'PROCESS THEODICY':
A POSTMODERN ALTERNATIVE TO THE
PROBLEM OF EVIL

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Abstract

'Process' theodicy provides us with a constructive postmodern alternative to the 'traditional' theodicy, by redefining the omnipotence of God (one of the elements of the incompatible triad) from a 'metaphysical' consideration of the nature of the world upon which the power is exerted. Unlike the traditional theists, who maintain that all apparent evil is really, from the ultimate perspective, a means to good, process theists hold the view that the possibility of genuine evil is rooted in the metaphysical characteristics of the world. And since God is not in complete control of the events of the world, the occurrence of genuine evil is not incompatible with God's beneficence toward all his creatures.

Introduction

"Theodicy" is derived from the Greek *theos*, 'God', and *dikç*, 'justice' or 'right'. The word is thus a kind of shorthand for the defence of the justice and righteousness of God in face of the fact of evil. The coinage of the word (in its

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French form, *théodicée*) is commonly attributed to Leibniz.[1] Traditionally, "theodicy" has been used in different senses: (i) the discipline that attempts to justify the ways of God to humanity, (ii) the attempt to vindicate the goodness and justice of God in ordaining or allowing moral and natural evil and human suffering, and (iii) the attempt to make God's omnipotence and omnibenevolence compatible with the existence of evil. The problem of evil thus concerns the contradiction between the reality of evil on the one hand, and religious beliefs in the goodness and power of God on the other.

Limiting the subject: 'Theodicy'

"Theodicy" is accordingly used as an accepted 'name' for the whole subject, comprising a systematic investigation of the problem of evil and its attempted solutions; the attempts to reconcile the unlimited goodness of all-powerful God with the reality of evil. Leibniz in his *Theodicy* speaks of three kinds of evil:[2] (a) the evil originated by human beings, that is *moral* evil or sin; (b) the physical sensation of pain and the mental anguish of suffering which may be caused by *physical*/natural evil such as diseases, earthquakes, etc.; and (c) *metaphysical* evil, viz. the finitude, contingency and hence imperfections of all created things.

Thus evil may be the product of human and non-human agency. Evil caused by human beings, such as murdering an innocent person, is moral. Drought that causes crop failure and widespread famine is an example of natural/physical evil. Although this theoretical distinction between moral evil and natural evil is useful, it should not be drawn too sharply, for human beings may be natural agents, for instance, as carriers of diseases, and evil caused by natural agency may warrant moral opprobrium, if it was preventable and those responsible for doing so failed. *Our discussion, nonetheless, tends to focus on moral evil, since it is much far likely to be within human realm than natural evil.*

In a very general classification, the religions of the world have offered three main types of solution. (i) There is the 'monism' of the Vedanta teachings of Hinduism, according to which the phenomenal world with all its evils is '*maya* or illusion'. Considered a response to the problem of evil, this view is defective in that it redescribes the problem but does not attempt to solve it, for it leaves unexplained the evil of our suffering from the compulsive illusion of evil. This line of interpretation is also favoured by Stoic-Spinozists, who view evil as illusory. (ii) There is the 'dualism' exemplified most dramatically in ancient Zoroastrianism, with its opposed good and evil deities – Ahura Mazda and Ahriman. A much less 'dualism' was propounded by Plato[3] and is found in various forms in the finite deity doctrines of such western philosophers as J.S. Mill[4] and E. Brightman.[5]

(iii) There is the distinctive combination of an ethical dualism set within an ultimate metaphysical monism (in the form of 'monotheism') that has been developed within Christianity. Christianity (like Judaism and Islam) is committed to a monotheistic doctrine of God as absolute in goodness and power and as the creator of the universe *ex nihilo*. This is the faith perspective and living context within which we address the questions of theodicy in this paper.

Positing the 'Problem of Evil'

The problem of evil stems from assuming three things, of which only two are compatible (sometimes called the *incompatible triad*): the omnipotence of God, the omnibenevolence of God, and the existence of evil. As discussed by philosophers, the question is 'whether it is *rational* to believe in the existence of an all-powerful, perfectly good creator given our experience of the evils that afflict our world'. The challenge of the fact of evil to the Christian/Jewish/Islamic faith has accordingly been formulated as a dilemma.

Epicurus presented the problem in the following way: "Is God willing to prevent evil, but *not able* to prevent evil? Then He is not omnipotent. Is God able to prevent evil, but *not willing* to prevent evil? Then He is not omnibenevolent. Is God *both* willing and able to prevent evil? Then why does evil exist?"[6] The problem of evil is generally formalized as a syllogism using the three premises, as follows:

    A.   If God is omnipotent, God could prevent all evil.

    B.   If God is perfectly good, God would want to prevent all evil.

    C.   There is evil.

    D.   Therefore (an omnipotent, perfectly good) God does not exist.[7]

This "simple statement," to use a phrase of David Griffin, of the problem of evil has generated much discussion and debate in the philosophical-theological circles. The strategy of the "traditional theodicies," in general, was to say that God is responsible for evil but not indictable for it. They could do it by maintaining that all *apparent* evil was really, from the ultimate perspective, a means to good, and hence was not *genuinely* evil. Traditional theists from St. Augustine to St. Thomas, and Calvin to Schleiermacher, would agree with the words of Alexander Pope: "All discord, harmony not understood; All partial evil, universal good; [...] One truth is clear, whatever is, is right."

On the contrary, the process theists do not deny that there is genuine evil. The general thesis of the process theodicy or "postmodern theodicy" which follows is that *the possibility of genuine evil is rooted in the metaphysical characteristics of the world.* In Whitehead's words: "The categories governing the determination of things are the reasons why there should be evil."[8]

A process/postmodern theodicy

The works of the process philosophers, like Alfred North Whitehead and Charles Hartshorne, have made a significant impact upon the contemporary philosophical and theological thought. Whitehead's important 'insights on the nature of God' and Hartshorne's call for 'new look at the problem of evil' together with the writings of other process theists, like John Cobb Jr. and David Griffin, have greatly contributed for constructing a postmodern/process theodicy. Process theists insist that the historical formulation of the theodicy problem can be 'dissolved' by modifying the traditional doctrine of divine power. Such a modification lies at the heart of a postmodern/process theodicy.[9]

The traditional discussion of the problem of evil has been, Hartshorne remarks, "a mistake or a pseudoproblem,"[10] perpetrated by a mass of undigested notions that are too vague or inconsistent to permit any useful application of rational arguments. He opines that the manner in which the theodicy question has been posed is problematic and as such insures that the conventional answers themselves are problematic. The theodicy problem is the result of a 'confused and untenable' belief about the meaning and definition of the term, 'God'. God is understood to be a perfect being in every way, and hence in power, goodness, etc. Accordingly, it was held that "a being perfect in power must have the power to prevent anything undesirable from occurring."[11] This "alleged notion of omnipotence,"[12] is what David Griffin calls the "omnipotence fallacy."[13] The crux of the 'omnipotence fallacy' lies in the claim that the meaning of perfect power or omnipotence can be settled apart from a metaphysical discussion of the nature of 'beings' upon whom this perfect power is to be exercised.

Logical considerations

The actual definitions of "omnipotence," and hence the meaning of the term 'omnipotent being' are quite ambiguous. On an intuitive level, the idea of omnipotence suggests that a being such as God has *unrestricted* ability to do anything whatsoever. But this definition, without some qualifications, is likely to issue in unpalatable consequences, such as '*God can render possible what is logically*

impossible'. Daunted by this problem, most thinkers agree that omnipotence should *not* be defined as the power to do anything that happens to be 'verbalizable'.

St. Thomas Aquinas

St. Thomas Aquinas offered an account of "omnipotence," which seemed to avoid this difficulty. Giving the meaning of "omnipotence," St. Thomas wrote: "Whatever involves a contradiction is not held by omnipotence, for it just cannot possibly make sense of being possible."[14] For example, "it is incompatible with the meaning of absolutely possible that anything involving the contradiction of simultaneously being and not-being should fall under divine omnipotence. Such a contradiction is not subject to it, not from any impotence in God, but because it simply does not have the nature of being feasible or possible."[15] Therefore, he could add: "Better, however, to say that it cannot be done, rather than God cannot do it," as if this were some limitation on divine power. St. Thomas thus concluded, "since power is relative to what is possible, divine power can do everything that is possible, and on this account is God called omnipotent."[16]

Rene Descartes

Many philosophers and theologians after St. Thomas have followed similar line of thinking in describing the meaning of "omnipotence." Rene Descartes, for example, acknowledged that mathematical truths, once God created them, couldn't be subsequently altered or abrogated. He, however, claims that although we perceive it to be altogether impossible for what is done to be undone, "it is no defect of power in God not to do it."[17] For, this inability is something self-imposed by a being who "determined Himself by creating what he created."[18] Likewise, Mackie, after asserting "there are no limits to what an omnipotent being can do," notes that most theists have excluded the logically impossible, and says that this qualification, however, "does not reject anything that is essential to theism."[19]

Richard Swinburne

Richard Swinburne also holds a similar view: "We may rightly say of God that there are certain things which, for reasons of logic, he cannot do - for instance, change the past, or make something red and green all over." But, despite appearances, he remarks, "we are not describing a limit to God's power."[20] God will be omnipotent because "he can do any action, that is, any action the

description of which makes ultimate sense."[21] In accordance with these descriptions, Ahern defines 'omnipotence' as "the power to bring about what is logically possible for a being of 'unlimited' power to bring about."

Logical conclusions

Perhaps no one would disagree with this definition, at least if 'unlimited' were equated with "greatest conceivable" and hence with "greatest possible." In this case 'omnipotence' means that a perfect being must have the greatest power that it is possible for a being to have, to be decided on the basis of what is consistently conceivable. With this definition, the statement that a perfect reality, and hence God, is an omnipotent being does not in itself entail that an omnipotent being could unilaterally bring about 'a state of affairs'.

But many authors, including Ahern himself, assume this entailment, as it is evident from the following definition: "The power *unilaterally* to affect/effect any state of affairs, if that state of affairs is intrinsically possible."[22] St. Thomas also endorses this stronger interpretation, in which "omnipotence" literally means that God really has *all* the power, and that "God causes everything that occurs."[23]

But these two definitions or meanings of omnipotence are not identical. In the first, "the idea of 'what is logically possible' is applied not simply to a state of affairs in itself, but to what God could *bring about*."[24] From this definition it does not necessarily follow that a being with perfect power could unilaterally bring about a state of affairs, simply if it is intrinsically possible. In other words, "a state of affairs is logically possible" is not identical with "it is logically possible that something/someone could unilaterally affect a state of affairs." It is this distinction, which is overlooked, in the supporting argument for the "all-powerfulness" of God. But if the latter premise is accepted without qualification, it would involve an *inconsistency* between 'an omnipotent God exists' and 'some actual beings exist'.

Metaphysical Considerations

Faced with this problem, Hartshorne has stressed the need for a proper understanding of the concept of perfection - perfect goodness, perfect power, as he thinks that, without this, little progress can be made. An adequate understanding of perfect power requires a discussion of the nature of 'world'. For, if 'to exert power' is always to exert power over "something," then the nature of "something" upon which power is exerted must be considered, before

drawing conclusions as to what a being with perfect power could do.[25] If the "something" is thought to be beings constituting a world distinct from God, then the nature of such a 'world' must be examined. The metaphysical question of the nature of a "world" is often overlooked in most discussions of God and omnipotence.[26] We will here focus directly upon the metaphysical issue: *Is it possible for one actual being's condition to be completely determined by a being or beings other than itself?*

'To be is to be powerful'

In *Sophist* Plato proposes 'power' as a distinctive "mark to distinguish real things." He suggests that "anything has real being that is so constituted as to possess any sort of power either *to affect* anything else or *to be affected*, in however small a degree, by the most insignificant agent, though it be only once."[27] If 'being is power', then the idea that there are some real beings devoid of power is a pure inference;[28] and the idea of powerless beings is finally meaningless, since it cannot be given any experiential basis. On the contrary, to speak of real beings as having power, has an experiential grounding. As many philosophers have pointed out, my present experience is an actuality; and I have direct experience of my experience itself as having some power to determine itself, namely, to determine how it will respond to all the influences upon it. Accordingly, this provides me with an experiential basis for speaking meaningfully of an actual entity.

According to Whitehead's categorical scheme, "creativity" (by which the many become one and are increased by one) is a universal feature of actuality.[29] To say that an actuality has 'creativity' is to say that it has 'power'. Whitehead, like Plato, conceived the nature of this creative power as twofold: "Power thus considered is twofold; viz, as able to make, or able to receive, any change: the one may be called 'active', and the other 'passive' power."[30] In the language of causation, it is the capacity to exercise final causation and efficient causation. To explain how these two dimensions of creativity are related, it is necessary to briefly expose Whitehead's unique understanding of what an "actual entity" is.

An actual entity is "an occasion of experience."[31] Each actual occasion exists in two modes, first 'one' and then the 'other'. An occasion comes into being as an experiencing subject. The data of its experience are provided by previous actual occasions. Its reception of these data is called its "feelings" or "positive prehensions" of those previous occasions. It becomes a unified subject by integrating these feelings. This process of integration into concrete unity is called "concrescence."[32] When the process of concrescence is complete, the occasion

becomes an object of experience, i.e., an object for other subjects. Its subjectivity perishes, and it thereby acquires objectivity. It transmits some of its feelings to subsequent actual occasions. This process, in which data are passed from one occasion to another, is termed "transition."[33]

These two processes – concrescence and transition – embody the two types of power inherent in each actual occasion. The process of concrescence embodies the occasion's power of self-determination, its power of final causation. The actual occasion then manifests its power of other determination, its efficient causation, in the process of transition. This dimension of power is equally essential to the occasion's actuality: "Its own constitution involves that its own activity in *self*-formation passes into its activity of *other*-formation."[34] The point to be stressed here is the fact that our world is composed of actualities with this twofold type of power is not a contingent feature of our particular world, but a *metaphysical* principle about reality. *Any* world would necessarily contain actualities with this twofold power/creativity. And if there is an actual world, and an actual world by metaphysical necessity contains a multiplicity of beings with power, then it is impossible for any one being to have a monopoly on power.

Absolute power is self-destructive

Secondly, the very notion of "all-powerful," interpreted as to mean that there is no power except God's power, is self-destructive. If creatures have no power at all, then the power exercised by God in absolute control over them seems at best infinitesimal. In social parlance, the power of a hero, for instance, is tested not against a weakling, but against a strong opponent, a villain. The strength of the villain adds credit to the victory of the hero over the villain. Philosophically, St. Thomas argues that the assertion that God alone exercises causality in the world would in fact imply a diminishment of God's power: "Some have understood God to work in every agent in such a way that no created power has any effect in things, but that God alone is the immediate cause of everything wrought."[35] But, as St. Thomas rightly observes, "this is impossible, because the order of cause and effect would be taken away from created things: and this would imply lack of power in the Creator, for it is due to the power of the cause, that it bestows active power on its effect."[36] That is to say, God's power is manifest in the fact that God is able to give the creatures its own power to act.

Hence the view that all creatures have real power, even though it denies the monopoly of power to God, attributes more power to God than does the doctrine of omnipotence, when this is taken strictly. These ideas are clearly stated by

Charles Hartshorne, when he says that omnipotence is sometimes viewed as a monopolistic concentration of power - the wielding, by one agent, of all the power there is or could be. This implies that all other beings are powerless. For example, if several sailors carry the same lifeboat, each carries a part of the total weight. But if the strongest sailor carries all the weight himself, the others will be left with nothing to do. Similarly, an omnipotent God would rob all agents of their proper causality. But if 'being is power' (Plato), then power over being is power over power, and the ideal or perfect agent will enjoy the *optimal concentration of efficacy which is compatible with there being other efficacious agents.*[37]

Now, if it is a metaphysical truth that actual entities as such have power, and that any actual world would have to contain actual entities, what can the term "perfect power" or "omnipotence" mean? "Perfect power," then, must be defined *as the greatest power it is conceivable for a being to have.* This definition is simply a version of Anselm's definition of a perfect being (God) as "that than which none greater can be conceived."[38]

"None greater can be conceived"

Describing the meaning of the word 'God', Anselm wrote, "to be God is to be such that 'than which none greater can be conceived'." This preliminary definition of God as the "greatest conceivable being" seems unobjectionable.[39] And Hartshorne has all praise for Anselm's definition, which he calls "a great discovery - a stroke of genius."[40] For, Hartshorne thinks that it captures the essence of the term "God," which refers to the "supremely excellent," or "all-worshipful" being. What really follows from this definition is the "unsurpassability" of God. For, as Hartshorne argues, "if God could be surpassed by a greater or better, should we not worship the one who would surpass him - even were this but a conceivable, not an actual being?"[41]

However, differences emerge when one begins to deal with questions as to how much and/or what kind of power it is conceivable for a being to have. There is an ambiguity in Anselm's definition owing to the simple phrase "none greater" (in *all, some* or *no* respects) and he implicitly resolved the ambiguity in a wrong way, so as to make unsurpassability coincide with infinity, or the notion of a *nec plus ultra.*[42]

It was Leibniz, a defender of Anselm's argument, who brought out the possibility of contradiction in the idea of "greatest conceivable," and also made the best start toward clarifying the ambiguity. The notion of perfection, taken as "greatest

conceivable," i.e. as an "absolute maximum," does not make sense logically, (although it is still employed as a category in the religious parlance), for if we take any conceivable number, a greater number can be conceived.[43] The resolution Leibniz sought was to define his notion of the perfect being in a different way. By "perfection," Leibniz wrote, "I mean every simple quality which is positive and absolute or which expresses whatever it expresses without any limits."[44] To put his point more clearly, 'perfection' in this sense is a maximum degree of a positive, simple quality. The conclusion Leibniz drew was that "greatest" must be taken to mean a purely qualitative, not a quantitative, maximum. However, Leibniz also claimed that knowledge and power, holding these qualities to be simple, are perfections, which can be exemplified to a maximum degree: "The greatest knowledge and omnipotence contain no impossibility."[45]

What is neglected in Leibniz's definition of perfection is the quantitative aspect of reality. After all, quantity may have a value and it is not attainable without having it.[46] He further argues that, for two reasons, it is literally impossible for God to be perfect in *all* respects. First, it is literally impossible for God to actualise all possibilities, or possible values are inexhaustible by God's actuality;[47] for they are infinite in number (and an absolute number is not possible). Hartshorne writes: "The infinity of possibilities in God's nature is inexhaustible in actuality even by divine power, or any conceivable power. For each creative synthesis furnishes materials for a novel and richer synthesis."[48] Secondly, it is logically impossible that there should be an actualisation of all possible values, for some values, to use the phrase of Leibniz, are "incompossibles."[49] That is, there are positive values that are not capable of all being actualised. The actualisation of one possibility always means that some other possibility has not been actualised. For example, if Anna has decided to write on Sartre's *Being and Nothingness*, God would know that; but God could not know equally possible alternatives, which Anna could have decided, but she did not, for instance, write on Heidegger's *Being and Time*. This is also the meaning of *choice*, and "if the possibilities we reject are not left un-actualised, any more than those we accept, then our choices are cosmically null."[50]

'Metaphysics of freedom' and Evil

According to Whitehead the *actual occasions* have "the power for self-determination" or freedom vis á vis God: "All actual entities share with God this character of self-causation. For this reason every actual entity also shares with God the characteristics of transcending all other actual entities, including God."[51] Since the world has its own freedom/creativity by which it can refuse to conform to the divine input, which is good, there is evil in the world. Evil arises from this

capacity not to conform to the divine purpose: "So far as the conformity is incomplete, there is evil in the world."[52] This nonconformity is not necessary; hence evil is not necessary. But the possibility for the nonconformity is necessary; hence the possibility for evil is necessary.

Hartshorne's "metaphysics of freedom" has also argued the case thoroughly that all reality, including the most and trivial levels, has some degree of genuine creativity. The 'minimal solution' to the problem of evil then is to comprehend that it is not God who determines all events, but the 'creaturely freedom' from which evils spring. Indeed, "since all creatures have some freedom, all evil can and should be viewed as involving unfortunate [...] cases of creaturely decision."[53]

With "a multiplicity of creative agents, some risk of conflict and suffering (i.e., clash of individual interests) is inevitable."[54] The source of evil is this multiplicity; but it is equally the source of good: "Risk of evil and opportunity for good are two aspects of just one thing, *multiple freedom*." [55] Risk and opportunity go together, not because God chooses to have it so, but because opportunity without risk is meaningless or contradictory. This is the sole, but sufficient reason for evil as such and in general, while as for particular evils, by definition they have no ultimate reason.

Accordingly, God's role is said to be 'not to decide unilaterally' the details of earthly life – even if this were possible – but rather to provide a world order in which freedom is possible, and hence the prospects for greater aesthetic goods, despite the inevitable evil and destruction which also occur. This does not, however, rule out the possibility of any particular evil, including the imminent self-destruction of the human race. God does not act ex *machina* to combat destructive force with destructive force. It lies in the patient operation of the overpowering rationality of his conceptual harmonization. Or, more accurately, in the words of Whitehead, "[God] is the poet of the world, with tender patience *luring* it by his vision of truth, beauty, and goodness."[56]

Persuasive Power of God

On these grounds, process theists, unlike classical theists, argue that the divine creative influence must be "persuasive, not coercive." According to Whitehead, "one of the greatest intellectual discoveries in the history of religion" was Plato's suggestion that "the divine element in the world is to be conceived as a persuasive agency and not as a coercive agency."[57] In Plato's vision, the creation of the world involves a victory of 'persuasion over necessity', and as such is not a total determination of all the details of the world.[58]

Whitehead's conceptuality for understanding God's *modus operandi* as persuasive centres on the notion of the "initial aim." [59] All pure possibilities or "eternal objects" are contained in the "primordial nature" of God. The primordial nature is an envisagement of these ideals with the urge toward their actualisation in the world.[60] Each actual occasion begins by prehending God and therefore this divine urge for the realization of possibilities. Each occasion thereby receives from God an "ideal aim" or "initial aim." This is an initial persuasion toward that possibility for the occasion's existence, which would be best for it, given its context. This aim is sometimes termed the "initial subjective aim." However, this initial aim does not necessarily become the subject's own aim; rather the "subjective aim" is a product of its own decision. That is, God gives the initial aim, but the subject chooses the subjective aim.

The fact that the power of this divinely given initial aim is not coercive, so that divine determinism is avoided, is made clear in many passages: "Each temporal entity [...] derives from God its basic conceptual aim, relevant to its actual world, yet with indeterminations awaiting its own decisions."[61] Again, "The initial stage of the aim is rooted in the nature of God, and its completion depends on the self-causation of the subject-superject."[62] In other words, God seeks to 'persuade' each occasion toward that possibility for its own existence, which would be best for it, but God cannot control the finite occasion's self-actualisation.

Whitehead thus consistently rejects the traditional notion of 'unqualified omnipotence' without rejecting divine providence altogether in order to solve the problem of evil. And he grounds this rejection of 'unqualified omnipotence' upon the *metaphysical* position that creative power and freedom is inherent throughout the realm of actuality. And since God is not in complete control of the events of the world, the occurrence of genuine evil is *not incompatible* with God's beneficence toward all his creatures.

Conclusion

One of the most common criticisms against process theodicy is that the process God is "too weak," or "too limited" in power. Stephen Fly was among the first to lodge this complaint several decades ago,[63] and since then many commentators have reiterated it. For example, John Hick has recently insisted that "the fundamental criticism of a process theodicy must be a criticism of the doctrine of a limited God."[64] Even writers sympathetic to process thought have found this issue particularly troublesome. The process doctrine that denies 'absolute perfection' has accordingly been called a "weakened form of theism."

Surely making a doctrine coherent is not to weaken it. If making a doctrine coherent were to weaken it, then even St. Thomas would not escape a similar allegation. For, he recognized that it would be no objection to God's omnipotence, if we were to say that he could not do any logically impossible action. For, St. Thomas wrote: "Anything that implies a contradiction does not fall under God's omnipotence."[65] A good number of thinkers have followed St. Thomas' line of reasoning, but in their own way.[66] For example, Swinburne, in an attempt to make theism coherent, suggests a narrower definition of omnipotence, one according to which being 'omnipotent' is compatible with being perfectly free. He then urges that it would not make God less worthy of worship, if he cannot act in ways, which he judges to be irrational.[67]

Here it should, however, be noted that most of these thinkers were more concerned with logical coherence than metaphysical issues, such as the nature of the 'world', genuine human freedom, the problem of evil, etc. Isn't it an explicit expression of this concern, when John Paul II says: "Yes, in a certain sense one could say that *confronted with our human freedom, God decided to make himself impotent*."[68] No one has better expressed both these logical and metaphysical issues in construing the doctrine of God than Hartshorne did.

Moreover, the expression "finite God" seems to be objectionable, because there is some ambiguity about this expression itself. It obliterates a subtle distinction between the saying that '*God* is limited', i.e. limited by the decisions of other actualities, and the saying that '*God's power* is limited'. In the latter case, this language suggests that such a God is 'imperfect' or 'limited' in comparison with some other conceivable notion. For example, Ahern was quoted as stating that a being of limited power would not be a fitting object of worship, since worship "supposes that a greater being is inconceivable."[69] Similarly, Campbell was cited as saying that we cannot worship a being that is recognized as imperfect in any way, and that limitation of power is an imperfection.[70] Hartshorne would readily agree with these writers that a being that has less than the greatest conceivable power would not be worshipful. He has time and again expressed his concern succinctly: "Instead of saying that God's power is limited, suggesting that it is less than some conceivable power, we should rather say: [God's] power is absolutely maximal, the greatest possible, but even the greatest possible power is still one power among others, is not the only power."[71]

Redefining 'Omnipotence' of God

Hartshorne's most favourite method of formulating the idea of God's 'omnipotence' is in terms of "unsurpassability." His formula is that "God is

unsurpassable by another."[72] When "unsurpassability" is viewed from the perspective of Anselm's definition: "that than which none greater can be conceived," two meanings are possible: "unsurpassability by others, and unsurpassability by anyone, even by self."[73] Following Anselm, Hartshorne also admits that unsurpassability (here Hartshorne prefers the term "perfection") has two aspects:

the absolute aspect, A, which cannot be surpassed in any way whatever, and the transcendentally relative aspect, or the aspect of transcendent relativity, R, which is surpassable only by [...] itself, not by any other individual. Or better, and positively: as A, God surpasses all things save only Himself; as R, he surpasses all things, including himself.[74]

Anselm himself did take 'unsurpassable' to mean "unsurpassable absolutely."[75] To some extend, Hartshorne does agree with Anselm in thinking that God is unsurpassable, but unsurpassable in whatever respects that is possible. In other words, God is, in some respects, unsurpassable.[76] From this meaning of the 'unsurpassability' of God, Hartshorne logically derives many of God's attributes, such as his creative inexhaustibility and his being eternally without beginning and end. The unsurpassability itself, simply as such, Hartshorne asserts, is immutable; that is, "God could not begin, or cease, to be unsurpassable."[77]

Nevertheless, Hartshorne is very emphatic in affirming that God is not unsurpassable absolutely, or in *all* respects; indeed he must, in *some* respects, be *self*-surpassable, for instance, in his actuality. This explicit affirmation implies that God is not 'absolutely perfect' in all respects, because an absolutely perfect being is inconceivable and impossible. Absolute perfection would have to mean the complete actualisation of all possible values. Hartshorne argues that it is literally impossible for God to actualise all possibilities, because, as already mentioned, possibilities are infinite in number, and some of them are mutually incompatible.[78]

On these grounds, Hartshorne is driven to the conclusion that God does not have a final state of maximum perfection, although, in any given instant, God's attributes must be categoric instances that incomparably surpass those of all other beings. God will still perpetually surpass himself in every future instant as his successive states actualise more and more possibilities. God's perfection must, therefore, be a dynamic and continually growing one. Hartshorne thus willingly speaks of the relative perfection of God, a perfection that can never be fully maximized.[79] In more positive terms, God will always be "the All-surpassing One" who forever surpasses all other beings and himself in the everlasting creative

advance. Thus Hartshorne could argue, "God is strictly unsurpassable in whatever aspects, if any, value can be maximized, and, in all other respects, surpassable by himself only."[80]

For these reasons Hartshorne agrees with the critics of James and Brightman that their deity is inadequate to be considered worthy of worship.[81] Hartshorne argues that James' view that God must be somehow less than all-inclusive is hardly an adequate alternative, since "a God only more or less supreme might [...] be overwhelmed and destroyed by some aggregation of lesser wills or forces."[82] Regarding Brightman's deity, a similar conclusion is drawn, which follows not only from the fact that Brightman's God is not perfectly good, but also from the fact that, according to Brightman himself, his God has imperfect - that is, less than the greatest conceivable - power.[83] For Hartshorne, in order to worship God, he must be superior to others; i.e. positively, he must be beyond all possible rivalry on the part of other individuals, and, negatively, they must not be able conceivably to surpass him.[84] In short, "God is the name for the one who is unsurpassable by any conceivable being other than himself."[85] The position affirmed here is that God is a perfect reality, greater than which nothing can be consistently conceived. This is so, in spite of the fact that God cannot unilaterally and completely determine the conditions of other actual beings. Since this cannot be done, it is no limitation on divine perfection that God cannot do it. We may, thus, conclude that there is nothing in process doctrine of God which undercuts God's perfection and hence worshipfulness of God.

God as 'Empowering Love'

"The power of God is the worship he inspires;"[86] and worship, by definition, "is loving God with all one's heart and mind and soul and strength."[87] The commandment of love proves that the God, whom we worship with all our being, is himself love! This is an affirmation of the definition of God found in the Scriptures: "God is love." Love, thus, is not simply one attribute of God among others, but love is the very 'essence' of God. The good news that the Gospel of Jesus has for us is not simply that "God is love," but "that God's love is powerful, and that God's power is characterized by love."[88]

We often think of God both as "all-powerful" and "all-loving." Our tendency is to think of God's power in the way in which we think of our own - except that God's is unlimited. We think of power as the capacity to control what goes on, or in terms of force - in terms of coercion. To be powerful is to be able to control, manipulate and determine a particular course of events. We speak of God exercising power in the same way, except that he does so completely. Accordingly,

as Whitehead has pointed out, we have fashioned God "in the image of the Egyptian, Persian, and Roman imperial rulers," and, in doing this, we have lost sight of what he beautifully styled "the Galilean vision" of God as nothing other than personalised Love.[89]

49. The way out of our dilemma resides, as Polk suggests, "in letting the reality of love teach us a new way of understanding power - a way which is first fully manifest in the life and teaching of the man from Galilee."[90] According to this view God's love is not something extraneous to his power, but love defines the very nature of God's power. We must now explain briefly what the nature of God's powerful love is. God's love, as disclosed in Jesus Christ, is not coercive, but life-giving. God's power does not coerce, nor does it rule,[91] forcing his will upon the creation; for coercion does not bring life, but resistance, stagnation and death. Love of God is rather persuasive; his love keeps on 'luring' by his vision of what is best in our present situation.[92] The power of love thus distinguishes itself categorically from all other manifestations of power in the history of human life. Love is powerful only when it is the other who is empowered by the act of love. Thus God as love "is the great companion – the fellow traveller who understands."[93]

Endnotes

[1]   *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, "Theodicy," Vol. XII, 289. John T. Merz (*Leibniz*, London: William Blackwood & Sons, 1884, 101) says of Leibniz that in 1697, in a letter to Magliabechi, he uses the word "*Théodicée*" as the title of an intended work.

[2]   Cf. G.W. Leibniz, *Theodicy: Essays on the Goodness of God, Freedom of Man and the Origin of Evil*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1952, § 21.

[3]   Plato, *Timaeus*, in *The Collected Dialogues of Plato* (Bollingen Series LXXI), ed. E. Hamilton, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1973, 30a, 48a.

[4]   J.S. Mill, "Attributes," *Three Essays in Religion*, London: Blackwell, 1874.

[5]   E. Brightman, *A Philosophy of Religion*, New York: Prentice-Hall, 1940, Cha 8-10.

[6]   David Hume presented the same problem thus: "If evil in the world is the intention of the Deity, then He is not benevolent. If evil in the world is contrary to His intention, then He is not omnipotent. But evil is either in accordance with His intention or contrary to it. Therefore, either the Deity is not benevolent, or He is not omnipotent." See, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, ed. H.D.

Aiken, New York: Hafner Publishing Co., 1948, 67 & 69

[7] David Ray Griffin, *God, Power, and Evil: A Process Theodicy*, Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1976, 18-9.

[8] A.N. Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, New York, The Free Press, 223.

[9] For a detailed discussion see, Kurian Kachappilly, *God of Love Revisited*, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 1998. Cha. 5.

[10] Hartshorne, "A New Look at the Problem of Evil," in *Current Philosophical Issues*, ed., F.C. Dommeyer, Springfield: Charles C. Thomas, 1966, 203.

[11] *Ibid.*, 202-204.

[12] Hartshorne, *Logic of Perfection*, La Salle: Open Court, 1962, 189.

[13] David Ray Griffin, *God, Power, and Evil: A Process Theodicy*, 258.

[14] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, trans. Blackfriars, New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1970, Ia. 25, 3.

[15] *Ibid.*

[16] *Ibid.*

[17] Rene Descartes, *Philosophical Letters*, trans. Anthony Kenny, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970, 241.

[18] Rene Descartes, *The Philosophical Works of Descartes*, trans. Haldane and Ross, New York: Dover, 1955, 250.

[19] J.L. Mackie, "Evil and Omnipotence," in *God and Evil*, ed. Nelson Pike, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1964, 47, 50.

[20] Richard Swinburne, *The Christian God*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994, 129. What makes some of these descriptions so perplexing is that most of the theologians and philosophers take 'omnipotence' to be an enduring property, a property God could not lose at any time he exists. See Walter Glannon, "Omnipotence and the transfer of power," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 36 (1994), 81-103; Edward Wierenga, *The Nature of God: An inquiry into Divine Attributes*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989, 31-2.

[21] *Ibid.*, 152.

[22] M.B. Ahern, *The Problem of Evil*, London: Routeledge & Kegan Paul, 1971, 15.

[23] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Ia. 14, 8. This doctrine of God's 'omnicausality', implying God's monopoly on power, is consistent with the combination of divine omniscience and simplicity. Since God knows all things, and his knowing cannot be distinct from God's power or causation, it follows that God causes all things. See Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Ia. 25, 1, ad 2.

[24] David R. Griffin, *God, Power, and Evil: A Process Theodicy*, 262.

[25] See Hartshorne, "God and Man Not Rivals," *Journal of Liberal Religion* 6/2 (1944), 11.

26 At least two reasons for the neglect of this metaphysical question are: "the influence still exerted by traditional ideas about omnipotence and the recent neglect of metaphysics in favour of logic and ordinary language" (David Ray Griffin, *God, Power, and Evil: A Process Theodicy*, 265).

27 Plato, *Sophist*, in *The Collected Dialogues of Plato* (Bollingen Series LXXI), ed. E. Hamilton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1973, 247.

28 Here it is worth mentioning that even some of those (for instance, Spinoza) who deny that we ourselves have any power of self-determination, admit that we seem to have such power, and, accordingly, draw proper conclusion, i.e. if we are totally devoid of power, we are not actualities.

29 A.N. Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 7, 20, 164.

30 *Ibid.*, 57. Cf. C. Hartshorne, *Reality as Social Process*, Glencoe: The Free Press, 1953, 137.

31 A.N. Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 189.

32 A.N. Whitehead, Adventures of *Ideas*, New York: Free Press, 1967, 303.

33 A.N. Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 320, 322f.

34 A.N. Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*, 248.

35 St. Thomas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, 105, 5.

36 *Ibid.*

37 Hartshorne, "Omnipotence," in Vergilius Ferm, ed. *An Encyclopaedia of Religion*, New York: Philosophical Library, 1945, 545. Elsewhere Hartshorne writes: "The supreme power is exercised not over the powerless but over genuine powers. Over what else could it be exercised, since "being is power" (Plato)? A plurality of powers with no supreme power would be chaos, and could not exist. But a plurality of powers with a supreme power is still a plurality of powers; and only crude reasoning and inattention to verbal ambiguities [...] have prevented this from being clearly seen and consistently adhered to" ("God and Man Not Rivals," 11-2).

38 St. Anselm, *Proslogium*, trans. S.N. Deane, La Salle: Open Court, 1903, 14.

39 Moreover, to say that God can be defined in this way leaves open the possibility that God is even more excellent or worshipful than our ability to conceive. Hence it may avoid objections from Wittgensteinians, who fear that, by defining God, we are limiting God to human language.

40 Hartshorne, A *Natural Theology for Our Time*, La Salle: Open Court, 1967, 17. Cf. Hartshorne, *Anselm's Discovery*, La Salle, Open Court, 1965, 31.

41 Hartshorne, *Natural Theology for Our Time,* 17.

42 Hartshorne, "The Idea Of A Worshipful Being," *Southern Journal of Philosophy*, 2/4 (1964), 165.

43 Hartshorne, *Anselm's Discovery*, 26f; *Natural Theology for Our Time*, 19f.

44 G.W. Leibniz, *Philosophical Papers and Letters*, 167.

45 G.W. Leibniz, *Discourse on Metaphysics*, trans. P.G. Lucas and L. Grint, Manchester: University Press, 1953, chap. 1.

[46] Hartshorne, *Anselm's Discovery*, 27.

[47] Hartshorne, *Philosophers Speak of God*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1953, 160, 242.

[48] Hartshorne, "The Dipolar Conception of Deity," *Review of Metaphysics* 21/2 (1967), 285.

[49] G.W. Leibniz, *Discourse on Metaphysics*, 28; Hartshorne, *PSG*, 506; *AD*, 28.

[50] Hartshorne, *Reality as Social Process*, 99.

[51] A.N. Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 222.

[52] A.N. Whitehead, *Religion in the Making*, New York: Macmillan, 1927, 60.

[53] Hartshorne, "A New Look at the Problem of Evil," 205.

[54] Hartshorne, *Creative Synthesis and Philosophic Method*, La Salle: Open Court, 1970, 237-8.

[55] Hartshorne, *A Natural theology for Our Time*, 81.

[56] A.N. Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 346. (Italics added)

[57] A.N. Whitehead, Adventures of Ideas, 213.

[58] Plato, *Timaeus*, 47-48.

[59] A.N. Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 224, 244-45.

[60] A.N. Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 32; *Adventures of Ideas*, 357.

[61] A.N. Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 224.

[62] *Ibid.*, 244.

[63] Stephen Ely, *The Religious Availability of Whitehead's God*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1942.

[64] John Hick, "An Ireanean Theodicy," in Stephen T. Davis, ed., *Encountering Evil*, Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1981, 122.

[65] St. Thomas, *ST*, la, 25, 4.

[66] Apart from the names already mentioned, see George I. Mavrodes, "Some Puzzles Concerning Omnipotence," *Philosophical Review* 72 (1963), 221f; Bernard Mayo, "Mr. Keene on Omnipotence," *Mind* 70 (1961), 249f; Alvin Plantinga, *God and Other Minds*, 168f; C. Wade Savage, "The Paradox of the Stone," *Philosophical Review* 76 (1967), 74f.

[67] Richard Swinburne, *The Coherence of Theism*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977, 161f. Here the question Swinburne addresses is "The Paradox of the Stone." The paradox arises when we ask whether God, allegedly an omnipotent being, can make a stone too heavy for himself to lift. If he cannot, then there is an action, which God cannot perform, viz. make such a stone. If he can, then there will be a different action, which he cannot perform, viz. lift the stone. Either way, the argument goes, there is an action, which God cannot perform, and so he is not omnipotent. For a detailed discussion, see *Ibid.*, 152f.

[68] John Paul II, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, London: Jonathan Cape, 1994, 64.

69 M.B. Ahren, *The Problem of Evil*, ix.

70 Charles Campbell, *On Selfhood and Godhood*, London: The Macmillan Company, 1957, 291.

71 Hartshorne, *The Divine Relativity*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1948, 138.

72 Hartshorne, *Natural Theology for Our Time*, 127.

73 Hartshorne, "What Did Anselm Discover?," *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 17/3 (1962), 220. See also Hartshorne, *Anselm's Discovery*, 28-9.

74 Hartshorne, *Logic of Perfection*, La Salle: Open Court, 1962, 67. Elsewhere Hartshorne explains these two meanings in a different manner: "It may mean (a) no individual greater than God is conceivable, or (b) not even God Himself in any conceivable state could be greater than He actually is" (*Ibid.*, 35).

75 Hartshorne, "What Did Anselm Discover?," 217.

76 See Hartshorne, *Anselm's Discovery*, 32.

77 Hartshorne, *Natural Theology for Our Time*, 127.

78 Cf. Page number 8.

79 Hartshorne, *Man's Vision of God and Logic of Theism*, Chicago: Clark and Company, 1941, 12-21.

80 Hartshorne, *Creative Synthesis and Philosophic Method*, 248-9.

81 Hartshorne, "The Dipolar Conception of Deity," 280.

82 Hartshorne, *Philosophers Speak of God*, 351. Cf. W. James, *A Pluralistic Universe*, New York: Longmans, Green, 1909, 293-5.

83 Hartshorne, *Philosophers Speak of God*, 363-64. Cf. Edgar S. Brightman, *The Problem of God*, New York: Abingdon Press, 1930, 137; *A Philosophy of Religion*, New York: Prentice-Hall, 1940, 324f.

84 See Hartshorne, *Anselm's Discovery*, 29, 126, *Man's Vision of God*, 6.

85 Hartshorne, *Natural Theology for Our Time*, 128.

86 A.N. Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World*, New York: The Free Press, 1967, 192.

87 Hartshorne, "Man's Fragmentariness," *Wesleyan Studies in Religion* 41/6 (1963-64), 17.

88 David P. Polk, "Empowering Love," *Lexington Theological Quarterly* 1 (1973), 63.

89 A.N. Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 342-3. Cf. Norman Pittenger, "What sort of God?," *Forewords* 6 (1981), 3.

90 David P. Polk, "Empowering Love," 63.

91 A.N. Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 343.

92 *Ibid.*, 344.

93 A.N. Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 351.

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