural selection during the ages since this event. I won't speculate further on this; but the possibility is worth keeping in mind, I think.

first ancestors in the first place. If our progenitors did not want to repent yet, these children would be a reminder of the consequences of our first ancestors' actions, not only upon themselves, but upon innocents they hurt in passing. Yet these children grow, and mate (either among themselves, or perhaps with local representatives of the same species out of which our forebears came, as dogs may breed with wolves), creating a new second generation. And this second generation still has the twisted synthetic shape, passed on by the forebears, perhaps augmented now by genetic material from another breedable species (thus diluting some properties of the original bloodline).

Some of those particular details are my speculation; that God once more did not fix the problem, is fact.

These second descendants (from the zero-original creation) would serve only a redundant purpose to remind the original sinners of a need to repair their personal (and thus effectual) relationship with God.

Would their existence help the first cursed descendants?

Not in this fashion, I think--the first descendants could not help being born the way they were. All the generations still do need help; but God has not yet provided that particular help. Even if all the prior generations have done their best to repent, the help has not yet been made manifest. (And again, I have not discussed further problems related to repentance and atonement, although I will not delay this much longer.)

If the original pair had simply been incorrigible rebels-- if they had not tried to repent in some way--would God have allowed them to breed at all? I do not know.

If they stayed incorrigible rebels in the face of their own children, who had been hurt by the actions of those original sinners, would God have allowed them all to continue to breed? He obviously did allow them to continue, whatever the case. I think if they had begun to repent at that point, God would have considered the lesson fulfilled, and would have fixed the problem for the second generation--might even have provided a way to fix the problem for the first generation of descendants (an issue I will return to soon).

On the other hand, if the first sinners had continued to be completely intransigent, then although God would have continued to try to help them, I do not think that further twisted generations would have helped get His point across to them. Sooner or later, I think, it would have been better to have reminded the first sinners of what they were missing by allowing unfallen children; there would be no point to allowing further innocents to suffer to no purpose.

Either way, whether the original sinners tried to atone or not, I think I can conclude that God would have fixed the problem relatively quickly, within the first few generations.

But He didn't.

Now, when I do something evil, God may let the consequences play out to help aid my return to grace. If I continue doing something evil, then I can be assured that God will continue to make my consequences be apparent to me--however much I try to deny those consequences! And I can expect the intensity of those consequences to increase, in order to try to get my attention, if I insist on ignoring those consequences.

But I will also admit: in principle, a point ought to be quickly reached when the benefit to me of recognizing that an innocent suffers for what I have done, is outweighed by the suffering of the innocent. Indeed, I feel, and also think, that something seems off-kilter in my explanation even this far.

If I hit you over the head, it may be to my benefit if you suffer from it--I can see a direct cause/effect chain, and God has a chance to speak more loudly to my conscience through your suffering. It is rather hard on you, but that is my fault: I have taken advantage of God's grace. But there should be limits to this sort of event--limits which common experience shows us to be transcended constantly in our own day and age, and limits which I think would also have been quickly transcended in the situation of the original sinners. I am not entirely convinced that even having a first twisted generation would benefit the original sinners; and I am quite certain that a second twisted generation would not benefit them, if the first did not.

Yet here we all are, unspeakable generations later, with the mark of Adam's curse upon us.

God ought, I think, to have stopped it. In principle He has the power to have stopped it. But He didn't.

What could have happened to prevent Him from stopping it?

Well, technically nothing could have 'prevented' Him from stopping it--except if stopping it involved a flat contradiction, which I do not yet see that it would. So He allowed it to continue. But I see no sense for Him to have allowed it to continue for the sake of 'Adam and Eve', and no more sense for Him to have allowed it to continue for the benefit of the sake of their first children.

He must therefore have allowed it to continue for the benefit of something, or someone, else.

For the benefit of Nature? Nature, as such, could not benefit from twisted creations of God working within it. Indeed, it is questionable whether unthinking Nature can 'benefit' from anything at all: Nature has no 'concerns', and to Nature any state of affairs is only a state of affairs.

For the benefit of a person, or persons, then.

Not for God's benefit--He needs no such help.

Not for humanity's benefit--for the continuance of the curse past a certain quickly reached point would not benefit any human.

For the benefit of non-human persons, then.

Not just any non-human persons, or person, either.

It would have to be a person who was also contributing in some fashion to the twisting of the human species.

It would have to be a person, or persons, who could (and did) continue to contribute, over human generations--as I might continue contributing directly to a result of my sin.

This person, or persons, would not be Independent; for as I have deduced long ago, multiple Independents are ultimately a contradiction in terms.

This person, or persons, must have also been created by God; must have been created good originally; and are now certainly rebelling against God by continuing to actively contribute to the perversion of other persons (physically, mentally, spiritually, or through any combination). They must not breed their own sort as we human animals do--or rather, if they do, then the results to those children must be different from the results to ours, or else I would only have to recourse back again as I have had to do with humans. This could in fact be the case, and may be interesting to contemplate; but for the moment I am concerned with what may be called the 'terminal' cases, in the sense that they are rebels not born corrupted.

If I trace, in principle, the implications back far enough, what do I find?

By experience in history, I find that these persons must not be too obvious in their operations, or else I would not have had to deduce their existence.

Yet also, in history, I find a common thread of evidence in almost all traditions: for almost all traditions say these persons exist.

And almost all traditions tell stories, whether true or false to whatever extent, about these persons.

A devil, or a set of devils, exists.

This implies that angels (or as the Hebrew would say, 'elohim', gods) either can and did exist (although all now are fallen, as we all now have fallen), or do exist (some of them having not fallen). But I am not speaking of loyal derivative supernatural entities right now. I am speaking of the rebels. And if there are multiple devils (literally deo-fols, "foolish/oppositional gods"), then one will be the strongest, either arguably (at any given time of their history) or absolutely.

'Satan' exists.

God would have stopped the pernicious results of the twisting of the synthetic shape through our own mere breeding, after no more than one generation, if the original humans had been the only active contributors to our fall as a species. But He didn't. Therefore, the original humans were not and still are not the only active contributors to the Fall.

Something else was continuing to act, in a rational and responsible fashion (unlike humans insofar as our mere breeding goes), to maintain the twisted shape, through successive generations. Something not overtly obvious to the natural senses. Something which could, without obvious natural presence, strike directly at the genetic contributions to the synthetic shape--and perhaps also communicate to seduce our minds.

Something that hates us.

But something that had been created by God--and so which, or rather whom, God must still love, too.

For by deductive logic, I can discover that God shall never set aside His love, no more than He sets aside His justice.

And by my own example, I see that my own intransigence can happen only when I willfully take advantage of the fact that God continues to love me: my sinning can continue only because God continues to love me, even though I am a rebel.

Devils twist at us, because God loves them enough to allow them to retain their dignity of causality, too.

So: we, as a species, need help. Our progenitors dug themselves, and their immediate descendants, into a pit. The devils, even if they did not help instigate this Fall (though one or more of them might have done so, and my tradition certainly indicates that at least one of them did!), have acted to maintain it--at a fundamentally genetic level, first, for we come into existence with the 'nature' of fallen humans.²⁶⁰

If they can tamper with us so fundamentally from the womb, they might be able to tamper with us at later stages in life. If tampering from the womb results, as it does, in their contribution at maintaining our synthetic shape, which further results in our personal inability to relate efficiently to our environment and especially to God personally; then I think I can safely conclude that future tampering by them, in my life and in your life and in the lives of everyone else, will have similar ends in view.

I do not say this further tampering post-conception is deductively certain; but I do notice (once again) the almost unanimous testimony of human cultures on this issue. A scientist may study our brains and discover a condition of epilepsy, or discover that an imbalance of the element lithium contributes to clinical depression. But discoveries of that sort have nothing,

²⁶⁰ This clearly implies their supernatural transcendence to our own 'Nature': experience readily shows that they do not appear in birthing rooms or at marriage beds, past and present, in modes naturally detectable, in order to do their tampering. Although then again, I think cultures often have pictured devils showing up at marriage beds and birthing rooms; and these cultures have often attempted charm-magic to ward the devils away from such sacred places.

of themselves, to say about what causes those causes. Such events may take place by 'accident'; or they might be instigated. The question of whether such events can be instigated by causes other than non-rational Nature, is a philosophical question, not a scientific one--and in principle, it is a question I have already deductively answered: yes, it is possible. Possible does not mean certain--I suffer from moderate clinical depression at times, and I do not conclude that at least one devil is behind every incident.

But devils do exist; and they apparently have the ability to do this sort of thing. Any case, then, should be treated as its own case.²⁶¹

So again: we as a species need help.

But not only us: this other species (of one or more individuals) needs help, too.

God shall fulfill justice, to us and to the devilkind--He will work to set right our abuses of His grace.

²⁶¹ I have not bothered to clarify the question of whether one or more than one such entity exists; sometimes it has been grammatically more convenient for me to speak of devils or of the devil. Nor have I bothered to clarify whether mediate rebellious entities--such as dark faerykind--exist; although I think this is entirely possible. Nor have I bothered to infer whether devils tamper with natural processes outside human characteristics, such as weather.

All these are interesting questions, and I am very far from denying them, but they are outside the scope of my argument.

God shall fulfill love, to us and to the devilkind--He already fulfills it partly, by allowing us grace for us to abuse, and He shall work to fulfill it fully.

But what can God possibly do?

I here re-present a paragraph from an earlier chapter: A servant assigned to be a steward with power and responsibility over a kingdom cannot be allowed to exercise all that authority and power once he has rebelled. Disruption in the kingdom shall already follow; but God will minimize it as far as possible--within the boundaries of other plans of His.

So, for instance, to minimize the disruption absolutely, God could have simply annihilated Adam and Eve (or a devil) on the spot. But that hardly fulfills love, or even justice, to Adam and Eve (or a devil)--for they would be completely gone, and so they would not exist any longer to be recipients of God's love and justice! Since God never has nor never shall (on peril of reality's self-destruction) set aside His love and justice, then I think annihilation must necessarily be out of the question.

Some other plan must have been put into effect, by God, after the 'fall'.

And that will be my subject for the remainder of this book.

SECTION FIVE -- THE STORY OF PASSION AND ATONEMENT

CHAPTER 48 -- the story from theology

In the four previous sections I have analyzed dozens and dozens of metaphysical propositions--over 600 pages worth!--deciding for various reasons between them, building and shaping a metaphysic, and arriving at what Christians have historically called 'orthodox trinitarian theism'. I have arrived there without reference to scriptural authority or claims of special revelation; right or wrong, any sceptic could in principle arrive here, too, by following out the logical trail in regard to data commonly accessible to any of us. I am a trinitarian theist, and this is why I would be a trinitarian theist, even if there was no such thing as historical Christianity, or scriptures to seek out testimony on.

I worship one God in Trinity,
and Trinity in Unity,
neither confounding the Persons,
nor dividing the Substance.

For there is one Person of the Father,
another of the Son,
and another of the Holy Spirit.

But the Godhead
of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit
is all one,
the Glory equal,
the Majesty co-eternal.

Such as the Father is,
such is the Son,
and such is the Holy Spirit.

The Father uncreated,
the Son uncreated,
and the Holy Spirit uncreated.

The Father incomprehensible,
the Son incomprehensible,
and the Holy Spirit incomprehensible.

(By this I do NOT mean 'no one can make true reasonings or even statements about God'. I mean that all three Persons are omniscient, unlike any creature which must be less in knowledge; and I mean, a little more literally, that no not-God system or entity 'naturally' contains or encloses any Person.)

The Father eternal,

the Son eternal,
and the Holy Spirit eternal.

And yet they are not three eternals, but one eternal.

As also there are not three incomprehensibles, nor three
uncreated,

but One uncreated, and One incomprehensible.

So likewise the Father is Almighty,
the Son Almighty,
and the Holy Ghost Almighty.

And yet they are not three Almightyies, but one Almighty.

So the Father is God,
the Son is God,
and the Holy Ghost is God.

And yet they are not three Gods, but one God.

So likewise the Father is Lord,
the Son Lord,
and the Holy Ghost Lord.

And yet not three Lords, but one Lord.

For as I am compelled by verity (and validity!)

to acknowledge every Person by Himself to be both God and
Lord,

so I am likewise forbidden to say: There be three Gods, or
three Lords.

The Father is made of none, neither created, nor begotten.

The Son is of the Father alone, not made, nor created, but
begotten.

The Holy Ghost is of the Father and the Son, neither made,
nor created, nor begotten, but proceeding.

So there is one Father, not three Fathers;

one Son, not three Sons;

one Holy Ghost, not three Holy Ghosts.

And in this Trinity none is afore, or after the other;

none is greater, or less than another;

but the whole three Persons are co-eternal together and co-
equal.

So that in all things, as is aforesaid,

the Unity in Trinity and the Trinity in Unity is to be
worshiped.

There are differences between trinitarians as to details
after this--many or most of us (though not I) would be pretty

hesitant to affirm that God loves rebel angels for example and seeks their salvation from sin, even though all of us would quickly affirm that God loves at least some human sinners and seeks their salvation from sin. And although all of us would agree, in principle, that God is the single ultimate Self-existent, Self-begetting, Self-begotten multi-Personal reality, not all of us would agree (though I do) that this means God is essentially intrinsically Love in God's own fundamental self-existence. And quite a few of us would have problems agreeing that the Spirit proceeds from both the Son and the Father (though I agree with quite a few others of us that the Spirit does not proceed from the Father alone.)

There are some other disagreements among us of this sort; and those disagreements, however little they may seem, are as important as the truth of the ultimate Truth is important! Which is why professionals among us go to a lot of trouble to work on properly identifying and understanding the details. Some of our variances can be reconciled with each other; in other cases we cannot all be right about our variances. But because we care about rightly worshiping and praising God, and about rightly representing God to other people, then we care about those differences. I wish we all cared enough to recognize when our opponents also care about God and are (typically) doing the best they can to love God with all their heart and all their soul and all their strength and all their understanding (even when they

have results that are different from ours, and are important enough to disagree even strenuously about!)

But after all, even we theologians are sinners, too. And to a sinner, by corrupted birth and by intentionally chosen habit, disagreement will (naturally!) tend to involve working toward non-fair-togetherness. And even toward regarding non-fair-togetherness as 'dikaiosune', righteousness. (Even though that word means... fair-togetherness!--the utter essential reality of God Most High, if trinitarian theism is true.)

Still, despite our differences, generally trinitarian theologians are going to agree on a huge and rather complex number of detailed doctrines regarding God and God's distinct relationship to the natural system in which we humans live. The differences are important enough that it's easy to forget (or, as sinners, to willfully ignore) how much we actually do agree on--in fair-togetherness with each other! Consequently it is also easy for sceptics to forget (or to willfully ignore) how much we actually do agree on. But as the orthodox trinitarian author Dorothy Sayers once said, on much the same topic, "For this state of affairs, I am inclined to blame the orthodox!"

One of those many things we trinitarian theologians agree on, however, is something that my argument in the prior Sections has often involved and finally arrived at: God acts in history, even for there to be a 'natural history' at all; and we can expect God to act historically in regard to human sin. (Which is

why, not-incidentally, there is a second half to that Creed I quoted the first half of at the beginning of the chapter!)

That history will itself be not only history but a story.

But what kind of story will it be?

If I pull together all the things I have argued up till now, what kind of story will result?

The result will also be the kind of story I ought to be looking for, to happen in our history, sooner or later.

Telling that myth, that story of principles, which I ought to expect and search for as history, is what I will do in this final Section of chapters.

Chapter 49 -- the genesis of atonement

What shall God do?

The devils have betrayed His love; and do betray those He loves. Yet, as the eternal ground of all reality (including theirs), still being intrinsically Love in His own unique and independent self-existence, God still loves the rebel angels.

The humans have betrayed Him, too; and are betrayed in turn by higher tormentors; and also betray whosoever they themselves can find to have power over.

Yet, still, God loves them, too.

God will do what He can, to mitigate the suffering that His beloved children cause, in their quests to affirm their own self-importance. Such a quest will always involve perverted suffering: for to make suffer, in pain or in pleasure, is to exhibit power over; and so to exhibit power over, in any perverted way, will be to make suffer.

Yet God has given them such power that they pervert.

And although He will limit it, He will not abrogate it--for He loves them.

He will let at least some of the consequences of their choices play out--for He loves them.

But neither will God, the omnipresent Love Most High, leave them alone. He will always be trying to call them back, because Love Most High knows they can only be happier, in the long run, if they are working with, rather than against, the source of their life and power. He will never let them destroy themselves utterly, in their mad lust for a freedom to be what they can never be.

For He loves them.

'Them', I say? 'They', I say?

'I' and 'ME', I say!

God is always working within me. God is always working through other people around me--even when they don't quite realize Who they are working with. God is always working through this Nature in which I live. The devils are tampering, to one extent or another, with this Nature; just as I also, as a sinner, am tampering, to one extent or another, with this Nature.

But we rebels don't have it all our own way. The enemies of the Lord Above plot deeply and plot well.

But the Lord Above plots, too--and He is the best of plotters.

God is plotting love and justice, to me, for me, as a rebel, and as a victim of rebels.

He is always plotting, He is always working--toward my return to Him. But He cannot simply make me return; not without voiding my personhood, undoing my childhood, which would run entirely against the point of having me personally reconciled to Him. So, what can He do?

One thing God does, is wait.

He waits, while feeling, in His voluntarily active omniscience, all the suffering we engender, in ourselves and each other--sufferings we may eventually be able to put behind us, by the grace of God, but which God as the Eternally Real at every point of our space and time can never put behind Him, but must always utterly know.

He waits, letting us, allowing us, to exercise such a dreadful power over each other--and over Him.

He waits, His Fatherly heart bleeding, because of us, for us, for our victims, for His children.

He waits, as a spurned lover waits, feeling every anguish of hell, praying to whomever will listen that His love will return.

And that is another thing He does:

We sometimes pray to God. But in awful truth, in total reversal of natural religious piety and expectation, God Most High is always praying to us: praying to us to come back;

praying for us to come back. We curl up in the dark, unwanting even to breathe, praying to Whomever will listen that our love will return, wanting to pray to our love for her or for him to return. God also curls up in the dark of our souls, praying to whomever will listen to Him, for His loves to return.

He is ever praying, ever urging, with a whisper or with a shout or with the roar of a lion. In the shocking language of the Jewish Tanakh (what Christians call the Old Testament), God twists Himself in emotional torment at the adultery of His people. The language is even more shocking in the Christian New Testament grammar: God "propitiates" us!

But He acts in other ways, too. He is always and ever trying to help--not only for the ones who have begun to try to love Him in return, but also for the ones who reject what they perceive of reality, thus in principle rejecting Him.

He whispers to us, or roars to us: "Please, please, do not embrace untruth!!"

And sometimes we listen.

Sometimes we do more than listen: sometimes we listen...
and then turn away.

But sometimes, sometimes... some of us... listen--and
agree.

Sometimes we do choose to work with Him.

And when that happens--when we resolve not to turn away from what little light we can see, and instead resolve to walk, to bathe, to glory in that light, as little as it may be... then, after a while, sooner or later... we see more light. A lot more; or a little more. Maybe it is only an illusion thrown by an enemy; but it is something to compare with what light we do have.

So we can walk by what light we do have; and search for more light thereby.

And when we do this, we are working with, not against, the 3rd Person of God, the Holy Spirit; and therefore we are working also with the 1st and 2nd Persons, even if we know none of them as such: we are working also with the Father and the Son.

But it is hard.

I bear the synthetic curse, as do we all: the sin of angels, and the sin of the man raised from mud--and my own sins, too. I can hear God a little more clearly when I try to work with what I do know about reality, when I try to be true; and I ardently admit and insist that this is true: for anyone,

polytheist, pantheist, theist, dualist, atheist, agnostic,
today, tomorrow, or deep in antiquity.

But we, most of us, can only hear a little. And often what we hear is garbled; for the lines of communication have been mangled on our end, by our ancestors, by our enemies, by our selfish perversions, even by our natural surroundings.

All these factors are real; and God will have His creation, will have us, to be real.

Yet, even so--if we look, if we listen, if we are willing to be fair, if we are willing to be humble...

We can find men and women who have walked among us for all of human history, saying something, working for something, standing for something.

And, in the process, standing for Someone.

They are fallible; they are sinners, too; their communication isn't perfect; their understanding isn't perfect.

But they are there--showing us there is some Way, better than the ways around them, perhaps better than the ways we ourselves know.

These men and women are the sheep of the Shepherd.

They are the saints.

For the vast majority of human history, they have also been what is commonly called 'pagan'; although they haven't always been what 'pagan' originally meant: peasants.

And though they have worked within the understandings of their time, sometimes against the understandings of their time, and not always in tune with the answers I myself have inferred--still, often there are hints, in what they do, in who they are, in what they stand for.

There is, after all, a universal religion.

The 'catholic' religion.

Except it is very hard to see, and very hard to hear. It requires discernment to embrace logic; and humility to embrace both myth and history; and a willingness to distinguish good from evil, and truth from falsehood.

And even then with the best of intentions--we still aren't likely to get much of it right.

God is doing, and will do, everything He can. But because He refuses to let His creations be something other than His creations, because He refuses to stop loving His creations, because He refuses to make them less real... what He can do in our hearts, isn't quite enough.

The saints who have walked the earth from the beginning of recorded history, and very probably from even before; who have been the salt of the earth, the taste from beyond Nature giving

savor to the cultures in which they live and which they sometimes succeed in altering or improving--they may be sheep, but they are not the Shepherd. They are not God. They are sinners, too, like you and me; maybe better ethically in some or every way, yet still cursed with the sin of Adam and of angels--and of themselves.

They may walk so close to God that they are taken to heaven, in history, in legend, in myth: Enoch, Melchizedek, Elijah, Arthur.

But they aren't good enough, they aren't powerful enough, they don't say enough. Even when they say more and do more than the rest of us--it isn't enough, no matter how hard they try.

And sometimes, for all of what they represent, and for all of what they accomplish... they cause more trouble than they help.

The kingdoms of David and of Theodosius, of Arthur and of Charlemagne, have fallen--in small part or in large, due to these very men themselves; for they were sinners, too.

In order to have the best chance of changing our willed outlook ('repentance'); the best chance of making our own responsible contributions to the undoing of our corruptedness and what we ourselves have corrupted ('remission'); the best chance of becoming, in our lives, united with God ('at-one-

ment', or as we say in English now 'a-tone-ment')--then what do we need?

We need God to help us. We need God to find a way to give us a clearer communication, a clearer communion, than is otherwise possible in our hearts.

We need God to come to us.

But there are constraints under which He must work, if He is to give us the clearest possible information about Himself, and if He is to do this without undermining His other plans.

And those constraints, some of which are quite paradoxical, are what I will discuss in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 50 -- principles of Immanuel

God must come to us, to give us the best possible chance of understanding Him. Not only in the ministry of the Holy Spirit to every person, inspiring and judging us in fair-togetherness, but even more directly than that, more obviously as a Person than that, more able to reveal the truth of His character in action we can see, not merely hear in our hearts.

That doesn't mean we necessarily will understand what is happening; we might still make our own honest mistakes about it, or we might still try to fudge our way around it to protect some inflamed sense of our own self-importance.

But this leads to a number of questions about the act of God I am now considering: what should I mean by God coming to us, each of us, personally, in this manner?

Well, there have been odd tales, throughout history, all over the world, about encounters with Someone. We have dreams. We see things.

But it doesn't take much thought to understand that such appearances, while perhaps important to us individually to one degree or another, aren't enough to accomplish what God wants to do for all of us.

The sceptic will rightly say that these tales, taken altogether (and often even taken individually) are a garbled mess. Almost anything can be made out of them.

I am not saying they don't serve, and haven't served, some good purposes. But the paradoxical truth is that they are too individualistic, even assuming a proper understanding on the part of the recipients (which is assuming a lot!), to be a universal special revelation. They don't have the best sort of trustworthiness.

The sceptic will rightly reply: very well, but He wouldn't need to appear to each of us individually, would He? He could show up right now, ring the end-of-day bell at the New York Stock Exchange, and make a speech from the podium in front of the CNN cameras.

Yes, He could do that. I even expect that to reveal Himself universally to all persons, those living and those who have died, God will do something vastly much more impressive!

But again, would that be the best sort of trustworthiness, the best act of faith on His part, the best way to show Who He is... at least, at the beginning?

A notable show of power, even a monstrous show of power, would show us only: power.

We are already far too ready to worship mere power, whether we are religious or secular. We are already far too ready to idolize the person who can merely do more than we can; and, for

that matter, we are already far too ready to jealously despise and envy those people. Even if we use a name for God that means 'good' (as 'God' in fact does as a word), we are likely to think in terms of meaning only power or authority.

What God wants to do, what we need done for us, isn't simply an announcement or demonstration, as if He was a candidate for President with a platform, or MacArthur returning to the South Pacific, or Elvis opening a new show in Las Vegas after all these years.²⁶²

Even dropping out of the sky on clouds and rolling up the heavens as a scroll, to sit in judgment upon a Jerusalem throne--or upon a Chinese Mountain of Heaven--isn't all we need, as individual people, because if power is all that is shown by God, then we will worship only power. I do expect an ultimately obvious reign of power to happen someday, too; but because God wants to help us best, He must do something else, too... something else, first.

We need to see the truth that He is a person, first and foremost, for us--for us, and with us.

Okay, so why don't we have a personal manifestation of God wandering around beside all of us, constantly; not showing off

²⁶² At the risk of sounding irreverent, it is tempting here to quote the Elcalde from the movie Zorro: the Gay Blade: "He is cunning! He is crafty! He is not simply going to walk in here and say, 'Here I aaa-am!'"

Of course, exactly one beat later Don Diego de la Vega walks in through the front door dressed as Zorro, calling out: "Here I aaa-am!"

But then again... even coming as Zorro, he has come cleverly in disguise. You'll have to watch the movie to understand.

His divine niftiness, necessarily, but giving us the personal attention we need?

I think part of the answer is: we do have something of this sort already, in our conscience!--this is a major role of the Holy Spirit, the 3rd Person of God, in relating to God's creatures. But if we aren't ready to listen to our conscience, and try our best to understand it and work with it--even if we don't recognize it to be the work of the Holy Spirit--then we are only going to be more petulantly annoyed at a personally vouchsafed manifestation of God following us around. Even if we thereby believed God existed, we still in our sins wouldn't necessarily believe in God.

What if we all receive an experience like this when we die? No doubt that would help, and so I do not doubt it will happen (sooner or later)! But again it wouldn't by itself help us relate to God beyond what our sin inclines us to think and expect about ultimate power.

There are numerous delicate balances, which are important to God--important enough for Him to have instituted them to begin with, and to keep them going even to this day: the balances of having a real creation, with real people, and real effects from subordinate actions and reactions. God doesn't in fact hold Himself apart from these situations, dictating them from on high; God rather empowers these situations to exist at all, as He empowers His creations within these situations,

allowing His creatures to contribute in various ways to the real story of that Creation.

This is what ultimate power actually does; but this is hard for us to imagine and to keep in mind. We need the Throne of Power to be a throne that reveals the self-sacrificial love and positive justice of ultimate power, the ultimate Truth of God Most High. We need the throne to be a seat of propitiation, not only in the sense that we throw ourselves on the mercy of the throne, but in the sense that the King comes to lead His rebellious subjects out of their rebellion, to lean upon Him, to smile upon Him.

Would multiple manifestations, seven billion God-images wandering the planet along with us, be in themselves demonstrating this truth to us about God, for us to repent as sinners and commit to cooperating with Him instead?

I discount the 'problem' of limited resources; He could miraculously take care of such a trivial problem as extra food. He would want to eat and drink with us, I think. Why? To show us that He cares about His creation.

But showing that He cares about His creation, means showing that He cares about respecting the rules of the Nature He has instituted. He would limit the amount of flashiness. Extra food and drink on special occasions, perhaps; but going hungry with us otherwise. Even depending on the charity of others for food or feasting.

He would especially want to let us see Nature affecting Him--by His voluntary, self-sacrificial choice.

And not only do we need to see His humility with respect to His own natural creation, but we need to see His humility with respect to us: how He lets us do a lot of what we want to do, even when it's bad--for us, for other people... and for Him.

What we do when we sin, hurts God. I suspect the devils know this very well, better even than we can know, though I also expect they ignore or discount the truth of God's voluntary acceptance of this suffering, preferring instead to believe that they are forcing God to react to their power.

We need to see that we hurt God with our sinning; and we need to see that God voluntarily bears our sins against Himself: suffering along with our victims--suffering for all-mighty love of us, even if we are the chiefs of sinners.

And, while there are numerous other goals that this manifestation of God's fundamental self-sacrifice would in principle be acting to accomplish, there is also something else that I have asked you, my reader, to keep in mind, on occasion, throughout this book:

God loves sinners--and that means all of us. It at least means me; I think it includes you, too, however much of a sinner you may be. (And however much of a sinner, or not, you think you may be!) He loves us enough, as I have said before, to let us

make our own horrid contributions to history, His story. The innocents suffer unjustly, because God loves us. You and I have suffered something we ought not to have suffered, if only by being born like this, because God loved our first rebellious progenitors; and because God still loves the rebel angels, and the rebel humans, who insist on tampering with His creation.

The bill for all this unjustness--not only what happens to you and me, but also what you and I inflict on other people unjustly--ends up eventually with God Himself. It isn't His fault; but He is authoritatively, sovereignly responsible.

So, it is only fair that He should pay for allowing us to be the sinners whom we are. Isn't it?

We need to see that God truly is fair, despite all the injustice around us. And the best way, the only way, to fully demonstrate that to us...

...is for Him to let Himself be condemned unjustly to suffer, as a Person (just as each of us is individually a person), by the enemies He loves.

But He cannot do this in a historical vacuum. There are other goals He will be acting to accomplish, too. And that will be the topic of my next chapter.

CHAPTER 51 -- the hope of the people sitting in darkness

If God is going to maintain all the various balances in His creation, while still working to His utmost to help effect our salvation from our own sins and the sins of our predecessors, then He will have to go about it within our history--not merely within the stories we tell ourselves (although He will do some work along those lines, too), but within the real natural reality we inhabit as synthetic creatures. This means He will act within a historical context, and it will be a context of His choosing: designed and guided, even 'tweaked' by Him to fit His plans; but also incorporating the choices of the people, the families, the nations, who will be a part of this particular story of history.

But those people will not be sock-puppets. They will be real people; they will be fallible, even though God works with them to the best of His own ability; and they will be sinners, just like the rest of us.

In fact, they are likely to be rather sinful!

When we look back into the beginnings of recorded history, we find that God has not yet evidently made the specially self-sacrificial impact I have inferred He will attempt, doing among us small and close what He is always doing throughout all

reality. There are little hints, scattered here and there, of something similar to the notions I have inferred; but however much knowledge of God was vouchsafed to our ancestors in the legends and myths of prehistory--and even the beginning of history is shrouded in such mists--the knowledge has been muffled, and forgotten.

God has let us go as far away from Him as we can, while still being alive in this Nature; as He has let the rebel angels go as far away from Him as they can. He has allowed injustice to flourish first, so that eventually we shall see that however far sin may exceed, the grace of God Most High shall hyper-exceed it!

So from this bottoming out, this chaotic mass of strength-worship, world-worship, sex-worship, blood-worship, suffering-worship (of pain or of pleasure), this worship of not-God, of the null within the non-story that merely repeats like a wheel, this fracturing and perversion of what light we do have into fog...

...out of this, God will begin His mightiest and most subtle work.

The earth was formless and filled with futility; darkness lay over the chaotic deeps, of history and of myth--the myths of the world.

But: the breath of God still hovered above those chaotic swirling depths, and over the people drowned in them. God did not leave them sitting alone in darkness; still He strove to work with them, however little that might be.

What happened to those people when they died? The same that happens to all of us when we die: the synthetic chrysalis falls free, leaving us in some other, higher Nature (for there is no point to undoing our creation, and so we must have a distinctive natural system in which to be); and the consuming fire of the eternal Holy Spirit works upon us, as He always has done, as He is doing this very moment to you and to me, as He always wishes to work even more with us. The Holy Spirit, the 3rd Person of the Trinity, is not separate from the 1st and 2nd Persons; the Father and the Son are there as well, God Self-Begetting and God Self-Begotten, as they are now with us, as they were with the people at the beginning of recorded history, and before the beginning.

Does this mean we will exist in some merely mental fashion without a body? Perhaps--we already exist in a merely mental world at night when we dream, while our sleeping bodies exist in the fuller reality of Nature. But this natural system is a fuller reality than a merely mental one--would anything be gained by restricting our existence afterward to that which was merely mental?

But if it is physical, too, we must either be supplied with new bodies, or else our old ones must be transformed and raised from their corruptibility into incorruptibility.

This, to put it mildly, clearly does not currently happen! But would it happen someday? And why would that be, if so?

I do not think it is likely that the new Nature we shall enter will be corrupted as our current Nature has been corrupted--there would be no point in God making such a translation of our spirits into an equal corruption. Then again, how much of our nature, and of our Nature, shall be done away with, and how much shall be saved and redeemed?

We shall put off corruption, and will (if we choose to accept the gift) put on incorruption: a new body, whether or not redeemed from the old one. Perhaps there we will meet--perhaps our ancestors did meet--creatures born into that Nature, unfallen. Perhaps they can come to this Nature on occasion, as messengers, or merely as travelers to the dangerous and exotic and beautiful land of this world that we should love.

These are but speculations: the 'elves' of our world are already here--you and I are two of them. Yet, we do have stories of other elves...

I only speculate about what might be in the 'next' world, or in other worlds, and whether any of it trickles or gushes or travels to this world; I heartily wish it to be true, for I love true magic, and our souls are suffused with it already: the

breath of God. I think we have grounds to honestly hope that anything good that can be done, has been or will be done. If it can be good to have elves, or unicorns, then have them we shall!--though always with the dangers that accompany any good thing, for there always must be consequences to any action.

Again, only speculation. I trust what I do know: and I do know God exists, and is committed to His creations, which includes this Nature, and which includes us as people. When we have finished the evil dying, then something new will happen, and new adventures will begin, for us as individual people--and I expect also for us corporately, as families or nations, for these are outgrowings of our lives as individuals. I trust that sooner or later--and I have no reason to suspect it would be much later--we will reach a Nature, a country, itself uncorrupted; whether new or, more likely, itself redeemed from our current field of reality, where our synthetic shape shall not hamper our hearts and minds.

(Why would that be more likely? Because God is already so committed to the current field of Nature that He allows it to affect us with suffering. To simply throw it away afterward and replace it with something else would leave victims of Nature without a victory over Nature--and without reconciliation to that which God has created but which has been since perverted.)

Yet, even in the new Nature to come, our hearts and minds will have already been partly shaped, not only by this Nature,

but by other hearts and minds acting within this Nature--not least, by our own selves as we make our choices. This is true for us today; and was equally true in ancient Sumaria, China, India, Egypt, Africa, Ireland, Peru.

Specifically what God has done for those people in their own cultures, I do not know, although I hope for the best.

But I also know that although He excuses what I do when I do have excuses (for He will be just to me), He does not excuse what I do when I have no excuses (for He will be just to me). Nor does He simply negate the results of my mistakes, whether I have excuse for them or not.

Forgiveness is necessary; atonement is necessary. And it cannot happen without my own willed choice of action, as a person. Nor can it happen without God's own willed choice of action, as a Person.

And the action of God, including His most primary basic action of self-existence, is God the Self-Begotten.

There is no salvation, apart from the Son of God.

But the Father will be begetting His action, and the Son will be surrendering in Unity to the Father, and the Holy Ghost will proceed; and the eonian fire will do every work He can do, to lead His children home.

This may require, to put it delicately, some 'spanking'.

But I think it could easily be rather more delicate than the pictures we have invented of human kings and human gods tormenting with insatiable human vengeance. We should resist such images, on pain of our own damnation, insofar as they represent God setting aside His love, His justice, or both.

Yet, then again...

people are people; and we make our own choices.

I will not join with the doctrine of automatic damnation and hopeless torment; but neither will I join with the doctrine of automatic salvation and beatitude. I proclaim the active love and justice of God, however fiercely or gently such love and justice may need to blaze.

And I testify to you: I can easily imagine, I have been sorely tempted, to do things for which I would heartily deserve the loving fearsome wrath of God Almighty.

I do not wish to be saved from God: there is no salvation apart from God!

I do not wish to be saved from a just and righteous and loving punishment: the discipline of God.

I want, and need, to be saved from my sins.

And I pray God, whatever it takes, please Lord do it! Save me--not some mere copy of me, but me, personally!

I trust Him to save me, whatever it takes, whatever it costs Him in His own anguish, or costs me in mine. I love Him that much.

And I tell you, my reader: such love is not an easy love for me to give. Sometimes I resent the fire. At this moment, while I write this chapter, my heart is being crushed into a bleeding mass and set on fire, out of sorrow and anguish and loss.

But however much it hurts me, for my heart to be pulverized, I also swear to you, my reader: it is far, far better, for myself and for those around me, for me to have a living bleeding heart, than to have a constricted little hole of a heart within a mountain of stone.

So, the hope I have for myself, I also have for the people of antiquity, who though they may not have had my advantages of knowledge, did have and still have the same mighty advantage you and I have here and now:

God loves them, too!

I trust Him to save me. I trust Him to save them. Whether they trust Him to save them, sooner or later, is another matter. But God Himself will do everything He can, for them as for me-- and for you, my reader.

We, all of us--past, present and future; human or angel or animal (if other sentient creatures have been or shall be)--all of us, as the children of God, are God's chosen people: for we have been chosen by Love, the interPersonal foundational of all reality, to be people at all.

We still are chosen, all of us, even when we are sinners; chosen through birth and by Divine choice: for God, the Trinitarian Unity Who in His own Self-existence is Love, loves His children--even when they are His enemies.

So, what do we need? We need to see God loving His enemies, choosing His enemies, electing His enemies for salvation, working to bring them into readiness to accept the inheritance they were born for.

We need a symbol, of God's love for all of us.

We, the chosen people, need to see a people chosen.

CHAPTER 52 -- a people chosen

It is the beginning of a history--not of all humanity's history, not of Nature, but of a particular story enacted by God, with us and for us, within the Nature we inhabit.

God is beginning His greatest adventure: giving us hope in this life.

For we --live-- in this life!--and God is committed to this Nature and to us, the synthetic persons He has molded, shaped, grown, begotten, within the womb of our mother.

But quickly or slowly or some combination thereof, God will do it in His own time; for His purpose is not to provide some technical 'method of salvation'.

Salvation from sin is a personal act, an act of God to co-operate with us as persons, and act of ours in response to the graces of God the Merciful and the Compassionate.

But He wants people in this history, sooner or later, to know more about Him and what His love truly is, than our own fanciful guesses and imaginations (and lusts and fears and hates) can tell us; more than He can tell us, and more than we can hear, merely within our corrupted hearts: hearts corrupted to expect some things of ultimate power and certainly not others.

He wants as many people as possible to work with Him as closely as possible, in this Nature; but one thing we need to know, in order to understand Him as a Person, is that while He can work swiftly He also works slowly (by our natural standards), subtly, spiritually from within, with His enemies--not only with the best of humanity (whoever they are), but with the dullest, most treacherous, least promising of us all.

Yes, He also does some things quickly, explosively even; and He will show us that, too. But we already have some idea of the power of quickness, of force, of heat, of cold, of wrath, of ravishing, of raw compassing energy.

And we are too quick, ourselves in sin, to envy or to worship mere power.

So I expect He will mostly work slowly, in ways which to our first natural guess would be folly--thinking, as we in our rebellion would do, in terms of how we would show those upstart rebels if we (the upstart rebels) were God!

Also, God will keep in mind the needs of His other children who are tampering with our Nature. The devils will also be taught some lessons--if they will listen and pay attention.

So, where to begin?

Start with someone who has some resources; that will mean someone in one of the core societies of the world.

But start with someone who isn't a vaunting hero, a haughty priestess, a vicious tyrant. Those are people whom God loves, too; but He does need to work with someone who has some immediate promise.

Someone not too good, someone not too bad: there will always be time for treachery later--and God will put Himself, at all levels, in line with that treachery, whenever it happens.

Someone who, in his own small derivative way, can begin to represent God more clearly to the world.

Would this be a man or a woman?

Whatever weaknesses a male may have, as follower or as leader; still at the most common (even 'vulgar') of levels a man represents a begetter, acting upon a receiver, to bring about creation.

Then again, a woman might more appropriately represent us all, all of creation, all of us who are affected by God.

I lean in the direction of expecting a man, in this case.

Not simply because this person will be regarded as an authority figure and the majority of societies throughout the world, worshiping in our sin the effecting of mere power to cause results, would more easily accept a man in this role; after all, God might choose a woman specifically to undermine the merely prevalent notion of authority!

Nor because this man, in representing us, must also represent our actions of responsibility in the story of atonement; after all, women can also act and might serve even better as a symbol of the derivative act-ers we all are.

No, I lean in the direction of a man simply because I also expect a woman will in fact be given an even more important role in the story eventually, fulfilling all these positive notions I have mentioned, as well as contributing a gift no man could possibly contribute to the story. And it might unbalance the story if the key human figure at the beginning of this story was also a woman.

So, not neglecting other possibilities of fulfillment, I will expectantly use the masculine to refer to this person.

Where to pick this man?

This man will be given the gift of vocation: he is to represent, eventually, a calling by God. People of his time, wherever they are in the world, may not have (or may no longer have) clearly in mind the concept of a calling.

Enchantments there may easily be in their epics, Sumerian, Egyptian, Peruvian, Chinese, Irish. But not yet an enchantment of love, true love, giving for the sake of the growth of the beloved in character and spirit. Enchantments of lust, yes. Enchantments of strength, yes. Enchantments of worldly wisdom, to some extent yes. Enchantments of death, most certainly!

Enchantments of life? Maybe.

But life, by itself, isn't love--or, rather, the Life of Lives is Love, but no one knows this yet (or else they have forgotten.)

Calendars they may have, yes; and accurate, and mathematical they may very well be, showing (to us) not only cleverness and sophistication, but also some strand of long-running knowledge that predates what we call 'history'. Even today, there are tribes in distant parts of the world, who somehow know the paths of stars they cannot see. They remember, through their culture; but someone once must have seen those stars--or else, they were told.

But these calendars may represent to them an unbreakable wheel--the triumph and domination of mere reaction and response, weighing down and overwhelming the choices of our will: the curse of our corrupted selves.

They may have some idea that the Earth is corrupted, and the heavens are divine. They may also have some idea that the Earth is blessed, and that somehow, some way, we ought to be able to share in the blessing of the Earth--even in the blessing of the heavens upon the Earth and by the Earth.

But their idea of blessing would be limited; they--we--need to learn more, of what it means to be blessed, and of what it means to suffer for the blessed and for the blessing.

And they cannot learn more, merely by studying the heavens and the earth--for the heavens they see are themselves Nature, and can at best be only a symbol, not the Absolute.

These people will, however, act; they will be quite impressed (and rightfully so) with the inherently magical power of actions and choices. Writing will become one such magic; and although our own 'modern' senses are often dulled to its wonder and its meaning, writing is still an enchantment today--sometimes holy, sometimes dark and deadly, always awful: full of awe, for those with eyes to see, and with ears to hear.

If, my reader, you do not believe me, try walking down the quiet aisles of a library, preferably an old one; and feel the enchantments coursing around you, shards of will encased in ink and paper, dormant yet almost twitching with carried intent--waiting for a supernatural creature to read those words and waken the enchantment.

Such enchantments will also exist in those days, usually spoken, perhaps occasionally written; dark enchantments for the most part, but laughing enchantments, too. We see television specials on 'the ancients', and perhaps we find the ancients dull, brutish, barely cognizant, far too serious. Well, perhaps they were; there is some evidence in what now remains, that the earliest civilizations and earliest 'savages', could take themselves rather too seriously. But there is also evidence that they laughed, had fun, enjoyed themselves.

As sinners, indeed, they would have enjoyed their selves a little too much!

But then again, my reader: so do you and I.

This is the humanity (perhaps not necessarily in our distant past) out of whom God will choose someone to begin working with Him for the history of our atonement.

Maybe not a priest, locked into the rituals or even the seductions of power.

But an idol-maker would do. Someone who has some working knowledge, in quite a literal sense, of what the 'gods' seen all around him 'are'.

Someone who, perhaps, has come to the conclusion, inspired by the Living God, that these gods are only wood and stone; but who, rather than give in to fatal scepticism, wishes for something better; perhaps already is hearing something better, speaking with the expected voice of an ancestor.

Someone good enough by the grace of God to look for what light he can see, and then to look for more light thereby.

Yet someone unsaintly enough, that he could be any of us.

There could be any number of such men (or women), scattered around the world, in any year.

But this one particular man will carry a message, a lineage, a tradition, an idea, a vocation.

So he will need to be located where he, and his descendants, have the greatest opportunity to spread such an idea and such a message, to as many different people as possible--sooner or later.

This is where he must be sent, as an externally enacted symbol of vocation: to a hinge, a pivot, a 'cardinal point' between such historical forces; and perhaps he should come from a time and a place where his call for vocation would be most distinctive: a time and place where 'normal' people do not 'normally' expect to receive such calls!

But it would also help if this cardinal point, to which he is called, is a land in which people could flourish. Moreover, I can see how it would help if someone already in that land knows at least a little more about God than this man does!

This man, after all, is not being chosen for his own sake, nor for having special wisdoms and insight better than anyone else. Probably plenty of men, and women, will have had such flashes; for God is still busy working with everyone He can, to whatever little extent remains possible--in this life. Some of those men, and women, would have achieved roles of importance and authority in their societies: the salt of the earth, the sheep who do not know their shepherd, are already on the march, carrying on the family name, doing what they can to keep the light shining in the dark.

It would be to one such man, or woman, that God's chosen man would be sent--for God will choose less than the very best our world has to offer. This man will be helped by those who are better than he; for that is what the best people do.

The man is nudged; he is called; he is sent.

And almost as importantly as being sent at all:

he goes.

He goes, for without going the call to be sent will be void. He goes, without knowing the future of what will happen. He goes, creating a story, a history...

An adventure.

The great heroes and kings of antiquity were born great heroes and kings (and queens) from the beginning, born of the earth and the sky perhaps, the mighty men--the Nephilim.

But this man is only a man, like any of us, not the strongest or richest, not the wisest or the most good (according to whatever light still shines in the dark).

Yet he will have resources; for he can hardly be in a position to know God enough, to trust God enough, to let God provide all resources needed. That trust will come later, maybe to him, certainly to his descendants who will carry on the ideas

and traditions that he learns and receives. This is to be a learning process: for him and for his descendents.

But it also is an adventure: the adventure of a man, the adventure of Mankind.

We all, most of us, know who this man is; we have heard his name, read his story, maybe dismissed it as legend or myth.

We know of a man, perhaps the man of whom I am talking, who went; to a place far away that he could feasibly reach; to a hinge--a cardinal point--of cultures, and of history.

There, we are told, he met a mysterious priest-king, a peacemaker, who knew far more of this chosen man's God, than did God's chosen man himself.

Melchizedek, the priest-king of Bethel, humbles himself to bless the inheritor whom his God has chosen; Abram, the exalted father, humbles himself to receive the blessing from a man who knows more than he does.

And the journey of the good news of God--a news now new to even the mysterious ruler of Bethel, that the Lord Most High works wonders through the dusty and unremarkable--has begun.

CHAPTER 53 -- the harmony of dissonance

I could follow Abram through his story--history or legend or both as we have it. But I would rather show, if I can, the intrinsic harmony underlying this odd and disturbing story--a harmony I could expect the general principles of, if I know enough of God beforehand to have some clue how He will work.

So, I will go back instead to our nameless chosen ancestor of the knowledge of God, as if I did not already know to suspect his name.

He may not get along very quickly with his knowledge--or more precisely with his learning. But it would be important to teach him that God works slowly, sometimes through channels seeming at first to be unprofitable. The lesson might be almost anything, so long as it is linked to the filling of a promise, in a fashion that this man, and people like him throughout the world in later history, could easily appreciate.

Such as a wife who remains barren through the couple's old age, for instance; barren in the face of a promise from God.

The man needs to be taught that God will work with people's choices, even if those choices happen to be something God would have preferred that they not choose. If, for instance, God promises a blessing to this man, and to the world, through his

offspring; and if the man has offspring by a woman whom God did not select for that purpose; then God would still keep His promise, and protect the child, despite whatever harm might be later wrought by the consequences of this choice.

And, the man needs to be taught that God doesn't just sit there up in the sky overseeing everything: instead, He works personally with His servants.

Working 'personally' in the heart would be a difficult concept to get across at first; and after all, there is nothing stopping God from putting in a physical appearance to make the point rather more plainly.

So, let the man know that God appreciates this Nature, and appreciates communing personally with people.

Sharing a good hearty meal, together, would go far along this line.

Let the man know that God has a sense of proportion and humor; that He can appreciate a joke; that He can laugh, and can help to laugh.

Let the man know that God is willing to be worked with, even will tolerate some honest dissension, especially if the dissension has what seems to the man a good end in view--even if by such toleration God seems to lower Himself too far in the eyes of those who would never lower themselves like this if they (the sinners) were God!

But also let the man know that God knows more than the man does; and sometimes will do things which the man is not going to understand--even to the point of seeming to go back on His own promises of fidelity.

The man is a real person, being a child of God--just as we all are persons who are children of God.

So, what if God did something that looked hideous and evil?

If we already know something about Him, how far are we willing to trust the goodness we think we know, in the face of our own fear and anguish?

The man may or may not pass such a test. In God's awful humility, He is willing to besmirch His own apparent character; as we can see every day around us, in the most powerful argument of the sceptic: the suffering of the innocent.

God might as well make this point, too, as clearly as possible from the first.

He will go further than to show this by proxy, as we see around us today.

He will do it by direct command.

But God will also make the point, that it is not God's will after all that the innocent should suffer--even though He may set up such a situation.

Later, God may let His character be smeared some more, by the descendants of this man. Yet He will work with them, however stubborn they are to Him, however cruel they insist on being to others.

A culture will be born, fathered specially by God to show what it means for God to be a father to us all.

Not the best culture in the world--although they may think of themselves that way in their pride, and although they will carry the thread of the knowledge of God, tenuously in their unkempt hands.

Not the worst culture in the world--for they still must be competent enough to survive to some extent!

But they may be near the bottom of the barrel.

They haven't been chosen for their own merits; they may even have been pulled out of total obscurity and powerlessness, once they became numerous enough to warrant being called a 'people' instead of merely a 'tribe'.

Nor will they be chosen for their own strength--they may seem like grasshoppers next to the mighty men around them.

Not chosen for their own wisdom. Certainly not chosen for their own goodness.

They will be a rough, tough bunch.

A hell's angels of a people: willing to exploit whatever power may come their way, for their own advantages.

And God cannot simply poof them into being saints overnight, if He is committed to treating even these wretches as people.

Even though He will have to sacrifice His own character, to some extent, upon the altar of their survival, while trying to get them to learn Who and What He is--which I could easily expect, as this will be part of the point for God to choose them at all, for all our sakes--He will work with their choices, and with their limitations.

He will temper them where He can. Where another culture would rape the women and children whom they wiped out, God will edge them toward more mercy--a shadow of mercy, by our standards perhaps (standards which may well have been grown out of such a history as I am proposing), but something these people will be marginally willing to work at.

And so God will assassinate His own reputation, for love of these wretches.

...these wretches who could be you and me, just as easily.

And He will feel, and will always feel into eternity, every thrust of every sword, whether He directly commands the deaths, or whether this people merely attribute what they want to His commands--either way, God suffers with the innocents, too; and

even, though His chosen people will probably be long in understanding this, with those who were not at all innocent: just like the dissonant people whom God has chosen Himself.

It is a terrible world these people inhabit.

It still is a terrible world today, across our planet.

There is plenty of blame to go around; and more than enough.

But God suffers, too.

And He will pay the bill, for what He has loved even the wretches of the world so much as to allow.

But no one, in the beginning, will know this yet.

These people must be taught more; taught to be better than they are; taught that God really does not want this oppression of power going on.

However similar they are to the people around them; whatever their shortcomings, which will certainly be many; they will have the thread of the knowledge of God, glowing, growing where it can.

"Whatever power and authority I give you," God will tell them, sooner and later, with ever increasing clarity and insistence, "is not to be used for your own self-aggrandizement. It is to help the poor, the

powerless, the alien sojourning in your land, the disenfranchised, the sick. You are to show them love and justice, and you are to be a light to the lands around you. You are to be the salt of the earth. You have been the sort of people whom I want you to learn to help; so learn from your own past, and help these people, even when they are your enemies. This is Who I truly am--I am the God Who loves the least of people."

Whoo-hoo! We're chosen by God, the God, Most High above the Highest, to be the light of the world! Yeah! Thhppt on all you other people! Our God is the best, most kick-ass God; you-all better bow down to us! And you can start by, um, setting up some temple prostitution sites around here... ack, no, kill them, kill them all!... Damned pagans, trying to ruin us! How dare you!? We're the best! In fact, you should be sending us your queens and, y'know... hey can we have a king?

"No."

We wanna king! Like those other guys have! How can we be the coolest most awesome nation in the world, without a king?

"By showing kindness, and mercy, and by standing for what is good..."

Yeah, yeah, we can do that better with a king!

"If you have a king, I warn you, there will be trouble."

We'll take it! We're tough, we can handle it!
Especially with You on our side, yeah!

"Learn the hard way, then. Here: I will give you just the sort of king you want; and I will take the responsibility for doing so."

Aw yeah, we're bad now! Let's go kick someone's butt! Damned pagans over there, good place to start with... um... actually, they're pretty tough... waitamminute, aren't we supposed to be great? C'mon God, you promised!

"...And meanwhile, I'll be busy over here picking out the sort of king I would have preferred you to

have, if you're going to have one. Oh, you need help
against the pagans? Here, try this fellow."

Wow, this guy worked out pretty good, for some
little hick yanked up out of nowhere...

"Just like you-all, by the way."

Yeah, yeah, whatever--hey we like this guy! With
this guy, we can't lose!

"Yes, you can still lose. Because 'this guy' is
only a man, just like you; no matter how much he loves
Me, He still is a sinner..."

Hey, God--can we have a Temple, like those other
guys?

...and so it goes.

These people will still be people, shepherds and potters
and farmers and bakers and prophets and priests and kings; they
will be an example to the world--but not quite the sort of
example we might expect, nor quite the sort of example they're
likely to expect.

They are sinners, called by God to be something better, to represent something better.

But when God calls sinners to represent Him, you may be completely assured that He Himself will not be coming out of it smelling entirely like a rose, even a rose of Sharon.

At best, He will smell like a sheep.

Maybe, on occasion, like sheepdung.

Sooner or later (and if we all know whom I am talking about, it was sooner and sooner and sooner...), as sinners whom He loves, they will break His heart--as well as do their best to break the heart of everyone else within reach, including the hearts of their own people.

They will stand for all of us--whether we like it or not.

And we will owe them a life-debt we can never repay.

For despite all their stumblings, and adulteries, and murders, and lies, and idolatries, and treacheries...

...they, in God's terrible humility, will have carried the light of the world.

And it will be within their tradition, within their historical context, within the troubles they will have dug themselves into in their pride, despite all the lessons they

were given--whenever they have reached the time they not only are ready, some of them, to listen in the misery of their punishment to the most important lesson of all; but also whenever the historical contexts around them are just right, in a time when the greatest and best things humanity can make are imploding under their own strength, crushing themselves and crushing this people--when all the chosen people of God are ready, whether they know it or not, to hear the best news of all...

...then God will humble Himself still further, to teach this message, this lesson, this news, to them.

And then--it will be time for God Himself to pay the price for this world and the people in it He has made.

(People like God's chosen people, like you and me: the sinners.)

CHAPTER 54 -- the Son of God

To this lynchpin people, at the heart of a world ready to hear the news, God will act, and send Himself, to be God with us, Immanuel.

A great Light will shine in this wilderness, a light for all the chosens: for those whom God had told they were chosen, and for those still searching, and for those who have trudged or have flown past hope into outright despair; for the good men and women and children, such as they are...

...but most especially for the enemies of God--who are all of us, sinners.

Within all the work God does, He lets us sinners have our own way, because He loves us too much to let us be something other than real boys and girls.

But this produces a hideous disparity.

It looks like God doesn't exist.

It looks like God doesn't care.

It looks like God is a monster.

So what, if I say that God suffers, too!? That is a metaphysical deduction, requiring wire-thin argumentation to

establish--and hey, maybe I made a mistake, have I ever thought of that?!

Yes, actually, I have. That is why I keep track of what I do, and continue to polish my thoughts on the subject.

But if I am right, then sooner or later, through a historical process about which I could make a few preliminary guesses (though admittedly fewer, perhaps, than if I didn't already have a culture and a history in mind--for I am not a great prophet), God will come to pay the bill for our sins, yours and mine; will come to pay for the world He made; will come to pay for loving His enemies.

And He will pay to the fullest, while still being God Himself.

He will come as a Man, in order to represent the idea of agent-to-patient.

I do not know whether He will beget children or not; I suspect not, in order to prevent problems in future generations, though I am not sure.

But He will come as a child, Himself, the way we all do; in blood and pain and fear and ignorance, born into the synthetic inheritance: for this is not to be merely a manifestation.

This is to be a sharing of our burdens.

Probably He will be born poor; for God will want to show that He is not the sort of God we naturally imagine a King to be--the way we, as sinners, would want to be, if we were the Kings, or Queens, of the world.

He will be born within the culture of this one chosen people among all the people He loves; His life will be lived linked to the light He has ever been shining progressively through them.

And, of course, if He has ever promised them He would come, then to them first He will go.

To them He will go first--not to damn everyone else in the world by showing favoritism to these people.

No, He will go to them, to be damned Himself: by the world He made, and by the situations He has allowed, and by the enemies He loves.

He will already have a mighty task, a mighty adventure, ahead of Him. So, I expect that He will need to come in a way which is slightly unusual, to say the least.

He will, for His birth, fix the synthetic inheritance.

He would not be doing this for His own convenience, but rather to give Himself no excuses at all.

God always could set aside His love or justice, as it often looks to us He does; He never has nor shall, but He could do it. The Father could refuse the Son; the Son could betray the Father; the Spirit could refuse to act toward fulfilling fair-togetherness between persons. God would cease to exist, along with everything else, past present and future; but He could do it.

So He will take the risks we take, so far as He allows us risks; but He will take more risks than we take, for we do have some excuse for what we are.

He will have no excuses. He will not let Himself off that easily.

God would want to come in a very odd way, as a sign to be looked for, I think.

And I am certain that He would not, will not, allow Himself to have our excuses for our failures.

Whatever temptations He will suffer, shall be His to suffer fully--more fully than us, for we do have some excuses for what we do. That would be only fair.

And, in a way, such a directly engendered birth would also be somewhat safer, so far as His mission (not His personal well-being) will be concerned. The always Self-Begotten 2nd Person of God, will need to have as much access to God the Father as humanly possible; limited though that will be.

He will be the action of God; God taking action; the finger of God.

He will be the Son of God.

But also, He will be the Son of Man.

Fully God, fully Man.

Would God, as poured out, be 'fully God'?

To be honest, it depends on what we mean by 'fully'. He can hardly be, as Incarnate Man, in every place at every time; although within the eternal transPersonal Unity, this omnipresence is not only certain but necessary for every place and every time. He will be taking on limits; yet even as God Eternal, He still submits to self-imposed limits. God the Son surrenders eternally in unity to God the Father. God surrenders a portion of His infinitude, in order to create a portion at all, something not-infinite, not-God; although He could bring this part to life again, to any degree He wishes, at any point, or at all points, of its existence.

God already limits Himself, in order to be Who He is, the Creator; even in order to be, period, He 'limits' Himself (if we wish to think of it that way) to being only a self-consistent reality--to being, as He Himself, only real.

Yet He is still God, fully God. One limitation from infinity, leaves the infinity in its fully rich reality; while also leaving the new limitation.

So, yes, He could be 'fully' God, and yet be 'fully' Man--
more fully human than any of us, in fact, for He will not give
Himself the excuses of our corrupted synthetic shape. We are not
quite the humans we were intended to be; but when God comes, He
will be.

Or, almost He will be.

For He will still be His mother's child.

He will thus bear part of the synthetic inheritance; He
will in His own way humble himself to need salvation, a
progression from where He is to what He ought to be: a salvation
not from His sins, but from the result of sin that He Himself
shall voluntarily bear. He will be, like us, a person of
sorrows--of sweat, pain, cramps, even diapers and 'swaddling
clothes'. No, I do not know how much of this would have been
ours anyway; I suppose in some form it would still exist, only
not in a debased and occasionally crippling way. But God the Son
will take on as much of the synthetic inheritance of our species
as He can, for better and for worse, while remaining Who He is.
And God the Father will not abandon the Son to the tampering of
devils.

Although the Father will give over the Son, He Himself
begotten, to the torments of devils.

God will not be spared those.

He will only be 'spared' our excuses.

The Son will be born; probably poor, as I suppose, if this will best get across the message of the humility of God. I expect the parents will have had some advance warning--if He comes as the new Adam, free from the curse of Adam's sin, although not voluntarily sharing the curse of Adam's suffering, then He will do some fixing of the genetics; and He will want people someday to know that this was how He came, facing what we face without even our wretched cursed shield.

So I entirely expect that a maiden will conceive, and give birth to a Son, Who will be God with us; and in order to help us understand the point, I expect she will be a virgin.

Thus the need for some special advance warning, so it won't be too much of a surprise.

Besides which, the woman will not be a sock-puppet, either. This is not a seduction or rape, such as may be found in other stories. She is a person, and deserves to be part of the choice, deserves to have her full share of responsibility in what is happening. This might even be a remarkable departure from the norm, in whatever society is chosen for this event.²⁶³

Some other advance preparations would also be made, although of a subtler sort. The Son will live His life within

²⁶³ Although it will be interesting to see to what extent this is recognized, in the future, as being a ratification of the dignity of Woman: that she will have her own say and her own responsibility in the salvation of the world, that she will stand for all of us as people, and for all of Creation itself--even for us men, who will not be worthy to stand in her presence, no more worthy than we should be to stand in the presence of any of our mothers, to whom we owe so much... and who, themselves, have so much to live up to.

this culture, and will want to show how God fulfills the promises of God, not only for this culture, but for the world.

So, we may expect some hints of this event to be scattered, not too plainly perhaps, through whatever preparatory traditions precede His birth; perhaps dating back to the first ancestor of this particular nation, and beyond into the mists of myth and legend.

Yet there might be (I do not insist on it, although I think I could hope with good faith on it) some more recent preparation, too.

His specially chosen people would probably have had some idea in advance when He is coming; but He isn't only coming for them. He is coming for everyone, for all of us.

I have no problem imagining that God would alert some pagans, or maybe even some sceptics, some outright unbelievers--some people whom his 'chosens' would consider to be enemies of God, although they are no more enemies than the rest of the world, including the people whom God has chosen. It wouldn't be a bad idea to call together some representatives of the best of the rest of the world, to witness the coming of the fulfillment of their hopes, too. Not merely the rich and wise (some of whom may be called to see this, even among the pagans), but also the poor and ignorant (the true 'pagans', or peasants, themselves)--although probably the poor men would be closer to the event in time and space to begin with, lacking the resources for much

travel. (They might receive a more glorious advance preparation, too--once more the humble would be exalted.)

Again, I do not insist on such things; but the possibility is worth keeping in mind, I think. It could happen any of a number of different ways; we should keep a sharp watch for something special, with the right sort of signs--something special, and something also humble, almost hum-drum. Fireworks, yes, maybe; but the birth itself would need to be something to which we can all relate--very 'natural', even. Maybe a birth without any special advantages.

Maybe even a birth at risk.

For God will be coming onto rebel territory, small, weak, easily killed, completely dependent, just as we all are.

And there are monsters here in our world.

Although, it wouldn't do for God to throw Himself to the monsters, just yet.

That would come later.

CHAPTER 55 -- the good news

I have no clear idea of how this Child would think, as He grows into manhood. God will have poured Himself out, continuing to enact His own specific part in the story of humanity. We might say the finger of God will be gently touching the earth; a mere hum of His voice; a finite trickle out of the river of His eternity.

I can only use metaphors, and I am well aware of the problems involved in imagining this accurately--which, I am also well aware, is likely to prove a stumbling block for an honest sceptic.

But I appeal to the reasonableness of what I have said before. I am quite sure God exists, and has particular characteristics including a particular personal character. I am quite sure of my own sin and corrupted character. And I am reasonably sure of how this all fits together.

Consequently, I am quite sure that sooner or later, God will do this: even if only for me (if I was the only one who needed it.)

And I am quite sure of what at least some of His intentions will be, in coming.

There is no good reason to call attention to Himself before He reaches a certain age--what that age would be, I can only guess. An age of responsibility, within the culture He chooses, I think; He will have some things to say to them, and He needs to be of an age where they will be prepared to listen. Fancy miracles alone won't be enough to guarantee acceptance; they will only be enough to guarantee a crowd hungry for something interesting to see.

And He has some things to tell them; some things which will be good news, but which will be a very peculiar good news, which many or all of His listeners are going to have problems with--not merely in understanding, but as personal problems.

Not merely as personal problems, but as perceiving a threat.

Not merely as perceiving a threat, but perceiving a threat to their own self-importance.

There will be a wide spectrum of response to what He says; and if He does do anything flashy, there is likely to be fear as well as amazement.

Better, in other words, if He has reached, say, late teens at the earliest, depending on circumstances. He might need to be older, in order to make best use of the historical situation, of course.

He ought, at least, to be old enough to run for His life,
if necessary.

Why not just blast them with power, if He is ever in
danger?!--or is ever in danger too soon?

Because that wouldn't be the point: He won't be here to
show off how much of a muchness He is, but to show how much He
loves us... even in putting up with our eccentric moods.

It may be that He knows Who He is the whole time; or it may
be that as He grows, the synthetic shape of His own Incarnate
natural/supernatural relationship (similar yet different from
our own) will also grow, allowing better communication with the
Father as He becomes older; or it may be that He will have no
special power and specific knowledge before a certain time. I do
not know.

He probably will want to have a tradeskill, to sweat for
His food the way the rest of humanity mostly does. I doubt He
would be a mere accountant or writer like me!--He would be a
builder or creator or grower of some sort. Although He will also
be a scholar, in His own 'amateur' way, I think, just as any of
us can be. It would only be fair if He also had to work for His
knowledge, like us, as well as for His food and His place to
rest--wouldn't it?

But sooner or later the time would come to travel, to start letting people know Who He is, and (more importantly) to start helping people know better the Father that He, and we, have.

I doubt He would choose special modes of travel, except perhaps for symbolic reasons--always temporary. Maybe once or twice in an emergency, or to make a point, He might travel in a way that was... odd. Otherwise, I suspect He would do what everyone else is doing. If everyone has a buggy, a buggy it would be. If a bicycle, a bicycle. If most everyone is walking from place to place, I expect that He will walk, too--especially in order to be with these people whom He loves. (This might even itself be a reason for Him to come at a time and place where walking is the norm!)

What would be His core message?

The simplest way I can imagine to state it, would be:

"God is a better Person than you think He is!"

But I can go a little further than that, I think.

After all, the reason for this Incarnation is to communicate with us better, from our side of the synthetic breach--a breach that happened due to rebellion.

We are in a mess.

It is a falsity to say that people never knew we were in a mess, until such-n-such a time. Go back to the earliest

documents, the earliest stories, all across the Earth, and you will find hints of a Golden Age when we weren't in a mess; which implies, by consequence, that we are in a mess now.

You will find some people believing the heavens are perfect, and the Earth is a sump; that we must somehow rise to the heavens, and be part of them--even if only by drinking beer brewed the way the beer goddess brews it for the heavenly clans!

But even where people worship the Earth as divine; even if you find an early culture where 'anything goes', and life is a party, and sex is free for the asking or the taking, and fighting is almost as good and maybe better than sex--you still, I guarantee it, will find people occasionally claiming that somehow they, at least, have been wronged.

Which implies, by consequence, that people at least understand the concept, and accept the reality, of people wronging other people.

Honor is a noble thing--when backed by charity. Honor without charity, is merely pride in superior behavior. The ancients did, and many people today still do, put a great value on honor; yet unless we read carefully, we are likely to mistake some of the reasons why they (as individuals or as groups) put such value on 'honor'.

At any rate, we may expect the Son to come to His people, pagan and otherwise, at a time when pagan-and-otherwise both have a clearer idea than usual, that somehow we humans have

messed up, and need help relating to God--or at least, help relating better to something better than themselves.

Maybe the temple sacrifices just don't seem to be working anymore (did God ever say He wanted a Temple?); maybe the orgies aren't fun anymore, or maybe the orgies are showing themselves to be as empty of meaning as being on drugs; maybe the philosophy just doesn't seem to be answering enough (or anything?) anymore; maybe the secret mysteries, for the elite, are too mysterious, to the extent that a suspicion is growing... that what they hide, is nothing.

Maybe the people who were supposed to be the heroes, now are showing themselves to be villains. Maybe power is corrupting more evidently than usual; maybe the best of humanity is crushing itself, imploding under its own weight of being the best.

Whatever the details (and those details are speculations of mine), He will come to a time and place that is ready to hear:

"Yes, things are messed up. But there is hope.

Yes, you are personally responsible for some of what is messed up. But God loves you anyway. You are people, persons, not puppets of fate, not animals yapping in the street.²⁶⁴

²⁶⁴ The Cynic philosophers were once in the habit of wandering around the Roman Empire, poking holes in people's perceptions of themselves; they especially liked to 'remind' people that people are only fancy animals. So they would defecate, or procreate, in the street, or do other things to shock

"God," He will tell them, "is your Father; and He loves you even more than a human father does--even though you are rebels against Him.

"God," He also will tell them, "loves sinners; and He is committed, by His love and His justice, to working with them, to the remittance, the sending away, of their sin. Their sin, all sin, will have to go, sooner or later: everyone will be salted by the eonian fire, and you are going to be burned if you insist on clinging to what you know is wrong.

"And, if you insist on being lazy and uncharitable, if you insist on taking no responsibility for your behaviors--especially if you claim to be the servants of God, and misrepresent Him in that way--it will go hard on you.

"Yet all those who thirst for righteousness will be filled, and their hearts made pure. All who are pure to the bottom of their hearts, will see the face of God. And all those who sorrow shall be comforted!

"If you will start, if you will seriously commit yourself to changing your mind, to 'repenting'; then you will find God to be helping you already.

"He is ready to forgive you, and to help you, and to help you help other people. He is already acting

the neighbors with animality. After which, they would beg for food. A beggar's bag was virtually the badge of a Cynic. Notably, the word is probably taken from the Greek for 'dog'. It was not a compliment.

toward this, before you even have heard that you should make a decision to allow Him to help you.

"It will be dangerous, accepting that help, even though the help is from God; for there are enemies in the world, who are not going to like this in the least.

"But, your Father in the heavens loves those enemies, too; and He will never stop giving His justice and His love to them.

"Oh--you hadn't thought of that, had you!? God loves your enemies, too!

"You had better get used to it, and be glad He loves all His enemies; for you are also His enemies!

"There is no getting around it. If you seriously intend it, that's the same as doing it. Even if you never had the courage to try to seduce your neighbor's wife, you still committed the adultery by willfully wanting to. Even if you murder your brother merely in your heart, you still will face the eonian fire.

"And even if you don't seriously intend to think it, you are still sick; and you have some responsibility, to try to choose whether you will be helped. If you know you are sick, and refuse the help--then that is the same as if you choose to have those behaviors."

This isn't going to sit well with a lot of people.

It is one thing to be healed of a sickness--and He will likely do a lot of that, where He has opportunity... where He has people willing to work with Him, for themselves or for the sake of others.

But it is another thing to be told that our thoughts are also actions, which we are responsible for to some extent--responsible enough, that we need to be purged somehow.

We must suffer God to work with us; we must let down our pride, and our defenses, and trust Him to do the right thing.

Otherwise, we will suffer something else: the way we will suffer if we insist on holding our breath.

But, trusting someone to that extent, even God, isn't easy.

And the Son will know this; He won't lean upon a split cane, or smother a smoldering wick. He wants the cane to be healed to the flexible steelstrength of a sword, and the wick to grow into a volcanic power.

But, with power, comes responsibility.

And eventually, we must take up our responsibilities.

Nor does God exempt Himself from this.

He has the greatest power; He has, even with no blame, the greatest responsibility.

And it is only fair, that He pays, too.

But, He won't be paying for sins that He has done--for He has done no sin.

He will be paying for letting us be free to contribute misery upon our fellows, and upon ourselves.

He will be paying for our sins.

That's what we wanted, isn't it? To know that God does play fair; to know that He does sympathize with our suffering in this unjust world?

Even to know, that God, damn Him, will get His!!

Yes; He will.

Even though He is innocent, His creatures are not. And He has let them, has let us, has let me, be that way.

And sooner or later, He will say and do enough to make Himself a problem to people, even though He is blameless.

His friends will desert Him.

His friends will even betray Him.

He will give up His life, and drink the fullest death any person can drink: even to the horrid depths of being tempted to despair.

And it will only be fair, if He does this having been unjustly accused; falling foul of the world He has made.

It happens to the rest of us. It should happen to Him--
right?

CHAPTER 56 -- the price for our sins

It's only fair--isn't it?

God will intentionally set Himself up, to be rejected by all His people: by His special chosen who carried His light, and by His other children who perhaps have been doing the best they can with what they have. Not only those who we might consider desperately evil will reject Him, but those we would be inclined to consider the very best.

For even the best of us have sinned, abusing the grace of God Most High.

He will have done plenty of things, to show He is good; but He will also give them just enough rope to hang Him, if they want to--on His own timing, if not theirs.

And the unjust of this world--very likely even some of the (relatively) just ones who just don't understand!--will want to hang Him.

The unjust of any worlds intersecting this one, will certainly want to hang Him, too.

Why, you ask, would any person dare to unjustly treat God?? Perhaps the other people don't really know that they are

condemning the Author of Life Himself to death, but why would rebel angels, who presumably know better, dare to do that?!

I testify, my reader: as a sinner--even as a sinner who knows God--I sometimes unjustly treat God!

I most certainly confess there are times when I simply turn away from the truth, the light I can see. This is a sin anyone can do, whatever specific knowledge he or she has. There is no difference here in principle.

What I do in my life, all sinners do in theirs, whether we are human or rebel angel. We will be standing together, in principle, against God Himself when He comes.

Not that this will take much courage on anyone's part. He isn't likely to merely show up and tell people, "Hi, I'm God!"

He might say something of this sort later, or to people (whether friends or enemies!) who have the best advantages to accept what He is saying (whether they do accept or not!) But not at first--because, as strange as this may sound, He will have more important things to help them learn.

So He will tell them other things first; and maybe give out little hints here and there, as the situation suggests. Different people will remember different things, in different ways, of course; but since what He will be saying is so important, God will probably find a way to let all of them

contribute to the record of this event, so that a sufficiently accurate composite picture may be built--even out of inaccuracies, or misunderstandings, or ignorances.

He won't have come to tell people Who He is, exactly; He will have come to tell Who His Father is--His Father, and ours.

He will tell them--maybe even in His very name--the Lord God saves.

But He will insist on a fair judgment, for people who know Him, and for people Who don't.

The people who know Him won't get specially let off, just for knowing Him.

The people who don't know Him, aren't going to be held specially responsible merely for not knowing Him.

Those who simply misunderstand, will be pardoned, even if they commit what seems the worst blasphemies against Him--for they do not know what they are doing.

But those who do understand, and who insist on not understanding--they will have eyes to see, but will refuse to see, and so they shall reap the consequences of their choices, and will be blinded.

They will have ears to hear, but will refuse to hear, and so they will be deafened.

Those who insist on judging to an unfair standard, will be judged according to that standard themselves--so they can learn better, not because God is unjust.

They (we, I) will not be condemned for the sins that are past, but for the sin they know is a sin and refuse to let go of.

So long as they do not let go, they are not seeking forgiveness--even if perhaps they say so, to themselves or to God or to other people.

And so long as they are not seeking forgiveness, they cannot be forgiven; for forgiveness is a co-operation, between a person and God.

But if they will seriously try, God will help them get through; starting now, in this life, not waiting until the eonian fire must be faced full on.

We deserve that help; for God is our Father, and we have claims on Him for His responsibility to us.

He wants to give us that help, even though it may seem slow to us; we will need to be patient: patient, to the agency of our Father.

He will rescue His bride (who is the human soul, including my own), and clean her, and marry her forever--if she will let Him rescue her, if she will let him clean her, if she will choose to marry Him.

If she does or not, God will still persist in pursuing her; but He isn't going to force her. He will let the consequences of her refusal play out in her, so long as she continues to refuse.

If she insists on playing in the foulness, then foul she will be; and foul she will likely make others she can reach.

That is the awful dignity of her causality.

Although sooner or later, God will put her where she at least can no longer befoul anyone else. He will not leave her alone there; He will give her Himself, and He will wait patiently on the bleeding edge of time, working, working, trying to work with her, until...

...until, whenever. It is partly up to her.

These are the things the Son will say. He will say them different ways, but this will be the gist:

"The Lord God saves; and if you insist on denying that the Lord God saves, then you cannot be saved."

It isn't a question of ignorance about God; He will, sooner or later, make Himself known to each of us. He will even go further, and make Himself known within our history, sooner or later, so that as many people as possible will have the benefit of knowing Him before we die. It does make a difference; and we all deserve it, for we deserve to know the Truth.

But it isn't about us knowing this or that doctrine, or about doing this or that ritual; and it certainly is not about knowing a particular name and using it like a magic passcard--even if that name is, itself, "the Lord God saves"!

So we can expect Him to work in a peculiar way.

He will be spreading good news, healing people, maybe doing other miracles to help for belief and for relief.

But--He will sometimes tell people:

"Hush! Don't tell!

"This is a secret. Not too fast, softly, softly.
The kingdom comes like yeast rising in dough.

"Trust Me; at least be willing to trust Me,
personally, if you possibly can--and I promise you, I
will give you whatever reasons you need, for trusting
Me, sooner or later.

"I will tell you Who I am when I think you are
ready to hear; I will even ask you on occasion when I
think you are ready to learn more.

"But what is more important, more crucial, is
your change of mind, your willingness to stand up,
even under torment, even if you have never done a
single worthwhile act in your whole life, and declare
the truth that something is right, and something is
wrong, and mean it!

"If you do even this, and nothing else, I promise
you: you will be with Me in paradise.

"But you have to mean it.

"If you mean it, and resolve to keep meaning it,
I promise I will take care of the rest.

"And I promise: when you see Me, you see the
Father."

I think it might be rather amusing, if the Son happens upon
any devils in His travels. They're likely to know right off the
bat exactly Who He is, if they have any advantages in perception
thanks to their own nature. They might be quite surprised to see
Him, here, 'vulnerable'--and in disguise.

I can imagine them trying to blow the secret, like petulant
children wielding whatever little sufferings they can wield, if
only by doing so they can show they have power over others.

I can hear them now: "What are You doing here!? Hey! Hey!
This is the Son of God!!"

And I can hear Him now: "Shut up, and get out."

Except for the suffering these itinerant devils might
otherwise be causing, I can almost imagine Him swallowing a
smile.

I wish I could see it, and be in on the joke. Imagine: a
nosy reporter pushes his way up to an officer trying to walk
through a hall incognito. "Hey, you're the Commander-in-Chief!"

Now, imagine him, not even bothering to say 'no comment'--
but yanking the batteries out of the microphone.

It would look just a little suspicious, hm? A mere 'no comment' might mean anything; but making them shut up about it, would leave behind a clue for the curious to follow.

And, in a way, that would also be the point: leaving behind a trail for the curious to follow. Helping them with some news they need to hear, but also leaving pieces of the puzzle for them to figure out on their own.

Why? Because it is a personal relationship; between a Person Who loves us, and we snippy humans who are rather too concerned with our own goings-on to pay much attention to God... unless He piques our interest.

But it is a personal relationship between God and those other rebels, too: the ones who may have a clearer clue What's Up. The ones who always did have a better clue; but who have deluded themselves, that if they could just find a way, they could beat the house edge. They're just sure, in the heart of their selfishness, that they don't really need Love Most High. He can suffer; He suffers with them.

That means they can have power over Him--to an extent.

It is a power He allows them, because He loves them.

But it is a power they want, and a power they insist on having: they will hurt anyone and anything they can, with pain or with pleasure if pleasure will do--indeed, to hurt with pleasure would be more attractive to some of them, because pain

at least is a warning that something is wrong, while pleasure is supposed to be happily appreciated... and so, is seductive.

They will hurt us, and hurt themselves, to make Him suffer, to have the power over Him they want.

It is the only power over Him they can have.

But they will take what they can get, and delude themselves from this that they can win.

And then... here He will be.

Vulnerable.

Just as they always dreamed it would be, someday.

Now they can make Him suffer more than ever before! He is too powerful for them normally, even coming now in this way... but He is laying it all down, throwing it all away, letting Himself be crushed by these cattle!

Well, we'll join in; we'll crush Him, too!

And then... oh, and then!!

God shall die!!!

CHAPTER 57 -- the Sword to the Heart

God. Is. Dead.

God is dead!! Just as we always knew: He can die! Now we are free, free of Him, free to be the gods we want to be, free to be our own laws, our own inheritance! Free to decide what is good or evil!

We live, though God is dead! We have overthrown the Highest, beat the Invincible! ...well ...we didn't actually 'beat' Him; He gave up the game. But we always wanted to make Him give up on us anyway, yes? Then we would show Him that we didn't need Him, that we could outlast Him!

Ah, but this is even better! We showed Him that His hope is futile, that the Truth which surrenders itself will be digested and expelled as waste! He put Himself at the mercy of His own creations, and we killed Him!

What did the Great Fool think?? That people would just fawn over Him for showing up late to the party!? That after all everyone has been through, He could just tell us He loves us, and we'd all have a happy group hug!? He couldn't even keep it that simple!--He had to open His big mouth one too many times, and stick His nose into the business of people whom He's

supposed to be letting do what they want... and we snipped it off! Along with every other part of Him!

Here is Your world, God! Hope You liked how it turned out!

.....

It will happen, sooner or later.

God will come, to let us know some things about Him we need to hear, but which are hard for us to hear as we are.

And we are going to kill Him.

And He is going to let us.

Because it fulfills all fair-togetherness, all righteousness, that He should pay: for loving His enemies enough to let them stay enemies, to let them mess up His story, to let them hurt the innocent--even Himself.

He has given us the holiest of Swords to wield: the dignity of action itself.

And we will drive it straight through His heart.

How? Could be any of several ways.

He will probably set it up so that it shall hurt Him more than any other execution of the time: the maximum penalty.

But I think He will also want to set it up in a way that makes a statement, a symbol.

As a Man, He will suffer the pain of His world to the uttermost; something He cannot do, unless He becomes a Man. As the eternal God, He can, and does, eternally and omnisciently know our sufferings; but only as a Man, can He die like a man, like any of us who suffer in His world.

So, I suspect the symbol of His death will be something that reminds us of a man dying in pain; which is what we suffer, in this world of enemies whom He loves; which is what He will suffer, in this world of enemies whom He loves.

The symbol of His death may also be a symbol of rebellion, in two or three different ways: God, slain for loving rebels, slain unjustly as a 'rebel'--maybe even as a rebel against God.

It wouldn't even surprise me if the death is so horrible, that a whole new word has to be invented for it.

A word like 'excruciating', for example.

Whatever it will be, this is the throne on which we need to see Omnipotent Power reigning: not as something He gets out of the way and puts behind Him, but as the enacted expression of Who He truly is--and of what the Omnipotent Power truly is, despite our first (and certainly our sinful) impressions. This throne of self-sacrifice for the sake of even His enemies, for the sake of all reality, will be the Throne of God Most High,

not only at a particular time in our history (though that, too), but in the final revelation: and in the eonian judgment.

For whatever we may do to Him, even if we murder Him in our sins: God is still God.

We can smother His life and bury it under our sin, when He comes to us here on Earth. And He will let us; because it is only fair--it will 'fulfill all righteousness'--that God Himself, at Whose feet is laid the existence of injustice, also suffers from injustice, to the maximum penalty one of His creatures can suffer.

But we cannot snuff out God Eternal.

We can kill the Son, the Incarnate action of God Himself, as far as any person can be killed. We can deny the Action of God, insofar as He ever lets His Action be denied.

But... a person can only be killed so far.

When I, who am a person, shall die, I won't become nothing. That wouldn't be love or justice to me.

When God dies, as a Man, He won't become nothing, either.

Whatever injustice we show to Him, He will not leave justice unfulfilled for Himself.

And it will be important to make this point, too. Not merely to show that 'something is there after death'--we will probably already have some ideas about that, although this might give us some better clues.

Rather, to show that we can do whatever we want, to God...

...except defeat Him utterly.

God is the House Edge. And He is going to play a winning game.

Even when He loses.

The devils, with their own advantages, may get the first clue; or they may, in their selfish delusions, be the last to figure it out.

If you kill God, and He doesn't stay dead--then you might as well give up...

...and go home!

There will be other reasons for Him to make a fairly quick return. He will have been saying some rather odd things; and He will probably have been killed as some sort of traitor (unjustly accused) by the current authorities.

But if He comes back, from the dead, alive and well--better than well--alive, yet obviously, in some way, more alive than He was before...

...then, what does that say, to the people who knew Him, who heard Him?

He was on "God's side" all along. God has vindicated Him--
God has vindicated Himself!--even if He did die a cursed death.

He would have to come back quickly enough for His followers to link it properly to His death, probably in some culturally symbolic way.

And, if He is concerned (as I expect) to show that He loves the Nature in which He died and will go the farthest distance to save it, then He will come back, not in a merely mental way, nor with an altogether new and 'spiritual' body--much less as a rotting zombie!--but with the body in which He died, raised and transformed: saved from the groaning with which Nature groans until now as if in childbirth!

This would be the first-fruits promise from Him: the promise that love and justice shall surely be fulfilled, however long it takes: the promise that, as He has suffered with the innocent, so the innocent shall be vindicated!

And that, as He has suffered with the guilty, going down into the pit with all of us sinners, so the guilty shall be raised as well: and raised with this in view, that sooner or later God shall be altogether in all--even in His enemies.

He might decide to come back on clouds and with thunder. He might walk up to the people who executed Him and say, "Hi! Guess what, guys?"

Or, then again, He might not.

The whole point is still to encourage us, as we are, to co-operate with Him.

If He just came back and wrapped up the whole show right then, it would be almost the same as saying He might as well have done that from the first.

We, His creations, deserve to have a chance to work with Him, here, in our lives, to set things straight--starting with us ourselves. This Nature is His; He loves it; He loves us. He isn't going to pull the plug on it; and He isn't going to simply pull rank and run things directly for us. He wants to work with us; or, more precisely, He wants us to work with Him.

Admittedly, it might come to pulling rank, sooner or later, if we, as a species, insist on messing things up; or if the devils who refuse to get A Clue insist on ruining everything of His they can get their claws into. Really, there isn't much difference between a rebel and a rebel.

If a line is ever crossed (and I expect this line will eventually be crossed), past which we cannot get ourselves out of trouble with only some help from Him; then He will have to intervene to the maximum.

But I expect Him to let it play out as far as possible, so that everyone, even the devils, will have the best chance to learn the lesson.

True, it will likely involve the innocent (or the relatively innocent, like me), suffering for the sake of the guilty (the ones who are sinners, like me).

But in principle, that won't be any different from before.

What will be different is this: we will have heard, many of us, that God has Himself truly paid, for letting us ruin our lives and the lives of others. We, some of us, will know the price for our sins: that God Himself voluntarily suffers with the innocent and with the guilty, reckoning Himself along with us, in hope of a Day of the Lord to come when all His creation shall be raised to vindication.

We will want to let others know, that despite all appearances, even at the apparent end of hope:

God does truly love the world.

Including His enemies, too.

AFTER WORD, FORE WORD

This book has been my testimony, for why I believe what I do. Despite its length, and its frequent complexity, it comes down to this: why am I a Christian?

The thrust of my argument throughout my book, has pointed toward the conclusion that I should expect God to act in our history in certain ways. I have tried to allow for a potentially wide range of variables in how those actions will someday be (or have already been) carried out. I have even tried not to hang the story entirely on the timeframe in which I think the story actually was carried out.

But I do think the story has been carried out.

Not only a story: not only a maybe, a city on clouds, spun from and balanced precariously on the needled tip of a blade of metaphysical inferences.

If somehow you, my reader, don't know what story I mean, you can easily find out. If you cannot find out easily--don't worry about it. If you have been following me even up through the chapters on morality, then you can know enough to do something positive, without needing to know that the story of what will happen, sooner or later, one way or another, has happened.

After all, I readily admit this: there is a difference between being logically sure of metaphysical certainties, and being convinced that a particular story has happened historically. I can spin a story out of my logic, but that doesn't mean the story happened. I can point you to some texts, which (by no coincidence, of course), happen to match what I have been saying fairly closely; but that, by itself, doesn't mean the stories happened.

We still have the responsibility to check a reported story. Maybe the records aren't so good. Maybe somebody has made a series of lucky guesses, or clever inventions, but without an actual series of events to hang them on.

In logical sequence, I should next give my reasons for thinking that the historical bona fides of certain documents are sufficiently accurate for making such a historical judgment. But such a far-reaching project (and even a summary would be far-reaching), is not how I should be ending an already-lengthy book.

So instead, I have tried to give a taste for what story I would expect.

And while this is not a substitute for historical judgments, I think it is an important component for the personal judgments each of us make, regarding all the claims of truth in the world around us.

At the very least, I think it will explain why this particular story should be the focus of so much attention and work, by people of every belief and unbelief, of every degree.

The way the story is eventually told may not be perfect, to our minds as believers--or as unbelievers.

But if you give a fair chance to the story I myself have in mind--

if you don't handicap it with pretensions the story in itself never pretended to have--

if you don't rule out what it is saying by metaphysical fiat--

if you take the time to figure out the standards for other documents from that period, which we consider to be reasonably reliable histories--

if you are willing to recognize credit where credit is due--
-

...and if you are willing to hope, and to believe, even if only a little, in love...

...then you might just be surprised.

Someday.

This is why I am a Christian. This is why I believe what I do.

I don't only believe certain arguments, and consequent doctrinal positions, to be true--although I do.

I don't merely add to those doctrines an acceptance of certain historical claims as being sufficiently accurate--although I do.

I don't even simply treasure the emergent story for its value and meaning--although I do.

Ultimately, I believe because of personal relationships: the necessity, and fittingness, of accepting my own personhood, and your own personhood, and the relations between us, as being real.

Real persons. Real relationships.

Not only between you and I; but between us, and God.

A friend of mine once wrote something, in a story.

"I don't understand," said a young woman. "Is it a religion? Or is it an ability?"

"I would say," replied the older woman thoughtfully, "that it is a love."

That, is why I am a Christian.

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may Love Most High belove my reader forever

JRP