DIVINE ACTIVITY

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Abstract. The paper discusses basic models of divine action and intervention. However, the most part of the article is dedicated to the question whether or not there are theistic reasons to stick to some sort of non-interventionism. Therefore, Schleiermacher's argument is put under scrutiny and presented in a way that could substantiate some version of non-interventionism. Additionally, the paper explores an argument in favor of non-interventionism coming from a specific notion of divine aseity and self-sufficiency. Ultimately the paper votes for a broader notion of the God-world-relationship alluding to the idea of the world being God's body.

INTRODUCTION

During the last two decades, German theology has become fully aware of the problem of divine agency. The number of monographs and book-chapters, articles and essays dealing with this very specific topic is still growing. It seems as if divine agency has become the topic that hurts most or, to put it into more friendly terms, reveals what we truly think about the concept of God and the relationship between God and the world. Supposedly, the so-called anthropological turn in theology or variety of anti-realistic approaches to theological statements (based on a certain mode of giving credit to Kant) has somehow put all the questions related to divine attributes on the back burner for quite a while. However, in the meantime these questions are back – for a number of reasons. One of those reasons is that divine agency is the topic where the proverbial rubber meets the street and where the antagonism of science and religion comes into sight. But most of all, it is the area where our notion of God

becomes entirely crucial. It is apparent that you cannot have a concept of divine action without getting your concept of God affected. So it is not just accidental that Reinhold Bernhardt, who offered one of the most prominent and well-received accounts of divine action in the German speaking area and who advertises the idea of a divine 'force-field' of love, turns to a rather a-personal or hyper-personal concept of the divine,[1] whereas Klaus von Stosch in his masterly crafted defense of (so to speak: weak) divine intervention ultimately embraces open theism.[2]

However, in this paper I am not going to talk about the benefits of having either a personal or a non-personal concept of God. Having a non-personal concept of God might get you out of some of the age-old atrocities of what John Bishop as well as Ken Perszyk have called 'omni-God theism'.[3] On the other side, we have to face the demands of 'Abrahamitic Theism', which seems to commit us to a personal concept of God. In addition, there are many who believe that you cannot be a Christian, if you do not believe in some sort of direct divine intervention.

But what is direct divine intervention? The easiest answer is that direct intervention happens – as direct intervention performed by human being does – at the level of basic actions. Once you want to perform a higher-type action of some sort, it will still be your own action, but it will be a *mediated action* in this case, even if it is constituted by your very own basic actions. So, if one is willing to accept divine basic actions, he/she should give an account of what such divine basic actions could consist of: Could they be purely mental activities (and how would they relate to a physical universe)? Or would they rather be bodily movements leading up to the somewhat extravagant idea that God possesses a body (or has our universe as his body)? A second proposal would be that divine actions could be called 'direct', if and only if they are not mediated through agents who are different from God or through events that are not simultaneously the truth-makers of divine basic actions. Although mediation of that sort could as well be within the range of divine agency (and it could also be a way of interacting with a world which is truly preferred by God), anyone who insists on the possibility of direct divine intervention might wish to add a second mode of divine agency: God is capable of performing actions which are not in need of any *further*

[1] Cf. R. Bernhardt (1999: 399-439).

[2] Cf. von Stosch (2006).

[3] Cf. Bishop & Perszyk (2014: 1-17).

mediation. This request finally brings us to the third interpretation of what could be called 'direct intervention': Within the human realm basic actions are realized by some kind of event-forming 'material' – we may as well speak of physiological or biological processes as the prerequisite of performing basic actions in a physical universe. But it seems that a certain reading of divine aseity rules out the possibility of divine basic actions being made of some (more or less material) stuff or are realized by further processes, which are not truly and necessarily internal to God. Finally, a fourth notion of direct divine interaction could be associated with the idea that a divine agent responds directly to a certain situation at a given time. In this case, the problem does not arise from the question whether God needs intermediaries or not, but whether an eternal being can truly respond to a state of affairs seated in time. Since God is considered to be beyond time (and, therefore, lacks some sort of time-indexed knowledge), it is quite dubious, whether or not he is able to bring about alternative states of affairs in a temporal or even timely manner.

Unfortunately, it is not always entirely clear in contemporary theological literature what proponents of a so-called 'direct divine intervention' specifically mean by the phrase in question. It seems to me that all the aspects of meaning mentioned above play a certain role for a correct understanding of this view. Nevertheless, I take the aspect of God not being in need of a by-relation in order to cause certain events as the *core criterion* of interventionist approaches.

I. MODELS

It was actually Ian T. Ramsey who first (to my knowledge) used the phrase "model" to talk about different analogies and conceptualizations of divine action. The beauty of his distinction is its simplicity, because it circles around two poles. Ramsey's very own conceptualizations seem to offer a less complicated approach than, for instance, Reinhold Bernhardt's distinction between an agent-personal, a sapiential-ordinative, and a representational model of divine agency.[4] Moreover, it does not get stuck in the somewhat unlucky and unfruitful distinction between a so-called causal and a so-called personal model of divine agency, since – from a certain point of view – persons have to be causally effective in order to have an impact as personal agents. However, I grant

[4] Cf. Bernhardt (1999: 314-439).

that the latter concept just wants to emphasize that divine agency is best pictured in terms of friendship and love or in terms of the aesthetic beauty of a certain presence, instead of billiard balls being stopped or developments being put on hold by a super-powerful divine influence.

According to Ramsey, the two poles we have to consider when we talk about divine action are economy (*oikonomia*) on the one hand and presence on the other.[5] Intuitively, in those distinctions all the aspects and worries we may have with divine action are named and put into focus: Do we not want to experience divine presence in our human realm – a presence, which includes some kind of unmediated encounter with the divine? Although the notion of presence straightforwardly seems to point at direct divine intervention, it is far from being clear whether this is really the case. Once you take a closer look at experiences within the human realm as points of comparison, the demands and standards of presence seem to differ on a case-by-case basis: It is quite different for us, to experience the presence of a neighbor, a friend or of a spouse. But, of course, there are areas of overlap, since presence does not necessarily require bodily presence. Rather, we want to catch the attention of the person, which is meant to be present with us. People can be physically present to us, but still seem to be light-years away from us, if their heads are in the clouds. Also the opposite is true: Persons can be close to us, although we have no chance to interact with them by immediate physical contact – we talk to them on the phone, contact them via email and feel their presence due to the fact that we get their attention. Only the framework of the intimate relationship of lover and beloved seems to require both physical and mental presence. Nevertheless, it is quite sound to say that even in those cases of close intimacy presence is still mediated to a certain extent, because bodily presence serves as a key symbol to the presence of the mind.

It is interesting to note that talking about divine presence as a model of approaching divine activity does not require that we make a decision between immediate and mediated forms of divine presence beforehand. Ramsey, for instance, is very careful and reluctant in doing so, because he reminds us of divine omnipresence, which seems to rule out an additional presence of the divine as a surplus or addendum to omnipresence.[6] Thus, Ramsey introduces the notion of God's *ordinary* presence:

[5] Cf. Ramsey (1973: 15-39).
[6] Cf. Ramsey (1973: 31).

> How can God be both locatable and non-locatable; here in this place, and yet such that the heaven of heavens cannot contain him? What I have offered [...] is the suggestion that what is sometimes called God's 'ordinary presence', non-locatable presence, is better – and less misleadingly – called God's ubiquity or omnipresence. Such ubiquity is revealed in each and every cosmic disclosure: it relates to that activity, power, other than ourselves, which any and every cosmic disclosure discloses.[7]

The second model of an extraordinary divine presence is characterized by Ramsey as follows:

> [T]o speak of the locatable presence of God is to speak of the activity of God which is displayed through, and so modelled in terms of, the presence of finite things and persons.[8]

It is noteworthy that the latter does not seem to require straightforward divine intervention or what some call 'direct' intervention. Maybe this is due to the fact that Ramsey's approach remains on a rather epistemic level and is less interested in the modelling of models. As soon as one is willing to push the distinction offered by Ramsey just a little bit further, some blurring of the outlines of both aspects might result: Divine ubiquity allows the disclosure of everything as being affected by the divine, while extraordinary divine presence requires the identification of certain events, things or persons as displaying the presence of the divine. It seems that the latter presupposes the ontological basis which is referred to by the former. But we would have to add some further specifications to keep what Ramsey called 'ordinary' and 'extraordinary' presence distinct from each other – by introducing, as I would phrase it, the idea of belonging to the cosmos as a whole. *Ordinary* divine presence would be accessible, as soon as we regard each and every event of the world as part of a well-structured cosmos, which is able to disclose divine presence. In contrast, extraordinary divine presence would presuppose the specific identification or (to use Ramsey's phrases) location of divine presence, which – as a location – comes always at the risk of idolatry[9] or (to allude to Freud) building up a fetish. I don't want to claim that any location of that sort is outright impossible (quite the opposite), but

[7] Ramsey (1973: 39).
[8] Ramsey (1973: 34).
[9] Cf. Ramsey (1973: 36-37).

I throw in the caveat that extraordinary divine presence demands some crystal clear criteria of identifying its manifestations in space and time. Whatever we come up with, we have to be careful, because the 'mystery, therefore magic'-fallacy might haunt us.

Ramsey's second model of divine activity is the analogy of economy – which he identifies as the most prominent idea on divine action found among the church fathers.[10] The most important aspect of this model is to identify events which are able to disclose certain *patterns*:

> Suppose now we see an array of stones in a continuous wavy line. Something might strike us, demand our attention, stir us to ask questions, 'What caused the stones to fall into this pattern?', and these questions might be answered in terms of the tidal currents, the shelving of the beach, the size of the pebbles and so on. In this way the pattern of stones would be set in a progressively larger pattern of causal antecedents, and the way prepared for a cosmic disclosure [...].[11]

What we can learn from this example is that we need more insight and information to derive a personal origin, because patterns do not per se refer back to a person. Thus, we need to point to intentions we are aware of or to circumstances which make it unavoidable to trace the patterns back to the will of a person. Therefore Ramsey adds:

> The Christian model of economy, like the Christian household is contextualized in love: which means that for empirical fit it must be possible to find patterns in the universe which can be 'interpreted by love'.[12]

The model of economy fits nicely to what parts of the tradition had to say about divine providence: God has installed a certain order of being and – at least in the view of some of the church fathers – also a supernatural order of salvation. Order in this case means that every event is given a certain value, a certain interconnectedness with other events, and a certain meaning determined by God's point of view. If God has some sort of serious foreknowledge, general providence and special providence (as it is related to certain individuals or events) turn out to be two sides of the same coin. The idea of economy does not preclude direct divine intervention, but its metaphorical surplus of meaning (as

[10] Cf. Ramsey (1973: 18-20).
[11] Ramsey (1973: 16).
[12] Ramsey (1973: 20-21).

well as its cultural shaping) could as well be combined with some forms of the above-mentioned 'by-relation': There might be certain instances or causes, which are capable of serving as mundane causes in order to set a divine plan in motion.

Although the concepts of presence and economy seem to be antagonistic to a certain extent, it is by no means necessary to regard them as fierce adversaries. If we take a second look at the historical shaping of the model of economy, we can also refer to the Greek and Hellenistic idea that the father of the household or the emperor installs a certain order (economy) in order to guarantee, thanks to the help of intermediaries, the execution of his will. In this view, certain instances of intermediaries can be regarded as making the presence of the father/emperor accessible. Although this notion may contain some sort of legal fiction, it does not rule out a more serious metaphysical option which says: a certain entity *x* can be present to another entity *y* thanks to the performances of an entity *z*, if there is a specific context and if there is a strong enough relation between *x* and *z*, which makes this transitivity of presence possible. Of course, it might be asked whether or not the idea of immediate access could be put into question by introducing such a model. However, the idea of mediated presence is, as it stands, not seriously threatening the very notion of presence, because even in the human realm we find countless examples of how presence is mediated by certain instruments without destroying the true presence of the one we are ultimately referring to.

II. MOTIVES

The idea of economy can be easily combined with the Christian doctrine of the Trinity. Considering many attempts of the Church Fathers to explain the mystery of the Trinity – as e.g. the writings of Origen –, it seems to be quite obvious that classical paradigms do not commit us to a concept of direct divine intervention. In fact, it rather is the other way round: We find the idea that God, as the father, can interact with the world only through the Logos and the Spirit. To Origen, there is no other way to keep divine transcendence intact while sticking to the idea that God has some serious impact on the world. Unfortunately, contemporary social Trinitarians are guilty of having blurred the outlines and sold out the benefits of the more classical model. Indeed, if the Logos is a full-blooded agent (as the Spirit is supposed to be according to social Trinitarian

models) we won't get any helping hand from Trinitarian theology and we even risk to increase the various problems of direct intervention. However, for Origen there is no direct intervention of the Father, since everything is mediated through the Logos and the Holy Spirit. While the Logos encapsulates the idea of economy and providence, the Spirit is the warrant of divine presence.[13] According to this classic theologian, the Spirit's gift is purely epistemic, because he enables us to see patterns of divine presence and activity. Patterns are regarded to be signs – and this would be the door that opens up to describe the precise role and essence of the Logos: The Logos is the sign of the Father, who has the capacity of leaving imprints in the world pointing back to the providence and love of God and who can be detected thanks to the support coming from the Holy Spirit. According to this view, incarnation is most appropriate and fitting, because it would be the most privileged way for God to leave his signs in the created world, which – based on the Holy Spirit – are also instances of divine presence. If Origen were cornered and asked whether his picture of divine interaction is interventionist tout court, the answer would be rather complicated and, to a certain extent, unsatisfying for the interventionist, since there is, to say the least, *ultima facie* no unmediated agency of God, the Father. Furthermore, the role of the Logos is – if the Logos is meant to have a serious effect on the world – deeply related to human nature. Furthermore, the works of the Holy Spirit can hardly be described in terms of agency – given that the supra-personal or a-personal descriptions of the Spirit are true: the Spirit is more like a *force of nature*, the *warmth of a sunbeam* or the *splendor of the divine majesty* than what we call a personal agent in a contemporary sense.[14] So, if we try to access the conceptual framework of these metaphors, the least we can say is that the activities of the Holy Spirit should not predominantly be interpreted in terms of independent actions of a free agent, since the Spirit is also the mode of divine presence in a non-divine realm.

It is equally important to underline that Ramsey's notion of economy revolves around the concept of patterns. As it seems, the disclosure of divine agency is epistemologically bound to the identification of those patterns. But what if our universe has to be considered as displaying great ambiguities? Just think of Paul Moser's famous 'Hell's Canyon Parable'[15]:

[13] Cf. Schärtl (2003: 148-149).
[14] Cf. Schärtl (2014).
[15] Cf. Moser (2010: esp. 3-15).

Lost in the desert, we find an abandoned police station and finally get to detect an old radio, which might well work, but we have no reason to believe that anyone is at the receiving end of that radio. Since we don't know whether or not the station is abandoned forever and whether or not the radio still works, *hope beyond hope* might be the most we can get. Coming back to divine agency we can pretty much tell the very same story: Our universe displays countless wonders and produces incredible beauty, but it also contains horrendous evils, which make it hard to believe in God pictured as the ultimate rational and morally good agent. Of course, there are the patterns of ultimate love and goodness to be found in this universe, but these patterns are over-written by other patterns, which rather point to Schopenhauer's worldview: that there is an a-moral force of life being at work everywhere at the universe, which does not really care about the fate of an individual entity. This ambiguity remains even if we come up with the most sophisticated theodicy.

But one could also defend this ambiguity from God's perspective. If the ultimate goal of human existence is to seek and to find God on one's own terms, a certain level of ambiguity is needed. I take this to be one of the core motivations in Klaus von Stosch's work on reconciling divine agency with a theory of revelation and the problem of theodicy: As it stands, divine intervention (and let us now just take revelation as an additional version of divine agency), must not rule out doxastic freedom, which I would rephrase as the ability to come to belief in God based on a willful and deliberate decision (and not by force of any kind).[16]

However, I have to admit that this picture is still quite optimistic. If we approach the problem of evil from a rather existential side, we may as well say that we continuously have to look into an abyss of horrendous evils, which seriously casts doubts whether or not there are instances of divine intervention. One can even include this statement into a refined logical argument from evil. As Ken Perszyk and John Bishop have brilliantly put it: Given that there is an eschatological good end to the universe (created beings are meant to encounter) and given that the amount of evil is such that no greater good defense is able to conceptually cope with it, we might as well question the nature of God as being a rational and morally good agent.[17] If this conclusion is valid, we will have only three ways to escape: At the end of the day, you could either doubt that God

[16] Cf. von Stosch (2006: 152-174).

[17] Cf. Bishop & Perszyk (2011: esp. 122-123).

is rational or question divine goodness (and both strategies will come at high costs). Or you can question whether or not God should be described as an agent at all. And it is this insight which is one of the reasons why non-interventionist approaches are still around and kicking, although they might seem to be on life support in the meantime.

So far, I have offered two rather theological motives to be reluctant when it comes to talk about divine actions. If we take a look at Origen's version of the Trinity again, we would have reasons to say that the average notion of 'agency' does not help at all, because it is quite unable to capture the nature of the divine *modus operandi*. Regardless, whether you embrace Origen's concept of the Trinity or not, the overall question remains, in how far the divine nature precludes certain modes of operation and favors others. And if we refer back to the problem of evidence and ambiguity, we are, at least, left with the problem of criteria for identifying intervention. The Humean debate on miracles, as fallacious it might seem from a nowadays perspective[18] (although some hold that you will find some kernel of truth in Hume's way of approaching the religious problems of miracles[19]), admittedly had the advantage of providing us with a criterion of divine intervention: breaking the laws of nature or breaking out of what is perceived to be a regularity in nature. Instead, one could focus on some version of 'single causality' – as David Armstrong once put it[20] – and, at the same time, abandon the idea of breaking a law of nature, since single causality entitles us to have a purely nominalist account of laws of nature. In order to develop a concept of miracles, one would have to refer to specific powers of God, by which he is able to stop finite events in their execution of natural-causal dispositions and to alter the ordinary course of events. Indeed, I think this model is a probable narrative to describe the place of miracles in a post-Humean and a post-post-Humean world. Nevertheless, the evidentalist's question would kick in in terms of identifying these powers we take to be exceptional divine capacities. But even if we were to find such exceptional powers, you could not really rule out that those exceptional powers are part of the 'natural' world accessible only under certain circumstances, once you have given up the Humean idea of regularity and law. Why is it that exceptional powers displayed in exceptional situations unambiguously refer back to

[18] Cf. Johnson (1999).
[19] Cf. Fogelin (2003).
[20] Cf. Armstrong (1990: 204-210).

the Christian God? Again, we must not treat mystery for divine magic. Without referring to the nature of divine revelation (and the nature of what is revealed by divine revelation) we won't get a satisfying answer. Let us, for the sake of the argument, say that exceptional powers and situations are meant to serve as instances of revealing the divine nature as supremely good and benevolent. This won't get us very far, because the problem of theodicy, which is a necessary side-aspect of divine agency, will ultimately haunt us. How can we reconcile the apparently rare incidents, which (still not unambiguously) seem to glimpse at the nature of God with the horrendously dark side of the universe? It might be – at least from an existential perspective – a more plausible story to claim that divine agency is seriously bound by the autonomy of the universe. This does not categorically rule out divine presence, but makes it somehow dependent on what events in the universe and their constituents are 'willing' to display, i.e. if they are willing to serve as the intermediaries of divine agency or presence.

III. GOD AS THE ABSOLUTE CAUSE

Is there an argument available, which would help us to vote against direct divine intervention (without voting against any form of divine efficacy or agency tout court) – an argument that does not fall prey to the naturalistic prejudice which holds that the web of natural causes is closed or that there is a natural flux of events and causes that must not be violated? It seems that some parts of contemporary systematic theology are eager to sign off on naturalism much too early, so that their reluctance in accepting incidents of special divine action is crucially bound to a certain version of naturalism (which could be or has already been proven to be rather wrong).

But I think that there is an argument available and I am inclined to call it the Rahner-Schleiermacher view on divine action. Before I offer a certain interpretation of this view, it is necessary to point out that it has to be purified in order to get rid of its affiliations with some sorts of naturalism or naturalistic determinism. I think that this affiliation is not required to keep the values of the argument, but that this purification will rather give us a reason to stick to the core of the argument.

In his *Grundkurs des Glaubens,* Karl Rahner raises the question whether there can be some kind of immediacy in relation to God.

If there is no such thing as an immediate/unmediated relation to God, then whatever we say about divine action has to be conceived in a way that does not simply cross out the position of finite beings vis-a-vis God. Therefore, Rahner emphasizes that God must not replace the role of finite beings and finite causes in contexts of causal efficacy.[21] Instead, God is the transcendental ground and horizon of every being, of every act of being and knowing. So, the connection between God and finite beings is a relation which is (exclusively?) an encounter between the transcendental horizon of being on the one side and the concrete, finite entity on the other side. The picture of special divine agency you might get from Karl Rahner looks more or less like this: Any form of special divine action is nothing else but the becoming concrete of the transcendental relation between God as the absolute ground and the finite entities. The possibility of becoming concrete is already a feature built into the layout of the world. And we find this feature, for instance, whenever we encounter the openness of the material world towards the mental. We see it at work when consciousness arises in the physical universe or when self-conscious persons open themselves up towards experiencing God, who is the ultimate horizon of experience.[22] In other words: Karl Rahner holds that God as the 'transcendental source' (ground/cause) of all being cannot intervene directly into the course of the world because of his nature as being the transcendental source of everything. Thus, so-called intervention would be possible only in a mediated way: through events or especially through persons that have the capacity of making or becoming aware of the transcendental relation to God.

A comparable approach can be found in Schleiermacher[23]: He seems to have two main concerns. The first concern refers to the idea that

[21] Cf. Rahner (1976: 91): "Die Unmittelbarkeit zu Gott kann, wenn sie überhaupt nicht von vornherein ein absoluter Widerspruch sein soll, nicht davon abhängen, daß das Nicht-Göttliche schlechterdings verschwindet, wenn Gott nahekommt. Gott braucht als er selber nicht dadurch einen Platz zu finden, daß ein anderes, das er nicht ist, den Platz räumt. Denn mindestens einmal das Anwesen Gottes als des transzendentalen Grundes und Horizontes alles Seienden und Erkennenden (das doch auch einen Ankunft Gottes, einen Unmittelbarkeit zu ihm ist) geschieht ja gerade durch und in der Gegebenheit des endlichen Seienden."

[22] Cf. Rahner (1976: 96).

[23] Cf. Schleiermacher (1830/31, part I: 240-241): "Indem nämlich dasjenige nicht erfolgt, was durch die Gesamtheit der endlichen Ursachen dem natürlichen Zusammenhange gemäß erfolgt sein würde; so wird eine Wirkung verhindert, und zwar nicht durch den Einfluß anderer auf natürliche Weise gegenwirkender und auch im Naturzusammenhang

God might serve as some sort of overriding cause. The second worry, however, is related to the causal closure of natural events, which seems to exclude any supernatural intervention. While the second concern is highly problematic – because it seems to give in to some sort of unfounded metaphysical naturalism too easily – the first worry is much more interesting and much more relevant to us. We can phrase Schleiermacher's first concern like this: It is a problem, if God brings about event *e* that should otherwise have been brought about by a mundane cause *c*, because in this case God takes the job of a mundane cause. The problem continues if you imagine that God stops the occurrence of event *e**, which otherwise would have been be brought about by mundane cause *c* (if *c* would have worked properly). In the latter case, God blocks the effect of cause *c*. So, if God intervenes into the course of the world, God either *replaces*, *blocks* or *overrides* the efficiency of *c*. Apparently, Schleiermacher thinks that 'blocking is mocking' while 'enhancing the powers of mundane causes equals cheating'. Therefore, Schleiermacher has serious troubles with the notion of special divine action. But why is this even a problem, since blocking or overriding is pretty much what any agent performing a deliberate action has to do in any case?

Maybe the idea of a causal nexus between purely natural causes is still at work here, because Schleiermacher thinks that natural causes contribute to the fact that nature will run its course, if left untouched. Within this order, natural and finite agents have a well-determined role and possess well-limited powers. Thus, Schleiermacher considers special divine intervention to be an annihilation of the course of events, which happened beforehand. However, this only makes sense if we presuppose that the causal or nomic web of finite properties and powers is necessarily closed. But, of course, we do not have to accept this presupposition.

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gegebener, endlicher Ursachen, sondern ohnerachtet alle wirksamen Ursachen zur Hervorbringung dieser Wirkung zusammenstimmen. Alles also, was von jeher hiezu beitrug, wird gewissermaßen vernichtet, und statt nur ein einzelnes Übernatürliches mitten in den Naturzusammenhang hineinzustellen, wie man es eigentlich will, muß man den Begriff der Natur ganz aufheben. Die positive Seite ist nun die, daß etwas erfolgen soll, was aus der Gesamtheit der endlichen Ursachen nicht zu begreifen ist. Aber indem dieses nun als ein wirksames Glied mit in den Naturzusammenhang eintritt, so wird nun in alles Zukunft alles ein anderes, als wenn dieses einzelne Wunder nicht geschehen wäre; und jedes Wunder hebe nicht nur den ganzen Zusammenhang der ursprünglichen Anordnung für alle Zukunft auf, sondern jedes spätere Wunder auch alle früheren, sofern sie schon in die Reihe der wirksamen Ursachen eingetreten sind."

Now, are we entitled to give Schleiermacher some credit? I am inclined, as indicated above, to reread Schleiermacher's worries differently – in a way that steers away from the highly problematic notion of causal closure. Instead, we should connect Schleiermacher's intuition to the notion of *divine providence*, which is the ultimate source of a natural order of causes and events as well as of features and powers built into the natural order:

(1) Imagine that based on divine intervention the actual world w@ turns out to be identical to w**, while, without divine intervention, it would have been identical to w*.

(2) On its own, world w@ would be identical to w*. In realizing w** by interfering with the course of events in w@, God expresses dismay and disapproval towards w*.

(3) The expression of dismay is rather a 'moral annihilation' of the dignity of the world w* that would have been identical to w@.

(4) Having foreknowledge, God could have known right from the start that w@ would turn into w* and that this provokes his expression of disapproval. Therefore, he could have equipped the entities building up the substance of the actual world with features which secure that w@ will always turn into w**.

Schleiermacher has a point, if we rephrase his intuitions in terms of divine fore-knowledge and the pre-creational approval of the world God is going to actualize. Then Schleiermacher's concerns are, as it stands, at the very heart of the classic notion of divine providence: If God does have some sort of serious fore-knowledge and if he is pre-creationally aware of the intended course of the world which he approves, special divine intervention does not seem to be necessary.[24]

But there is something else that can be found in Schleiermacher's view, which connects Schleiermacher back to the position I have outlined and associated with Karl Rahner: The status of God as an absolute cause seems to prevent God from acting in an intermediate and direct way, i.e. in a way that makes God's agency comparable to human agency.

[24] It is important to note that once you have a strong notion of providence you don't actually need the occurrence of miracles. Cf. Hebblethwaite (1978: 224): "Divine providence is distinguished from miracle by the fact that in providence God is supposed to act in and through natural agencies to bring about his purposes and specifically not in the gaps between them."

Furthermore, the notion of a causal order, which has been established by God based on divine providence, seems to confront God with the problem of *causal overdetermination* in case God would want to replace, override or block natural causes, which are in place. Let us take a closer look at the issue of absolute causes. If we isolate the more important aspects of this idea in Rahner's and Schleiermacher's writings, we can identify three main theorems, which serve as a backbone to this view:

(1) If *x* is the absolute cause of *y,* it cannot serve as a relative/finite cause of *y* simultaneously. [from 1) *seems* to follow: If God is always the absolute cause of *y* he can never be the relative/finite cause of anything.]

(2) If *x* is the absolute cause of *y* and if *y* is the relative/finite cause of *z,* then *x* must be the absolute cause of *z* either.

(3) If *x* is the absolute cause of *y* and if *y* is brought under the 'influence' of *z* (in case *z* is an ideal, a universal etc.), then *x* must be the absolute cause of *z*.

According to this view, to be an absolute cause means to serve as an ultimate cause of being. Nevertheless, one might simply ask whether this notion of absolute causation, which offers the above-mentioned distinction between absolute and finite causes, rests on a simple dogma. It seems, as if the grammar of this distinction is tied to the assumption that there is a crucial metaphysical difference between absolute and finite causes. Apparently, this is also echoed in the notion of finite causes, although it is quite hard to define what Rahner as well as Schleiermacher exactly mean by finite causes in particular. If we say that finite causes are such that they are part of the natural order of causation, we might as well get stuck into a vicious cycle. Instead, I would like to introduce the following explications:

(a) A finite cause is finite *iff* it can be represented by a set of states of affairs whose number isn't infinite.

(b) A finite cause is finite *iff* it explanatorily depends on another entity.

It is easy to see that – based on those terms – God cannot play the role of finite causes because of his very own infinity as well as his aseity. But we still have to add another ingredient:

(c) Any event *e* that originates within the world needs a *causa efficiens* that serves as its relative/finite cause.

The idea, which is expressed in c), states more or less that within the order of the world the composites of the world display a certain signature (as being finite). In such a situation an absolute cause would be a serious disturbance of the whole layout of the created world. And this might as well be the reason why Schleiermacher talks about the risk of 'annihilation': How can it be the case that some sort of causation, which doesn't fit the parameters of the created world, enters the created world without overwriting the above-mentioned signature and without mocking the dignity of finite entities? That infinity – in God's case – might be a problem for divine interaction can also be accessed by some kind of weak analogy: Just imagine that the world fulfills the above mentioned requirements for non-finite causes. An eternal world would be something like an infinite collection of events. Does it make sense to think that the world as a whole works as a finite cause to bring about certain effects? Presumably not.

Now let us turn to the problem of causal over-determination. Overdetermination can be described as a subspecies of redundant causation:

> *Redundant causation* occurs whenever there are multiple actual distinct events *c1*, *c2*, ... , *cn*, *e*, such that each *cj* without the other *c*s would cause *e*. For simplicity I focus on the case with just two redundant factors, *c1* and *c2*. In such a case, *preemption* (asymmetric redundancy) occurs whenever just one of the *c*s actually causes *e*; *overdetermination* (symmetric redundancy) occurs whenever both of the *c*s are causally on par with respect to *e*.
>
> So when two vandals throw rocks that simultaneously shatter the window, there are three actual distinct events: *c1*, the throwing of one rock; *c2*, the throwing of the other rock; and *e*, the shattering of the window. Here *c1* and *c2* are redundant causes of *e*. And since both *c1* and *c2* are causally on par with respect to *e* (neither rock arrives first, or knocks the other off course, etc.), *c1* and *c2* are overdetermining causes of *e*.[25]

Within the framework of divine agency, the problem of over-determination is based on a crucial premise: The risk of over-determination arises only if we consider a certain event *e* that would have been caused by a mundane cause anyway. So, imagine that God allows the world to run its course (free agency included while giving God some sort of middle knowledge in order for him to know what is going to happen). If God wants to bring about the event *e* knowing fully well that event *e* will

[25] J. Schaffer (2003: 23).

occur "anyway" (thanks to the course of events and the agency of free agents God knows about ...) and if he affirms or approves it, it would mean overdetermination to put in an additional divine volition (if this is a divine basic action) or to perform a divine basic action to bring *e* about or to display supernatural powers to bring *e* about. As you can see, the over-determination warning within the area of divine agency rests on a very strong presupposition which says:

(A) Every event *e* God *wants* to be brought about is *capable* of being brought about and (actually) *will* be brought about by mundane/finite causes anyway.

But, of course, we can still question whether A) is acceptable. What could be the reasons that support A)? One reason would be to insist on the autonomy of the created world. However, this is just not enough – not just because the notion of autonomy is ambiguous, but rather because one might wonder whether autonomy is indeed valuable from God's point of view. Instead, a strong notion of providence might help us here. Therefore, we need a modification of A) that looks presumably like this:

(B) Every event *e* God *wants* to be brought about is *capable* of being brought about and (actually) *will* be brought about by mundane/finite causes anyway, *iff* the occurrence of *e* is part of an order of events established by divine providence (right from the start).

This idea, however, would not be applicable in cases in which *e* is not part of a foreseen course of events or of a certain order of events. But given divine providence, we will have to ask whether or not some event *e* can literally be outside God's providence.[26] Let us assume, just for the time being, that certain outcomes of libertarian free will (on the side of creation) are not within the range of divine providence (although from a Molinist point of view God would not be surprised by the occurrence of these events). It might as well be assumed that even direct divine

[26] I will take it that open theists will strongly disagree with this idea. The broader question is whether or not providence is a required divine attribute. Of course, the notion of providence is another burden added to the problem of theodicy. However, as Perszyk and Bishop have shown, the open theist is not better off with regard to this very specific problem. If God has some serious foreknowledge, it is hard to reconcile his knowledge of the horrendous evils with his morally benevolent and loving character. But if God doesn't have any serious foreknowledge and just takes the risk of horrendous evils to come, this will not only undermine his moral character but also his position as a rational agent since it is downright irrational to bring about something unforeseeable 'at all costs'. See Bishop & Perszyk (2011: 116-119).

intervention cannot undo these outcomes of creaturely libertarian free will. Since these outcomes rest on indeterminacies, which God seems to have willingly put into the order of the created world, God can only overrule them at the cost of mocking, even annihilating creaturely freedom.

IV. DIVINE ASEITY

One very powerful divine attribute, which seems to demand a serious reconsidertation of how God acts and how he is related to the world, is divine *aseity*. We should understand divine *aseity* as the most radical form of independence. God does not depend on anything metaphysically and if he seems to depend on something, this is just a *prima facie* impression, which *ultima facie* cannot be true. So, any limitation God seems to have is brought upon God only and exclusively by himself. From this very notion of divine aseity we may derive the nature of the relation, which created beings have with respect to God. Whatever the different flavors of such a relation might be, it seems to be apparent that this relation must not cross out divine *aseity*, i.e. divine independence. It is also apparent that there is one prominent act of God, one instance of divine agency, which meets the standards of divine aseity at full length: *creation*. In creation, spelled out as *creatio ex nihilo*, there are no metaphysically robust relations established previously to the act of creation. Furthermore, creation is best approached as an instance of David Armstrong's singular causality, because the event of creation is singular by itself. Before and at the moment of creation, there is no chance of referring to laws and regularities, because apart from God there are no further entities having any properties or displaying any dispositions, which could serve as truthmaker of regularities we are willing to detect.

The creation-mode of activity keeps divine aseity fully intact and, equally, asserts the full dependency of the created world. So, we can state as the basic signature of any finite entity:

(SFE) $\forall x$ (If x is not identical to God, or if x is not a proper part, attribute or aspect of God or of the divine essence $\rightarrow$ God contributes in the creation-mode to the existence of x as long as x exists).

My proposal at this point is that divine agency is predominantly and exclusively performed in creation-mode, if divine aseity has to be taken

seriously. I will also add the somewhat courageous (if not outrageous) idea that any additional form of divine agency would put God himself in the weird position of being guilty of causal overdetermination by himself.

To understand this, we need a somewhat more complex understanding of creation. In order to get there, I will make use of Brian Leftow's distinction between *initial creation* and *late creation*. Leftow starts out with a very basic notion of creation – pointing out that God provides the material mundane beings are made of. Let us just, for the time being, assume that the material substitutes of finite beings are what van Inwagen or Merricks call 'material simples'. Then we arrive at the following picture of creation:

> Simples make up *David*'s block of marble. If all of these were created, all *David*'s parts were created. If all parts or all stuff of *David* are created, God made all of *David* appear *ex nihilo*. By doing so he made a creating-*ex-nihilo* causal contribution to *David*: He made the creating-*ex-nihilo* sort of difference for *David* by providing all *David*'s matter *ex nihilo*. This is God's necessary but insufficient contribution to *David*'s appearance. Taken in terms of this, 'God created *David*' is a loose way to say that God created all of *David*, and the latter is a consequence of his making all of the universe begin to exist. [...] [I]n a slightly thicker sense of 'creates', God creates *David* with C's help, as C determines that it is *David* God creates, though God made His whole creative contribution to *David* by strict-sense creating all of the universe.[27]

However, this basic notion of creation is not satisfying. If we say that God is the creator of everything, his role has to be more robust and somewhat more important. So, Leftow continues:

> We can add to this first model to 'thicken' the sense in which God creates items that appear after the universe begins. Suppose, for example, that at the beginning or later, God creates *ex nihilo* some deterministic causal systems, primed to act. He foreknows all that they will bring about. Surely He fully intends some of it. (Perhaps He merely accepts some, as a foreknown but unintended price for effects He wishes: perhaps these effects are unavoidable given these creatures' natures.) By putting these systems in place primed to act as He intends, God causes them to bring about what He intends. So God works through such systems once they exist, even if He is not currently willing their results. So if God creates

[27] Leftow (2012: 15).

> such a system, He in a thicker sense creates things which appear by its deterministic workings: through it He arranges parts into wholes whose existence He intends. If God has created some deterministic systems *ex nihilo* and intends the existence of at least some things He knows that they will bring to exist, God late-creates some items this way.[28]

But even this picture is not satisfying in every respect. The very last step would be to throw in some devices that safeguard the freedom of creatures, which are endowed with some kind of significant free will:

> If God led Michaelangelo to carve as he did, God in this thick sense made David through him. The system consisting of God, Michaelangelo, and the rest of C is not deterministic, but it is close enough to being so to let us say that God creates through Michaelangelo.
> These additions yield a second model: God as remote and creatures as proximate causes of late creation. On this model, both God and creatures act in ways that guarantee an effect; that is, are individually sufficient for it. God 'late-creates' only through creatures.[29]

However, we have to add that the distinction between initial creation and late creation makes sense from a finite perspective only. If God is eternal, initial creation and late-creation happen at the very same instance for him, within *the one eternal now*. Thus, we might as well assume that initial creation and late-creation are just two aspects of one and the same action, since no sequence of time is available to God to discriminate and distinguish different instances of activity. So, if late-creation is just a metaphor to describe from a human and temporal perspective what seems to be some sort of a later appearance (but within God's context this would not be correct, since creation and late-creation are simultaneous and happen in one eternal "now"), we may introduce a *transitive* notion of creation. But what can we gain from a transitive notion of creation for the case of divine agency?

Imagine a slightly enriched picture of initial creation and late creation, adding some further ingredients to Leftow's approach. This way we can put some flesh to the bones of a *transitive notion of creation*. For instance,

(1) if God creates the raw material of the universe,

(2) if God determines universals or laws or causally relevant properties and powers,

[28] Leftow (2012: 16).

[29] Leftow (2012: 16-17).

(3) if God creates finite agents,
(4) if God determines the essences of agents and grounds the counterfactuals of their freedom within those essences,
(5) and if one agent brings about event *e*,
(6) then God is related to this event *e* in the creation mode.

The problem of over-determination is couched in the question whether immediate divine action – imagine for the moment that it could, indeed, occur – could *do* anything further which would not already be provided by the creation-mode of divine action. Again, let us use our imagination: Imagine that God determined by creation mode that a certain event *e* will occur and additionally decides in a later-stage 'non-creation'-mode (displaying a specific instance of his will) that *e* will occur, then this would be a (strange) version of causal over-determination. For in this case, God would display two distinct volitions (one might add that this contradicts the doctrine of divine simplicity) aiming at the very same effect. So, what could God really add to the creation mode of bringing *e* about? Maybe the second volition is meant to truly secure the occurrence of *e* due to the fact that the creation mode might not be stable enough to do so (given the fact that the creation mode has to secure certain probabilities in order to have a place for created freedom).

Even if we neglect for the time being that the notion of an instable creation mode remains quite puzzling, we still have to face another serious problem: If *e* is an event that can be brought about by a free finite agent only, then God cannot bring it about – neither in the creation mode nor by (*ex hypothesi*) direct intervention – without literally destroying the nature of finite beings' free will. So, if everything that God is able to bring about, when he establishes the order of the world, can be brought about in creation mode, why would direct intervention still be necessary?

The only way how God could do anything beyond what is already done in creation mode would be to undo what he has installed in creation mode. Although it might be in accordance with the 'raw power' of divine omnipotence to replace finite causes, this very same ability might not be within the range of a divine omnipotence, which has confined itself further by a serious form of divine self-determination and limitation. In other words: Once God has established a certain order of being by creation mode it is hard to see why further intervention is really needed. If God has some sort of serious foreknowledge and is capable of providence, he is in a position to predetermine the particular course of events – at least

within a range of possible courses of events –, which finds his approval. If God has some form of middle knowledge, the possible outcomes of creaturely free will could be also part of his picture of the actual world. Again, the question arises why one needs additional divine intervention, which puts God himself into a position of causal overdetermination in presenting two colliding volitions aiming at the very same effect.

If we add, in applying Ramsey's insights to our current debates, that divine presence can be mediated by mundane causes, it is hard to see why the eternal God, who has installed a certain order of the world by creation-mode, cannot be present to a certain person seated in time. But, of course, one man's *modus ponens* is another man's *modus tollens*: My picture crucially depends on divine eternity and foreknowledge. If you want to have direct divine intervention, you might as well get rid of these attributes – and this is the move Open Theists would have to make.

Clearly the creation mode cannot and must not imply proximity with regard to immediate authorship or agency, because this would overrule the fact that finite beings can serve as the prima facie causal sources of certain mundane events. Nevertheless, God is related to every event *e* by creation mode. Based on middle knowledge God could have furnished the essences of agents in a way that order the counterfactuals of freedom for each event and every agent to an eschatologically good end. Based on a strong notion of providence we have to say that God has established the laws of nature (or the powers of finite beings) as well as the material the world consists of in a way that secures a course of the world which finds divine approval. Why would God still need specific and direct intervention – especially if we take into account that the outcome of finite free will must not be under the full control of God?

Well, this picture will still cast certain doubts, because it looks as if God is only indirectly involved in altering the course of events, when he has to create the material of the world, powers and properties, finite agents themselves and when he has to determine laws and essences etc. in order to 'late'-create a certain event. It seems that the material, the laws and the essences are very complex and intermediary means to the end and that they are either constituting divine agency or realizing some kind of creatio-continua-kind of activity. However, from a divine point of view, creation and late-creation are just two sides of one coin – ultimately based on a single divine volition, which unfolds into the continuing creation of the universe. Divine simplicity and eternity would give us, I assume, further reasons to embrace the creation-mode of divine action.

V. CONCLUSION

Of course, *causa efficiens* is not the best way to think about the impact God may have on the world. In my proposal, the *causa efficiens* mode of operating is reserved to the creation mode of agency in God's case, because this mode is the only way to preserve divine aseity.

I am quite intrigued by the idea (contemporarily presented by John Bishop and Ken Perszyk) that God predominantly (if not exclusively) serves as a formal and final cause to the universe. This could be a way to strengthen the model of divine economy as well as the notion of divine presence, which does not compete with a view that demands finite causes for finite effects. To make my point clear, I am inclined to refer to a common analogy: God as the formal cause of the universe could be seen as the soul of a body, which is the universe itself. This would give us a chance to identify mundane events as basic divine actions, if those events somehow respond to an attraction which is given to them by the formal cause. Furthermore we could also see the emergence of new features in the world as the result of the above-mentioned tendency towards supreme goodness and beauty, if those features are presuppositions of the occurrence of entities which realize ultimate goodness or ultimate beauty.[30] If God's nature is nothing less but supreme goodness, the attraction of goodness could be the pattern we need in order to identify divine activity in the world.

If we make use of this model, there might be additional benefits. We could, for instance, introduce the idea of a continuous incarnation of the divine. This very idea is not completely extravagant because you can find it in the writings of classic Christian theologians like Maximos Confessor.[31] Christopher Knight maintains that this view would allow us a 'pansacramental' approach[32], because it offers the prerequisites to

[30] Cf. Hebblethwaite (1978: 227): "There is also the *argument* that evolutionary theory cannot actually *explain* the appearance of new and higher levels of organization out of the interaction of lower levels. It is not a question of gaps. The descriptive evolutionary story is continuous. Higher levels have emerged out of the lower. We are not to suppose that additional items have surreptitiously been fed in. But the whole process leading from 'elementary patterns of energy to the limitless complexity of the physical instrument of Shakespeare's wit or Newton's genius' is not self-explanatory. We do not detect the Creator's hand at this point and at that. But the whole story manifests his providential work in and through the gradual complexification of organic life; for it manifests a teleology hard to deny."

[31] Cf. Knight (2005: 182-183).

[32] Cf. Knight (2005: 193).

understand incarnation as the process in which the universe gets closer to the nature of God and is in a progressively better position to display the very features of the divine nature, namely ultimate goodness and beauty. Of course, in order to get to this point we are relying on a very peculiar understanding of incarnation, which – alluding to Hegel – means the presence and realization of the infinite or ultimate within the finite universe. If you take this approach, indeed everything can become the medium which reveals and realizes divine presence. However, as a crucial criterion we would have to add that this only happens when the mundane entity is willing to be attracted and, therefore, shaped by the ultimate form which is the divine nature.

Let me add an additional note: Some theologians have introduced a very specific interpretation of quantum indeterminacy in order to offer a causal joint for divine action. But this is presumably misconceived as it runs into further problems[33]: If something is regarded as indeterminate, it still implies breaking a law of nature (or some kind of rule which is equivalent to a law of nature) if God starts messing around with the statistical probabilities in order to guarantee a certain outcome even if this messing around goes undetected for the human observer. Still, the whole story would be a case of some sort of heavy-weight divine interference, which seriously jeopardizes the dignity of the created order. Instead, we may very well interpret indeterminacies in nature as the dispositions God could have built into nature (by creation-mode) in order to let nature respond to the attraction of the formal cause. The patterns we would have to identify in order to talk about divine agency and activity are analogous to the patterns we detect once we find out that there is a serious difference between being a corpse and being a body owned by a person. If contemporary naturalism gives us the impression that humans are just parasites inhabiting a corpse, theism must come up with signs that the universe and its development resemble a lively organism.

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[33] Cf. Saunders (2000).

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