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Divine and Human Action

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Unlike most others in this volume, this essay is not a direct discussion of divine action. Rather, it raises questions of "second intention" concerning the kind of concepts we are able to form of divine action, and it considers the bearing of this on our situation vis-à-vis God.

What concepts are applicable to God depends, of course, on what God is like.[1] If, for example, God is a personal agent in the same fundamental sense as ourselves, albeit one that is immaterial and unlimited in fundamental respects, many concepts applicable to human beings will be applicable to Him, perhaps with a little doctoring. There is no space here to defend a position on the nature of God. I will be thinking of God as (i) immaterial, (ii) infinitely perfect, and (iii) timeless, in that His own being, His own life, does not involve temporal succession. The third of these assumptions is particularly controversial, but I forgo any defence in this place.[2] I shall be considering what sort of action concepts could be truly applicable to such a Being.

It is a familiar truism that our concepts of God, at least those that go beyond such bare ontological features as self-identity, are derived

[1]To establish a conclusion about the kinds of concepts applicable to God, or even to argue for such a conclusion, we have to say something about what God is like, thereby claiming to apply certain concepts to Him. Thus the enterprise is inevitably infected with a certain circularity.

[2]For an impressive exposition and defense of the doctrine see Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann, "Eternity," *Journal of Philosophy* 78 (1981), 429–458.

from our concepts of human beings; and this would seem to be particularly obvious with respect to my topic. Our thought of God as agent is clearly modeled on our understanding of human agency. Thus a natural and frequently taken approach to our problem is to start with human action concepts and determine how much of them is transferrable to the divine case. In traditional terms, can we speak *univocally* of divine and human action? Or, better, to what extent can we speak univocally of divine and human action? As the last formulation indicates, I take seriously—indeed advocate—a position rarely taken on this issue, viz., partial univocity. The field has been dominated by, on the one hand, those who see no difficulty in a wholesale univocity, and on the other hand, those who hold that no term can be univocally applied to God and to us. This latter group is divided into those who suppose that some irreducibly analogical relation holds between divine and human senses of terms, and those who take the terms in question to be applied figuratively or "symbolically" to God. It is odd that the partial-univocity possibility has not received more attention. After all, a partial overlap of meaning is an excessively familiar semantic phenomenon. Just to take the most obvious example, the terms for two species of the same genus share the generic feature and differ, tautologically, with respect to the differentia. I conjecture that partial overlap of meaning has been ignored because of the prominence of those who, like Tillich, construe the otherness of God so radically as to leave room for no commonality of meaning, leading in turn to an overreaction by those who feel that unless univocity receives a compensatory stress our talk about God will founder in a morass of pan-symbolism. In any event, it is the partial-univocity thesis that I wish to explore and defend.

However, the univocity issue has a determinate sense only to the extent that there are determinate boundaries around the meaning of a term. To go at it from the other side, insofar as what belongs to the meaning of a term, as contrasted with what is obviously true of the things to which the term applies, is not fixed, there is no determinate issue as to whether another term, or that term in another application, bears the same meaning. And it has been forcefully pointed out in recent decades by Quine and others that it is very difficult (impossible, according to Quine) to discern such boundaries. Let's take an example directly relevant to the concerns of this essay. It is a basic fact about human action that one cannot perform an action the necessary conditions of which include changes in the world outside the agent, with-

out doing so by moving one's body in certain ways. Does that mean that it is part of the *meaning* of '*S* closed a door' that *S* brought it about by movements of *S*'s body that a door was closed? This obviously has a crucial bearing on whether human action terms can be univocally predicated of God; for if that is part of the meaning, then, since God has no body, no action term with that meaning could be truly predicated of God. In "Can We Speak Literally of God?"[3] I argued that this is not part of the meaning, that it is a (conceptually as well as metaphysically) *contingent* fact about human beings that one can only bring about changes in the external world through movements of one's body, and that it is no part of the meaning of action terms, including those that in fact apply to human beings, that this should be the case. However, I must confess that the matter is not crystal clear. Again, is it part of the meaning of '*S* succeeded in achieving his purpose that *T*' or '*S* carried out her intention to do *A*' that there is some temporal separation between the initiation of the having of the purpose or the forming of the intention, on the one hand, and the achievement of the action on the other? This will have an important bearing on whether notions of purpose and intention can be applied in the human sense to an atemporal deity. Again, I don't find this very clear. I am not for a moment suggesting that *no* line can be drawn between meaning and the facts of the world, between the dictionary and the encyclopedia. It is clearly part of the meaning of 'intention to do *A*' that the intender have some tendency to do *A*, and it is clearly not part of that meaning that intenders not infrequently fail to carry out their intentions. Nevertheless, in the most interesting cases it is often unclear where the line is to be drawn. If it is drawn so as to circumscribe meaning most narrowly, there will be much more of a chance for univocal terms across the divine-human gap; if it is drawn more generously less will carry over to the divine case.

Even if we cannot settle all these boundary disputes to everyone's satisfaction in a clearly objective fashion, our problem will remain. It would be misguided to suppose that the question of how we should construe divine action is tied to the details of the ways in which conceptual content is encoded in the meaning of one or another linguistic item. The more fundamental issues concern how much of the *way* we

[3] In *Is God GOD?*, ed. A. D. Steuer and J. W. McClendon, Jr. (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon, 1981), pp. 146–177.

think of human action can be carried over to our thought of divine action. It is of secondary importance how much of this is carried by the meaning of one or another linguistic expression.

It seems to be agreed on all hands that concepts of human intentional actions (we shall be restricting ourselves to intentional action) are to be understood in terms of the role of psychological, motivational factors like intentions, desires, attitudes, beliefs, and so on. To (intentionally) close a door is not just to make some particular sort of bodily movement. Nor does it just consist in a bodily movement of the agent's leading to a door coming to be closed. That overt pattern does not count as a case of *S*'s intentionally closing a door unless it constitutes the carrying out of an intention to close the door in question, unless it was done because *S* had an interest in the door's being closed . . . The dots indicate that there is a variety of ways in which psychological antecedents or concomitants of the overt activity are thought to enter into the concept of intentional human action. There are differences both as to what sorts of psychological factors play a crucial role, and how they are related to the more overt aspects of the action, e.g., causally or otherwise. Although these differences are of the first importance for the project of developing an adequate account of human action, they are peripheral to our concerns here, with an exception to be noted. For the sake of concreteness let's adopt Donald Davidson's lingo, though not putting it to the same uses, and say that *S* intentionally closes a door just in case *S* performs the overt movements that lead to the door's being closed because *S* has a "pro-attitude" toward a state of affairs, *A*, and a belief that the door's coming to be closed either is or is likely to lead to a case of *A*.[4] In more informal terms, *S* intentionally brings about a state of affairs *B* only if there is a state of affairs, *A*, which might or might not be identical with *B*, for the sake of which *S* is doing what leads to the bringing about of *B*.

If something like this is along the right line, then the question of whether we can carry human action terms over to the divine case can be divided into two main parts: (i) Can psychological motivational concepts be applied to the divine case? (ii) What about the bodily

[4]See Donald Davidson, "Actions, Reasons, and Causes," *Journal of Philosophy* 60 (1963), 685–700, for his version of this. In "An Action-Plan Interpretation of Purposive Explanations of Actions," *Theory and Decision* 20 (1986), 275–291, I present reasons for objecting to the idea that the crucial psychological factors are to be thought of, as Davidson and many other theorists do, as antecedent causes. Again, these differences are not crucial for the present discussion.

movements that get thus motivated and lead to the crucial external result? I shall discuss these in reverse order.

1 Action and Motivation

It is clear that human beings bring about changes in the external world by moving their bodies in various ways, and so, as pointed out above, if this fact is (partly) constitutive of the meanings of human action terms, then that will prevent these terms from being truly applied, in just the same sense, to an incorporeal agent. However, if everything else carries over we can still apply closely analogous terms. Whereas in the human case the appropriate psychological background leads to bodily movements that result in the door's being closed, we can think of the structure of a divine action of closing a door as being just like this except for the shortcircuiting of the bodily movement part. That is, in the divine case the sort of psychological factors that led in the human case to the bodily movements that were designed to get the door closed will, in the divine case, lead directly to the "external" result, in this case the door's being closed. More exactly, this would be the pattern of God's closing the door as a "basic act," one done not by way of doing something else. Of course God could do everything He does as a basic act, but He may well choose to do some things by doing other things. Thus the Old Testament tells us that God got the Israelites out of Egypt not by directly bringing it about that they were instantaneously somewhere else, as He perfectly well could have done, but by altering the configuration of the water in a lake or inland sea in order to make it possible for them to cross. In any event, whatever it is that God does directly in any particular project will follow immediately on the relevant psychological antecedents. Thus the absence of bodily movements in the divine case will not prevent us from applying to Him human action concepts, or concepts that can be simply derived from them.[5]

The second part of the question will occupy us for most of the re-

[5] If someone were to ask at this point "How on earth can God bring about external results directly?", I would have to rule the question out of order. I am setting out to explore not the "mechanism" of divine action, if there can be any such thing, but rather its conceptualization, what sort of concept we can form of God's doing something. Whatever that concept may be, it most certainly will not contain any specification of how God manages to bring off what He does.

mainder of this essay. Let's begin the discussion by looking more carefully at what we need to carry over from the human side in order to come as close as possible to univocity. The basic idea of the approach to intentional action with which we are working is that overt changes (to use a term that is neutral as to whether movements of the agent's body are involved) constitute, or constitute the overt aspect of, an intentional action only if they result from a psychological structure that involves at least a "goal-setting" state (our "pro-attitude") and a cognitive guidance state—one that provides "information" as to actual or probable connections in the world, information that is needed to determine how the goal state may be reached. The category of *pro-attitude* stretches over a wide variety of conative factors—wants, desires, aversions, longings, yearnings, attitudes of various sorts, scruples, commitments, and so on. (Actually we are speaking of "con-attitudes" as well as pro-attitudes. In the sequel I shall frequently use the term 'attitude' for the general category, leaving '*pro* or *con*' to be tacitly understood.) Different items on this list work differently, have different antecedents, manifest themselves differently in consciousness, and so on. Now it is doubtful that the divine nature provides any basis for such discriminations. God is subject to no biological cravings, rooted in the need for survival. Since He is perfectly good He wants nothing that runs contrary to what He sees to be best, and so there is no discrepancy between what He wants and what He recognizes to be right and good. He does not pursue goals in sudden gusts of passion or uncontrollable longing. For the divine case we can safely confine ourselves to the generic category. As for the cognitive guidance factor, we could ignore that, as far as the motivation of behavior is concerned (though we would still think of God as possessing perfect knowledge), if God were to do everything He does as a basic act. But since we want at least to leave open the possibility that this is not the case, we will have to make room for God using His knowledge to determine what will lead to what.* In the human case it seems that the appropriate

*These issues deserve much more discussion than is possible here. For one thing, since anything God brings about in the world will have innumerable consequences, it might be thought that God will be indirectly bringing about all those consequences, and so it is impossible that God should not do *many* things indirectly. But it must be remembered that we are restricting ourselves to *intentional* action, and it cannot be assumed that God intends to bring about all the consequences of everything He brings about, even though He will, of course, know about them. Second, if we were to take God to be "omnidetermining," deciding every detail of His creation, then He would have no need to guide His action by His awareness of relevant features of the world. For He

generic term for this side of the matter is *belief*. For human beings choose means to attain their goals in the light of what they believe to be the case, whether or not these beliefs are correct and whether or not they count as knowledge. But God will not possess any "mere beliefs," beliefs that do not count as knowledge, since He has complete knowledge of everything knowable. Moreover, as I have argued elsewhere[7], the category of belief would seem not to be applicable to God at all, since, among other reasons, there is a point in using the concept only where there is a possibility that the subject may take something to be the case without knowing it to be the case. Thus, it would seem that the cognitive side of the divine motivational structure should be restricted to knowledge.

Thus our question becomes: Can we use the same concepts of "attitudes" and "knowledge" of God and man? Let's begin with the former. In supposing that God has a pro-attitude toward my becoming sanctified, am I attributing the same sort of thing to God that I am attributing to you when I suppose that you have a pro-attitude toward winning the race? Clearly there will be enormous differences between what is involved in God and in you having such an attitude. There is no question of assimilating the details of the divine psychology to human psychology. But is there a significant core that is common to divine and human attitudes? Clearly the answer to this is going to depend not only on what God and we are like but also on what is or can be meant by speaking of attitudes in either case. So let's turn to this latter issue.

This is, of course, just a particular form of the more general issue as to how to construe intentional psychological states, including but perhaps not restricted to "propositional attitudes." What we are calling 'attitudes', at least in their human realisations, would seem to belong to the latter category. To want, or to have an interest in, a chocolate fudge sundae would seem to involve a certain favorable conative attitude toward the proposition *my eating a chocolate fudge sundae*, or some-

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would have chosen every such feature in the original act of creation, which was carried out on the basis of no knowledge of "the situation," there being none. If, on the other hand, as we are assuming, God has chosen to refrain from deciding some features Himself (e.g., free choices of human beings, together with their contributions to the way things go), leaving them up to the created agents in question, then He will have to "look and see" how those things have been constituted, where that is relevant to his decisions as to how to bring about a certain state of affairs.

[7] "Does God Have Beliefs?" *Religious Studies* 22 (1986), 287–306.

thing of the sort. On the current scene there are two prominent approaches to the understanding of such states. On the one hand, there is the view identified with Bretano, and represented on the current American scene by Chisholm, that intentionality is a basic, unanalysable feature of psychological states. The generic feature of being "directed onto" an object, propositional or otherwise, is a basic feature in the sense that it cannot be explicated in terms of other concepts. This view leaves it open as to whether each of the various forms taken by intentionality, e.g., believing, hoping, fearing, or desiring that *p*, is itself basic and irreducible to others, or whether some of these forms can be taken as basic and the others explained in terms of them. But at the very least the position will hold that the difference between knowing that *p* and having a pro-attitude toward *p* is unanalysable in terms of anything else. In particular, a positive attitude toward a state of affairs—taking it to be desirable, gratifying, attractive, worth while, a good thing, or whatever—is a basic underivative feature of our mental life. No doubt such attitudes, in conjunction with other facts, have various consequences for behavior, thought, and feeling; but it would be a grave mistake to suppose that the intrinsic nature of attitudes can be specified in terms of such consequences.

On this view, there would seem to be no bar to the univocal predication of some intentional concepts to God and to us. If *taking a state of affairs to be a good thing* is a basic, unanalysable relation of an intelligent agent to a (possible) state of affairs, there is nothing in the concept to limit it to an embodied, finite, imperfect, or temporal agent. Why shouldn't God, as we are thinking of Him here, relate Himself in such a manner to possible states of affairs? There would seem to be no basis for a negative answer.

2 Functionalism

However, many contemporary Anglo-American philosophers are unhappy with the idea that concepts of intentional states are unanalysable. We are committed to finding analyses; *c'est notre metier*. Various suggestions have been made as to how to unpack concepts of intentional states; currently the most popular one is *functionalism*. The basic idea of functionalism is that "psychological states are type individuated by their distinctive role within a complex network of states mediating

the perceptual conditions and behavior of organisms or systems."[8] The concept of a belief, an attitude, or an intention is the concept of what performs a particular *function* in the psychological economy, a particular "job" done by the psyche, just as the concept of a loudspeaker is the concept of what performs a certain function, viz., converting electronic signals to sound. Of course, the specification of psychological functions is far more difficult and complicated than the specification of audio functions. The above quote indicates the dominant approach to this by contemporary functionalists. The fundamental role of the psyche is to mediate between perceptual or other informational input and behavioral output; and a particular psychological role is a particular piece of that overall mission, a particular way in which one state interacts with other states and with informational input to influence behavior. Thus, e.g., a belief that it is now raining is a state that interacts with an intention to go outside, a desire to remain as dry as possible, and a belief that carrying an umbrella is the best way to stay as dry as possible, to elicit the behavior of carrying an umbrella. Other components of the total functional role of this belief include its interacting with the belief that it has been raining for the past six days to infer that it has been raining for a week, and its interacting with the strong desire for sunny weather to produce a feeling of despondency. Clearly a complete analysis of even a very specific psychological concept would be an enormously complicated affair, perhaps beyond our powers.

In previous publications[9] I have argued that psychological and action concepts of a generally functionalist sort can be applied to God, even viewing the divine nature as I am in this essay. No doubt, the challenge has contributed to the attractiveness of the project. Functionalism is generally associated with a physicalistic view of human beings, and computer analogies have played a large role in its development. It would be quite a coup to show that concepts derived from this milieu could be applied to a being that is incorporeal, timeless, and absolutely infinite. But there was also a positive lead. A major emphasis within functionalism has been the idea that since a certain kind of psycho-

[8]Robert van Gulick, "Functionalism, Information, and Content," *Nature and System* 2 (1980), 139.

[9]"How to Speak Literally about God", in *Is God GOD?*, pp. 146–177, and "Functionalism and Theological Language," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 22 (1985), 221–230. In the first-mentioned essay I was only dealing with problems introduced by divine incorporeality. In the second I was thinking of God just as I am here, but I believe that I can now do a better job of bringing functionalism to bear on the problem.

logical state is that which carries out a certain function, whatever its intrinsic character, one and the same psychological state concept might be applied to beings of widely different inherent natures, to biological organisms (of various physical and chemical sorts), to computers, even, perhaps, to angels. Put in another way, the fact that *Y* is widely different in constitution from *X* will not in itself prevent a univocal application of psychological state concepts, provided the crucial sort of function is being performed. Analogously, provided *X* has the capacity to convert electronic signals to sound it is a loudspeaker; its composition, internal mechanism, and external appearance can vary widely, as audio buffs can testify.

To be sure, at best there will be large differences between the human and divine psyche. Going back to van Gulick's summary account of functionalism, God is not an organism, though He may be a "system," depending on just how we use that term. Nor does God receive information through sense perception. And if van Gulick is thinking of "behavior" types as constituted by types of bodily movements, that part of the picture doesn't carry over either. So let's see how we can generalize the account to the divine case. First let's replace "organisms or systems" with "agents."[10] As for "perceptual conditions," the lack of sense organs is no disability for God just because God, being omniscient, has no need for any such means of acquiring information. Since the "input" drops out of the picture, the functionalist model will be simplified to the following: psychological states are type individuated by their distinctive role within a complex of states that gives rise to action.

Note that the functionalist interpretation of psychological concepts is, at least when we neglect input, simply the "motivational background" conception of intentional action stood on its head. An intentional action is one that stems from attitudes, beliefs, and the like in a certain way, and attitudes, beliefs, and the like are to be construed in terms of the way in which intentional action stems from them. At a later stage we shall look at the apparent circularity this introduces.

The following qualification should also be made explicit. Since I am aspiring only to exhibit a partial overlap between concepts of divine and human action, even if the overlap is solely functional in nature it need not exhaust our concepts of psychological states in either context. Thus I need only maintain that our concept of human belief, desire,

[10]The full implications of this shift will appear shortly.

or intention, is *at least in part* the concept of a role in the motivation of behavior, in order to have a basis for partial univocity.

I have already suggested that the divine psyche is dramatically simplified as compared with the human. I am loath to agree that it is as bare of distinction as, e.g., the Thomistic doctrine of divine simplicity would have it, but it lacks bases for many of the distinctions between different types of human attitudes, and it equally lacks our distinctions between different degrees of firmness of belief. For present purposes we can think of the divine motivational structure as made up of (i) attitudes toward various (possible) states of affairs,[11] and (ii) complete knowledge. We can then think of divine action as arising from a pro-attitude toward some goal state and the knowledge that the action in question will realize that goal state (or will probably do so, in case free choices of creatures have a role here, and God lacks "middle knowledge" of how each free creature would act in each situation in which that creature might find itself). Of course, in a limiting case, the action in question is just the bringing about of that goal state; this is the case in which God realizes His purpose directly. In terms of this simple model we can think of a divine pro-attitude toward *G* as, at least in part, the sort of state that, when combined with knowledge that doing *A* is the best way of achieving *G*, will lead to God's doing *A*. And, pari passu, knowledge that doing *A* is the best way of achieving *G* is the sort of state that, combined with a pro-attitude toward *G*, will lead to God's doing *A*.

3 A More Complex Model

However, this model is much too simple in a number of respects. (The complications to be set out now should also be read back into the oversimplified account given earlier of what sort of motivational background makes an action intentional.) First, and most obviously, God presumably, and humans certainly, will have pro-attitudes toward mutually exclusive states of affairs. For example, God may have both a pro-attitude toward all human beings enjoying eternal felicity and a pro-attitude toward inveterate sinners being suitably punished for their

[11]These attitudes will be construed differently depending on whether we think of values as chosen by the divine will or whether we think of God as recognizing values that are independent of His will. But we need not take sides on this controversy for purposes of this essay.

sins. And, assuming that a suitable punishment would involve the lack of eternal felicity, even God can't have it both ways. Or God might have a pro-attitude toward Jacob being the (one and only) bearer of a certain revelation and also a pro-attitude toward Michael's having that status, in which case He will have to sacrifice at least one of these desiderata. Thus in order to allow for at least the possibility of incompatible divine goal states, we will have to introduce a tendency notion and say, instead of the above, that a pro-attitude toward *G* is the sort of state that, in conjunction with the knowledge that doing *A* is the best way to attain *G*, will give rise to a *tendency to* do *A*. How are we to explain this notion of a *tendency*? The rough idea is that a tendency to do *A* is a state that, in the absence of sufficient interference or blockage, will issue in doing *A*. It is, so to say, being prima facie prepared to do *A*. What interferences or blockages there can be will vary from case to case, and so that specification need not be included in the most general concept of a tendency.[12] Second, and perhaps most important, we must construe the relation of tendencies to action in such a way as to preserve the divine freedom. Here my account in "Functionalism and Theological Language" was defective. Because of divine timelessness I gave up thinking of attitudes as causes of action, but I replaced this with the idea that "a functional concept of *S* is a concept of lawlike connections in which *S* stands with other states and with outupts."[13] This has the double disability of rendering God subject to natural laws and of denying God any real freedom of choice, at least if the laws in question are thought of as deterministic. As far as the first problem is concerned one might replace the notion of law governedness with the notion of the nature of God being such that a tendency (formed by an attitude-knowledge interaction of the sort we have described) that is not successfully opposed will issue in action. But that still leaves the second problem. Are we really prepared to think of God's behavior as issuing automatically from the interplay of motivational factors? Wouldn't that make God into a mechanism, a system the output of which is determined by the interplay of its parts, rather than a supremely free agent? Wouldn't that represent God as less free than us?

While these considerations are quite sound, they do not show the

[12]If that did have to be included the definition would become circular. For the most important interference with a given tendency is other tendencies to incompatible actions.

[13]"Functionalism and Theological Language," p. 225.

above account to be mistaken, but only incomplete. What we must do is to recognize that among the factors that can prevent a tendency from issuing in action is the divine will. To say that God is supremely free implies that He has the capacity to refrain from doing *A* whatever the strength of a tendency to do *A* that issues from His attitudes and knowledge. This is not, of course, to say that God wills at random, nor is it to deny that He can be depended on to act in accordance with His nature and to act for the good. It is only to say that God's free choice is interposed between any tendencies issuing from His nature and His activity. God's activity is the activity of a free agent in the most unqualified sense. Not only are the things He directly brings about the result of "agent causality" rather than "event causality," even where the events or states are states of His own psyche; it is also the case, if this is indeed a separate point, that no exercise of this agent causality is determined by anything, not even by states of Himself.

These claims about divine freedom have often been taken to conflict with the attribution to God of essential goodness. If God is essentially good then it is metaphysically impossible that He should act in any way other than the best. A proper discussion of this issue must await another occasion. Suffice it to say that God's freedom of choice will have to be construed as a freedom to choose whatever is logically (metaphysically) possible; and if God is essentially good that makes many choices metaphysically impossible that otherwise would be possible. Within those constraints, however, it can still be maintained that God always has a free choice among metaphysically possible alternatives. And however we construe the divine goodness and its relation to action, there will be situations in which there is no unique action to which God's nature constrains Him. Just to take the major putative example of this, Christian theology has traditionally maintained that the divine goodness does not constrain God to create anything other than Himself.

Since a given attitude-knowledge combination does not by itself necessarily issue in action, either in the divine or the human case, we are led to recognize another sort of motivational factor that mediates between the field of tendencies and overt behavior, determining the character of the latter. If everything proceeds in accordance with event causality and the agent itself does not constitute a factor to be reckoned separately, we need not think of this mediating factor as being different in kind from the various tendencies. It is, as Hobbes says of the will, simply the strongest current tendency, the winner in the struggle

among competing tendencies. However, if the agent (as a whole, or *as* an agent) always has, or can have, the last word, we must recognize a quite different sort of factor, an internal act of the agent, an act of will, volition, or whatever, that does, or at least always can, control the gates to the external world (for embodied agents, the gates to bodily movement). Again, the human agent is more complex than the divine. Since a temporal agent can form intentions for the future, we must distinguish *intention to do A*, which may not issue immediately in doing *A* and which may dissipate before *A* ever gets done, and a *volition to do A*, ("executive intention") which issues in doing *A* unless the external world (external to the psyche) prevents it. Since there can be no intention for the future in a timeless agent, for God we need only recognize volitions (executive intentions) as leading from the field of tendencies to the actual thing done. As the above discussion indicates, for a given agent, divine or human, sometimes the strongest tendency will issue directly (automatically) in action, and sometimes there will be (may be) a free choice of the agent, made in the light of the current tendency field but not determined thereby (the tendencies "incline without necessitating"), that determines what is done. In the former case we shall speak of the immediate psychological determinant of action as an *executive intention;* in the latter case we shall speak of *volition*.

Although I can only hope to scratch the surface of human motivation in this essay, there is one additional feature I had better make explicit. The bridge between the tendency field and overt action (the volition or executive intention) is not best thought of, as the above remarks would suggest, as confined in its intentional object to the action done (the state of affairs the bringing about of which constitutes the action). For one thing, the agent may, in one volition or intention, launch itself onto a complex activity, involving a number of subordinate stages, each designed to lead to its successor. Thus, if I form the intention to go to my office, this requires me to intend to perform a number of sequentially linked actions of arising from my chair, suitably garbing myself, unlocking my front door, etc. etc. Again, where God decides to restore the kingdom of Israel this involves His doing a number of things to lead up to this. In such a case what is formed, as the immediate psychological determinant of overt activity, is better termed an *action plan*, something that involves a mental representation of the structure of the complex activity intended. And in the case of a temporal agent this action plan will monitor and control the evolving sequence of steps

to the final goal.[14] Even where no such sequence of results is intended, the intentional object of the executive intention or volition will typically involve not only the defining result of the action in question but also that for the sake of which the action is entered on. Even if my intention is the simple one of opening the door, my intention will also involve an awareness of why I am doing it, e.g., to let someone in; and so even here we have an action plan, though of limiting simplicity. In fact, the reason or purpose for which I do something, as I argue in "An Action-Plan Interpretation of Purposive Explanations of Actions," is best construed as given by the structure of the action plan involved.

We can now read these additional complexities back into the account of intentional action. One intentionally brings about *B iff* the bringing about of *B* is due to (is the carrying out of) an executive intention or a volition to bring about *B*. That intention or volition, in turn, is to be understood, in part, in terms of the way in which it stems from a field of tendencies, and if what I have just been saying is well taken, it bears marks of this origin in the structure of its own intentional object.

Let's return to the functionalist account of intentional mental states in the light of this enriched model. Attitudes and cognitions are to be understood in terms of the way in which they interact to engender action tendencies. Tendencies, in turn, are to be understood partly in terms of this origin and partly in terms of the way they interact with each other to either determine executive intentions or to influence volitions, as the case may be. Finally, executive intentions and volitions are to be understood in terms both of their background and of the way they determine overt action. This whole functionalist contribution to our concepts of such states can be thought of as deriving from conditionals like the following:

1. If *S* has a pro-attitude toward *G*, then *S* will have a tendency to do whatever *S* takes to be a way of attaining *G*.

2. If *S* has a tendency to do *A*, then if this tendency is not successfully opposed by a stronger tendency or by an act of will, *S* will do *A*, if the external world cooperates in the right way.[15]

We must be clear that we have deviated from the usual functionalist account by introducing free acts of will into the picture. This means that we are countenancing an irreducible concept of agency (currently

[14]See my paper "An Action-Plan Interpretation of Purposive Explanations of Actions," for an elaboration of this idea.

[15]This last qualification becomes vacuous in the divine case.

termed 'agent causality'), the concept of an agent's directly bringing something about, where this something is to be explained in terms of the agent's exercise of its powers, rather than by any sort of event or state as a cause, and where this activity on the part of the agent is not causally determined by anything, not even its own states, though it may well be influenced by them. This is not a notion that can be given a functionalist interpretation, so far as I can see, without losing its distinctive contours. What is directly engendered by agency, the volition, can itself be partly construed in functionalist terms. But the concept of an agent's bringing something about, as we understand that here, resists any such explication.

The attentive reader will not have missed a certain circularity in this functionalist treatment of the divine psyche. Divine intentional action is what issues from a certain motivational background, and the elements of that background are in turn construed in terms of the way in which they lead to action. If all divine action issues from divine acts of will, it might be thought that we could ignore the business about pro-attitudes, tendencies, and so on in explaining divine action, thereby avoiding the circularity. But that only makes the circle smaller. It is an essential part of this program to construe volitions functionally too. If we leave out of account the way in which volitions are influenced by attitudes and the like, the only way to say what a volition is, is to say that it is an internal act of the agent that determines overt action (in the case of finite agents, within the limits of bodily capacity and external opportunity).

I'm afraid that I see no alternative to biting the bullet and admitting the circularity. Intentional action and conative psychological factors are to be understood in terms of their interrelations. For the human case, unlike the divine case, one might try to get out of the circle by construing the behavioral output in terms of bodily movements rather than full-blooded action. But this would require us to construe at least some of the attitudes and beliefs as taking bodily movements as intentional objects; and it seems to be the exception rather than the rule that human action is guided by beliefs, etc., that have to do with specific bodily movement types, rather than the results or significance of bodily movements. When we speak, e.g., the relevant purposes, beliefs, and intentions have to do with what we are saying rather than with what we are doing with our vocal organs to get it said. Even in the human case we are saddled with the circle. The way out is to recognize that functionalism cannot be a reduction of intentionalistic concepts (of

actions and psychological states) to non-intentionalistic concepts, physicalistic or otherwise. It must be construed as a partial interpretation, exhibiting the conceptual interrelations of actions and intentional psychological states, thereby shedding considerable light on their nature.

The functionalist treatment of divine knowledge has thus far been restricted to the knowledge of means-end connections, hardly even the tip of the iceberg. Of course the cognitive guidance of behavior extends far beyond these narrow bounds. Depending on features of the particular case, bits of information other than means-end connections will be relevant to one or another divine project. Thus, e.g., God will want to know the details of the Israelites' observance or nonobservance of the convenant in deciding how to deal with the threat from Assyria. But unless we want to assume that everything God knows is relevant to some decision He makes or might make, that will still leave much knowledge without a functionalist interpretation. For humans the account can be eked out by reference to sources of informational input. Knowledge (belief) varies in lawful ways with sensory input, as well as interacting with conative factors to guide behavior. We have noted that this maneuver is not available for the divine case. Nevertheless there is a divine analogue of input to which we may appeal. Since God is essentially omniscient, He knows that *p* for every true *p*. Therefore, as we might say, the facts of the world constitute "input" for the divine psyche. Knowledge is the aspect of the divine psyche that varies lawfully, indeed with logical necessity, with the facts. It is that divine psychological state that takes all and only facts (true propositions) as its intentional objects. It is thereby distinguished from all other divine psychological states.[16]

Let's take stock. I have indicated how one can give a functionalist construal of psychological and action concepts that enables us to give at least a partial account of such concepts in their divine application and thereby to articulate some commonality between our thought of human and divine action and motivation. In both cases an action can be thought of as a change that is brought about by a volition or intention, where that is formed against the background of action tendencies that are formed by the interaction of attitudes with cognition. I am not claiming that concepts of divine and human actions, conative factors,

[16]Note that if we were to take God to be what I called "omnidetermining," we would not be able to distinguish knowledge in this way. For in that case the divine will would also have every fact as its intentional object.

etc., are exactly the same, even in their functionalist component. On the contrary, there are many differences, some of which follow from points already made in this essay. For one thing, the form of the interactions may be different. Perhaps there is a relation of event or state causality between attitudes and cognitions on the one hand and action tendencies on the other in the human case but not in the divine. And, most obviously, attitudes and beliefs are typically related by temporal succession to the action tendencies they determine in the human case; the action is "generated" or "given rise to" by the attitudes and beliefs in a temporally literal sense of these terms. This is especially obvious where there is a process of conscious deliberation as to what to do, but there are also unconscious and non-centrally directed temporal processes of tendency formation. Whereas there can be no such internal *processes* of tendency formation for a timeless agent. Moreover, if a functionalist concept of a psychological state type, *P*, is spelled out by the way in which states of that type interact with others in the motivation of behavior, then any differences in the total motivational field will be reflected, to some extent, in the concept of each type of state. And we have noted several such differences. Human intentions or volitions lead to the corresponding action only if the external world, including the agent's body, cooperates in certain ways, but no such qualification is needed for divine motivation. Human beings exhibit a great variety of cognitive and conative states that is not matched by the divine psyche; and at least some of these differences make a difference in the way the total motivational structure issues in behavior. For example, biological cravings influence action tendencies differently from the way in which internalized general moral principles do. Again, in the human case different degrees of firmness of belief will make a difference to the strength of tendencies formed, a difference quite inapplicable to the divine case. For another difference on the cognitive side, God, being omniscient, will know everything entailed by a given piece of knowledge, so that, assuming that the inferential interrelations of cognitions enter into a functionalist account of cognitive states, this will work out somewhat differently on the two sides of the divide. But despite all these differences, there is a basic commonality in the way in which attitudes combine with cognitions to determine action tendencies, and the way in which action tendencies are related to the final active volition or executive intention. There will be crucial conditionals in common, of the sort listed earlier. In both cases, e.g., if the agent

has a pro-attitude toward *G* and a cognition that doing *A* is a way to realize *G*, then the agent will have a tendency to do *A*.[17]

Since it may still be doubted that any functionally construed psychological concepts can apply to a timeless being, I should say a word about that. We can assure ourselves of the intelligibility of this conception by taking as our model a physical system—mechanical, electromagnetic, or thermal— in which the values of some variables at a given time are a determinate function of the values of other variables at that same time. This gives us the idea of *simultaneous* "subjunctive" or "counterfactual" dependence, in contrast to the dependence of states on those that precede them in time. To be sure, there are other features of these systems that do not carry over to our timeless divine agent. For one thing, the value of a given variable at a particular time will have resulted from temporal processes of interaction within the system; for another, the relations of contemporaneous dependence reflect the subjection of the system to laws, and we don't want to think of God as subject to laws. Nevertheless, it seems clear that it is not a conceptual or otherwise necessary truth that relations of contemporaneous dependence are dependent on these other features. Hence we are able to form the conception of a being (a "system") in which some factors depend on their relations to others for being what they are, even though there are no temporally successive processes of formation, nor any subjection to laws. More specifically, we are to think of God as realising a complex structure of attitudes, knowledge, tendencies, executive intentions, and volitions in the "eternal now," a structure that involves the kinds of dependence we have been talking about. Thus, let us say, it is true eternally of God that He wills that the Church be inspired by the Holy Spirit to develop the doctrine of the Trinity because He has

[17]One might suppose that if it is possible to give a (partial) functionalist account of divine action and motivational concepts along the lines we have been suggesting, it is not so important to show a basic commonality among these concepts and their analogues in our thought about ourselves. For the search for univocity has been fueled largely by the fear that without it we will not be able to apply terms and concepts to God directly, literally, and straightforwardly, that we will at best be able to speak of Him metaphorically or symbolically. But if my suggestions in this essay are on the right track we can forge concepts that apply directly to God, whether or not they overlap with concepts that apply to human beings. I think this reaction is justified as far as it goes; but I think it is also true that unless our understanding of divine purpose, intention, and will had at least as much commonality with human motivational concepts as I have been alleging, we would, justifiably, doubt that the divine states in question deserve to be called 'purpose,' 'intention,' and so on.

a pro-attitude toward the Church's making explicit the most fundamental truths about Himself (at least those suitable for our condition), and He knows that this development is necessary for that. Note that although there is no temporal succession within the divine life there is temporal succession between the things brought about by God in the world, the external aspects of His activity. Thus although His *will* to choose Israel and His *will* to become incarnate are embraced without temporal succession in the eternal now, it does not follow that the results brought about in the world by these volitions are simultaneous.[18]

4 Beyond Functionalism

That's the good news; now for the bad news. The concepts I have been adumbrating are very thin, to say the least. All we have are concepts of positions in a structure of mutual dependence, "counterfactual dependence," to use a currently fashionable phrase. God's being favorably disposed toward *G* and God's doing *A* are the sorts of things that are related to each other, and to other states and activities, in the ways we have been laying out. God's having a pro-attitude toward the rejuvenation of Israel is the sort of state that is such that if God knows that giving a certain commission to Ezekiel is the best way to bring this about, then God will have a tendency to give that commission to Ezekiel. And that tendency is the sort of state that is such that an agent that has it will give that commission to Ezekiel unless sufficient interferences are present. Among such interferences is a divine decision not to give that commission to Ezekiel. And what is a divine decision (not) to do *A*? It is a state such that . . . And so it goes. I have laid out a certain structure of what depends on what in what way, but as to what it is that stands in these relations of dependence I have said virtually nothing. There are only two places at which this system of mutual dependencies gets anchored in something outside it: (i) For any proposition *p*, *p* entails that God knows that *p*, as well as vice versa; (ii) for any *p*, God's willing that *p* entails that *p*, but not vice

[18]For more on this point see Stump and Kretzmann, "Eternity," and my "Divine-Human Dialogue and the Nature of God," *Faith and Philosophy* 2 (1985), 5–20.

versa. But this makes little contribution to our grasp of the nature of the internal states that stand in the specified functional relations.[19]

Of course I have said that the functionalist account only claims to be a partial account. But that's just the rub. How do we fill in what it leaves out? In the human case we have a lot to go on that we are lacking in the divine case. First, and most obviously, we have our own first-person sense of what it is like to want something, to be afraid of something, to believe that something will occur, to hope for something, to feel that one ought to do something, to intend to do something, and so on. But we can hardly pretend to any such insight into what it is like to be God, or even to have purposes, intentions, and the like in the way God does. Thomas Nagel has gained fame (or significantly added to it) by pointing out we don't have much idea of what it is to be a bat. How much less are we in a position to know what it is like to be God. Moreover, we can see how our concepts of human motivational factors are enriched by aspects that must be absent if God is as we have been supposing Him to be. Just consider temporality. Our conception of human purposes and intentions is partly constituted by our understanding of the way in which the purpose or intention holds fast through a variety of changing circumstances, providing a basis for changing our approach to the goal as we encounter unforeseen difficulties and complications. And our conception of the relation between an intention to bring about *G* and actually bringing about *G* is partly constituted by our realization that one can have the intention even though *G* is not yet brought about. Again, our understanding of what it is to make a decision or form an intention is partly constituted by our sense of how a decision is the terminus of a *process* of deliberation. But none of this is applicable to a timeless deity. Again consider God's supreme perfection. This prevents our making use of any analogue of the way in which our understanding of human acts of will is enriched by our awareness of effort of will in struggles against temptation. In the human but not in the divine case, our ability to distinguish between willing, intending, or deciding to do *A*, on the one hand, and doing *A*, on the other, is partly dependent on the fact that the former will not issue in the latter unless one receives the right sort of cooperation

[19]Indeed there is some question as to whether our account even entails that the system constitutes a distinctively *personal* agent. See Ned Block, "Troubles with Functionalism," in *Minnesota Studies in the Philosophy of Science* 9, ed. C. W. Savage (1978), pp. 261–325, for some doubts along this line. To be sure, since we have opted to construe the "output" of the system in rich, intentionalistic *action* terms, that may suffice to dispel the doubts.

from the external environment. Finally, consider the point that even if God is temporal, He will, being supremely perfect, have at any moment a perfect knowledge of whatever is the case at any time. Hence He will know just what situation He will be reacting to at any point in the future *and what His reaction will be*. And that means, in effect, that His decision as to what to do in that situation has already been made; He will never decide on the spot how to react. Again, even though God be temporal, He cannot go through any genuine process of deliberation as to what to do at *t*, or any process of genuine *formation* of an intention to do something at *t*, since at every previous moment He will already know what He will do at *t*. These contributions to our understanding of our own motivational structure are unavailable in the divine case, not only because of timelessness but also because of omniscience.

Thus, the account we have offered of concepts of the divine psyche and divine activity leaves them quite sparse. Even if we help ourselves to an unanalysed conception of personal agency, we are still left with only a tenuous conception of the knowledge, attitudes, and volitions of the divine agent. Is this enough? Enough for what? I would suppose that we do not need more for theoretical purposes, just because we have no right to expect a satisfactory theoretical grasp of the divine nature and doings. That is, we would need much more to attain a satisfactory theoretical grasp, but such is, by common consent, unsuited to our condition. However, there are more practical needs to be considered as well. There is the need for guidance, direction, inspiration, assistance in attaining salvation, in leading the kind of life and becoming the kind of person God intends us to. For these purposes do we need more of a grasp of the divine psyche and activity than we are provided by my austere conditionals?

Whether or not it would be possible for people to receive adequate guidance in the religious life while deploying only the meager conceptual resources I have allowed, it is clear that this is not the way it goes in actual theistic religions. If you think of the Bible and, more generally, of practically oriented religious literature, it is at once apparent that God is represented as deliberating, forming purposes and intentions in the light of developing events as they occur, acquiring knowledge of events as they transpire, exhibiting features that attach only to temporal, imperfect agents. It may be said that those who write, and those who read with approval, such works simply do not share the conception of God with which I have been working. I have been dealing with

the "God of the philosophers," while theirs is the "God of the Bible" or the "God of simple believers." But this reaction fails to take account of the point that those who explicitly advocate the conception I was using typically take the Bible as authoritative, and also speak and write in these terms themselves when their purpose is homiletical, pastoral, or edificatory. Thus, there seems to be a deeply felt need to represent God and His doings in a much more concrete way than I have provided. Moreover, I think we can see why this should be the case. For the practice of the religious life, we need to think of ourselves in genuine personal interaction with God: in prayer, in the action of the Holy Spirit within us, in God's providence for our needs, in seeking enlightenment from Him, and so on. But the conception I have offered of a timeless "personal system" of functionally interrelated psychological states simply does not present anything with which we can coherently conceive ourselves to be in dynamic personal relations of dialogue, support, love, or instruction. To this it may be objected that a functionalist account of the human psyche does not represent human beings as incapable of genuine interpersonal relations. But first, in the human case, we can draw on our intimate familiarity with ourselves and each other; the functionalist account is not our sole resource. And second, the functionalist account of the human psyche does not represent it as a timeless, infinitely perfect agent.

Thus, it seems to be a practical necessity of the religious life to represent God as much more like a created, imperfect temporal agent than what I am taking to be a sound theology will allow. We must, for devotional and edificatory purposes, think of God as finding out what happens as it occurs and forming intentions to deal with developing situations as they develop, even though an omniscient being, whether timeless or not, would know everything about the future at any given point in time.

I would like to consider what bearing this has on the central concerns of this essay, even though I cannot enter into a proper discussion. One reaction to the points I have just been making would be to abandon the view that God is timeless and that He eternally possesses complete knowledge of the future. Many religious thinkers have taken this line. But here I want to stay within the previously announced constraints and consider what moves are open. Clearly, given those constraints, this more concrete picture cannot literally apply to God. Thus with respect to whatever in the picture goes beyond my austere functional account, we will be thrown back on the familiar array of alternatives

that are open, with respect to the total meaning of theological predicates, to those who deny that any terms (concepts) we can form can be literally applied to God: the alternatives of analogy, metaphor, symbolism, etc. The problem is not quite as urgent for me as for them, just because I recognize that there is an abstract core of predicates that are literally true of God. But given the ineluctability of the more concrete characterizations, it is a genuine problem. The answer would seem to lie somewhere in the general territory of metaphor and symbol.

I hope that I have said enough to indicate both that there is a hard literal core to our talk about divine action and that, for the religious life, we need to go beyond that in ways that launch us into the still not sufficiently charted seas of the figurative and the symbolic.