HOW ARE WE ARE TO THINK OF GOD'S FREEDOM?

PAUL HELM

University of London

Abstract. The paper discusses two conceptions of divine freedom. The first, Hugh McCann's, proposes that God is a timelessly eternal act, whose agency is not deliberative and who, in that act, creates himself and the contents of his will. God is such an act. Following discussion of this view, its costs and benefits, a more traditional account of God's freedom, in which he possesses vestigial alternativity, the freedom to choose an alternative should there have been a sufficient reason to do so.

THE STRANGENESS OF GOD

God, the concept of whom is routinely discussed by the bulk of Christian philosophers and philosophical theologians, is incredibly strange, though this fact is seldom pondered. Perhaps this is because of a professional familiarity with a concept or concepts of God is conflated with the being of God himself. Such a God is said to be an unbounded or infinite spirit. Perhaps he exists in three persons. But if so this adds to the strangeness. What is an infinite spirit? Maybe one that exists at all times and in all places. Taking fright at this, we might say, no, God cannot exist at all places and times, but he has *access* to all times and all places. But is this an improvement, as far as intelligibility is concerned? Do these modifications take away any of the initial strangeness? It does not seem so. Or consider this, does such a God have a personality, a preference or schedule of preferences; a goal or goals for the attainment of which he adopts means? Or, having wonderfully brought the universe into being, and upholding it, is his posture principally reactive to changes in

the creation. Having initiated the universe, does he restrict himself to tinkering with it?

We think of him, perhaps, as a most perfect being, or a most perfect trio of persons in one perfect godhead. We think, with Anselm, that what is great-making, or what constitutes a perfection, is what it is better to be than not to be. This infinite spirit is thus good in some sense, but in what sense? Must this being be worthy of worship? But what sort of goodness is worthy of what sort of worship? Maybe what is worthy of worship is a being that has those properties which we would like to have had we been God!

Currently, I guess, if we were to poll the professionals, what would have the vote is a God who has created human beings with libertarian free will, which justifies many if not all of the incalculable ills and evils of this vale of tears, and which at the same time provides us professionals with an interesting agenda of problems and possible solutions to them. One such problem is the consistency of the existence of such a God with the moral evil, and the postulation of a God who is in time, in order to give men and women sufficient elbow room to choose to do evil things and he reacts to them. Nevertheless to have the prospect of entering into a dialogue with God, there has to be a relationship with him that has some seriously symmetrical features. So the guild of philosophical theologians definitely has something to show for all the ratiocination of its members; some proposals, but also a raft of remaining problems that require 'further research'.

I do not say these things to poke fun at professional philosophical theology. For I myself am implicated in all this. In fact I am perhaps deeper in the mire than is this outlook I have been sketching. Perhaps the best spirit in which to try to get clearer about some of all this is one of both attachment and detachment; attachment to a particular point of view, and detachment from that point of view in a readiness to help others try to get straight on their point of view, while soliciting for similar help oneself.

There is another thing to keep in mind. Philosophy, or at least the reaching of philosophical conclusions, is about trade-offs between costs and benefits. Any definite philosophical view seems to be in the same plight. What is a limitation in the one case is not in the other, and vice versa. In this spirit I shall in this paper attempt to discuss the freedom of a timelessly eternal God. In what follows I shall try to keep this strangeness of God in mind also, in this case because of his transcendence.

Strangeness that expresses itself philosophically in a concern about even the conceptuality to be employed in trying to think about God.

To start with, in the first part of the paper, I try to see the freedom of God through the eyes of one current philosophical theologian who does indeed recognize this element of strangeness in theism, Hugh McCann. This account is to be found in his *Creation and the Sovereignty of God.* While there is much that is thoughtful and provocative about what he argues, I shall towards the end of the paper return to a more conventional way of thinking about this deeply mysterious business, though there are versions of this type of view that might profitably borrow some of what McCann has to say.

MCCANN ON DIVINE FREEDOM

Hugh McCann is someone whose outlook on divine sovereignty, considered in the most general terms, is one that I share. While his book is wide in scope, elaborating views in philosophical theology for which McCann is best known – a robust account of divine sovereignty, including God's timelessness, an occasionalistic view of God's creating and upholding of the creation, and a libertarian view of human freedom – what I wish to comment on here is what might be regarded as the book's central issue, certainly the culmination of McCann's fascinating discussion, the issue of God's freedom.

What he takes to be the dominant picture of God's freedom, freedom as the exercise of a deliberative choice among possible worlds, is rejected by McCann. This view

> [i]magines that the enterprise of creation begins with God deliberating about the alternatives. In an ontological if not a temporal sense, there is a phase prior to God creating the world in which God surveys the available options – namely, the (presumably infinite) set of worlds that are logically possible – and chooses from them the world he will create. (p. 158)

His rejection is prompted by a concern that the currently received view entails an abridgement of divine sovereignty. For on this view God deliberates among possible worlds which – to exaggerate a little – he *finds* among the contents of his knowledge, his *natural knowledge* as it is sometimes called. These possibilities, being *there*, cannot be said to exist as a result of his creative action.

McCann rejects this general approach, no matter how it is worked out, because of the way that it compromises divine sovereignty, and the nature of creation. Further, he holds that the simplicity of God has no place for a deliberative view, for it threatens to destroy God's freedom. For on such an account God has all his properties essentially, and if so then no being has any choice at all as to what its essential attributes are to be. (pp. 213ff.) He has no elbow-room to make free choices and to bring them to pass. Without such choice God's free will and thus his sovereignty would be qualified.

Another objection that McCann has is this: suppose that there is a best possible world that God deliberates over, that 'there is only one that is the best, one that will stand out to an all-knowing and all-loving God as the possible world most worthy of being realized in existence' (p. 158). This qualifies divine freedom.
McCann says:

> [I]n order for God to be God he must from eternity possess all the properties that are essential to him, so that their presence would be presupposed for any existence-conferring activity we might attribute to him. (p. 216)

How then could any of these properties be the causal products of his will?

> God's nature must, then, be ontologically presupposed in his activity as creator and so cannot also be an ontological product of that activity. (p. 216)

Which returns us to the problem of God's will. (p. 217) If everything about God's nature is essential, then this is as a consequence of universal necessitation. But '[I]t might be possible to argue that that although it is indeed true that all of God's deeds are essential to him, even so he is not subject to any necessity in their performance' (p. 219). There are no alternatives, no possible worlds actualizable but not actualized, since this, the actual world is a product of his essence, and it is impossible that he is free to have created an alternative.

> [I]f all that he does counts as a manifestation of his essence, then whether his actions are necessary or not, there will still be a problem as to how they can be 'up to him' in any truly libertarian sense. (p. 219)

McCann avoids such necessitarianism by virtue of the fact that the act which is God is the manifestation of his free creativity.

So in the light of the difficulties regarding necessitation, McCann makes a proposal of a more radical kind respecting God's freedom. Leaving aside the idea that the divine nature might be the effect of some other, non-divine source, McCann thinks that an alternative to this might be 'to treat God's nature as voluntarily derived, as somehow owing to the operation of his creative will' (p. 214). God is 'event' or act. So God is not a substance, but nevertheless the eternal act which is God has essential properties. I shall return to the problem of divine necessitarianism later on as part of my own suggestions, but I wish first to look at the idea that God himself is the product of his own creative will.

DIVINE CIRCULARITY

Consider first the problem. McCann makes appeal to Alvin Plantinga's 'sovereignty aseity intuition' (Plantinga 1980: 34), that is, the intuition that God is in no way dependent on or subject to anything beyond his control, including the idea that God's properties may dwell in some independent realm and be exemplified in God, that their existence in that realm may thus be ontologically prior to God. McCann does not hold to the idea that God has a 'structure' such that certain features are ontologically prior to other of his features. So he does not allow that God's essence is posterior to anything he does. God's perfections, which are not be understood abstractly, such as being omniscient and omnipotent, 'cannot pertain to God's nature without his say-so; if they did, his sovereignty would be as such impugned as if they had independent existence as well' (p. 214).

What does McCann propose? In respect of God's relation to his creation God is best thought of as a kind of primordial timeless event.

> He is not reactive or passive toward anything, awaits no prompting in order to be manifested in any respect, and is not modeled on any archetype. God is, rather, fully completely spontaneous – nothing held back, nothing hedged, nothing in doubt or subordinated, and by the present account utterly without dependency of any kind. (p. 228)

God is, essentially, an act of free will – an act with no prior determination of any kind, in which he freely undertakes to be and to do all that he is and does. The effect of this is profound and dramatic. Far from escaping his sovereignty, God's having the nature he does turns out to be *in itself* an exercise of his sovereignty. That is, the reality that is God's having the nature he does is itself the action of his freely undertaking to have it,

and all that is essential to him is grounded in this exercise of freedom. It does not follow that God confers existence, or any other aspect of his nature, on himself, in the sense that his act of so doing is prior to or causally productive of the active being present. But McCann claims that his nature falls under his own sovereignty, *thus avoiding the circularity problem*. For even though his nature is essential to God, it is 'up to him' in the sense that there is nothing that makes it what it is beyond the very exercise of voluntaries that constitutes it. (pp. 231-2)

McCann's is an initially attractive idea, because God-as-act coheres nicely with traditional ideas of God as pure act, and seems to do justice to the idea of God's absolute sovereignty. And it does justice, he thinks, to Aquinas's position that 'it is in willing his own being that God also wills the being of all other things' (p. 229). So, as McCann puts it, God is this eternal act, which includes God's willing the actual world, the power of the act also being a part of God's perfection. His perfections are identical with his act of creating the universe. (p. 229)

SOME COMMENTS

Sovereignty does not go so far as Descartes' 'universal possibilism' as characterized in Plantinga's *Does God Have a Nature?* (Plantinga 1980: 95f.), according to which even the laws of logic are only contingent. Perhaps McCann would say that such a question is not even askable? We shall see him making a move like this later on.

Initially this looks to be a case of an act without an agent, for the agent *is* the act. Otherwise we are back to the deliberative, possible worlds way of thinking. '[T]he reality of God's having the nature he does is itself the action of God's freely undertaking to have it, and all that is essential to him is grounded in this exercise of freedom.' (pp. 231-2) This is not only an interesting and unusual way of thinking of God's transcendence and his perfection, it creates difficulties.

Let us think of the concern which prompted this *tour d'esprit*, that of the ontological priority of divine perfections over God himself. On McCann's proposal,

> [W]hile God is not self-creating in the sense of causing himself to be or conferring existence on himself, he is creatively disposed toward his nature, in that that nature finds its first and only reality in the completely spontaneous act of God Intending to have that nature – that act that is God himself. (p. 232)

It might be asked: Isn't being creatively disposed a feature of God's prior nature? And doesn't being disposed indicate passivity in God?

What God creates is in turn both God's existence and his having libertarian freedom. What is this character due to? Not presumably to God who is unfolded in it, its product, though perhaps a product that he is creatively disposed to be. Of course the act does not have temporal parts, but it does have parts, or seems to. Part of the difficulty here is the sheer unfamiliarity of the proposal. If the traditional doctrine of divine simplicity is certainly difficult to grasp, how much more that of an eternal, free act which grounds God's nature? McCann recognizes this in allowing that while the doctrine of divine simplicity requires a collapse of the distinction between subject and attribute, and that his proposal that God is an actual state of affairs requires this separation, it compromises the traditional picture, in which what God is is logically prior to what God wills. As he doubts that any other views can do justice to divine simplicity in the traditional sense, the gain in the view he is advocating must lie elsewhere.

One gain is that God is a state of affairs, like Socrates acting wisely. Yet God does not change; he is not a series of such states of affairs. Nevertheless we can say that he is 'his existent nature, his being, an actual dynamic state to which existence itself is essential and upon which all else that is real depends' (p. 228), and by 'all else' McCann means not only what exists in time, but *abstracta* of various kinds, but it is not clear that these include all those which earlier led to the circularity problem. Though McCann does say that '[God| is not modeled on any archetype' (p. 228). Is he the contents of this act? He is the act behaving thusly – being goodness and justice and whatever else constitutes a perfect act. He is act, not reaction, an act of complete spontaneity. God is what he becomes, not by any sort of temporal process, but in a sort of timeless 'moment'.

Let us return to some of the difficulties in the traditional view that prompted this. For example, the circularity problem arises when we think that God may have all universals under his sovereign creation. God does not exercise his will, on this view, but he *is* an exercise of will. Hence he cannot deliberate. That is a benefit for McCann, for whom God transcends all modality. (p. 235) So how does he deal with this? God does not just happen to have the attributes that he has – that would be an abridgement of his freedom, having attributes that were just given, or 'came to him', and so were not his as a result of a sovereign

act. But he *is* an exercise of will, and the 'one thing that cannot happen with an exercise of will is that from the agent's perspective, it should be a matter of happenstance' (p. 231). So the act is an act of sovereignty? An act of free will, but not an act of anybody? The act itself is somebody.

It is hard to see how McCann can consistently say 'God is essentially, an act of free will – an act with no prior determination of any kind, in which he freely undertakes to be and to do all that he is and does' (p. 231). We cannot say that God finds himself in an act for there is no passivity in God. God is free for McCann because there is an absence of independent states that have a determining or inclining force on what he may do, the spontaneity that is characteristic of action, and intrinsic intentionality. But besides this there is not what is often sought in libertarian freedom, namely alternativity. (p. 234) We shall return to this point.

But can this creative act that is God be thought of as exercising deliberation between possible outcomes that are present before his mind? There is no process of selection, no deliberativeness about what he does, nor whatever may be the absence of deliberativeness. His nature is essential to him in that it is essential to his creating. (p. 230) God is identical with the act, but also (it seems) the subject of the act. Can he be both together?

That is, it is not clear that McCann's idea of God as an act of free will helps us with the circularity problem. The God who is the act of free will presumably has a character in the act, but not a prior character. God and this one libertarian (in a qualified sense yet to be discussed) act are indistinguishable. We may gain some help from the thought that God does not develop in stages or through stages, for this is a timelessly eternal act, from beginning to end (as it were). And there is no distinction within that act of a timelessly eternal God and what that God wills. For on this view there is no distinction between God and what God is the agent of respecting himself, and possibly in his creation *ad extra*. The temporal continuum of the creation and all it contains is grounded in the one eternal act. Yet this act which is God is one 'without any prior determination', though 'he freely undertakes to be and to do all that he is and does' (p. 251). God is what he is and does after this free act, or in the free act, which is an act that is free in three essential features; the absence of any determining cause, spontaneity, and intrinsic intentionality.

God avoids subjection to modality by being free, and the freedom from modality is a bar to asking questions about the modal status of what he creates. The actual world is possibly only possible, or it is possibly

necessary, but we cannot pursue the question of which it is. (p. 231) How can McCann distinguish between the status of God's powers in creation and that of what he creates, and so avoid pantheism? Well, the world that God creates is part of God's creating action, but are not contingency and alternativity at the creaturely level embedded within this world?

And there is the further problem of an eternalist making an act or action the absolutely most basic thing in reality. There is the question of an action that is eternal, which takes up no time. I shall postpone this for a moment. In addition there's the question of how God thinks of or in this act. Does God pursue an enterprise or project the characterization, and hence the description and understanding, of that which is logically posterior to his undertaking it? No, God does not perform the act, he *is* the act. Does God exist only when the act is complete? But the act is durationless. It is in the occurrence of this durationless act occurring (atemporally) that God's creative resources come to have a character, and he to realize what that character is. But God cannot be said to learn in this process, because learning requires states of passivity, which God does not possess. Logical moments do duty for what would be temporal moments for an action performed in time.

I'm an enthusiastic atemporalist and resort (as do others) to 'logical moments' to try to get things straight; a device to make distinctions rather than divisions in eternity. But I have an Ockhamist conscience about multiplying such moments. Sometimes they seem to do full duty for temporal moments in eternity! But I think that McCann uses them sparingly, but perhaps he needs to use them more to explain away the difficulties.

As I understand it, in this one indivisible timeless moment, this eternal act or action, the distinction between God in himself and as he is to us cannot be expressed, for God is eternally both God as he is in himself and in that he is God for us, the God of creation and redemption. So there is no basis for a distinction between God *in se* and God *quoad nos*.

God's will is the act of willing. But that act has contents which can be separately discussed, and distinct powers and properties which are to be considered distinctly from their exercise. The first alternative seems to go against the requirement that God's act, himself, is without any prior determination. He is what he is eternally in the act. Let us suppose the act; then it is presumably an action with a willing of finite effects, an immense universe and all that it contains, unimaginably gigantic and of amazing detail all the way down, yet in some sense bounded. Does God know what

the act that is himself is or is to be? So is his foreknowledge a property manifested in an act which a willing of finite effects or consequences, an action of creation. And what of deliberation? Throughout his book McCann is suspicious of a deliberative picture of God's action, in which God selects one from among an infinite number of possibilities prior to some act. But McCann can hardly wish to endorse the proposal of God as an act of free will is mindless, but its mindedness is in the act, for God has no mind which can be considered prior to the act. Some of this sounds pantheistic, but that sound can be removed if we bear in mind the distinction between God and his creation.

So while there is much that is fascinating about McCann's proposal there are also numerous problems with it. There is, at the root, the basic problem of everything on the 'being' and the 'decree' side of God, being a component in an eternal act or action. Of course what is planned in this act includes temporal sequences, a changing creation, but as far as the decree of God is concerned it is one timeless moment. How are we to understand this? As an action that takes up no time. No time here must mean no time, and not just a very short time, like the time it takes to blink, but no time at all. Can sense be made of such a timeless moment? But within that moment it is necessary to differentiate between, say, the end of the action, and the means for the achievement of the end or ends of the action, a distinction which can only be logical or rational in which the means has only logical priority to the end. There are numerous goals to be achieved in this timeless moment. (I realize that these questions are pertinent to eternalism per se, if they are pertinent at all)

Finally, is God free? On the account God knows/intends that his free action has the features we have noticed. McCann is a strong libertarian where it is possible to be, but reckons that this eternal action of God falls outside the categories of libertarianism as he believes these apply to the creature.

A MORE TRADITIONAL PICTURE

In contrast to this fascinating but very difficult idea of McCann's, I wish to offer a criterion of freedom of a more traditional, in McCann's sense a 'deliberative' (with qualifications) account of God's freedom. Some of what this involves has come out by implication in our discussion of McCann, so here we can be briefer.

I think that many current philosophical theologians have abandoned the idea of offering metaphysical criteria for the Creator-creature distinction, for example, criteria such as the Creator is timeless and space-less and so changeless, the creature temporal and spatial and liable to change and so. Such a distinction has been replaced by a the operation of a sliding scale so that God's immutability is liable to be parsed as God's resolve not to change; temporality replaces timelessness, etc., and God's relation to space is rather like a person's relation to his body when it is functioning normally. His omniscience is conditioned by the character of the universe he has chosen, or by his own resolve to be ignorant about aspects of the future.

When considering divine freedom a basic question is: are the ways in which philosophers discuss creaturely libertarian free will and determinism of help in discussing the freedom of the Creator? I think that a general answer to this question depends on how anthropomorphic the idea of God is taken to be, and that in turn depends on to what extent God and creatures in his creation share properties or predicates. If God is in time then he shares the property of *being in time* with ourselves for on most views we are in time. But even if not, even if God is 'outside' time as we say, then both he and ourselves share the property of being interested in what goes on in time, say. But then we have the problem of how like our interests are God's interests. And similarly with space, and morality, and ontology, and so on.

The currently conventional way to approach the question of God's freedom as 'deliberative' means that God becomes the Creator by actualizing one amongst many possible worlds, which are *there*, in the mind of God as sets of possibilities just as he the Creator is there and the prime actuality (e.g., Rowe 2005). McCann is very exercised, as we have seen, by the circularity problem. Indeed his discussion that leads to his account of divine freedom, and the discomfort it causes, is dominated by it. This deliberative view is less exercised by it. It seems to me that God's necessarily having the glorious character that he has is the stopping place in any investigation of the scope of God's sovereignty. The question 'And who made God?' shows a certain intelligence but one which has not yet tuned in to the grammar of God, to the fact that God is the one of whom it makes no sense to ask that question, because of his aseity or necessity. In a parallel way to ask, did God simply find himself with the character he has? Or did he in some sense give himself that character, or endorse it, having in that way a God-only sovereignty over himself? Is not this

also a bit like the young boy? Our 'sovereignty-aseity intuition' may be strong, but it is not so strong that it covers God's sovereignty over his own essence or being, surely. Any more than it reaches to the 'universal possibilism' of Descartes, as Plantinga calls it. Where did God get the idea of perfect goodness from, and how did he invest himself with whatever it connotes? These seem ill-tuned questions. On a more theological note, to think of God as the self-creator, however hedged about with questions we cannot answer because we don't know how too, looks like a violation of the creator-creature distinction.

But that's not to say that in turning away from the more extreme implications of the circularity problem, it is necessary to turn away from all the proposals that McCann makes. We may think of the deliberative model as open to some of the McCann treatment as well. At least, I shall try this out. In the Genesis account we find that the object of his activity was 'without form and dark'. This is not the eternal formless matter of the ancients, nor (perhaps) a phase of an unformed physical universe, or not only that. Maybe we can take this phrase to embrace not only a physical void but also a conceptual void at the creaturely level until concepts are created as an aspect of the Creator's sovereignty. And how are concepts created? By creating kinds of thing, possibilities being imaginative extensions of what is actual. At the creaturely level at least, possibility may depend upon actuality (Ross 1986).

THE CRITERION OF DIVINE FREEDOM

I wish to take up a possibility raised by McCann but dismissed by him, that God's activity as creator is not *wholly* a matter of his essential nature. (p. 219) Deliberation is a cost to be borne. This account will be deliberate in structure, but a deliberate act in my sense would not involve full alternativity, at least not straightforwardly.

We are familiar with the difference between senses of necessity: *Necessarily, if the table is brown then the table is coloured* and *The table is necessarily coloured.* So there is a parallel difference between *Necessarily, if God decrees/foreknows that the universe is created then the universe is created*, in which the necessity of the creation follows a divine act, but not otherwise; and *The universe is necessarily created*. Given this, there could not fail to be a universe.

Expressed in biblical terms, this contrast is between 'From everlasting to everlasting you are God' and 'You return man to dust' (Ps: 90 2-3).

The decree of God is contingent as in 'could have been otherwise'; it is not sufficient that it is contingent in the sense of simply 'not intended or foreseen'. Divine action would not be free unless it was contingent in the first sense. So the question is: How is the contingency of divine action to be understood?

Let us suppose that the divine decreeing of this universe is not a part of God's essence, due to it alone. How are we to think of this? We might propose a test of freedom of this sort: In order to be free in the sense of being a true alternativity, God's decree that A happen and that B not happen must be hypothetically necessary.

How are to think of this and to express it? What I suggest is the following criterion of divine freedom: that the exercise of the decree of God, is a sufficient condition of God having freedom of alternativity. So divine creation is a case of hypothetical necessity, a necessity that depends on the divine decree, but not otherwise, not *de re* necessity. A case of *de dicto* necessity, a necessity of the consequence. This in turn assumes that the decree of God to bring A about is a non-necessary act. Of course God is immutable in his nature, but his decree is consistent with that nature, on this view. But he is not himself, in his essence, subject to it. So his action *ad extra* is non-necessary, but in accordance with God's immutable nature and is the outcome of his decree.

So God is subordinate to modality, though not in himself, in his essence, but rather his free decree is. He freely chooses and as a consequence what he decrees is necessitated by an immutable decree which is so because it is a freely chosen instance of God's immutable nature. So God decrees freely (with an alternativity yet to be discussed) and what is chosen has an immutability.

Is God's deliberation between possible outcomes a case of God being at the mercy of external features or goings on? I don't think so, because all contents that constitute the world he chooses will be contents of his mind, this being a non-Molinist account of God's freedom, and the actual world contains a feature F which ensures that it is electable over all alternatives. It is not necessary for this to work that there exists an objective, independent schedule of alternative worlds which God must consult, or an objectively determined scale of preferences, operated by an independent felicific calculus, a set of possible worlds of ascending goodness which God must 'respect'. Rather, God could have summoned an alternative to the world he chose had there been for him sufficient grounds to do so. So the outcome, whether this actual creation,

or some other possible creation, is created, is not the outcome of God's deliberation, but of the truth of the following counterfactual: If there had been for God a reason to choose some alternative to what he did choose, he would have done so. This much is needed to preserve the agency of God and so to distinguish between God the Creator from an eternal principle or value, which are necessarily inert, not capable of agency.

Suppose a possible world that best brings about God's purpose or purposes. This needn't be thought of as the best universe in some scale of value determinable independently of God's preferences, but that world which God has an overriding reason to create, or the best reason to create. Rather, we're to think of a scale of alternative possibilities which the 'good pleasure' of God might have been attracted to. Such a condition applies both to ends and means to those ends. So God does what seems best to him, and therefore is the best. Could an alternative to what in fact God chose have been attractive? It is stretching speculation too far for my taste to suppose that only this universe, of the untold alternatives, has the feature F. Does this suggest voluntarism? Perhaps it does, in the sense that if God is simple or has a highly integrated unity that is short of simplicity, the will of God will be involved.

We began this paper by considering McCann's objections to God's freedom as deliberation between alternatives, alternative states of affairs or possible universes as created objects, not possible worlds in the strictly modal understanding in which God himself is a component of some worlds and not others. But I am arguing that there is a modified account of this that may work. We can, consistently with this idea of alternativity, state that had the prospect of an alternative state of affairs have afforded a better way of satisfying or expressing God's generosity, or an equally good expression of his wisdom, or whatever, it might be that God could have and necessarily would have decreed that alternative world at the expense of the world he did in fact decree. Such a counterfactual is not necessarily false; it is one that God did not have a sufficient reason to bring to pass.

So perhaps we can think of the *de dicto* necessity of the created order along these lines: A (some alternative universe/outcome to the actual universe) could have obtained/been decreed, had God's creative thought been different. And what we have been arguing is that this is a not a counterfactual that is necessarily false. If God were to have had a 'different creative thought' for some alternative to A then decreeing to bring about that alternative would have been eternally 'embedded', as the

actual world is in fact embedded. The choice of that one universe would have been the dismissal of all alternative universes, and of alternatives derived from each alternative in a Ross-like way. This is a different state of affairs from one in which it is proposed 'Were God not to be perfectly good, then ...' which is a counterfactual respecting the essence of God and is necessarily false.

That is one way we might think of divine freedom. But we can also think rather differently about it, in a more McCann–like way. Suppose God had in mind this world and as part of the same act he willed it to be. We can fill this out, perhaps, in the following way. The world in respect of the perfections of God is contingent. God in this scenario did not deliberate between alternatives, he knows *ab initio* which he must choose, where 'must' here does not record any external necessitation. From that one world depicted other possible worlds are derivable rather in James Ross's sense. We can handle the usual talk about possible worlds in this way. Yet for all we know God could have depicted a different world from which a different set of possibilities are derivable. And the answer to the question, what would that world then be like might be a shake of the head: 'We have no idea.'

It follows from this that God's freedom does not have to accommodate what might be call, à la William James, a *forced* choice. Nevertheless this account does make it possible to think of some at least of God's actions as less well entrenched in his essence than others, namely the possibilities by a quite different creative choice and the possibilities it would engender, and those that are derivable when the imagination is fired by the one world which God has in fact created.

SELF-PRESENTATION

Can we say anything more about such an alternative in a condition of timelessness? Using the notion of 'immediate self-presentation' one might suppose that a timeless omniscient being knows the creative choice before (logically, but not temporally) to exhibit that feature F, and that it (and its consequences) are immediately 'self-present' to the mind of God. It is the one overwhelmingly obvious alternative, 'clear and distinct' so to speak, immediately ruling out all other alternatives. Nevertheless there is a logical alternative.

So it is possible to say that if the good pleasure of God had been that an alternative world be designed/created, with its own crop of

possibilities emanating from it, then an alternative world would have been created that could have been incommensurable with what was in fact designed/created. So my suggested criterion of God's freedom is satisfied if there is a possibility that God could have designed/created. Given such a circumstance the actual world is hypothetically necessary.

So an alternative account of God's freedom to McCann's, one that adheres to something like his idea of divine sovereignty, could borrow a central thought of McCann's account of divine creativity, and with respect to the creation abandon the idea of possible worlds before the mind of God. The idea of an infinite number of possible worlds before the divine mind's eye is in any case, perhaps, an unnecessary extravagance in our fitful understanding of God, such as it is. One might instead think both of the actual world being a result of divine creativity, and of the possibilities we presently reflect on as being derivable, by human acts of abstraction, composition and correction that we are familiar with, extrapolations of the one creative act. So we could suppose that the creation has an instance of triangularity such that the concept of triangularity is logically posterior to the decree to create a particular universe in which there are umpteen triangles.

This account I have been tentatively sketching has some of the features of a deliberative account, notably that of there being alternatives before the mind of God which he is able to reflect on. But it is easy to see that it lacks other features of full blown alternativity, any that require the passing of time, or the surrogate of such passing, an array of eternal 'moments'. If at 10 am Joe has not made up his mind whether or not to wear his new tie but has made up his mind by 10.10 am, this is an intelligible situation of a person resolving a state of indecision, whatever factors make for that resolution. I am supposing that it is impossible for God to be in such a state of indecision. Though there are alternatives which he could have chosen, none were 'feasible', and even were he in time he would not need a period of time to resolve the matter of what to create. The point is, no alternatives open to God need be Jamesian 'live' options. Nonetheless they are possible alternative outcomes. For the Creator is above all things a *creative* God.

Earlier I noted that in philosophy there are costs as well as benefits to any argument. What are the costs here? The chief one has to do with simplicity and the contingency of creation. It is hard to see how a strong sense of divine simplicity can be combined with the contingency of the creation, even in the sense discussed, or even with any contingent

features within a creation that is in itself necessary. And there seems to be potency remaining in a God who creates a finite universe, imperilling his status as one who is pure act. These problems are brought out by James Dolezal (2011).

A PARADOX

To end with, I make the following observation. A compatibilist, such as myself, nonetheless wishes to preserve the alternativity of the Creator's choice, and who therefore for whom alternative choices to what exists must be possible, though not actual; and such as Hugh McCann, a robust libertarian when it comes to creaturely choice, but someone who thinks that God, though he is libertarianly free, does not possess alternativity in even an attenuated sense. What this may teach us is that the developed categories of libertarianism and compatibilism are exclusively creaturely categories, inapplicable to God.

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