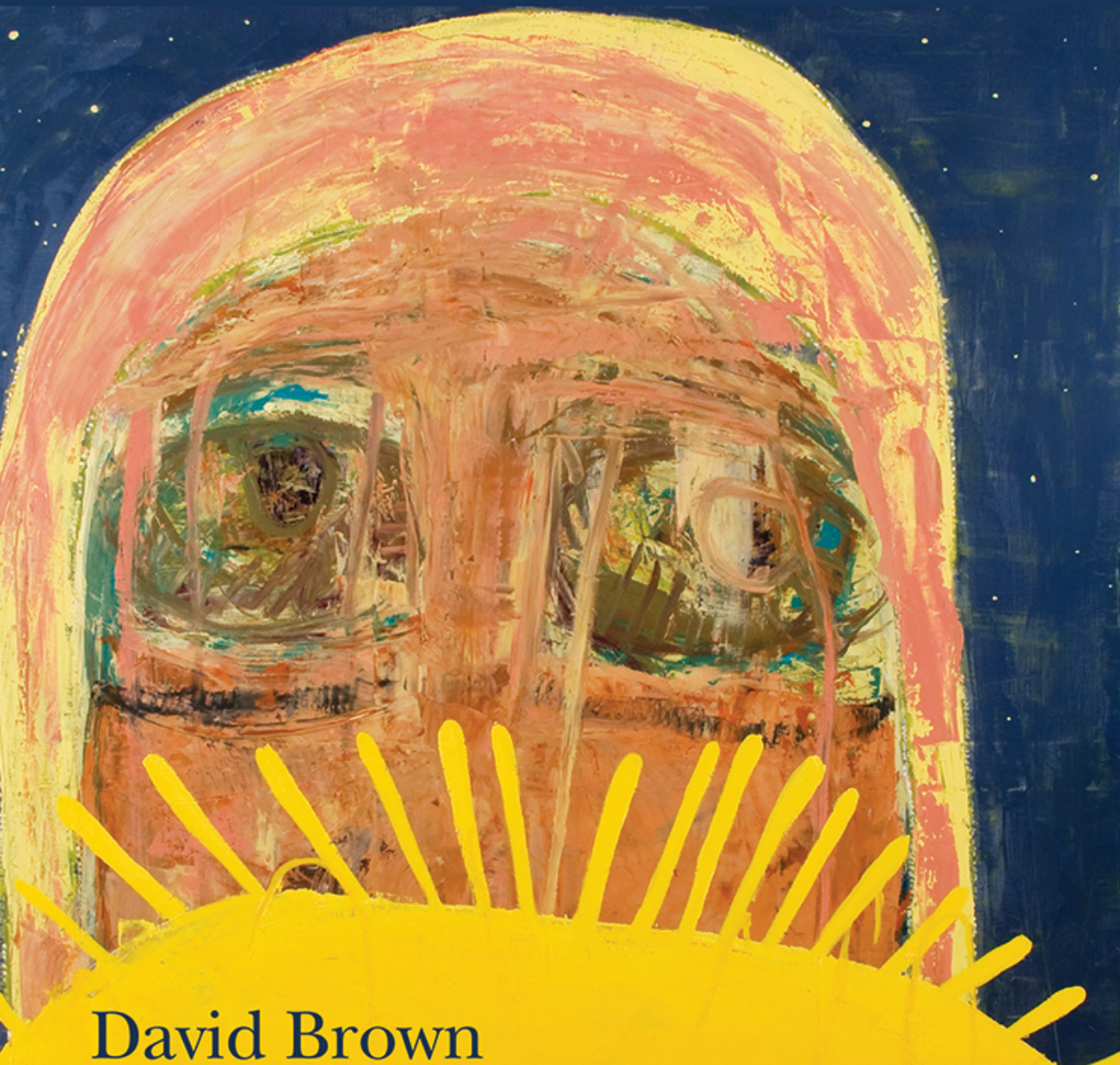
ROUTLEDGE

God in a Single Vision

Integrating Philosophy and Theology



David Brown

Edited by Christopher R. Brewer and Robert MacSwain

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In the ancient conversation between Western philosophy and Christian theology, powerful contemporary voices are arguing for monologue rather than dialogue. Instead of these two disciplines learning from and mutually informing each other, both philosophers and theologians are increasingly disconnected from, and thus unable to hear, what the other is saying, especially in Anglo-American scholarship. Some Christian philosophers are now found claiming methodological authority over doctrine, while some Christian theologians even deny that philosophy has its own integrity as a separate discipline. Against these trends, David Brown has argued over the past thirty years that philosophy and theology are both necessary in order to grapple with the reality of divine mystery and Christian faith. Neither discipline can be reduced to the other, and each has its own contribution to make for a full understanding of what Brown describes as 'a single vision' of God. In this volume, Brown addresses some key topics in philosophical theology, including the created order, experience and revelation, incarnation and redemption, and heaven and our communal destiny. Combining analytic clarity, doctrinal substance, and historical depth, this volume exemplifies Brown's project of truly integrating philosophy and theology. It thus provides an ideal introduction to this vital conversation for undergraduate and postgraduate students, as well as a connected argument of interest to specialists in both disciplines.

David Brown is Emeritus Professor in the School of Divinity at the University of St Andrews. Ever since the publication of *The Divine Trinity* in 1985, he has been recognized as one of the leading philosophical theologians of Great Britain and an important international voice in the conversation between philosophy and theology. He is a priest in the Scottish Episcopal Church, a Fellow of both the British Academy and the Royal Society of Edinburgh and a previous President of the Society for the Study of Theology.

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Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK

First published 2016
by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

and by Routledge
711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication Data
CIP data has been requested.

ISBN: 9781472465566 (hbk)
ISBN: 9781472465597 (pbk)
ISBN: 9781315585239 (ebk)

Typeset in Bembo
by Out of House Publishing

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Editor's Introduction

Robert MacSwain

Although David Brown's first book was an essay in Anglican moral theology,[1] he established his primary reputation as a philosophical theologian with his second volume, *The Divine Trinity*.[2] Born in Scotland in 1948 and originally trained as a classicist at Edinburgh, Brown then pursued a joint degree in philosophy and theology at Oriel College, Oxford, followed by a doctorate in moral philosophy at Clare College, Cambridge, co-supervised by Elizabeth Anscombe (1919–2001) and Bernard Williams (1929–2003). After training for ordained ministry at Westcott House, Cambridge, Brown returned to Oxford in 1976 as Fellow, Chaplain, and Tutor in Theology and Philosophy at Oriel, and then subsequently University Lecturer in Ethics and Philosophical Theology. In keeping with the heritage of Oriel, Brown deliberately identified his work with two of the college's most prominent past members: Joseph Butler (undergraduate, 1715–1718) and John Henry Newman (fellow, 1822–1845).[3] However, Brown was also associated closely with two successive Nolloth Professors of the Philosophy of the Christian Religion who were also fellows of Oriel, Basil Mitchell (1917–2011) and Richard Swinburne.[4] He was thus generally affiliated with the analytic movement in contemporary Anglo-American philosophy of religion, and his early work was in this mode primarily.

Brown remained at Oriel until 1990, when he became Van Mildert Professor of Divinity at Durham University and Residentiary Canon of Durham Cathedral. At Durham his primary conversation partner was Ann Loades – now Professor Emerita of Divinity – and in collaboration with her his teaching and research expanded to include sacramental theology and the dialogue between theology, the arts, and human culture.[5] In 2007 he thus returned to Scotland as Wardlaw Professor of Theology, Aesthetics, and Culture at the Institute of Theology, Imagination and the Arts (ITIA) based at St Mary's College, the School of Divinity of the University of St Andrews.[6] A Fellow of both the British Academy and the Royal Society of Edinburgh, Brown formally retired from teaching and supervision in September 2015.

When he published *The Divine Trinity* thirty years earlier in 1985, Brown sought to produce a creative fusion of patristic studies, historical-critical biblical scholarship, systematic theology, and analytic philosophy. Despite the continued growth and development of analytic philosophy of religion, this is not even now a common combination, as at least one of these four elements is usually missing.[7] This fusion is, however, representative of a certain type of Oxford Anglicanism, and Brown

stands squarely – and indeed, somewhat defiantly – in a philosophical and theological tradition that includes not only Butler and Newman but also, more recently, Austin Farrer (1904–1968) and Basil Mitchell.[8] *The Divine Trinity* divided readers along broadly disciplinary lines, with philosophers appreciating it and theologians more dubious; but much of the negative response often seemed as much impatience with Brown's whole school of thought as with this book in particular.[9] This tradition might be called 'Critical Catholicism': instead of seeking to go beyond (or around) 'secular' reason, it accepts native British empirical standards in both philosophy and history, does not object to metaphysics and natural theology in principle, sees special revelation as building upon general revelation, and rather than isolating Christian faith in a protected world of its own seeks to integrate it fully with what is known in other fields of human inquiry. At the same time, such 'Critical Catholicism' takes seriously the basic contours of Nicene Christianity and works as much as possible within those parameters, adjusting them only when it seems absolutely necessary in light of new knowledge.[10]

The volume currently being introduced brings together some of Brown's most significant philosophical and theological essays published in the three decades between the publication of *The Divine Trinity* in 1985 and his retirement in 2015, as well as some new material that reflects his current positions on certain topics. Although remaining both 'Catholic' and 'critical', Brown's thought has changed considerably in the last thirty years, and this volume thus bears witness to development as well as continuity. Brown introduces the chapters in the Introductions to the four Parts, and so my goal here is simply to provide a broader context for readers new to his work, which by comparison with much contemporary writing in philosophical and systematic theology is distinctive in several respects.[11]

First, Brown's consistent pursuit of the Anglican *via media* means not only that he positions himself intentionally between the disciplines of philosophy and theology, but that in *philosophy* he positions himself between analytic and Continental approaches, and in *theology* he positions himself between both liberal/conservative and Protestant/Catholic polarities. He thus remains in conversation with as many perspectives as possible.[12] Second, Brown is an unusually hospitable thinker who genuinely allows various disciplines to be themselves, and so even in his engagements with other fields such as history, literature, classical studies, or anthropology he seeks to *learn* from them rather than fit them into some overarching scheme, agenda, or narrative.

Third, in pure philosophy of religion, Brown does not offer original theories dealing with metaphysics, epistemology, or language, but rather works within a broadly analytic framework to make critical interventions in current debates. He typically seeks to offer a more holistic or historical perspective on a given issue, drawing on a wider range of references and considerations than his interlocutors. He does, however, defend the truth of certain positions, such as the value of religious experience and the validity of metaphorical discourse. Fourth, in philosophical and systematic theology, Brown has made original and widely discussed contributions in his non-punitive theory of purgatory, his defence of specific versions of social trinitarianism and kenotic christology, his distinctive theory of divine revelation as mediated fallibly through both tradition and imagination,

and his proposals regarding a pervasive sacramentality discerned in nature and human culture alike.[13] As with his work in philosophy of religion, here too Brown seeks to revitalise options and open pathways that are often neglected by more dominant approaches.

To conclude, in an academic world of increasing hyper-specialization, Brown is a rare example of a scholar who remains in careful conversation with biblical studies, analytic philosophy, Continental philosophy, Protestant theology, Roman Catholic theology, and secular religious studies. He has also deliberately cultivated expertise in a wide range of historical eras, for example contributing important studies of the twelfth-century Anselm as well as the eighteenth-century Butler. Brown's work does not exhibit the type of formalist precision currently in philosophical fashion,[14] but his compensating virtues of disciplinary breadth and historical depth are augmented by an illuminating acuity of insight. Although he has never repudiated his early analytic training, Brown's journey since 1985 might be titled 'Escaping Flatland' – that is, avoiding a preoccupation with logical issues to the exclusion of the three-dimensional world in which we live.[15] It is a journey towards a single vision of integrating philosophy and theology that readers are invited to travel along while reading this volume – and perhaps beyond.

Notes

1 David Brown, *Choices: Ethics and the Christian* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983).
2 David Brown, *The Divine Trinity* (London: Duckworth; LaSalle, IL: Open Court, 1985).
3 See the Preface to Brown, *The Divine Trinity*, vii. Brown subsequently published several studies of both Butler and Newman: see, for example, David Brown, 'Butler and Deism', in *Joseph Butler's Moral and Religious Thought: Tercentenary Essays*, ed. Christopher Cunliffe (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 7–35; and the introduction to David Brown, ed., *Newman: A Man for Our Time* (London: SPCK, 1990), 1–18.
4 Brown contributed essays to the Festschriften for both Mitchell and Swinburne, and wrote Mitchell's biographical memoir for the British Academy. For details see David Brown, '"Necessary" and "Fitting" Reasons in Christian Theology', in *The Rationality of Religious Belief: Essays in Honour of Basil Mitchell*, ed. William J. Abraham and Steven W. Holtzer (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 211–230; David Brown, 'Did Revelation Cease?', in *Reason and the Christian Religion: Essays in Honour of Richard Swinburne*, ed. Alan Padgett (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 121–141; and David Brown, 'Basil George Mitchell', *Biographical Memoirs of Fellows of the British Academy*, XII (2013), 303–321.
5 See their co-edited volumes, David Brown and Ann Loades, ed., *The Sense of the Sacramental: Movement and Measure in Art and Music, Place and Time* (London: SPCK, 1995); David Brown and Ann Loades, ed., *Christ: The Sacramental Word: Incarnation, Sacrament and Poetry* (London: SPCK, 1996); and Brown's contributions to Natalie K. Watson and Stephen Burns, ed., *Exchanges of Grace: Essays in Honour of Ann Loades* (London: SCM Press, 2008). For a comprehensive later tribute to the cathedral where he served for seventeen years, see the massive volume, David Brown, ed., *Durham Cathedral: History, Fabric and Culture* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2015).
6 For an engagement with this aspect of Brown's work, focusing on five volumes published by Oxford University Press, see Robert MacSwain and Taylor Worley, ed., *Theology, Aesthetics, and Culture: Responses to the Work of David Brown* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012). Some of Brown's essays in this area are forthcoming in a companion volume to this current one, *A Generous God*, also published by Routledge.

7 For various interpretations, critiques, and defences of this movement, see William Wainright, ed., *God, Philosophy, and Academic Culture: A Discussion Between Scholars in the AAR and the APA* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996); Harriet A. Harris and Christopher J. Insole, ed., *Faith and Philosophical Analysis: The Impact of Analytical Philosophy on the Philosophy of Religion* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005); Oliver D. Crisp and Michael C. Rea, ed., *Analytic Theology: New Essays in the Philosophy of Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); and Andrew Davison, ed., *Imaginative Apologetics: Theology, Philosophy and the Catholic Tradition* (London: SCM Press, 2011; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012).

8 For Brown's engagements with Farrer, see David Brown, 'God and Symbolic Action', in *Divine Action: Studies Inspired by the Philosophical Theology of Austin Farrer*, ed. Brian Hebblethwaite and Edward Henderson (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1990), 103–122, now reprinted in Robert MacSwain, ed., *Scripture, Metaphysics, and Poetry: Austin Farrer's* The Glass of Vision *With Critical Commentary* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), 133–147; and David Brown, 'The Role of Images in Theological Reflection', in *The Human Person in God's World: Studies to Commemorate the Austin Farrer Centenary*, ed. Douglas Hedley and Brian Hebblethwaite (London: SCM Press, 2006), 85–105.

9 American analytic philosophers of religion such as William P. Alston and Eleonore Stump responded positively to *The Divine Trinity*, whereas British theologians such as Colin Gunton, Nicholas Lash, and Kenneth Surin were negative, with British figures such as Sarah Coakley and Rowan Williams being somewhere in the middle. The Scottish Dominican Fergus Kerr's later assessment is more irenic: see Fergus Kerr, 'Trinitarian Theology in the Light of Analytic Philosophy', in *The Oxford Handbook of the Trinity*, ed. Gilles Emery and Matthew Levering (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 339–345, discussion on 340–342.

10 The term 'Critical Catholicism' is obviously inspired by Edward Gordon Selwyn, ed., *Essays Catholic and Critical: By Members of the Anglican Communion* (London: SPCK, 1926), and is meant to conjure both comparison and contrast in relation to the 'Liberal Catholicism' of Charles Gore and *Lux Mundi* (1889), the 'Affirming Catholicism' movement in the Church of England, the 'Radical Orthodoxy' of John Milbank and his associates, and the 'post-liberal' theology that emerged from Yale Divinity School in the 1970s and 1980s. I am not at all suggesting that 'Critical Catholicism' is a distinct movement, nor that it is uniquely associated with Oxford, only that it aptly describes the specific tradition of Anglican theology within which Brown situates himself.

11 For a comparison of Brown with two other significant Anglican theologians writing today, see Benjamin J. King, Robert MacSwain, and Jason A. Fout, 'Contemporary Anglican Systematic Theology: Three Examples in David Brown, Sarah Coakley, and David F. Ford', *Anglican Theological Review* 94 (2012), 319–334.

12 See, for example, his volume *Continental Philosophy and Modern Theology: An Engagement* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987). In the introduction Brown writes, 'Despite the fact that my own background is in analytic philosophy, I have sought to resist the temptation common among English-speaking philosophers of regarding continental philosophy as "shallow" simply because it is in general more accessible and less technically argued. For the issues it raises are clearly important ones' (xii).

13 Most of these topics are treated in this current volume, with the focus on sacramentality included in *A Generous God*.

14 See, for example, his brief review of the volume *Analytic Theology* (cited in note 7 above), 'Is Clarity Always a Virtue?', *The Expository Times* 121/5 (February 2010), 254–255.

15 Edwin A. Abbott's satirical parable *Flatland* was published in 1884: see the critical edition with notes and commentary by William F. Lindgren and Thomas F. Banchoff (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010). The 'three-dimensionality' of Brown's work is even stronger in his writings on sacramentality and the arts, but my focus here is on his contributions to philosophical and systematic theology: see notes 5 and 6 above for this other aspect of Brown's work.

Part I

The Created Order

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Introduction

This volume would not have emerged at all had it not been for the insistence of the volume's editors, two former research students of mine, who volunteered to facilitate the process; and for all the work they subsequently expended on the project I am profoundly grateful. Perhaps inevitably, somewhat different visions emerged. Should a collection of essays that touched on philosophical concerns freeze the point at which I had reached, 'greatest hits' so far, as one of them put it? Or should it also address some obvious gaps, as the other editor suggested? Or should there perhaps be some attempt to produce a connected volume, one in which one essay flowed naturally on from its predecessor (my own preference)? The resultant compromise has attempted to achieve all three objectives, and so what follows does tell a story, with offerings both from the distant and more immediate past.

Overall, as is indicated by the volume's title, *God in a Single Vision: Integrating Philosophy and Theology*, my concern over the years has been to value the contribution of both disciplines. Historically, demarcation lines were once clear, with philosophy of religion a matter of arguments for and against the existence of God, the coherence of the classical divine attributes, and so forth, with theology then taking over to treat of the deliveries of revelation. However, as I began my teaching career in the 1970s, analytic philosophy began to spread its net more widely, and indeed one of my own books, *The Divine Trinity* (1985), could be seen as part of that process of encroachment on theology. Although many theologians regarded the results with suspicion, my own view was that the boundaries between natural and revealed theology were to a great extent artificial in any case, and so such cross-disciplinary fertilization could be immensely fruitful. However, a word of caution needs to be sounded, and that is reflected in this volume, for just as it is implausible to claim that Christian revelation can be understood apart from the wider culture into which it was once delivered and within which it is now set, so philosophers could not assume either an unchanging deposit in the nature of the Christian faith nor that their own discipline was not subject to the possibility of various potential distortions of Christianity as a result of the more common contexts in which it was deployed. There is not the space to develop such themes here; a few examples must suffice. As I indicate in the essays on Scripture, there is a worrying tendency for analytic philosophers to assume a simplicity to the text that in my view cannot be

sustained, and that in turn leads them to deploy understandings of the incarnation that are no longer historically defensible. Then, on the question of potential distortions from the discipline itself, I would cite the desire for clear-cut arguments that dispense with the complexities of figurative language, including the full richness of metaphor and analogy. This is not to deny the presence of excellent books on such subjects,[1] but it is to suggest that the full implications are seldom drawn, as I attempt to indicate here when writing in detail about the atonement and *en passant* on the Trinity. It is surely after all no accident that theologians have invariably opted to express their ideas about the human condition in the language of continental philosophy, and not in that deriving from the English tradition. Phenomenology and existentialism, and even deconstructionism, offered avenues of exploration and questioning that were less readily available within analytic philosophy.[2]

More immediately, some of these points can be observed in the three chapters that follow in this Part. Thus in the first chapter, 'Why a World at All?', answers from both philosophy and theology are considered but in a way that takes very seriously the fact that 'creates' is itself a metaphor. Much twentieth-century theology rightly sought to make us more aware of the subtleties of the image of God as Father and its potential dangers. Yet even as deep a thinker as Karl Barth could go badly wrong, and so it is important to recognize that while the qualification 'ex nihilo' ('out of nothing') protects the term from any suggestion of the use of antecedently existing material – which many (including myself) would see as fundamental to what we mean by God: the source of all that is, itself, dependent on nothing (technically known as divine aseity) – there are deeper questions that also need to be faced.[3] 'Create' after all remains very much an anthropomorphic image, suggesting the need for decision, application, and effort, none of which can be made to yield sense in relation to an almighty or omnipotent deity. More pertinent is the way the image suggests some interest in what emerges, some connection with what is created, as is true in every human act of creativity. It is the nature of that interest that is pursued in the first of the chapters that follow, in which the legitimacy of the question is accepted at the same time as the constraints imposed by aseity.

God as Creator is such a fundamental article of the Creeds and of Christian doctrine that it is all too easy to suppose the implications of the term self-evident and as such necessarily in conflict with alternative ways of expressing the divine's relation to the world. In pursuing that question in the next chapter, 'Creation and its Alternatives', it is noted how many of the apparently different approaches depicting that relation are not necessarily as far apart as is usually supposed, at least once they too are also seen to involve metaphors. Thus with terms such as emanation, pantheism, panentheism, and transcendence it is more a matter of how precisely these images are applied rather than their basic meaning as such which will determine how distant or close particular conceptions or interpretations are to the orthodoxies of Christian doctrine. So, for example, in practice some versions of pantheism do succeed in retaining a strong sense of divine independence from the world (contrast Stoicism and Process Theology),[4] while to use the metaphor of all things flowing out of God as in emanation

need not necessarily lead either to an exaggerated sense of the divine character of the world nor to a turning away from divine transcendence (witness Neo-Platonism).[5] Although I have most to say about how these terms have been used in the western tradition, it is worth noting that greater conceptual clarity on such matters could have important implications for inter-faith dialogue and perhaps also allow greater flexibility in the re-conceptualization of the divine relation to the world within Christianity itself.

Then, in the final chapter, I turn to the problem of evil in the world, or theodicy, as it is sometimes more technically known. Here, my aim was to integrate philosophical and theological considerations, as well as their location in historical context. My suggestion is that the typical philosopher and theologian of the present day are alike both wrong: the theologian in denying that there is any fundamental logical challenge that needs to be answered; the philosopher in supposing that answering that challenge can ever constitute a complete response in itself. The term 'solution' is not, therefore, wrong on the lips of the philosopher, but its limited applicability must be acknowledged. Equally, the theologian must avoid appearing to suggest that an adequate response lies solely in the cross of Christ. Rather, such an appeal can only be seen to be of help if it is allowed to work indirectly through being brought alongside other cases of suffering, to illumine how God as creator and Saviour responds to issues of the quantity of suffering and the unique particularity of each individual.

Notes

1 Janet Martin Soskice, *Metaphor and Religious Language* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985) has rightly acquired a definitive place in reading on the topic, while Martha Nussbaum through several books, including *Love's Knowledge* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990) has done much to broaden analytic philosophy's horizons.

2 For a much-praised example of the use of deconstructionism, see Kevin Hart, *The Trespass of the Sign* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

3 In *Credo* the meaning of Father is virtually identified with power: (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1964), 19–27, esp. 19, 22. So it comes as no surprise that in the *Church Dogmatics* creation and fatherhood are seen as a single revelation: (Edinburgh: T & T, Clark, 1975), I/1, 390–391. But what such footwork ignores is that both terms have a range of antecedent meanings. Thus, so far from escaping natural theology, all Barth is in effect doing is accepting one cultural understanding of 'father' to which questions of power are central over against other meanings that in more recent times have assumed greater prominence, for example love.

4 Although Process Theologians in general identify the divine with the mental aspect of the world, it is an aspect that is profoundly affected by the material. Indeed, that vision of interaction and interdependency is often viewed as one of Process Theology's great strengths. While by contrast there is within Stoicism no element that is not material, the divine creative Fire (or the later Spirit of Chrysippus) is portrayed as inherently directive rather than dependent or interdependent on other forms of matter. See further M. Lapidge, 'Stoic Cosmology', in *The Stoics*, ed. John M. Rist (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 161–185.

5 Although some contemporary commentators such as Lloyd Gerson want to downplay the importance of Plotinus's mystical experiences, the more common view remains that, while asserting divine immanence in the world, it is experience of the One as

transcendent to that world which brings us closest to understanding the nature of divinity. See Lloyd P. Gerson, *Plotinus* (London: Routledge, 1994), 218–224; for a contrary view, A. Hilary Armstrong, 'The Apprehension of Divinity in the Self and Cosmos in Plotinus', *Plotinian and Christian Studies*, ed. A. Hilary Armstrong (London: Variorum Reprints, 1979), XVIII, 187–198.

1 Why a World at All?

Though my title may suggest yet another re-run of the cosmological argument, what I want to consider in this chapter is the reasons that have been adduced within the Christian tradition for God creating the world, and their relative plausibility. Five principal categories may be distinguished, and so we shall examine each of these in turn. These five are: (i) a biblically or experientially based argument that it is inappropriate to look for a reason; (ii) the suggestion that it is to be found in an act of pure divine will; (iii) that it is a matter of divine need, for instance a need for, or to give, love; (iv) that it is part of the meaning of divine goodness, and (v) an aesthetic variant, that creativity is natural to God. I shall argue that the last two present the least difficulties. None the less, it is instructive to consider, if only to reject, the earlier possibilities because of what they tell us about the nature of theological argumentation.

Reasons as Inappropriate

First then, the argument that it is wrong to seek for such a reason. Both Schleiermacher and Barth take such a view, but for very different motives. For Schleiermacher theology has no proper basis other than in experience and so to ask a question about God that steps beyond our experience is to violate the Kantian limits to our knowledge: it is to ask a transcendental question that in the nature of the case can have no answer. Indeed that is why for Schleiermacher the heart of the doctrine is not some original act of creation of which we can have no knowledge, but the experiential certainty of our preservation and that of the world in existence at this and every particular moment of our lives, our feeling of absolute dependence for our existence on something other than ourselves.[1]

By contrast, Barth seeks to justify his own rejection of this search for an ultimate reason, not in the limits of experience but on the alleged constraints he finds in the biblical witness. For him covenant is the central biblical category and creation is only to be interpreted in its light. While unlike Schleiermacher he thinks that this allows him to pronounce at length on the subject of creation (much space is devoted to the doctrine in his *Church Dogmatics*),[2] he remains adamant that all this is to be inferred from the covenant and that nothing can be said apart from that context. Thus, when in the following quotation Barth speaks of the creation being for

our benefit one should not think of him as giving God's ultimate reason but only the reason to be inferred from the covenant; indeed he goes on to warn against any attempt to raise the question except in this way.

> We cannot understand the divine creation as otherwise than benefit .... That God's creation has the character of benefit derives everywhere ... from the fact that its fundamental purpose lies in the covenant between God and man .... But doubt falls on this character in proportion as we dissociate covenant and creation ... seeking either a particular knowledge of creation alongside or outside the Christian knowledge of the covenant[.][3]

But the arguments of neither Barth nor Schleiermacher are persuasive. The difficulty with Barth is that his analysis of the biblical revelation has been superseded by the work of subsequent biblical scholars. For so long as the work of Gerhard von Rad was taken as normative it did appear that for the Bible Exodus was, as it were, subordinate to Genesis; that is to say, that a belief in creation was derivative from, and thus subordinate to, belief in the covenanting God. Even Deutero-Isaiah was interpreted in this light. As von Rad writes, 'at no point in the whole of Deutero-Isaiah does the doctrine of creation appear in its own right ... it performs only an ancillary function .... It is but a magnificent foil for the message of salvation, which thus appears as the more powerful and more worthy of confidence'.[4] It is, von Rad claims, only through influence from the Egyptian wisdom tradition that in late psalms such as 19 and 104 that creation first appears in its own right, and not just as supportive of covenant theology.[5]

But such an analysis has been fundamentally undermined, not to say disproved, by more recent scholars such as Claus Westermann and H.H. Schmid. In response to von Rad's observation that creation fails to appear in Israel's historic credo in Deuteronomy 26:5–9, Westermann makes the telling point: 'Creation was not an article of faith because there was simply no alternative .... They had no need expressly to *believe* that the world was created by God because that was a presupposition of their thinking.'[6] It was thus this assumed wider backdrop against which the doctrine of covenant was developed, a backdrop which Israel shared with its Canaanite neighbours and whose chaos mythology lies demythologized just beneath the surface of the biblical text at a number of points, for instance in the enthronement psalms identified by Mowinckel.[7] Schmid carries the argument further by suggesting that the basic assumptions of covenant theology could only have been generated from a creation theology. This is because its pattern of reward and punishment presupposes a God automatically able to bring about such effects in nature, but how could this be possible unless he were already a God of nature and not just a God of covenant history?[8]

Sufficient has perhaps now been said to indicate the way in which Barth's exegesis of Scripture might be undermined. But, though this removes the objection that Scripture precludes the search for a reason for creation, it does not necessarily mean that Scripture can of itself provide us with such a reason. The most obvious place to look would be the first chapter of Genesis. Though in the history of Christian

thought there has been frequent appeal to the recurring phrase, 'And God saw that it was good', it is doubtful whether in its historical context any such answer was intended.

Writing in the late nineteenth century against the background of the discovery of the Babylonian creation account *Enuma Elish*, Hermann Gunkel not only argued for dependence but that the apparently innocent reference to 'good' might also need to be understood against the background of the original account's story of the struggle to impose order.

> Here also lies in the background an originally strong anthropomorphism: the possibility of failure. God considers each act of creation, testing how it has turned out: he finds each to be 'good', which is to say successful. These are considerations, which P certainly did not come up with on its own, and which it perhaps hardly even understood. And yet, such considerations lie behind his words.[9]

While not denying the roots of the story in pagan mythology, this particular claim I find difficult to believe, since the present narrative contains no indication of struggle. Much more likely, it seems to me, is that the explanation lies in the reassurance the repeated phrase can give to the reader: God's purposes for this world are good. In other words, though the thought is put in the mind of God, the real intention of the narrative is to say something to us: the world is not a battleground between the gods as in the original Babylonian myth (Marduk defeating Tiamat), but one under the care of a God who always creates what is good. But, if that is so, the passage can be of no help to us in answering the more basic question we have posed ourselves: why create at all?

Schleiermacher's objection to raising the question may be dealt with much more briefly than Barth's. Certainly it must be conceded that to raise such a question is to pose an issue beyond our experience, but that cannot of itself undermine its legitimacy. For basic to the traditional understanding of creation is a claim that God's existence is intelligible apart from, and not reducible to, that of the world, but if that is so, the nature of the connection between God and the world is not given in itself but has first to be sought. Schleiermacher cannot conceive of such a response precisely because he has tied the meaning of God to an experience that indissolubly links them both, this feeling of absolute dependence, and that is what in the end draws him nearer to pantheism than to the traditional doctrine of creation. Of course, a fully adequate reply to Schleiermacher would also need to face the more fundamental question of his acceptance of the Kantian, experiential limit to our knowledge. But that is too large an issue to tackle here. Suffice it to say that Schleiermacher's rejection of the search for a reason cannot be justified on experiential grounds alone. A claim that something is known only through experience cannot of itself foreclose the intelligibility of conceptual questions then being raised which are not themselves based upon, or answerable in terms of, experience. Such a position only follows when combined with a contentious Kantian metaphysics, which there seems to me good reason (at least in

this instance) for deeming false: the question is in itself intelligible and generates no obvious antinomy.

An Answer in the Divine Will

But even conceding the legitimacy of the question, need the reason be anything other than divine fiat, God's will that it should be so? Here we have the second type of response which I said I would consider. First, let me mention one obvious pointer in its favour. If, as in the cosmological argument, God is seen as the source of all that is, it would seem puzzling to suggest that he act for any other reason than simply his will; for would that reason not then exist outside of God, and so not after all have its source in the source of all that is? Such considerations came to dominate later medieval thought and the Reformation, but the gist of the idea is already in Augustine:

> If the will of God has a cause, it is something that precedes the will of God, which is an outrage to believe. Therefore, to him who says, Why did God make heaven and earth, we must respond: because he willed it. For the will of God is the cause of heaven and earth, and thus the will of God is greater than heaven and earth. He then who asks, why then God willed to make heaven and earth, seeks something greater than the will of God: but nothing greater can be found.[10]

But, though the idea is thus clearly in Augustine, it would be wrong to suppose the notion central to his thought. Its presence, however, did give the Reformers the justification they were seeking to allow it to assume central stage in their own writings, particularly the writings of Calvin. For Augustine was of course *the* theologian par excellence for Luther and Calvin. But, as is increasingly being acknowledged, the immediate antecedents of many of their ideas lie in the later Middle Ages, and this stress on the divine will is no exception.

One major, perhaps the major, contrast between earlier and later medieval philosophy is a changed conception of God, from God conceived of primarily in terms of intellect to a God defined by will. Determining the range of factors which helped bring about this change is not easy, but certainly a major impetus was given by the late thirteenth-century reaction to Aquinas and rationalist theologians like him, as reflected in the Bishop of Paris's famous condemnation in 1277 of 219 propositions. The rejection of two of them is of particular significance, no. 34, 'that the first cause cannot make many worlds', and no. 163, 'that the will necessarily pursues what is firmly believed by reason, and that it cannot abstain from that which reason dictates'. The denial of the second proposition seems to imply that rationality is no necessary guide to the conduct of God, while the denial of the first, though capable of a traditional interpretation, came to be taken to imply that there were no limits to the sort of world God might create.

It was this view which came to dominate the thinking of later Franciscan philosophers such as Duns Scotus and William of Ockham. Scotus for instance uses