

# *The Concept of God; Some Philosophical Considerations*

**Reginald S. Luhman**

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Christianity, perhaps more than any other religion, has a well developed concept of God. The attributes ascribed to God derive partly from revelation and partly from philosophical reflection of the nature of the greatest imaginable being worthy of worship. For God to be the greatest imaginable being worthy of worship he must be a being who maximises all possible qualities like power, knowledge and goodness. He must also exist eternally and therefore cannot have any equals. The nature of God is often explained in the following way:

- (1) He is an **Omnipresent Spirit**. He knows what is happening everywhere without being dependent for that knowledge on anything or anyone else. He is a spirit because he could not have to depend on physical organs like eyes and nerves to convey knowledge that he did not already have. Also having a body would limit him to a particular time and space.
- (2) He is the **Creator** of all things, responsible for the past, present and future existence of material objects and the laws that govern them.
- (3) He is **Omnipotent**, that is able to do everything that is logically possible to know.
- (4) He is **Omniscient**, that is, knowing at any time, what is possible to know.
- (5) He is **Eternal** by nature rather than choice. He cannot choose to cease to exist.
- (6) He is **Perfect**, that is God performs any morally right action, but does not perform any morally bad action.

It is a simpler concept of God than that of polytheism because it does not need to be explained in terms of anything else. The monotheistic God has qualities that essentially belong together and provides a total personal explanation for everything else that exists.

Some believers in God have said that God is totally transcendent and therefore beyond our comprehension. This will not do. If statements about God are to have meaning then they cannot be totally beyond our understanding. An early Christian writer, Tertullian, said that he believed that God had become man because the belief was absurd. It was absurd in the sense that for God to become a man he must be subject to change, which He could not be if He were **immutable** (changeless).

The reasoning by which he arrives at this conclusion shows inconsistency. One of the fathers of the early church, Tertullian, invoked the meaning rules of our language, with respect to God's being 'different', in order to establish that these rules do not apply to God! Tertullian

thought that religious belief is possible provided it is self-contradictory. But what does a self-contradictory believer believe? His belief unsays everything it says.

Professor Bernard Williams in his comments on Tertullian's paradox, said, "Faith could be a way of believing something, as opposed to believing it on evidences, but how could it be a way of stepping from what is understood to what is not understood? ... if you do not know what you are believing on faith, how can you be sure you are believing anything? ... My difficulty is that, if the belief is incomprehensible and necessarily so, one cannot see what is being accepted, on faith or otherwise." (B.Williams. in Flew and McIntyre. *New Essays in Philosophical Theology*. 208-9)

### **How can one know God?**

Is it possible to know God and his attributes if, by definition, God is infinite and perfect? Traditionally there have been two ways employed to obtain knowledge of God, the way of **affirmation** (the **kataphatic** way) and the way of **negation** (the **apophatic** way).

The way of affirmation is to work from our own experience of concepts like goodness and love and seek to expand them to an infinite degree. One discovers God through sensations and religious experiences, like visions, and by participating in religious activities like prayer and ritual, for example the celebration of the Communion.

The way of negation is more prevalent in Roman Catholicism, for example St. John of the Cross, and in Eastern religions. It starts with the observation that God cannot be spoken of in human language because God is transcendent. Words can only point beyond the finite world to God. By eliminating all the things that God is not we begin to penetrate into the mystery of what God is. To know God it is necessary to escape from the finite and ascend into heaven.

The way of doing this was developed by an anonymous writer, who lived in the 5<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> century AD, referred to as Pseudo-Dionysius. He wrote several books charting the stages of the negative way (*Via Negative*)

- (1) Attaining a knowledge of God's names and attributes, not to get a literal description of God, but to use as pointers to God as the cause of all things.
- (2) Symbolic - obtaining a knowledge not only of the created earthly world but of the angelic world.
- (3) Mystical - final illumination and entering into the presence of the divine. He believed that all things merge into God just as a circle merges into itself.

### **Coherence and Consistency in the Concept of God.**

If the concept of God is to make sense each attribute of God must be self-consistent and consistent with all the other attributes of God. The concept of an omnipotent God, for instance, would lack self-consistency if it could be shown that there are things an omnipotent God could not do. Examples of such things might be the inability to change the past, or to sin, or to make a stone that He could not lift. An example of lack of consistency between attributes would be the inability of an all-knowing God not to know the free choice of one of his creatures.

It has been claimed that if God is an absolutely perfect being then He is one who has unsurpassable knowledge and therefore knows the meaning of every significant proposition. There would be a lack of consistency if it could be shown that there are certain things that God could only know if He were limited in power, for instance feelings of fear and frustration. To fear is to believe oneself to be in danger, but an omnipotent being could not fear because there is no possible harm or danger that could possibly befall him. An absolutely perfect being could not experience frustration because, being omnipotent, there can be no obstacle to his will. Whatever he wills he accomplishes.

There are ways out of the dilemma by taking a non-realist view of God or by accepting the ideas of **Process Theology**, which claims that God is in the process of becoming. On this view God is affected by the universe, as well as having an effect on it. God is incomplete without the world because the world gives God meaning and embodiment. Process Theologians argue that, if the world did not add anything to God, then the existence of the world would be devoid of ultimate significance. In Process Theology God is neither omnipotent nor omniscient, but is in the process of becoming both of these.

Another way out is provided for the Christian by his belief that God is a Trinity, a doctrine found offensive by both Jew and Moslem. If God could take on the form of a perfect man then He could experience what man experienced and thus sympathise with our weaknesses and limitations (see Hebrews. 4.15.) while not compromising His omnipotence and omniscience as God the Father.

Even if one takes a realist view of God, it is obvious that God, by His very nature, is very different from us, and therefore language used about God is not exactly equivalent to language we use about ourselves. This has led to theologians using analogy and other forms of language, like symbol and myth in an attempt to understand God.

### **The Use of Analogy.**

Aquinas used three types of language in order to clarify how we seek to describe God. These types of language were **univocal**, **equivocal**, and **analogical**.

Univocal language occurs where words are used in the same sense in different situations. For instance, a husband can be loved by both his wife and by his child. Aquinas maintained that God's love is not the same as our love to one another, because he is not finite like us. Therefore univocal language cannot be used to describe God.

Equivocal language is where the same word is used in two different situations with totally different meanings. For instance, 'My cricket bat and a fruit bat are both in the attic' Equivocal language is unhelpful as well, because if the words were not equivalent and we only knew what a cricket bat was, it would not help us to understand the concept of 'fruit bat'. So if God's love is totally unlike our love we could not know what it consisted of.

Analogy implies there is both a likeness and difference and in normal cases it would be necessary to know in what ways the things are alike and in what ways they are different. With the concept of God this does not apply. Aquinas distinguished various types of analogy, not all of which are applicable to God. They include the following:

- (1) *Duorum ad tertium*. This is the analogy that holds between two entities in consequence of the relationship that they both bear to a third entity. Thus we could use the word 'healthy' to describe Smith and Brighton. Both the complexion of Smith and Brighton bear a relationship to the concept 'healthy', but each in a different way. Smith's complexion is a sign of health, whereas the climate of Brighton may be said to induce health. This type of analogy is not applicable to the concept of God.
- (2) *Unius ad alterum*. This is the analogy of attribution, where the analogy is between the two entities themselves without reference to a third. Thus we could say that both Smith and God are good. In the case of Smith the goodness is a derived goodness, whereas it is necessary quality in God who produces the goodness in His creatures.
- (3) *Plurium ad plura*. This is the analogy of proportionality. Strictly this means that the analogue under discussion is found formally in each of the entities. Thus we can say that vegetables, animals, man and God each possess life literally, but that the nature of that life is different. It is possible to have analogy of proportionality in a metaphorical sense. For example we can describe the lion as the king of the beasts because it bears the same sort of relationship to the animals as a king does to his subjects, but of course it is not literally a king.

When using analogy to understand God should we start with man or with God? Professor H .P, Owen wrote, " The religious philosopher does not ask the unbeliever to change the finite facts or to look at new ones. Rather he asks him to see the finitude of personality, not as a self-sufficient datum, but as a reflection of the absolute, Personality which is God. The Infinite is ... implied by every aspect of finite being ... so that at the deepest level of spiritual perception it is true that if we saw ourselves we should see God." (*The Christian Knowledge of God* (Athlone Press London 1969) 236)

There is a partial parallel to the use of analogy in religion, in the use of models in science. In science gases have been likened to billiard balls and chromosomes to volumes in a library. These models, like the analogies in religion, are attempts to represent symbolically aspects of the world, which are inaccessible to us in the normal way. The validity of the models depends on their being some isomorphism (or actual fit) between the model and the real structure of the world. As with religious analogies, the scientific models are taken seriously but not literally. For instance, gas molecules are neither the tiny elastic spheres of the model nor are they billiard balls, but they resemble them in important respects just as God is not a person in every respect like us, but human personality resembles God's personality in certain important respects.

## **Explaining God or ‘Explaining God Away’?**

How helpful is the analogical approach in explaining the nature of God? One of the most influential modern theologians to apply analogy to the concept of God was Paul Tillich, who was born in Germany but settled in America after being barred, by the Nazis, from teaching in German universities in 1933. Tillich has been variously represented as a theist, a pantheist, a humanist, an atheist or a crypto-atheist. Tillich was influenced both by Wittgenstein and by the idealist philosopher, Friedrich von Schelling.

From Wittgenstein he developed his views on verification, arguing that truth must ultimately rest upon ‘what is’ (reality). Each discipline has its own tests of truth and falsity. He claimed that there are many different spheres of life and that each of these spheres is a self-contained realm of understanding. Each self-contained realm has its own appropriate criteria of truth and falsity and its own language, which grow and die according to the use that are put to by the community.

From idealism he established his fundamental ideas. He posits, as did Augustine and others, that the central question of theology is, ‘Why is there something, rather than nothing?’ For Tillich the starting point is, “The ontological question, the question of being-itself, arises in something like a ‘metaphysical shock’ – the shock of possible non-being. This shock has been expressed in the question, ‘Why is there something; why not nothing?’” (P.Tillich *Systematic Theology. Vol 1* (University of Chicago Press 1951)163)

For Tillich the Christian message provides answers to questions implied in human existence. Only those who experience what it is like to be finite can understand what the meaning of the word ‘God’ is because, “God is the answer to the question implied in human finitude” He is “... the infinite power of being which resists the threat of non-being” (ibid.72)

Tillich believed that all statements about God, including qualities, actions and manifestations, are symbolic. Tillich distinguished between a **sign** and a **symbol**. A sign is a convention, for instance in our culture a red light at a traffic junction means that a motorist is required to stop. A symbol is more than a sign. The symbol participates in the object it signifies. For instance a Rolls Royce indicates wealth and a national flag involves citizens of a country to identify with it as a way of demonstrating national loyalty. Christian symbols, like the light in the tabernacle in a Roman Catholic Church not only represent the presence of Christ, but also might mean to a worshipper that they are ‘coming home’ to their spiritual abode.

Closely associated with the use of symbol is the employment of **myth** by some theologians in seeking to understand the concept of God and God’s activity in the world. They use the word ‘myth’ not necessarily as an untrue story, by as a religious story which seeks to represent ultimate reality in a way that we can more readily understand. The problem is whether, in fact Tillich and other theologians using these concepts, are reinterpreting the concepts traditionally applied to God or totally redefining God in a way that leads to a denial of the concept of God altogether.

## **Problems arising from some of the traditional attributes of God**

### **Omnipotence.**

Because it is difficult to define omnipotence it has been thought that the concept itself is self-contradictory. Does God being omnipotent literally mean that God can do everything including what is logically contradictory and what is wrong? Some have claimed that it does. But surely God could not sin and at the same time remain a perfect being!

### **Omnipotence and the Laws of Logic.**

Descartes believed that God was not even limited by the laws of logic. This cannot be true. Logically impossible actions, like drawing a square circle, are not real activities. Furthermore a God who was not bound by logic would be a God who was not bound by consistency and therefore not a God to be trusted. He could promise something and then, quite reasonably, break the promise. The Bible claims that there are things that God cannot do, for instance to swear by someone greater than himself or to lie (Hebrews 6.13,18).

### **Can God Sin?**

It seemed to Anselm and Aquinas that, if God is all-powerful, then He must be able to sin. Obviously if God did sin He would not be perfect. Their solution was that inability to sin does not imply imperfection because omnipotence itself entails perfection. We could, of course, also maintain that God could do evil but never chooses to do so because, if He did so choose, He would be less than perfect, which would mean a limitation in his power.

### **Has God the power to change the past?**

Future events are open but past events seem closed. It makes no sense to pray that a dead victim of a plane crash should be spared. But if God cannot change the past does this not put a severe limit on omnipotence?

Aquinas' solution to this problem was to show that any proposition describing a state of affairs in the past can be true or false, but if the past could be changed then the proposition would be false. He writes, "Now that the past should not have been implies a contradiction. For as it implies a contradiction to say that Socrates is sitting, and is not sitting, so does it to say that he sat, and did not sit. But to say that he did sit is to say that it happened in the past. To say that he did not sit, is to say that it did not happen. Whence, that the past should not have been, does not come under the scope of divine power." (Aquinas *Summa Theologica* 1.25.4)

### **The Paradox of the Stone.**

There is a famous paradox intended to show that there are some things that God cannot do. It can be presented as follows:

- (a) Either God can create a stone, which He cannot lift, or He cannot create such a stone.
- (b) If God can create a stone, which He cannot lift, then He is not omnipotent since He cannot lift it.
- (c) If God cannot create a stone, which He cannot lift, then equally He is not omnipotent because He cannot create it.
- (d) Therefore God is not omnipotent.

Several solutions to the paradox have been proposed. One of them, proposed by Wade Savage, shows that the paradox involves a fallacy. This can be demonstrated by using two people, rather than one person, in the solution. Suppose Brown cannot lift a stone heavier than seventy pounds, then if Smith can create a stone heavier than seventy pounds then he can create a stone that Brown cannot lift. If Smith can create stones of any poundage, and Brown can lift stones of any poundage, then Smith cannot create a stone, which Brown cannot lift, and yet Brown is not thereby limited in power. It must be equally the case when Brown is both stone-creator and stone-lifter.

Perhaps the best way to define God's omnipotence is to say: "God can perform any action the performance of which is logically consistent, and consistent with God's own nature." (Michael Peterson et.al. (ed.) *Reason and Religious Belief*. (3<sup>rd</sup>.edition Oxford OUP 2003) 67.)

### **Omniscience.**

Omniscience, the ability to know everything, is one of the most difficult of the attributes for us to understand. For God to know everything He must know the future as well as the past and the present. But how can the future be known? If the future is undecided how can God know it? If it is already decided, how can man be a truly free being responsible to God for what he does with his life? Some things that it is possible to know require that the one who knows them changes. Is God capable of change or is He unchangeable (i.e. **immutable**)? If He is immutable then how can God know what can only be known by someone who is mutable?

## God and Time.

### The Nature of Time.

Philosophers have distinguished two theories of time, sometimes called the A and B theories. In the A theory only the present is real. The past has ceased to exist and the future has yet to come into being. In the B theory all events in time – past, present and future – are equally real and the passage of time is a subjective illusion. In the B theory there are no tensed facts such as ‘The Battle of Hastings occurred in 1066’ or ‘It is now 3.00 P.M.’

Isaac Newton believed in **absolute time**, that is that time exists apart from events. This means that there does not have to be a beginning to time. Time is unbounded and therefore every instant of time must be preceded by another instant. If the universe had a beginning, on this view there would be a period of time during which the universe did not exist. According to the theory of relativity, if the universe had an absolute beginning, then time would have a beginning, but if it only had a relative beginning from a prior state then time would not have a beginning.

The alternative view is a **relational view of time**. Most people who hold this view generally believe that the beginning of events occurs with the beginning of time and that the universe comes into existence with time. We could still talk about what existed before the universe in the same way that we can say that there are no temperatures lower than absolute zero, because we can have the concept in our mind.

Does God exist outside of time or is God, in some sense, limited by it? On the Newtonian view God would exist changelessly in an undifferentiated time prior to creation, but on a relational view, God would exist changelessly and timelessly before creation, which marks the first event and the beginning of time. There are two ways of seeing God’s relationship to time. One is to say that God is **timeless**. The other is to view God as **everlasting**.

### Timelessness and God.

Timelessness implies that God is without beginning or end, has no temporal duration or location and is outside of time. The view originated with Plato and is found in Augustine, Anselm, Boethius and Aquinas. Boethius realised that there must be genuine human freedom or else God would be responsible for all human sin and therefore argued that God sees all things as eternally present. Thus God knows all future acts as we know past events because He has a true belief about them. With human actions God knows, but does not determine them. Aquinas used an analogy to help explain this. God, he said, is like a man on a hill, who is watching travellers approaching, a view that none of the travellers have of one another. In this analogy someone on the road is in an ordered set of places; others are either alongside him, in front of him or behind him. The observer is outside the ordered set of places but is spatially related to the travellers on the road. God could be like the observer. He is outside of time but His vision can take in the temporal order of events. Another analogy we could use is that of a novel or a film. The author of the book or the director of the film knows the future activities of the characters whereas the reader of the book or viewer of the film will see the activities unfolding chronologically.

There are difficulties with timelessness. It seems to imply that a timeless being must view everything that has happened, is happening and will happen as eternally present. Also a

timeless being would be incapable of reflecting and deliberating because these activities require acting in time. A timeless being could not remember, because memory implies having learned or experienced something in the past. Nor could he will, desire or purpose because all of these envisage a future state of affairs different from those that now exist. Similar considerations would apply to God's forgiving sins, making promises and answering prayers. It also creates problems for the Christian belief in the incarnation, that God became man by entering into human history. This Soren Kierkegaard called the 'Absolute Paradox' – the presence of the Eternal in time or how God can enter the space-time world without ceasing to be the Eternal.

Aquinas sought to answer this by saying that we can only talk about God analogically. He claimed that while creatures are really related to God, God can have no real relation to creatures. God exists timelessly unrelated to creatures, while creatures in time change in their relations to God. This poses a problem for the incarnation because the divine nature can have no real relationship with the human nature.

### God as Everlasting.

To say that God is everlasting is to say that God has no beginning or end, but is not divorced from the process of time. God can still remain the same, while other things change if God is everlasting.

One way of saving the belief in the timelessness of God is by claiming that God has a time strand of His own. We can then distinguish two types of time. One sort of time is that of the inanimate universe where it is possible to distinguish between a 'before' and an 'after'. This is part of God's creation and God can only enter it by becoming a creature. God could, without becoming a creature, subject himself to time by being related to changing things. The other sort of time is a private or mental time which can be experienced by beings with minds and is made up of millions of separate series each related to a particular individual. Personal times can be related to other personal times by participating in inanimate time. If God is conceived of as existing timelessly before creation and in time after creation it also answer Augustine's question, 'What was God doing prior to creation?' Augustine sarcastically answered that, 'He was preparing hell for those who pry into mysteries.' A better answer, from within the Christian tradition, is given by Professor William Craig. He says that prior to creation God was in an eternal and changeless love relationship between the persons of the Trinity with an eternal determination for a creation in time which would involve human persons capable of responding to His love.

### **Omniscience and Immutability.**

Some philosophers claim that there is an inconsistency between the possession of omniscience and the inability of a perfect being to change. It is claimed that, if a perfect being is omniscient and not subject to change, then he will be incapable of knowing anything that does change. Thus a sentence like, 'Christ will be born' is true at one time and false at another (for example after he has been born) and thus no one could know the sentence to be true after the birth of Christ. In fact this is no more than a formal contradiction. All that is being claimed is that no one can express both of the statements, 'Christ will be born' and 'Christ has been born' in the same words at the same time. The same is true with statements like, 'I am now reading these words', which cannot be said by another person, who would have to say, 'He is now reading these words.' This only implies that no two people, whether they are

omniscient or not, can express certain statements in identical words. It does not imply that the two people cannot know the same piece of information.

### **Omniscience and Human Freedom.**

One of the most perplexing problems associated with God's omniscience is without doubt its relationship to human freedom of action. Nelson Pike put forward the following to illustrate the problem. Jones is mowing his lawn on a certain Saturday. Eighty years previously an omniscient God had predicted that on that Saturday Jones would mow his lawn. In order for Jones to be truly free he must be free to refrain from mowing his lawn and for this to be so, one of the following must be true.

- (a) Were he to refrain, God's belief would have been false.
- (b) Were he to refrain, God would have believed eighty years ago that he would not mow his lawn.
- (c) Were he to refrain, God would not have existed eighty years ago.

(a) must be rejected if God is infallible because an infallible being cannot hold a false belief and (c) must be rejected on the grounds that it makes God finite and changeable. Pike also believes that (b) is inconsistent because it implies that if Jones is free then a belief held at an earlier time must have ceased to have been held.

There are several ways out of the difficulty. We could solve it by denying human freedom, but this, as we have noted, would make God responsible for everything including human sin. Or we could redefine what is meant by human freedom.

### **The Nature of Human Freedom.**

It is possible to view human freedom in one of two ways

#### Libertarianism -The Freedom of Indifference. (Incompatibilism)

This is a freedom that is genuinely undetermined, that is the agent must be free to make a genuine choice with all the antecedent conditions remaining the same. Thus if we are free to watch any T.V. channel then there is nothing that precludes us from watching whatever we want to watch. This would not be the case if, for instance, the T.V. set only has one channel.

Persons are not completely free. All our actions are limited or determined by factors outside of our control, such as heredity and the environment in which we find ourselves. The choice to go on a hunger strike may be determined by the social and political situation we find ourselves in and would be a free choice. Such a free choice is not equally available to someone lost in a desert without food. This determinism is often called **soft determinism**.

#### Compatibilism-The Freedom of Spontaneity.

This is a freedom to do what we want to do, but that what we want to do is conditioned. Thus we could be hypnotised to watch a particular T.V. channel, or there was only one channel available to watch.

This is a view adopted by the followers of John Calvin (Calvinists), who argue that it protects the sovereignty of God. This view makes it easy to reconcile God's omniscience and omnipotence with human freedom. God would always ensure that what His creatures wanted to do would be what he determines. This is a form of **hard determinism**. The role of God's creatures is to submit to God's will. But it also makes God ultimately responsible for evil. It also stretches the meaning of freedom. Thus a prisoner who wanted to remain in a locked room would be free!

### **God, Foreknowledge and Human Freedom.**

There are three possible ways to represent God's foreknowledge with respect to human freedom. One is to follow compatibilism and argue that God, being omniscient and omnipotent, knows and determines everything that happens in the universe. The second, taking the libertarian position, maintains that the future is truly **open** and that nobody, not even God, can know the future, because the future does not exist until certain events and free choices are made that determine it. In this scenario God could know the future if He is timeless, but cannot determine it. There is a third view, which takes a middle course, Molinism or middle knowledge.

Molinism originated with the Jesuit theologian Luis de Molina. He argued that God knows not only everything that has or will happen but every choice a person would have made even when no choice is made. Robert Adams asks whether President Kennedy would have bombed North Korea had he not been assassinated. For us this is an open question, but the Molinist claims that God knows what Kennedy would have done. God knows, concerning every created free person, how that person would have chosen in any possible situation of libertarian free choice, even if that choice was never made. Before God creates He plays over in His mind all the possible scenarios for all his creatures to obtain the best results, even though many elements in the planning involve genuine libertarian free choices on the part of the creatures. The possible scenarios are called **counterfactuals of freedom** and God is said to exercise **middle knowledge**.

### **The Book of the Future.**

To help understand how God knows the future it has been proposed that we use the analogy of a book of the future. The analogy is limited and is misleading in certain respects. For instance it suggests that God can come to know something and that His knowledge is somehow mediated. This analogy may, nevertheless, help clarify the issues involved.

The three possible scenarios of the future are:

- (a) The book is empty and every page is blank because no future propositions have a truth value.
- (a) The book is full of all the true propositions about the future.
- (b) The book is incomplete. God only possesses partial knowledge because he chooses to restrict His knowledge to allow for a certain amount of independence in free rational creatures.

Of these (c) is the most promising, but this does seem to make God to some extent dependent of the choices of His creatures.

### **The Chess Analogy.**

Peter Geach seeks to solve the problem by using an analogy from chess with a grand master playing several games of chess simultaneously. "God is the supreme Grand Master who has everything under his control. Some of the players are consciously helping his plan, others trying to hinder it; whatever the finite players do, God's plan will be executed; though various lines of God's play will answer to various moves of the finite players. God cannot be surprised or thwarted or cheated or disappointed. God, like some grand master of chess, can carry out his plan even if he has announced it beforehand. 'On this square.' says the Grand Master, 'I will promote my pawn to Queen and deliver checkmate to my adversary': and it is even so. No line of play that finite players may think of can force God to improvise: his knowledge of the game already embraces all possible variants of play, theirs does not." (Peter Geach. *Providence and Evil*. (Cambridge University Press 1977) 58)

The analogy makes sense of human responsibility as well as helping to solve the almost insoluble problem of evil, which we will be discussing later. It does mean that human freedom could not be absolute, which of course it is not. It is limited by the sort of people we are, which in turn is the result of our genetic makeup and the environmental pressures that bear upon us throughout life. If God is the creator and sustainer of the universe then He must be actively involved in this process throughout the lives of all people. David Basinger has pointed out several areas in which human freedom has to be modified for the chess analogy to work. He takes as his example the case of a bank robber who decides to kill a bank clerk who recognises him. He asks how God could ensure that the clerk is not killed while allowing the robber to exercise freedom of action. There are several possibilities open. The robber could be allowed to fire the gun and the firing mechanism could jam. Continual resort to this kind of action would make significant choices illusory, for then one could not rely on expected results following from deliberate actions. God could instil other thoughts into the robber's mind so that he did not go through with the action, which if resorted to frequently would involve God in deception. Finally God could intervene with a miracle like temporarily blinding the robber. Of course there is always the possibility that the robber will kill the clerk. This does not mean that God's purpose will be thereby thwarted because, if there is a life after death to which the victim goes, then God's will has still triumphed.

### **Immutability.**

We have already considered immutability in God in connection with God's omniscience. It is an attribute that is hotly debated. The traditional theist believes God is perfect and, as such, must be incapable of change because change can only be for the better or the worse. If God cannot change how can He be the God of the Bible who enters into relationships with His creatures? Although the Bible says that God does not change (Malachi 3.6; James. 1.17-18) it also says that He changes His mind (Genesis. 6.6; I Samuel 15.35; John. 3.10). Some would argue that where it says that God changes His mind the Bible is speaking figuratively, but it is unclear why this should be so. The doctrine of immutability is derived not from the Bible but from Greek philosophy.

As we have already seen Process Theologians do not believe that God is unchangeable. They argue that belief in a changeable God makes Him more approachable. We do not admire someone who does his duty and feels serene irrespective of its effects on others. But if God is considered immutable, then we are expected to admire God for doing so. The problem with the solution of Process Theology is that a God who is subject to change is not a God in whom we could exercise complete faith because we have no assurance that He will not perish or be overcome by circumstances.

Is the problem more apparent than real? Professor Owen obviously thinks so. He argues that God does not have to adapt to the world, because the world was created by God, and there is nothing in it that does not exist ideally in God's mind. Further God can be affected by human joys and sorrows and respond to them without being forced to change. He cannot be more loving because He is self-existent love. How can this be? The answer, according to traditional theologians, following the lead of Thomas Aquinas, is to distinguish two orders of relations; one in the real order of being and the other in the intentional order, that is in God's consciousness. God's real being is complete but He is affected positively by what we do in his relational consciousness, but this does not imply any increase or decrease in God's inner being.

### **Concluding Remarks**

It will be obvious from the discussion that no firm conclusions can be reached concerning the nature of God. This is hardly surprising if God is the creator of everything that exists including our finite minds by which we seek to understand him.

Without doubt the most problematic area of this study is to demonstrate how God can be identified. It was suggested that this must be done by means of analogy. This is inevitable given that God's nature cannot be perceived by human senses. we must say that it would be impossible to perceive God. As John Morreal has pointed out, God could not be perceived by human beings because, "Not being physical, and so not reflecting or emitting light, God is not the kind of thing which could be seen...Similarly God is not the kind of thing that could be heard because he is not the kind of thing the emits or reflects sound waves." (J. Morreal 'Perfect Happiness and the Resurrection of the Body' *Religious Studies* 16.1 (1980) 33) Of course we can have a 'vision' of God. But what would this consist of? We could 'see' something but this would not be God or 'hear' something, like a voice, but it would not be literally God's voice. Thus we are again in the realm of analogy. Christians have maintained that we can know God through Jesus Christ. Believers in God claim that God makes Himself known by revelation. "No one has ever seen God: the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known."

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