

# FUNCTIONALISM AND THEOLOGICAL LANGUAGE

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## I

THOUGHTFUL theists have long felt a tension between the radical "otherness" of God and the fact that we speak of God in terms drawn from our talk of creatures. If God is radically other than creatures, how can we properly think and speak of Him as acting, loving, knowing, and purposing? Wouldn't that imply that God shares features with creatures and hence is not "wholly other"?

To be sure, whether there is a problem here, and if so just what problem, depends both on the precise way(s) in which God is "other," and on the way in which the creaturely terms are used. Let's take a brief look at both issues.

The respects in which God has been thought to differ from creatures can be roughly arranged in a scale of increasingly radical "otherness." Without aspiring to range over all possible creatures, including angels, let's just think of the ways in which one or another thinker has deemed God to be different from human beings:

- A. Incorporeality
- B. Infinity. This can be divided into:
  - B<sub>1</sub>. The unlimited realization of each "perfection."
  - B<sub>2</sub>. The exemplification of all perfections, everything else equal it is better to be than not to be.
- C. Timelessness
- D. Absolute simplicity. No composition of any sort.
- E. Not a being. (God is rather "Being-itself.")

Even if D. and E. rule out any commonality of properties between God and man, it may still be, as I shall be arguing in this paper, that A.-C. do not.

As for the other side of the problem, let's first note the impossibility of avoiding *all* creaturely terms in thinking and speaking of God. We can avoid the crudest anthropomorphisms, speaking of God's hands, arms, and other bodily parts. But we cannot so easily avoid psychological and agential terms ("know," "love," "forgive," "make") that are

taken from our talk about ourselves. Suppose that we do carry out so heroic a renunciation and restrict ourselves to speaking of God in such terms as "being itself," "ground of being," "supreme unity," and the like. Even so we would not be avoiding all terms that apply to creatures, e.g., "being" and "unity." The notion of a "ground" is presumably derived from the notion of *causality*, or perhaps the notion of a *necessary condition*, and both these terms apply to creatures. So long as we say anything at all, we will be using terms that apply to creatures, or terms derivative therefrom. Hence so far as the aim at avoiding creaturely language is concerned, we may as well retain the more concrete mentalistic and agential concepts that are so central to the religious life.

But of course there are various ways in which creaturely terms can be used in speaking of God; and some of these may be ruled out by a certain form of otherness, and not others. These ways include:

1. Straight univocity. Ordinary terms are used in the same ordinary senses of God and human beings.
2. Modified univocity. Meanings can be defined or otherwise established such that terms can be used with those meanings of both God and human beings.
3. Special literal meanings. Terms can be given, or otherwise take on, special technical senses in which they apply only to God.
4. Analogy. Terms for creatures can be given analogical extensions so as to be applicable to God.
5. Metaphor. Terms that apply literally to creatures can be metaphorically applied to God.
6. Symbol. Ditto for "symbol," in one or another meaning of that term.

The most radical partisans of otherness, from Dionysius through Aquinas to Tillich, plump for something in the 4. to 6. range and explicitly reject 1. The possibility of 3. has been almost wholly ignored, and 2. has not fared much better.

I can use this background to explain what I will do in this paper. First I shall be concentrating on the psychological terms we apply to God—"know," "will," "intend," "love," and so on. I do not suppose it needs stressing that these are quite central to the way God is thought of in theistic religion. As creator, governor, and redeemer of the world God acts in the light of His perfect knowledge to carry out His purposes and intentions, and as an expression of His love for His creation. As is implicit in this last sentence, the divine psychology comes into our religious dealings with God as an essential background to divine action. God impinges on our lives primarily as agent, as one Who does things—creates, guides, enjoins, punishes, redeems, and speaks. But action is an outgrowth of knowledge, purpose, and intention; unless we could credit these to God we would not be able to think of Him as acting in these ways or in any other ways.

Second, I am going to work with a conception of God that involves modes of otherness A.-C., but stops short of a doctrine of absolute simplicity and does not deny that God is in any sense a being. There is no opportunity here to defend that choice; I will only say that I find the arguments for D. and E. quite unconvincing, and that this particular packaging has been a common one. Third, I shall seek to show that these modes of otherness are compatible with a degree of univocity in divine-human predication. I shall not go so far as to defend 1., though my position will be compatible with that strong a claim. I shall be arguing that even if God differs from creatures as radically as this, we can still identify a common core of meaning in terms for human and divine psychological states, and that we can, at least, introduce terms to carry that meaning. If ordinary terms already carry just that meaning, so much the better. But whether or not that is the case, it will at least be possible to speak univocally, in an abstract fashion, of divine and human knowledge and purpose.

As my title indicates, I am going to exhibit this divine-human commonality by exploiting a functionalist account of human psychological concepts. But before getting into the details of that, I want to give a more general characterisation of the sort of view of which my functionalist account is

one version.

The most general idea behind the argument of this paper is that the common possession of abstract features is compatible with as great a difference as you like in the way in which these features are realized. A meeting and a train of thought can both be "orderly" even though what it is for the one to be orderly is enormously different from what it is for the other to be orderly. A new computer and a new acquaintance can both be "intriguing" in a single sense of the term, even though what makes the one intriguing is very different from what makes the other intriguing. This general point suggests the possibility that the radical otherness of God might manifest itself in the way in which common abstract features are realized in the divine being, rather than in the absence of common features. What it is for God to *make something* is radically different from what it is for a human being to make something; but that does not rule out an abstract feature in common, e.g., that *by the exercise of agency something comes into existence*. It is something like the way in which a man and a wasp may both be *trying to reach a goal*, even though what it is for the one to try is enormously different from what it is for the other to try. Many theistic thinkers have moved too quickly from radical otherness to the impossibility of any univocity, neglecting this possibility that the otherness may come from the way in which common features are realized.<sup>1</sup>

More specifically, I shall be suggesting that there are abstract common properties that underly the enormous differences between divine and human psychological states. By extricating and specifying these properties we can form terms that apply univocally to God and man.

## II

The tools I shall use to exhibit this commonality are drawn from the movement in contemporary philosophy of mind called "functionalism." Functionalism has been propounded as a theory of the meaning of psychological terms in ordinary language and as a theory of the nature of psychological states and processes, whatever we mean by our ordinary terms for them.<sup>2</sup> Since we are concerned here with meanings of terms, I shall restrict

attention to the former version. The basic idea, the source of the name, is that the concept<sup>3</sup> of a belief, desire, or intention is the concept of a particular *function* in the psychological economy, a particular "job" done by the psyche. A belief is a structure that performs that job, and what psychological state it is—that it is a belief and a belief with that particular content—is determined by what that job is. In saying of a subject, S, that S believes that it will rain tomorrow, what we are attributing to S is a structure that performs this function. Our ordinary psychological terms carry no implications as to the intrinsic nature of the structure, its neurophysiological or soul-stuff character. No such information is imbedded in our commonsense psychological conceptual scheme. Thus, on this view, psychological concepts are functional in the same way as many concepts of artefacts, e.g., the concept of a loudspeaker. A loudspeaker is something the function of which is to convert electronic signals to sound. Its composition, its internal mechanism, and its external appearance can vary widely so long as it has that function. In thinking of something as a loudspeaker, we are thinking of it *in terms of* its function.

If this basic insight is to be exploited we will have to specify the defining functions of various kinds of psychological states. One of the guiding principles of functionalism is that the basic function of the psyche is the regulation of behavior. The point of having desires, aversions, likes and dislikes, interests and attitudes, is that they set goals for behavior; and the point of having knowledge, beliefs, memories, perceptions, is that they provide us with the information we need to get around in our environment in the pursuit of those goals. In seeking to exploit these commonplaces in the analysis of psychological concepts, functionalism is following the lead of analytical behaviorism, one of its ancestors. Analytical behaviorism sought to construe a belief or a desire as a disposition to behave in a certain way, given certain conditions. Thus a belief that it is raining might be thought of as a set of dispositions that includes e.g., the disposition to carry an umbrella if one goes out. Behaviorism failed because it was committed to the thesis that each *individual* psychological state determines a set of dispositions to behavior. Human

beings just are not wired that simply. Whether I will carry an umbrella if I go out is determined not just by whether I believe that it is raining, but rather by that in conjunction with my desire to keep dry, my preferences with respect to alternate ways of keeping dry, my beliefs about the other consequences of carrying an umbrella, and so on. Even if I believe that it is raining I might not carry an umbrella, if I am wearing a raincoat and hat and I believe that is sufficient, or if I do not object to getting wet, or if I believe that I will project an unwanted image by carrying an umbrella. What I do is not just a function of a single psychological state but rather of the total psychological "field" at the moment.

Functionalism, as an improved version of behaviorism, seeks to preserve the basic insight that the function of the psyche is the guidance of behavior, while avoiding the simple minded idea that each psychological state determines behavioral dispositions all by itself. It tries to bring this off by thinking of a belief, e.g., as, indeed, related to potential behavior, but only through the mediation of other psychological states. A belief that it is raining is, *inter alia*, a disposition to carry an umbrella if one is going outside, provided one has such-and-such other beliefs, desires, aversions, attitudes, etc. The concept of a belief is (in part) the concept of a certain way in which a state combines with other states and processes to determine behavior.<sup>4</sup> And since other psychological states have to be mentioned anyway there is no bar to bringing purely intra-psychic transactions into the picture. Functionalism recognizes that a belief has the function of combining with other beliefs to inferentially produce still other beliefs, the function of combining with desires and aversions and other beliefs to produce other desires and aversions (as when my belief that I can't get a wanted object without earning money gives rise to a derivative desire to earn money), and the function of combining with desires to produce affective reactions (as when my belief that I have not been accepted to medical school combines with my desire to go to medical school to produce disappointment), as well as the function of combining with other psychological states to influence behavior. Clearly a complete analysis of a psychological concept

along functionalist lines would be an enormously complicated affair and perhaps beyond human power to achieve.<sup>5</sup>

Most contemporary formulations of functionalism are even wider than we have yet suggested. A typical recent statement is the following. "Functionalism is the doctrine that pain (for example) is identical to a certain functional state, a state definable in terms of its causal relations to inputs, outputs, and other mental states."<sup>6</sup> This brings into the picture the way in which sensory inputs create or affect psychological states, as well as the way the latter interact in the guidance of behavior. Because of the focus of this paper we will not be concerned about "inputs" or any other influences on the genesis of psychological states. Since we are looking for concepts that could be applied to a timeless deity (as will appear in due course), such concepts will have nothing to say about how a state originates. And even apart from timelessness, a being of perfect, unlimited knowledge, power, and goodness will not acquire His knowledge via any sort of process. He will have it just by virtue of being what He is. Hence in this essay I shall restrict even human functionalist concepts to those that specify the ways in which a given kind of psychological state combines with other to affect behavioral output and other psychological states.

Behaviorism was a reductive theory, one that aspired to show that each psychological concept could be explained in purely non-psychological terms—physical antecedent conditions, physical behavioral response, plus the overall dispositional structure. But since functionalism does not take psychological states to individually determine behavioral dispositions, it cannot aspire to reduce or eliminate psychological concepts one by one. A functional definition of any given psychological term will include many any other psychological terms. If any such reduction is to be effected it will have to be a wholesale affair.<sup>7</sup> For our purposes we are not interested in functionalism as a reductive theory. For that matter, the use to which I am going to put functionalism does not even require that any (much less every) psychological concept has to do solely with functional role. Critics of functionalism have contended that a belief cannot be completely characterized in functional terms since that leaves

out the distinctive "intentionality," the "aboutness," characteristic of the mind. And it has also been contended that feelings and sensations cannot be adequately characterized in terms of functional role, since that leaves out their distinctive "qualitative" or "phenomenal" character. For our purposes it doesn't matter whether those criticisms are justified; it doesn't matter whether a concept of a functional role does the whole job. As will appear in the sequel, it will be enough if our concept of a given type of psychological state is, *in part*, the concept of a functional role.

### III

With this background we are in a position to bring out how functionalism can help us to reconcile a degree of univocity with the radical otherness of the divine. The crucial point is one that was just now made in passing, viz., that a *functional* concept of X is noncommittal as to the intrinsic nature, character, composition or structure of X. In conceiving of a Ø in functional terms we are simply thinking of a Ø in terms of its function (or some of its functions), in terms of the job(s) it is fitted to do. So long as something has that function it will count as a Ø, whatever sort of thing it is otherwise, whatever it is like in itself. One of the main sources of functionalism in the philosophy of mind is the attempt to use our knowledge of computers to throw light on the mind and mental functioning, and, conversely, to understand the sense in which mental terms can be used to characterize the activities of computers. Functionalism is well fitted to bring out a sense in which it might well be true that mental terms (or some of them) apply univocally to human beings and to computers. For if the concept of recalling that *p* or the concept of perceiving that *p* is a concept of a certain *function*, then this same concept might well apply to beings as different in their composition, nature, and structure as a human organism and a computer.<sup>8</sup> Since in saying that S recalled that *p* we are, on the functionalist interpretation, not committing ourselves as to whether a neurophysiological, an electronic, or a purely spiritual process was involved, the concept might apply in the same sense to systems of all those sorts. This point is often put by

saying that a given functional property or state can have different, even radically different, "realizations."

The application to theological predication should be obvious, in its main lines. The same functional concept of knowledge that  $p$ , or of purpose to bring about  $R$ , could be applicable to God and to man, even though the realization of that function is radically different, even though what it is to know that  $p$  is radically different in the two cases. We can preserve the point that the divine life is wholly mysterious to us, that we can form no notion of what it is like to be God, to know or to purpose as God does, while still thinking of God in terms that we understand because they apply to us.

But of course the obviousness of the application is no guarantee that it will work. Even if functional psychological terms apply univocally to man and computer, to man and beast, and even to man and angel, there could still be Creator-creature differences that make common functions impossible. So we will have to get down to the details.

Whether any functional properties can be common to God and man, and if so which, depends on what divine-human differences there are. It will be recalled that we are working with a conception of God as differing from human beings in three main respects: incorporeality, timelessness, and infinity. We shall consider them in turn.

Can an immaterial spiritual being perform (some of) the same psychological functions as an embodied human being? Are functional psychological concepts neutral as between physical and non-physical realizations, as well as between different sorts of physical realizations? It would seem so.<sup>9</sup> If a functional concept really is non-committal as to what kind of mechanism, structure, or agency carries out the function, then it should be non-committal as to whether this is any kind of physical agency, as well as to what kind of physical agency it is if physical. To be sure, if human psychological functioning is, in large part, the guidance of behavior, then behavior-guidance will figure heavily in human psychological concepts. The concept of the belief that it is raining will be, in considerable part, the concept of some state that joins with psychological states of various other kinds in certain ways to produce tendencies to behavior. If

such concepts are to apply to God then God will have to be capable of behavior, and it might be thought that this is impossible without a body. If God has no body to move, how can He *do* anything, in the same sense in which an embodied human being does things? But this is not an insuperable difficulty. The core concept of human action is not *movement of one's own body*, but rather *bringing about a change in the world—directly or indirectly—by an act of will, decision, or intention*. That concept can be intelligibly applied to a purely spiritual deity. It is just that we will have to think of God as bringing about changes in the "external" world directly by an act of will—not indirectly through moving His body, as in our case.<sup>10</sup>

Timelessness, like immateriality, may seem to inhibit the application of functional concepts. How can an atemporal being *carry out* or *perform* a function, something that, like all activities, requires a temporal duration? This consideration does show that we shall have to abandon the term "function" in its strictest sense, but that does not mean that we shall have to give up the project of applying to God what functionalism calls "functional concepts." We have already noted that functionalists broaden out the strict notion of a function into the view that a functional concept of a state,  $S$ , is the concept of the causal relations in which  $S$  stands to inputs, outputs, and other states. Now if causality is thought to require temporal succession, such concepts too will be inapplicable to a timeless being. Rather than get into an argument over that, I will loosen the requirements one more notch and say that a functional concept of  $S$  is a concept of *lawlike connections* in which  $S$  stands with other states and with outputs.<sup>11</sup> Some such connections involve temporal sequence (as with causal laws of the "Lighting the fuse produces an explosion" type) and some do not. For an example of the latter type, consider: "If  $S$  wants  $X$  more than anything else and realizes that doing  $A$  is necessary for getting  $X$ , and believes that doing  $A$  is possible, then  $S$  will intend to do  $A$ ." This is a "law of coexistence." It tells us what intention  $S$  has now if  $S$ 's current beliefs, desires, etc., are related *now* as specified. Of course a human being would normally have arrived at these desires, beliefs, etc., by some kind of process, which would often have included some process of

deliberation, but this particular lawlike statement doesn't get into any of that. It simply specifies what intention a subject will have at a given time, provided it has the other psychological states specified at that time. There is no reason why such regularities should not enter into a functional psychological concept, and a concept wholly made up of such regularities could apply to a timeless being.

To be sure, commonsense concepts of human psychological states are not made up wholly of such "laws of coexistence," but also include "laws of temporal succession," such as "If *S* considers whether it is the case that *p*, and in the course of this consideration brings to consciousness his beliefs that *If q then p* and *q*, then *S* will come to believe that *p*." And this suffices to show that our ordinary concepts of human psychological states cannot be applied in their entirety to a timeless being. But I have already disavowed any intention to show that any of the psychological terms we commonly apply to creatures can, in precisely the same sense, be applied to God. I am only seeking to show that terms for psychological functions can be devised that apply in just the same sense to God and creature. What the above considerations show is that we could form functional psychological concepts that are made up wholly of laws of coexistence and that could apply univocally to creatures and to a timeless Creator. Or at least these considerations indicate that the timelessness of the Creator is no bar to this.

#### IV

In considering the infinity of God we will have to further restrict the range of functional psychological concepts that are applicable to God. We are understanding "infinity" here as the absence of any imperfections and the possession of all perfections. Thus among the modes of divine infinity will be omnipotence, omniscience, and perfect goodness.

Let's begin by considering the sort of behavior guidance principle that functionalists take to be partly constitutive of the concepts of beliefs and wants. Here is the most simpleminded version.

I. If *S* wants that *p* and believes that doing *A* will bring it about that *p*, then *S* will do *A*.

This will not do. The antecedent might be true and yet *S* not do *A*, and this for a number of reasons.

- A. *S* may want something else more than she wants *p*.
- B. *S* may have a stronger aversion to doing *A* or to something she believes to be a consequence or accompaniment of *p*.
- C. *S* may believe that doing *B* would also lead to *p* and may prefer doing *B* to doing *A*.
- D. *S* may have scruples against doing *A*.
- E. *S* may not have the capacity or opportunity to do *A*.
- F. *S* may be prevented from carrying out an intention to do *A* by some emotional upset.

A natural way of taking account of these complexities is to change I. to:

- II. If *S* wants that *p* and believes that doing *A* will bring about *p*, then *S* has a *tendency* to do *A*.

Having a tendency to do *A* is a state that will lead to doing *A*, given ability and opportunity, provided it is not opposed by stronger tendencies. At a given moment the "motivational field" will contain a number of competing tendencies, and what is actually done will depend on which of these tendencies is the strongest.<sup>12</sup>

Now let's consider whether this kind of lawlike connection could be partly constitutive of any divine psychological state, and if not what modifications would be required. The first point that may strike the reader is the inappropriateness of attributing wants to the deity. And so it is, if "want" is taken to imply lack or deficiency. However, even if this is true of the most common psychological sense of the term (and I doubt that it is), it is easy to modify that sense so as to avoid that implication. What we need for our purposes and for purposes of human psychology, is a sense in which a want is any "goal-setting" state. This sense is sufficiently characterized by II. Anyone in whom a belief that *A* will lead to *p* increases the tendency to do *A*, thereby has a want for *p* in this sense.

In this broad sense 'want' ranges over a vast diversity of goal-setting human psychological states—aversions, likes, interests, attitudes, internalized moral standards, and so on. It is an important question for human motivation whether all "wants," in the broad sense, operate according to the same dynamic laws. But be this as it may, it

is noteworthy for our present concerns that there is no such diversity in the divine psyche. God is subject to no biological cravings, rooted in the needs for survival. Since God 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. And so on. This means that a lot of the complexity of human motivation drops out. "Recognizing that it is good that *p*" would be a better term for the "goal-setting" state in the divine psyche.

Here is another simplification. In human motivation we can think of the various current action tendencies as interacting to produce a winner, an intention to do something right away. Whether this intention to do A actually issues in doing A will depend on the current state of S's abilities and on cooperation from the environment. But God's abilities are always in perfect condition and He needs no such cooperation. Therefore there can never be a gap between divine intention and action. But then is there any point in inserting intention as an intermediary between the field of tendencies and action? Can't we just say that what God sees to be best (or what He chooses between incompatible equal goods) He *does*? So it would seem.

I have been talking as if God apprehends or recognizes the comparative goodness of various possible states of affairs and acts accordingly, actualizing those that are good enough to warrant it. This presupposes that the values are independent of God's will, that He *recognizes* them to be as they are. But many theologians have protested against this on the ground that it limits God's sovereignty by assuming a realm of values that exists and is what it is independent of His creative activity. The "voluntarists" who put forward this argument think of values as themselves being created by an act of the divine will. Hence God's will is not guided by His apprehension of values, at least not primordially. I will not try to decide between these two powerful theological traditions in this paper. Instead I will point out that a functionalist account of the divine psychology can accommodate either, though the precise form taken by the account will be correspondingly different.

On a voluntarist view there will either be a single primordial act of will that sets up values and standards, after which action is guided by apprehensions of the values so constituted; or else many divine decisions are constitutive of value. However on either version there will still be many divine acts that are guided by the values so constituted. Whereas on the opposite view, "intellectualism" as we might call it, all divine volition and action is guided by divine apprehension of the inherent value-qualities of alternative possibilities. Thus the main bearing of these differences on functionalism stems from the fact that for voluntarism, but not for intellectualism, there is at least one action that is not guided by apprehensions of value. Nevertheless the general account of the function of cognition and wants in the guidance of behavior will be the same on both views.

Turning now to the cognitive side of behavior guidance, there are problems about the application of "belief" to God, somewhat analogous to the problems about "want." "Belief" in the sense in which it is contrasted with knowledge, "mere belief," does not apply to God. Since God is a perfect cognizer, He has no beliefs that do not count as knowledge. But even if we are thinking of a wider sense of "belief," in which when S believes that *p* S may or may not know that *p*, the whole point of having that sense is that a subject *may* believe that *p* without knowing that *p*. Since that possibility is lacking for God, the term "belief" loses its point in application to Him. Therefore we will speak most felicitously about the divine motivation if we simply substitute "know" for "believe" wherever cognition enters in.

Where does this leave us with respect to the cognitive guidance of behavior in the divine psychology? To turn the question around, what behavior guidance principles figure in concepts of divine cognitive states? First of all, as we have seen, evaluative apprehensions play a crucial role on an intellectualist construal and a lesser role on a voluntarist construal. Second, does God's knowledge of the existing situation exercise any guiding role? Here we must take account of another theological controversy, this time over whether God determines every detail of creation. Those who hold that He does will not recognize any action of God,

with respect to the created world, other than His creation of that world in all its details. There is nothing else for Him to do. *We* may think of God as reacting to successive stages of the world as they unfold, but that is because we are, illegitimately, thinking of God as moving through time, responding to successive phases of the world process as it unfolds. If God is timeless He decides on and constitutes the entire affair in one act of will—the beginning of the universe and all of its successive stages, including anything that looks to us like *ad hoc* responses of God at a particular time. From this perspective God's knowledge of how things are in the world plays no guiding role in His behavior, which wholly consists of the one complex act of determining every detail of the world. That act is not guided by an awareness of how things are in the world, since apart from the completed act there is no way in which things are. Cognitive guidance of behavior is limited to evaluative apprehension.

Suppose, on the other hand, that God does not determine every detail of creation. He voluntarily abstains from determining the choices of free agents like human beings. This means that there will be certain aspects of creation that He does not know about just by knowing His own creative acts. With respect to the choices of free agents and states of affairs affected by them, he will have to “look and see” how things came out in order to know what they are. If He is timeless he does not have to “wait and see”; all of his knowledge and activity is comprised in one “eternal now.” Nevertheless His activity vis-a-vis the world is divided into (a) original creation *ex nihilo*, and (b) activity directed to states of affairs that, in part, are what they are independently of divine fiat. Creative activity of this latter sort *will* be guided by His knowledge of these states of affairs.

Next let's turn to another sort of regularity that enters into concepts of human cognitive states, *viz.*, that based on inferential relations. One of the functions that makes a belief that *p* the state it is, is its tendency to enter with other beliefs into inferences that generate further beliefs. Thus the belief that Jim is Sam's only blood-related uncle tends to give rise to the belief that Sam's parents have only one brother between them; it also tends to combine with

the beliefs that Jim is childless and that Sam has no aunt to produce the belief that Sam has no first cousins.

Now a timeless deity will not carry out inferences, since this requires a temporal duration. Indeed, an omniscient deity will not *derive* any of its knowledge from inference, or even from an atemporal analogue of inference; for any true proposition, *p*, such a deity will automatically know that *p* without needing to base it on something else He knows. So inferential regularities cannot be even partly constitutive of concepts that apply to God. But suitable analogues of such regularities may be available. It will still be true that whatever God knows, he knows all the logical consequences thereof, knows that all probabilistic consequences thereof are probable, knows that all contradictions thereof are false, and so on. That is, there is a certain structure to divine knowledge that corresponds to logical relationships, and corresponds much more closely than any body of human knowledge.

The discussion of this section indicates that the divine psyche is much simpler than the human psyche in the variety of its constituents. Assuming God to be atemporal, it involves no processes or activities, no sequences of events. There are no beliefs as distinct from knowledge, and hence no distinction of degrees of firmness of belief. Propositional knowledge is all intuitive, the simple recognition that *p*. There is no distinction between wants, cravings, longings, and the sense that something ought to be done. There is only one kind of goal-setting state, which could perhaps best be characterized as the recognition that something is good or right. There are no bursts of passion or emotional upsets to interfere with rational motivational processes. There is no point in distinguishing between a present intention to do A and doing A intentionally. Though God may not be as simple as St. Thomas supposed, it is true that much of the complexity of human psychological functioning drops out. The complexity of human psychology is largely due to our limitations: to the fallibility of our cognition, the internal opposition to rational decision making, the limitations of our capacities, and the relative irrationality of our intellectual processes.

## V

Where do all these differences leave our project of identifying psychological commonalities in God and human beings? We have discovered a vast reduction in the number of distinct types of divine psychological states, in comparison with the human estate. But that is quite compatible with important commonalities in states of those types. How does the matter stand in that regard? Let's see just how divine psychological states could be functionally construed, adopting a non-voluntarist position for the sake of illustration. As for the cognitive side, a divine recognition that it would be good that *p* can be construed, in part, as a state that will give rise to the action of bringing about *p* unless God recognizes something logically incompatible with *p* as a greater or equal good.<sup>13</sup> On the cognitive side, God's knowledge that *p* can be construed as a state that (a) will carry with it the knowledge of everything logically entailed by *p* and exclude the knowledge of anything contradictory to *p*, and (b) gives rise to action that is appropriate to *p*, given what God sees to be good.<sup>14</sup> Do functional concepts like this apply to human beings?

They do not apply just as they stand, because of the human limitations we have just noted. A human being does not know, or believe, everything entailed by what she knows or believes, nor does she fail to believe everything logically incompatible with what she believes. A human being does not always (or even usually) do what she recognizes to be the best thing to do in the circumstances, even assuming that she correctly assesses the circumstances. But these differences do not prevent a significant commonality in functional psychological states. This commonality can best be brought out by constructing tendency-versions of the law-like generalizations imbedded in the functional concepts just articulated, and attributing them to human

beings. Thus we can ascribe to a human being a *tendency* to believe whatever is entailed by what she knows or believes, and a tendency to reject what is incompatible with what she knows or believes. And we can regard these tendencies as partly constitutive of the concepts of belief and knowledge. Likewise we can say of a human being that she will tend to do what she can to bring about what she recognizes to be best in a given situation, and we can take this tendency to be partly constitutive of the concept of recognizing something to be best. We can then formulate the divine regularities in tendency terms also. Thus it will be true of God also that if He recognizes that it is good that *p* He will tend to bring about *p* insofar as He can unless He recognizes something incompatible with *p* to be a greater good.<sup>15</sup> These tendency statements about God constitute a limiting case in which the qualifications are vacuous, since God can do anything He chooses to do and since God is not subject to non-rational interferences in carrying out what He recognizes to be good. Nevertheless they are true of God.

I take it that this brings out a significant commonality of meaning between psychological terms applicable to God and to man. Even though there is no carry-over of the complete package from one side of the divide to the other, there is a core of meaning in common. And the distinctive features on the divine side simply consist in the dropping out of creaturely limitations. Thus a functional approach to psychological concepts makes it possible to start with human psychological concepts and create psychological concepts that literally apply to God, thus generating theological statements that unproblematically possess truth values.<sup>16</sup> This saves us from the morass of an unqualified pan-symbolism and makes possible a modicum of unquestionably cognitive discourse about God.<sup>17</sup>

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## NOTES

1. The general thrust of the preceding paragraph is reminiscent of St. Thomas' distinction between the property signified by a term and the mode of signifying (or the mode signified). Thomas says that for certain predicates that are applied both to God and

man, e.g., "good," the property signified is common but the mode of signifying is not. (*Summa Theologiae*, Iae, XIII, 3. *Summa Contra Gentiles*, I. 30.) That naturally suggests an elaboration in terms of underlying common abstract features that are realized in quite different ways. But neither Thomas nor the Thomistic tradition has seized this opportunity to locate an area of univocal predication.

2. The latter version may be accompanied by proposals as to how psychological terms should be given meaning for theoretical purposes.

3. I shall use "The concept of *x* is..." interchangeably with "The term '*x*' means...."

4. When the matter is put in this way, in terms of the *determination* of behavior, it looks as if functionalism is committed to psychological determinism, and to the denial of free will in any sense in which it is incompatible with determinism. But the theory need not be stated in those terms. We could hold that ones current psychological state, at most, renders certain lines of behavior more probable than others, and still state functionalism in terms of these probabilistic relationships.

5. For important formulations of functionalism see Block, 1978, 1980b; Lewis, 1972, 1980; Putnam, 1975 Chs. 18-21; Shoemaker, 1981; van Gulick, 1980.

6. Block, 1980b, p. 257. The reference to "inputs" and "outputs" reflects the computer orientation of functionalism, of which more below. The "output" on which we have been concentrating is behavior.

7. For a suggestion as to how this can be done see Lewis, 1972.

8. I am by no means endorsing the view that psychological terms apply univocally to human beings and computers. I am merely indicating one application that has been made of the feature of functional concepts under discussion.

9. A prominent functionalist without dualist or theological sympathies, Hilary Putnam, has stressed this conceptual possibility, (1975, p. 436).

10. For a detailed exposition of the point see my "Can We Speak Literally of God?" in Steuer and McClendon (1981).

11. See above for the explanation of why 'input' has been omitted.

12. Again this may seem to rule out free will. However, if we wish we can include the will as one source of tendencies, and hold that whenever a subject makes a strong enough effort of will, the tendency so engendered will be stronger than any other tendency.

13. If God apprehended something incompatible to be equally good He still might bring about *p*, but He would not necessarily do so.

14. As we saw earlier, (b) is applicable only if God does not determine every detail of the created world.

15. The "or equal" drops out when the generalization is in terms of a tendency. God will still have a tendency to bring about *p* even if something incompatible is equally good and even if that other alternative is chosen.

16. Or at least the predicates present no bar to the attribution of truth values.

17. This paper has profited from comments by Jonathan Bennett.

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