

THEOLOGY

A Thematic Compilation

By **Avi Sion** PH.D.

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Self-published through Lulu; CreateSpace & Kindle.

Website: www.TheLogician.net. E-mail: avi-sion@thelogician.net.

Theology can be freely read online at avisiontheology and in various other locations. It can be purchased in Amazon.com, Lulu.com and many other online booksellers.

The present document contains **excerpts** from this book, namely: The Abstract; the Foreword; the Contents; and Sample text (Chapter 1).

Avi Sion (Ph.D. Philosophy) is a researcher and writer in logic, philosophy, and spirituality. He has, since 1990, published original writings on the theory and practice of inductive and deductive logic, phenomenology, epistemology, aetiology, psychology, meditation, ethics, and much more. Over a period of some 28 years, he has published 27 books. He resides in Geneva, Switzerland.

It is very difficult to briefly summarize Avi Sion's philosophy, because it is so wide-ranging. He has labeled it '**Logical Philosophy**', because it is firmly grounded in formal logic, inductive as well as deductive. This original philosophy is dedicated to demonstrating the efficacy of human reason by detailing its actual means; and to show that the epistemological and ethical skepticism which has been increasingly fashionable and destructive since the Enlightenment was (contrary to appearances) quite illogical – the product of ignorant, incompetent and dishonest thinking.

Abstract

Theology is about God and Creation, or more precisely perhaps about our ideas of them, how they are formed and somewhat justified, although it is stressed that they can be neither proved nor disproved. This book is a thematic compilation drawn from past works by the author over a period of thirteen years.

Foreword

Some readers may find my occasional references to God in some of my works as misplaced. In this day and age, any reference to God is considered by many as necessarily apologetic and prejudiced. But I insist, my works are *secular and rational works of philosophy*. I simply refuse to be intimidated by ignorant pseudo-philosophers, who tell the masses that atheism is an established fact of 'science'. I consider myself a philosopher in the ancient and high tradition, which admits of no such fashionable dogma.

In this context, *theology* is admitted as a legitimate and noble field of open philosophical debate, in which theism and atheism are both given voice and must both argue their case rationally, though both may remain forever equally speculative. In my view, people who claim that atheism is scientific are as epistemologically pretentious as those who claim knowledge of the Divine by ordinary experience and reasoning. The role of philosophy here is merely to eliminate certain incoherent ideas, and so limit the field to a more limited number of respectable ones. Beyond that, all beliefs (including the atheistic) are personal faiths.

Contents

1. Chapter One	5
1. Logic and mysticism.	5
2. On natural proofs of religion.....	8
3. Theodicy and the Believer's Wager.....	17
4. Proof of God by analogy?	25
5. Disproofs of God?	27
2. Chapter Two.....	36
1. Nagarjuna's main arguments	36
2. Other issues raised	47
3. Buddhism and Theism	51
3. Chapter Three.....	56
1. Applying logical standards to theology	56
2. Conceiving the Divine attributes.....	61
3. Analyzing omniscience and omnipotence.....	68
4. Harmonizing Justice and Mercy	74
5. The formlessness of God.....	81
4. Chapter Four	85
1. Causation and volition	85
2. Necessity and inertia in causation.....	94
3. Direct and indirect volition	101
4. Matter-mind and spirit	106
5. Conceiving Divine volition.....	109
6. Spiritual Darwinism	114
7. Theological perspectives.....	117

5.	Chapter Five.....	126
1.	Two distinct endeavors	126
2.	Many people make claims	129
3.	How to decide?	132
4.	A word on Buddhism	134
5.	Evaluating claims.....	135
6.	Acknowledging science	139
6.	Chapter Six.....	141
1.	Interpretations of meditation.....	141
2.	The coexistence of the One and the many	150
3.	The individual self in Monism.....	156
4.	Already there.....	164
7.	Chapter Seven	169
1.	The idea of God	169
2.	The idea of creation	171
3.	Two acts of faith	173
8.	Chapter Eight	175
1.	About the soul.....	175
2.	About God.....	180
3.	Theology	186
	References.....	188

Sample text (chapter 1)

LOGICAL ASPECTS OF FAITH

1. Logic and mysticism

One of the difficulties in religious thinking is its categorical expressions of knowledge.

There exists a tendency, in the human mind, to confuse conceptual insight with perception, and view them as having the same degree of probability. However, whereas perception (and its derivatives, which we term 'empirical fact') has a rather high level of credibility (rarely is what we perceive, as such, in an as near as possible unprocessed form, found incorrect), conceptual consciousness has broader possibilities, as it includes the imaginary, which allows us to propose alternative scenarios, and therefore relatively less credibility, *ab initio*.

For the simple mind, which has not reflected on epistemological issues, the mere event of thinking of a conceptual scenario in answer to some query, is sufficient in itself to justify that scenario. No further evidence is needed, no checking procedure. Of course, this is an extreme case. A person practicing this approach to knowledge full time, would be most likely in a nuthouse, I presume. Rather, we all practice such shortcuts to knowledge, though to varying degrees, and in some cases in different domains.

The danger here, is to confuse *speculation* with knowledge in its finished state.

Every insight or belief is strictly-speaking a speculation, which may be right or may be wrong. After proper evaluation, which is itself to some extent speculative, we may be closer to the truth, and may with more confidence declare it to be right or wrong. Such evaluation consists in examining the perceptual and conceptual context, all known fact and insight, and judging its consistency with the proposed newcomer, the thesis under scrutiny, and considering the mutual impact of these blocks of information. Furthermore, the context is in non-stop flux, so that the evaluation must constantly proceed and recur, to remain accurate. Only thus can we be reasonably sure.

In the early stages of human development, whether historical or individual, we tend to be less careful in our evaluations of knowledge. More maturely, we must regard our alleged knowledge more critically and fairly, without prejudice one way or the other, more objectively and freely. If we fail to, we in the long run must needs succumb to doubt, the structure is bound to seem shaky eventually. If it is strong, it will withstand all tests; if it is weak, it might be strengthened, or else does not deserve respect. This is a challenge religion, too, must face, to survive.

Logic has no *in principle* objection to mysticism. It has no prejudice with regard to the eventual *content* of the world. What concerns logic is *the morphology and aetiology of our knowledge*, the forms and processes which gave rise to it. With regard to mysticism (the “Qabalah”), it would seem to constitute an attempt to conceive scenarios - which are speculations, at first sight, as far as logic is concerned - to explain certain phenomena or texts. Since the questions posed concern domains inaccessible to scientific investigation, the answers are, ultimately, inherently *unverifiable*, although some degree of confirmation, doubt, improvement or rejection may be possible.

In other words, there are propositions which are not likely to ever be proved right, or wrong, which may even be impossible to evaluate convincingly. They concern God, the Beginning of things, the End of days, and so on. They are beyond Man’s mind, because they are out of his mental reach or outside of his universe. Anything said about them, positive or negative, is purely speculative, from a normal human point of view. Even what is claimed Divinely inspired, though it may well indeed be so in reality, is viewed by logic as speculative; since *we*, ordinary people, when we hear such claims, are forced to consider the possibility that the speaker may not have been inspired, for instance. It is a stand-off.

We must neither reject offhand, nor be naive, but must do as much evaluation as possible, and still remain open at the end. This is to some extent implied by the Biblical laws of adduction. The fact that these laws are found in the Torah, testifies to the need for a certain degree of empiricism and exercise of the critical faculty. It is an admission that men (or women), by their nature, may confuse their imaginations and speculations with reality, and often come forth with unfounded claims of Divine inspiration. We are called upon to judge carefully.

Even within religion, if not especially in that realm, people can very easily err, and tend to accept the offerings of their conceptual faculty at face value. Which does not mean, let us make clear, that such error is inevitably or even usually implied within religion.

2. On natural proofs of religion

In discussing the logic in religious documents like the Bible or Talmud, we have had no occasion to consider what philosophers call “proofs of God”. The reason is simple: the pursuit of such proofs is not a religious phenomenon, at least not originally, but a concern of secular philosophy (specifically, the branch called theology). The Torah’s proofs of God are implied in the epiphanies and acts of God that it reports, like His appearance to Moses in the Burning Bush or His division of the Red Sea. When the prophets argue on God’s behalf, they do not use abstract philosophy, but refer to Biblical events which are taken for granted. Similarly, the Talmud takes off from the Biblical document without critically questioning its origin or contents. Nevertheless, nowadays theological discussions inevitably linger on natural proofs of religion. The modern mind requires it.

It must be said at the outset that there are no unassailable proofs of Judaism’s beliefs; nor are there disproofs. Every known argument, one way or the other, has a rebuttal. Unless we are each

personally and constantly in the Presence of God, we are bound to have to rely on *faith*; and lacking such experience, our reason also cannot with certainty deny its Object. The main characteristics we attribute to God in our thinking, our ‘definition’ of him as Existent, Unitary, Unique, Omnipresent, Omniscient, Omnipotent, Creator and Master of everything, perfectly just and merciful Judge, providential and gracious, and so forth, are all intellectual and emotional projections (constructions largely based on Torah data, to be sure), which ultimately depend on acts of faith.

These comments apply equally to Christianity, Islam, and other monotheistic religions. As for systems like Hinduism, Taoism or Buddhism, they too contain unprovable and undisprovable beliefs, like the idea of karma or the notion that liberation is possible (by means like meditation or whatever). In every religion, there are certain starting points, which one may choose to accept or refuse; logic becomes used in them only as from those points of departure.

Consider, first, the most natural of arguments in favor of belief in God. Looking around one at the world, one is bound to marvel at the miracle of *existence*, at the fact that *anything at all* exists, and furthermore at the degree of *variety, order and complexity* of what exists, not to mention the wonder of *our consciousness of all that*. This general miracle, which seen daily passes unnoticed, is surely more impressive than any particular miracle, like the Splitting of the Red Sea. Where did all this come from? It could not always have been there! Who made it happen? It is too fancy to have happened “by chance” and “*ex nihilo*” (even supposing the concepts of chance and nothingness at all meaningful)! Thinking thus, one may easily infer: yes! There must be a God, powerful and conscious to a very high degree, who created all this, the miracle of Nature.¹

However, convincing as this argument may seem², it is easily rebutted. For we can similarly argue that if this universe we experience is a marvelous thing, *how much more* marvelous is an Entity capable of creating it! Our initial argument posited God as an explanation of the surprising phenomenon before us; but upon reflection we must admit that we have thereby given ourselves an even more complicated problem to solve³. We could therefore argue: **if the world requires explanation, how much more so God; and if God requires no explanation, how much less so**

¹ This sort of intellectual pursuit of the First Cause, is found in Greek philosophy. One Talmudic version is the story in Midrash *Genesis Rabbah* (ch. 38), according to which the patriarch Abraham arrived to a knowledge of God by reasoning backwards from each thing to its cause. The argument has often, in philosophy, been understood as based on the idea that everything has a cause, therefore so must the universe have one; but such an idea is consistent only if we accept that of infinite series, which is rather difficult to accept, and which in any case if accepted would exclude acceptance of a first cause. The version more commonly found today appeals rather to the need to explain the improbable *fact* and *richness* of existence; it refers to complexity as much as to causality.

² And I can testify that there have been times in my life when this has been the only convincing argument I had left to offer myself!

³ As for the belief, found in Hinduism and Christianity, that God has appeared in human form (incarnation), it does not merely present a more difficult technical problem; it is rather an unconscionable concept: how can a container contain itself? If at all, such appearance would have to be postulated as a projected illusion, a sort of holograph, at best; it cannot be proposed as a ‘real’ material body like that of human beings.

the world. In brief, our intervention has only been briefly satisfying; the initial problem remains essentially unsolved; if we achieved anything, it was to complicate matters further.

Thus, whether we refer to the existence as such of the world as a whole (positing a cosmological argument) or to the variety, order and complexity of its parts (a teleological argument), the logical impact of such ontological arguments is identical - nil. We may through such reasoning make the interesting discovery that matter may have been created *ex nihilo* by a spiritual Being, but that does not provide us with a *final* explanation of things. The existence and power of the Creator remain a formidable mystery⁴. In any case, note well, such neutralization of the argument does not prove anything against the idea of God; it merely signifies that the proposed course of reasoning is not logically conclusive.

An alternative philosophical approach to the issue, is epistemological rather than ontological. We may ask the question: what *would* in principle constitute definite proof for or against each of the tenets of religion; what would it take to convince us firmly? For instance, with regard to the existence of God, one might assume that some manifestation of Divinity, such as a great light or a very unnatural occurrence, would firmly convince any empiricist.

However, it is conceivable that even under such conditions, once the surprise is over and one has had a chance to think again, one may even doubt one's vision! Normally, we do not doubt any experience unless we have cause to, due to some conflicting experience; however, the intellect is always capable of skepticism and might be able to find some excuse for it even under the conditions stated⁵. We may consider this scenario as acceptable to the Torah, since we know from within it that even after witnessing extraordinary events such as the Exodus from Egypt or the Giving of the Torah at Sinai, there were individuals who evidently, as their deeds demonstrate, had doubts concerning the reality or significance of these events.

With regard to the characteristics of God we have mentioned, other than Existence, the following comments may be made. Most of these concepts encapsulate some logical perplexity. How may God have many attributes and powers and yet be one? Some, like Maimonides, try to bypass the

⁴ Note that the argument is often misconstrued as an attempt to explain matter. But it is not so, essentially; for the mind (consisting of the stuff of our inner experiences and the soul we seem to have) is just as fascinating an enigma, if not more so. The problem is more broadly: *existence*. In this perspective, we may say that Judaism, which conceives of an eternal spiritual God, preceding and outlasting all matter, and Aristotle, who conceives of an everlasting universe, including God and matter, are basically in agreement with regard to the eternity of existence as such (for the former, with regard to God's existence only; for the latter, more broadly). This is ironic, considering how some commentators present these doctrines as in radical conflict; they are in disagreement, but only in relation to the issue of matter's longevity. A truly radical counter-thesis is the claim that existence suddenly appeared spontaneously out of non-existence; some people apparently believe that. But the way the latter thesis is 'imaginable' should be noted: we visualize the event like a cartoon on TV, the screen is at first empty, then 'pop!' a universe appears from nowhere; however, there is a screen to begin with, and there may be invisible events behind the screen.

⁵ Hypotheses circulated in recent years to explain the Sinai experience include, for instances, references to psychotropic substances, or technological gadgets, or visiting extraterrestrials.

issue, by saying, His oneness is something different from the unity of any thing in the natural world, it is unique; or, by claiming (contrary to the Torah's practice) that we can only describe God by means of negative propositions, saying what He is not (not plural, not finite, etc.). But these are artifices, which do not really resolve the paradoxes. God as both transcendent and immanent, the uncreated creator and unmoved mover of everything, all-knowing with an inner and outer perspective, all-powerful with unsurpassable control of events - all these concepts are *extrapolations of natural powers and events to an extreme degree*, but we have no experience of them nor capacity for it.

How can a human, not him/her self knowing everything, *know* that God knows everything; how can a human, in whose experience all powers are finite, *know* of an agent of will capable of doing anything it wants? At best, what is involved is a Walt Disney imagination, without attention to detail. The definitions of such limitless concepts are unavoidably *mere juggling of words*, they refer to nothing we have real knowledge of. Indeed, the concepts are *fraught with logical problems*. Can an omniscient being conceivably know that he is omniscient? he can only assume it, for there may well be something beyond his ken he is not aware of⁶. Does omnipotence include the capacity for self-creation ex-nihilo? the idea is unconscionable. How are we to conceive God as being everywhere, the being and sustainer of being of all material, mental and spiritual existents, the container of the whole universe, and yet somehow not get into pantheism, as did Spinoza?

And so forth - my purpose is not here to exhaust the issues, or cause loss of faith, but merely to point out that any attempt to rationalize our standard ideas about God is a display of naivety. Better to humbly acknowledge the difficulties involved and our reliance on faith.

To conclude this topic, then, we must say that reason can order and make consistent our thoughts concerning God and other religious beliefs, but it can never definitely prove them. It is vain to seek actual proof. There is no escape from the necessity of *emunah*, faith. Faith is essential to freedom of will and moral responsibility: if the moral act is done under the compulsion, as it were, of mere logic, the human being loses his special status as decider. To say this, is not to provide a sort of transcendental proof of religion - but is merely an explanatory perspective, proposed from within religion, after its acceptance. The undecided are not logically compelled by it, but are still free to choose for themselves whether **to believe or not to believe**.

Furthermore, it must be noted that proof of God would in no way entail proof of the rest of religion. Given that God exists, there still remains the issue as to *which religious document, if any*, is to be relied on as God's message to us. Is it to be the Torah, the Gospels, or the Koran, or the Baghavad-Gita, for that matter? An additional act of faith is required here too! Furthermore, granting the

⁶ Of course, *by definition* (deductively) an in-fact omniscient being knows his omniscience. But the problem is at the inductive level, gradual development. More needs to be said on this and similar issues.

choice of the Written Torah as a whole (in our case)⁷, a *multitude* of additional acts of faith are required to believe in the Oral Law (the Talmud and subsequent Rabbinic developments). *Every* law, attitude and story in the Bible and subsequent religious literature, is a complex of separate beliefs, requiring a new act of faith. Washing the hands in the morning, the *nidah* going to the *mikveh*, as much as belief in invisible entities (like angels), acts (like Divine judgment) and domains (like the World-to-come) are bundles of acts of faith.

The demand for proof of God becomes, in this perspective, merely the beginning of an infinite process. If we awaited the answers, refusing faith, we would never find the time to enter religion...

3. Theodicy and the Believer's Wager

In any case, in practice (we must keep insisting on this point), people do not become religious on account of rationalistic arguments, but for more visceral motives. Good philosophy tries to abstain from extreme rationalism, and while it tends to frown on confused anarchism, it is open to considerable speculation and intuition. But religion allows the irrationalism in us, our instinctive deeper yearnings and emotional responses, greater freedom. This is, I think, its human dimension; it makes us more than machines.

To be sure, the extremes of religion, 'fundamentalism', or more precisely 'integrism'⁸, are to a large extent products of an excessive rationalism (in a pejorative sense of the term - it is the rationalism of simpletons), which explains the severity they have historically very often implied (their expressions, particularly the violence, are of course irrational).

What makes people religious in practice are banal things like hope for happiness on earth (which is gradually transmuted into hope for life in a thereafter), hope for better human relationships, hope for understanding, love, harmony, a woman or man, children; also, the release from fears, protection from the hardships of life, and of death, release from guilt and from uncertainty, absolution and guidance. (These are very broad brushstrokes, but you know what I mean.) Religion makes promises and threatens, capturing ready victims and then spinning an ever tighter web

⁷ Which is not an easy feat, in view of its lack of system (why would God's historic statement to humanity be so disorderly, so 'unprepared?'); and the many apparent inaccuracies and inconsistencies in it (those noted by the Rabbis, and those ignored by them); not to mention the disproportionately large place given to apparently minor matters, while major issues are glossed over or totally ignored. But a critique of the Torah is not in order, here: the present work takes it, as much as possible, as the point of departure.

⁸ *L'integrisme*, a French word which seems to be becoming English. It is handy because it describes the total empire religion may have on its adherents, dragging them into ever more demanding commitment. Its connotation is, however, especially political; the terrorist tactics of various Islamic fanatics or absolute theocracy of Iranian *ayatollahs* (clergy), which we currently witness daily in the news, sadly come to mind. The term is still accurate in this context, suggesting totalitarianism, the desire of some to have *everyone* else follow their path and to control *all* aspects of their lives. 'Fundamentalism' rather indicates the level of *text* the adherents refer to for their beliefs; i.e. a certain naive and superficial approach to textual exegesis. Behind the intolerance, which is also to be found to some extent in today's Jewish world, is the severity towards self seemingly demanded by religion (and other puritanisms): this is what causes us to look at others with hardness.

around them, with expert moves and the help of its victims themselves (these words may sound harsh, disillusioned; but this is a view, which has some truth). Religion has psychology, it knows what moves people.

The human being has his or her own intuition of justice. It is not in all people identical nor of equal intensity, but it is the source of their ability to at all grasp the concept. This personal intuition of justice may be influenced, one way or another, by religious or other doctrines - cultural influences may cause a rationalistic or even forcible reconstruction of the instinct in an individual - but epistemologically it precedes them and antecedes them. The concept of justice, then, is in all individuals the result of a compromise between personal insight and socio-cultural pressures, whose power over the individual depends on the particular combination of desires, fears and guilts which at a given time determine his or her susceptibility.

All this has apparently little to do with God, but rather more to do with psychology and sociology! But in truth, since religion takes up so firmly the idea of God, we tend to associate the two, and usually think distancing ourselves from the former necessitates distancing ourselves from the latter. Belief in God is theologically conceivable without belief in a religion; many people have tried to opt for this middle ground. But in practice the link is rather strong. Resistance to religion arises to the extent that, or as of when, the promises or threats it makes are regarded as empirically untenable.

What is it we expect from God when we ask him for justice and mercy? *Justice*: that we and our loved ones be rewarded for our good deeds and that our enemies be punished for their bad deeds and be deprived of graceful gifts. *Mercy*: that we and our loved ones be given gifts of grace and be forgiven for our bad deeds. When our hearts feel generous, we understand that God may reward good deeds of our enemies and occasionally forgive their bad deeds. All this is a basic instinct of humans. On this basis we may pray for our protection, our sustenance, our happiness, and so forth.

Of course, the concepts involved in such general or specific prayers are complex. There are many aspects, levels and degrees to them.

Good and bad may be spiritual, mental, physical, emotional - or political, social, economic or environmental or even esthetic; and may be so to various degrees, directly or indirectly, and categorically or conditionally. One may cause good or bad to God's designs, or to oneself, to other people (individually, in groups or as a species), or even to animals or vegetation (individually, in groups or as species)⁹. Furthermore, there may be harmonies and conflicts between all these

⁹ With regard to the mineral world, the issue is debatable. We ordinarily consider concepts of good or bad as applicable to such objects only in relation to living creatures, or eventually to God. One might however say, more absolutely, that the destruction of even a stone, is "bad" for it, or that a gem or a work of art or a technological marvel has an intrinsic "value" as an apogee of the universe. But within such a notion, there would be no degrees or conditions. The good of a thing would be its unchanged existence; bad for it would be any modification in its being, at which point it would be *another* thing, which in turn would have only either-or value-relations to events. As for God, Whom we conceive as indestructible, and even unchanging (although a Free Agent of change), the concepts of good or bad are inapplicable to Him personally; at most we can say that whatever He wills is good, and whatever He wants us (to whom He has allotted some measure of choice) to will - is good, and not-to-will - is bad.

domains - they impinge on each other, naturally and logically, in various ways, and hierarchies must be set up or identified. Additionally, our perceptions come into play: the objective status of a value or disvalue is often moot or irrelevant, and our subjective intuitions of them may have more impact.

Likewise, friends and enemies may be real or imagined. These notions basically refer to the benefit or harm other people cause us (in the various ways just mentioned). But motives and emotions are involved in such evaluations: issues of love, hatred or indifference, sincerity or insincerity, on both sides. There are friends or enemies in fact (by virtue of objective impact) and those of intention (referring to whether they affect us one way or the other deliberately, incidentally or by accident).

We assume and hope God, the Judge and Arbitrator, sorts all these factors out, and delivers and enforces a fair decision.

Appeal to God presupposes a belief in good and bad. Zen will say that good and bad are linked, and its adepts try to see the world neutrally, without such dualist concept. It is true that the *thought* of good automatically gives rise to the *thought* of bad - or at least, absence of good - by way of *outline and contrast*. Logically, the concepts can be grounded in relation to a standard of value, which merely 'passes the buck' to some arbitrary norm, unless universal values can be identified. But actually, within human beings, these concepts, good and bad, are very difficult to pinpoint; they are vague, variable, and often inconsistent. It is more in the way of an instinct, or at best an intuition of appearance, that we conceive good or bad to apply to something. This is one of the peaks of our conceptual faculty, this discerning of the unwordable, but no less valuable than sense perception. It is the dignity and decency of humans.

In relation to God, what humans seek, and what makes them enter and practice religion, is a set of rules to the game of life, which, if they adhere to them and perform certain things (in the largest sense), it will be well with them as they wish; and if they do not, they may expect negative consequences. It is *a deal* we want to believe in, and are willing to pay for (whether or not we admit our mercantilism). It is a rationalist demand for a comprehensible world in which good and bad are each put in its place. Religion comes along and promises just that, an orderly causality (this is in the case of theist religions - in the case of religions like Taoism and Buddhism the offer is different, an escape by transcendence from the good-bad dichotomy). One accepts the doctrine hopefully, and *tries to perceive the world in the prescribed way* so as to obtain solace.

Difficulty may arise after a long apprenticeship, when one finds that the rules we were promised do not hold, and the sequences of good and bad in our lives, whatever they be for each individual, do not necessarily adhere to the promised program¹⁰. At this point, religion proposes transcendental

¹⁰ In this context, it is worth quoting George Santayana (d. 1952): "Fanaticism is described as redoubling your effort when you have forgotten your aim". It is clear that not everyone reevaluates their ideological loyalties.

domains - heaven and hell¹¹. A perception of events contrary to the expectations raised by the religion, together with a conviction of having played the game by the rules, may cause a breakdown of faith and the abandonment of religion, or parts thereof. But a vacuum remains, if the world continues to seem irrational - a need for fair-play unfulfilled.

The *Believer's Wager*¹² is that God exists, and that his or her particular choice of Religion (or even his/her personally designed religion, or variant of an established Religion) is the correct one for himself or herself. It is a wager, because the refusal to make a leap of faith, is itself a leap of faith, into something which must be evaluated too:

- What if my religion is **true**, and I abstain from following it - will I get hurt and/or will I miss goodies?
- And what if my religion is **false**, and I do follow it - will I mess up my life and/or will I waste it?
- What of **other** belief-systems on the market - how do they compare, in terms of credibility and efficacy?

There is a wide-ranging calculus in the decision, which may be referred to as the essence of *theodicy*, but ultimately *some* leap of faith remains unavoidable, in whatever direction it be.

4. Proof of God by analogy?

I heard Geneva's Rabbi Marc Raphaël Guedj recently argue, in a sermon, that "just as Man's soul sees but is not seen, so God sees but is not seen". I have seen a similar argument in Rabbinic literature before, or perhaps it was the simpler proposition that God is to the world what the body is to the soul¹³. This is of course an argument *by analogy*. However, it should be noted that the analogy is *imperfect*, since we regard God as creating the universe whereas we do not regard Man's soul as creating his body¹⁴.

In any case, we see from the above objection that, as I have always argued, though analogy is not in itself erroneous, it is rarely if ever conclusive. The analogy admittedly carries some conviction, but this must be weighed against the points of difference. There are always differences—otherwise the things compared would not be two but one! The issue is to estimate the significance of the

¹¹ Incidentally, the idea of hell is said to have originated in Zoroastrianism, a dualist religion of the 6th cent. BCE which still has adherents. See Roberts, p. 169.

¹² This is called *Pascal's Wager* in histories of philosophy; but since I thought of it independently and I am sure others have, and a more descriptive name seemed worthwhile, I have renamed it.

¹³ Which argument is, incidentally, found in Indian philosophy, specifically in Ramajuna (1100 CE). (See Ferm, p. 15.)

¹⁴ And in fact I doubt that the view that God is in a similar relation to the world as Man's soul is to his body is strictly kosher; it could be interpreted as a sort of pantheism, which the Rabbis dislike.

differences. In the above case, as all will admit, our concepts of God and Man do not merely differ in scale.

Also, before we try to infer God from Man, we must more deeply consider whether our concept of Man is knowledge or theory. We (myself included) assume that Man has a ‘soul’ on the basis of the fact of consciousness: phenomena do not just manifest themselves, but they seem to appear *to* someone—a Subject seems logically required, which experiences things. Nevertheless, many people (in particular, Buddhists) deny this inference, and emphasize the transparency of the ‘soul’, its lack of concrete manifestations, to conclude that the existence of the ‘soul’ is an illusion.

Furthermore, solipsism remains a philosophical possibility (though not one I personally incline towards). I, the Subject, perceive some things closest to my apparent center of perception, which things I call ‘my body’; and I perceive (more wholly, though less intimately) other bodies beyond mine, which resemble mine and behave like mine; and from that I conclude that ‘there are other people out there’, i.e. entities who are conscious, and seemingly volitional, and emotive, in short who seemingly like me ‘have a soul’. But that inference, though a good working hypothesis, has no deductive certainty; it is still quite conceivable that the ‘other people’ I perceive are empty phantasms.

Clearly, these deeper doubts (though picky) make the argument by analogy we mentioned to start with even more tenuous. If Man’s soul is in doubt, it cannot be adduced very convincingly in support of a world soul (i.e. God).

5. Disproofs of God?

a. The counterargument I have given (chapter 14.1), that *if the world requires explanation, how much more does God require it*, is an excellent way to neutralize certain traditional proofs of God. A Being capable of creating a world as great and marvelous as this, has to be still greater and more marvelous; to posit such a Being increases rather than decreases theoretical difficulties, and therefore presents no logical advantage.

This is comparable to the well-known counterargument that *if the world requires a cause, then so does God*, for if the antecedent is based on the principle that everything requires a cause, then the consequent has to submit to the same principle. In other words, the idea that everything has a cause is a thesis that the causal chain is infinite; we cannot therefore consistently use it to justify a first-cause thesis. I believe we must admit of first causes within the world—for instance, in freely willed acts by humans (influences on whom do not constitute causes in the deterministic sense here used); in that case, the world may need no cause or may have as first cause a causeless God.

We can join and contrapose the two statements and say *if God requires no cause or explanation, nor does the world*. My counterargument is I think original, but finally merely a broadening of an

older counterargument¹⁵. In any event, these arguments do not disprove God, they merely neutralize alleged proofs of God; that is, they demonstrate that those so-called proofs are not conclusive.

b. I have said that you cannot conclusively disprove God, either. Sure, theodicy—since the Book of Job¹⁶—gives us ample reasons to doubt God, as we conceive Him through Judaism. *If God is perfectly just and full of love for His creatures, then how come terrible crimes are not prevented and innocent victims are not protected?* There is no excuse for such negligence¹⁷: if human freedom would have otherwise been impossible to create (as some argue¹⁸), there was still the option of not creating humankind at all (and regarding why we were created no plausible argument is found by anybody).

Such argument convinces many people that God does not exist, or at least that He is not as described by apologists, since there are evidently contradictions between the expectations raised by religion and historical and personal experience. Nevertheless, while powerful, such argument does not strictly disprove God: (i) What is just or unjust is sometimes if not always unclear or problematic; judges or jurors often disagree, for a variety of reasons. (ii) There may be hidden pathways to justice which in the long term restore the balance, as defenders of faith have often argued.

I am personally not greatly impressed by such defenses, for to (i) I would respond that only the (innocent) victim can decide whether it feels justly dealt with or not, if he/she is still alive and fit, and to (ii) I would respond that justice hidden or delayed is justice denied, the issue is prevention not mere cure. Nevertheless, we must grant that none of such arguments or counterarguments logically permits us to draw a decisive conclusion. Arguments from theodicy result in at best the improbability of the existence of God as we imagine Him (i.e. just and loving).

c. There is another old objection that puts God in serious doubt, or at least God as we conceive Him. It is: *if God is eternal, perfect, self-sufficient and satisfied, then He is immune* to any danger or desire, and therefore has no need or motive to create/destroy or pursue/avoid anything, no use for temporal things or events. God, alone, without need of others since complete, with nothing to fear since eternal, would not suddenly put in motion unnecessary turbulences in His unity, generating lies¹⁹ and suffering for no conceivable reason. He is not lonely or bored, nothing exists to affect Him or which is capable of doing so, so why would He bother?

¹⁵ Which I learned from Ayn Rand, but which I seem to remember Aristotle previously taught.

¹⁶ Incidentally, referring to my earlier comments concerning those who add insult to injury, and without cause accuse all victims of crime or misfortune of having somehow deserved it. It occurs to me that Job had said it already, in his complaints against the unfair and unkind accusations by his three friends (see also Ferm p. 61-62).

¹⁷ To argue that ‘God gives the criminal time to repent’ is absurd, since the victim is thus forgotten.

¹⁸ But I do not see why a timely destruction of Hitler and his ilk would have been a problem. Since the world is well able to exist for long periods without such horrors, it follows that human freedom does not require them.

¹⁹ When I speak of lies here, I mean that if existence is essentially unitary, then it follows that the world of plurality is all illusions, and created illusions are lies.

I think this points to a weighty contradiction. What it means is that the *hypothesis* that a God exists with such and such characteristics (eternity, etc.) is belied by the *empirical data* that a temporal world at all exists (quite apart from the lies and suffering in it). Thus, what we apparently have here in inductive terms is not mere reduction in probability and putting in doubt of a thesis, but its decisive rejection and elimination. The world is not only not a proof, but it is a disproof of God!

This counterargument is not new to philosophy, but I failed to consider it previously and to see its persuasiveness. I was taken in by arguments found in Rabbinic literature, which referred to God's spontaneous will to create the world and humanity out of pure love, to share His life and joy—but now, upon reflection, I realize such theses do not stand to reason! It follows that we do not merely have (a) an absence of proof for God, or (b) complaints which make Him improbable—we have (c) in the very existence of a temporal world, an actual disproof.

But upon further reflection, I am not too sure of the finality of the above objection. For the description of God relied on here makes Him resemble a stone! We rather conceive God as in the image and likeness of humans, that is as having freewill (and that to an extreme degree). And I believe, though I have not yet demonstrated it, that freedom of the will conceptually requires the ability (though not necessity) to act quite anarchically, without purpose (not even the goal of acting without purpose). If this is indeed a characteristic of human volition, then there is no reason to deny a similar feature to Divine will.

d. Another influential argument in favor of atheism is the perspective modern science has given mankind regarding how very little space and time it occupies in this universe.

Modern science has of course raised considerable doubts about the veracity and accuracy of Biblical and other religious accounts, taken literally, of the universe and of mankind's position in it. Examples of such deficiency are countless. Critics often point out the numerous and important deficiencies of the Biblical narrative of Creation (e.g. with regard to the duration and order of universal development, the non-mention of extinct species and geological changes, and so forth); but there are many other issues (e.g. the proposed listing of ethnic groups and their relations). Also in other religions there are, according to modern science, serious errors (for example, the Hindu-Buddhist belief in an eternal cyclical universe).

However, the issue I wish to focus on here is not related to specific traditional claims, but has a more theological character:

- (i) Although modern science has concluded that the universe is not infinite (but to date about 13.7 *billion light years* in diameter, according to some), it has also made clear how comparatively minuscule our home is (a planet some 12,750 km in diameter). We are living on *a mere speck of dust*, in one galaxy comprising some 200 billion stars like the Sun, in a world of some 80 billion galaxies (according to one article I read).
- (ii) Also, our planet is a rather late arrival on the world scene (being some 4.5 billion years old, I read), and the human species as such is a very late arrival on it (although life is considered to have started here say 4 billion years ago, *homo sapiens* appeared in the evolutionary chain

perhaps some 200'000 years ago). History (comprising the remnants of human culture) stretches barely 6'000 years (or rather, lately, some 10'000 years): it is a puny detail in the story of life on Earth.

Thus, modern science has shown mankind to be a very, very tiny detail in space and time – and the theological question naturally arises: *why would God create such a spatially and temporally enormous theatre, if His purpose in creation was only the drama of human redemption?*

Before the advent of modern science (starting with the Copernican revolution), people imagined their life at centre-stage, and the stage as not much larger than the earth and not much older than human history. But now we know ourselves to be a mere detail in a very grand tapestry.

Galileo was persecuted by some Churchmen, because they realized the danger he posed to their religious doctrines; and they were not far wrong in that assumption. Modern atheism is largely based on *the perspective* modern science (astronomy, biology) gives on humanity. Paradoxically, today's human arrogance is based on a humble realization of human insignificance in the larger scheme of things.

The issue is not only what the Bible stated incorrectly or did not say – but moreover an issue of dimensions, of the disproportion between us and the rest of the universe. This thought, tacitly or explicitly, is a strong force for atheism in today's world. Defenders of religion must take it into account and propose convincing replies. And indeed, upon reflection, the argument of perspective is not unbeatable.

We could turn it around and say: God made a world so enormous around us so as *to give us a hint of His infinite greatness*. Our whole universe, for all its immensity in our eyes, is perhaps in turn a mere speck of dust in God's eyes. The faithful have always acknowledged God's greatness in comparison to humans, and indeed have considered it an argument in favor of awe and worship.

Moreover, it could be argued that God also wanted *to give us a hint of His great love for us*. How so? If one considers a task of little worth, one devotes little time and effort to it. But God took billions of years of complex preparation before producing mankind – forming and destroying stars, forming our planet, developing life on it, making and breaking numerous habitats and species, until finally the (still very perfectible) human species emerged historically.

We may in this context, for example, quote Psalms 113:5-6.

“Who is like the Eternal our God, Who, [though] enthroned on high, lowers Himself to look upon the heavens and the earth?”

Like an artist of great genius, God has created a massive masterpiece around the detail that mattered most to Him, to give it richness and depth. In His infinite love, He has made a free gift of attention and care to inferior creatures like us (a bit as if we were to adopt microbes as pets!)

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