
# Plantinga and the Two Problems of Evil

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# LYCEUM



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# LYCEUM




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# LYCEUM

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# Man and God in Philo: Philo's Interpretation of Genesis 1:26

***James A. Arieti***

ויאמר אלהים נעשה אדם בצלמנו כדמותנו

καὶ εἶπεν ὁ θεὸς ποιησώμεν ἄνθρωπον κατ᾽ εἰκόνα ἡμετέραν καὶ καθ᾽ ὁμοίωσιν

A consideration of this biblical verse ought to give pause to anyone who ever doubted its divine authorship. The more one studies the verse, the more one is inclined to believe it the word of God. How could human prose be so rich? Each word, even stripped to its grammatical nakedness, has evoked some sort of interpretation; in its entirety, the verse has played matchmaker to a marriage—even if an unhappy one—of Greek philosophy and Hebrew thought, with Philo ministering the vows; this marriage of Hebrew thought and Greek philosophy may in some sense be said to have begotten Christianity. Indeed, the preservation of Philo's work probably results from his adoption by early Christian thinkers.[1] The verse has embarrassed some, inspired others. Nearly every Father of the Christian Church discusses the verse, and Christians have made much more of the verse than Jewish scholars, seeing in the verse the doctrines of the trinity, the fall of man, and the messiah as redeemer.

"Let us make man in our image." The expression ennobles man, bestowing dignity by means of the link it forges between man and God. The commonness of man and God or the gods is a familiar idea in pagan thought as well as biblical thought, whether the commonness be physical or psychical. There was, to be sure, some question for the pagans whether man was like God or God was like man, but Cicero is representative of the quite reasonable observation that the comparison cannot be commutative, for it makes a considerable difference which way the likeness is put: if the gods are eternal, then men, who are not eternal, must be like the gods: it would make no sense to say that a god who always was resembles a man who came into being. (***On the***

[1] Eusebius (***Preparation of the Gospel*** 7.13) believed that Philo taught the doctrine of the trinity; Jerome (***On Illustrious Men*** 11) includes him in a list of Church Fathers.

***Nature of the Gods*** 1.90; ***Tusculan Disputations*** 1.65) There is no question in the Bible about who was made in whose image.

Pagans surely thought of the gods as resembling men in shape: all their artistic representations of the gods show them to be particularly handsome persons; in poetry they are described as having human features, even human physical defects—thus Hephaestus is lame, Aphrodite is wounded in the hand by Diomedes. The early view is that they differ little from men except in their immortality. Man's mortality gives pathos to Sarpedon's speech in ***Iliad*** 12; the gods' immortality renders their battle scenes in Homer rather farcical and uninteresting (for what interests people are matters of life and death, but where the gods are concerned there are no matters of life and death, just ***ennui).***

More significant is later pagan thought, which saw a spiritual or psychic affinity between man and God. Thus Diogenes of Apollonia said that air was a bit of God in all of us, a view not different from the view of the Stoics later, if we but substitute fire for air. What men share with gods, according to the mainstream of paganism, is, as Longinus puts it, "good deeds and truth."[2] For Plato and those who followed him in these matters, man's rational soul was created by God and was itself divine (e.g., ***Timaeus*** 41c-42e; ***Republic*** 501b, 589d-e); insofar as a man developed this part of himself, he developed the God in him. Whether a man's soul was part of the divine soul of the cosmos or whether it was individually distinct (Aristotle said that the soul was made of a fifth element—***aither***), it came directly from God.[3] This bit of the divine in man resulted from his possession of reason, ***logos***, than which man possessed nothing greater. Reason was what separated man from the beasts; or reason was what man had in common with God. From the first view arose what we call secular humanism, from the second what we call religious humanism. Reason is

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[2] ***On the Sublime*** 2. Cf. Pindar, ***Nemean Odes*** 6.4-5; Plato, ***Republic*** 6.510; Diogenes the Cynic (in Diogenes Laertius 6.51); Galen, ***On the Usefulness of the Parts of the Body*** 1.2.

[3] E.g., ***Timaeus*** 41c-42e; ***Republic*** 501b, 589d-e. Plato's intention is not, of course, the way he has been understood through the ages. For a discussion of the discrepancy, see my book ***Interpreting Plato: The Dialogues as Drama*** (Savage, MD, 1991).

the ability to think, to remember, to reflect, to retain the past and to foresee the future. Insofar as it is correct it is perfect, and in its perfection, divine. For the Greeks of philosophy, God is a universal mind, a self-moving cause.

Aristotle remarks, in the ***Magna Moralia*** (1208b27-31)—if that work be by Aristotle—that "it would be absurd for a man to say that he loved God." The gods of Aristotle and Plato, however different they may be in other respects, shared one fundamental trait: neither was what we call a personal god. Each man, to be sure, was able to penetrate beyond the anthropomorphic characteristics, and characters, of the pagan pantheon, beyond Zeus and Athena and Hera and Apollo, to some sort of monotheistic unity. But that unity, however sublime, was not human; it resembled man only in that it was an intelligible being, without body. Opposed to their view—that it would be absurd to speak of loving god—was the Hebraic notion, enshrined in the ***shema***: "Though shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul and with all thy might."

The views of the Greek philosophers were, of course, conjectural. Plato makes it clear again and again that he is hypothesizing, that he is unsure, but that some things are more likely than other things. When we come to interpreters of Scripture, however, we leave the area of mere human conjecture, for those who tried to interpret it have taken it as the word of God. Since God has decided to communicate with man, man owes Him the debt of understanding what He has to say. When God said, "Let us make man in our image," what did He mean?

First arises the question of what an image is. Is an image an inferior copy of some original? For example, if we have a portrait of Mr. Jones, must the portrait look less like Jones than Jones actually looks? Let us suppose that we have several portraits of Jones. Of two or three of these portraits, perhaps we say, "They do look like Jones, but something's missing;" of the fourth we say, "That's got him!" What has it got? Perhaps we would say, "it captures his essence" or "it tells us what he was really like." If "it tells us what he was really like," is the image more like Jones than Jones himself? For the portrait captures his essence, whereas the real Jones might some days "not be himself." In this

case is the image more perfectly Jones than Jones? Surely what makes one artist great and another mediocre is this ability to capture pictorially the essence of the object. What shall we say of God's mimetic ability? Surely God must be a great artist. So when he was making men after His image and likeness, was He capturing His own essence? Or was He capturing one part of His essence?

Plato distinguishes two kinds of image-making (***Sophist*** 235d): that in which the object is the same size and color as the original; and that in which the true proportions are altered so that from farther away the image will appear accurate—as the columns of the Parthenon actually slant so that they will seem straight from far away. Which kind of image-making did God engage in when He made man? If God is not a body, but some kind of spiritual entity, how can He even have an image? How can abstractions—beauty or truth or God—have an image? Or must the passage be taken figuratively? Even figuratively, how can something nonphysical be represented by a figure? But can't compassion be represented by the image of one man helping another or ferocity by the image of a lion eating a lamb? These are not representations of the abstract ideas, but of an individual compassionate or ferocious deed. Only in the beholder do these become allegorical scenes; the images are not in themselves representations of the abstract ideas.

Problems such as these must have deeply troubled the rabbis. The language of the Bible cries out for anthropomorphic explanations; indeed, if God were some huge giant flying around in heaven, problems of interpretation would be much easier to solve. But for those who believe in an incorporeal God, the biblical passage is difficult. Thus, as Alexander Altmann observes, there is in rabbinic sources a reluctance to define the meaning of "image."[4] The Targum attempts to avoid anthropomorphisms by translating "image" as "similitude." Targum Onquelos, Altmann reports, leaves the phrase in Hebrew because of "a desire to refrain from meddling with a phrase so much charged

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[4] Alexander Altmann, "***Homo Imago Dei*** in Jewish and Christian Theology," ***Journal of Religion*** 48 (1968): 235.

with theological ambiguity."[5] As for the Hebraic understanding of "in the image and likeness," a number of scholars argue that it refers to man's physical appearance. T. Nöldeke, H. Gunkel, P. Humbert, and most recently J. M. Miller have so argued.[6] Humbert argued further that the more abstract ***demut*** (likeness) was introduced beside ***selem*** (image) to avoid the implication that man's body is a precise copy of God's.[7] Miller argues that the more concrete term ***selem*** actually clarifies the vague ***demut*** by specifying that the similarity of God and man has to do with corporeal existence.[8] James Barr argues that the author of this part of Genesis was influenced by Second Isaiah 40:18-19 and the view there that God cannot be compared with anything on earth.[9] Yet, says Barr, the author wished to show that man was special and to call attention to his similarity to God, without, however, specifying the nature of the similarity. No other words than the rather imprecise ***selem*** and ***demut***, adds Barr, would have been as effective.

In Jewish legends, a likeness was drawn between man's body and the world:

> The body of man is a microcosm . . . . The hair upon his head corresponds to the woods of the earth, his tears to a river, his mouth to the ocean. Also, the world resembles the ball of his eye: the ocean that encircles the earth is like unto the white of

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[5] Ibid., 237

[6] T. Nöldeke, "צלמות and צם" ***Zeitschrift für Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*** 17(1897): 183-87; H. Gunkel, ***Genesis*** (HKAT 6th ed., Göttingen, 1964) 112; P. Humbert, "Etudes sur le récit du paradis et de la chute dans la Genèse," ***Memoires de l'université de Neuchatel*** 14 (1940): 153-75. J. Maxwell, "In the 'Image' and 'Likeness' of God," ***Journal of Biblical Literature*** 91(1972): 289-304.

[7] Humbert 165.

[8] Miller 294.

[9] James Barr, "The Image of God in the Book of Genesis—A Study in Terminology," ***Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*** 51 (1968): 11-26.

> the eye, the dry land is the iris, Jerusalem the pupil, and the Temple the image mirrored in the pupil of the eye.[10]

This says nothing about the world's being like God or conceived of as a god. There is no hint at all in rabbinic commentaries that any corporeal significance was attached to the word "image." Tikune Zohar (137) couldn't be clearer: "God said, 'I will give a man a soul, for it is written, ***in our image***, which means, with a soul.'"[11]

Even if early Jews did somehow conceive of man as being made in the image of God's body,[12] by Hellenistic times the idea of a corporeal God was philosophically naive. Philo explicitly says that God is not in human shape and that the human body is not divine: Ὁ θεός, οὔτε θεοειδὲς τὸ ἀνθρώπειον σῶμα (***On the Creation of the World*** 69)[13] And he adds:

> It is in respect of the Mind, the sovereign element of the soul, that the word "image" is used; for after the pattern of a single Mind, even the Mind of the Universe as an archetype, the mind of each of those who successively came into being was moulded. It is in a fashion a god to him who carries it as an object of reverence; for the human mind evidently occupies a

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[10] Louis Ginzberg, ***The Legends of the Jews*** (Philadelphia, 1968), 49-50. Ginzberg cites as references: Raziel 20b; Midrash Bereshit Rabah 3.7 and 9.2; Koheleth 3.11, Tehillim 34, 245.

Origen, perhaps influenced by this legend, or perhaps inspired directly by Scripture, suggests that plants and animals may be images of heavenly patterns (***Commentary on Song of Songs*** 3.12).

[11] Quoted in M. Kasher, ***Encyclopedia of Biblical Interpretation*** (New York, 1953), 61.

[12] I do not think that the argument of Maxwell (above, n. 6) and the others is by any means conclusive. The question would remain, to express the idea, what other words could the writer have used.

[13] All references to and translations of Philo are from the Loeb edition (London and Cambridge, MA, 1929 ff.).

> position in man precisely answering that which the great Ruler occupies in all the world. (ibid.)

That mind is God's image in man Philo repeats over and over again.[14] In ***On the Decalogue*** (134) he says that the human mind is "a clearer likeness and copy than anything else on earth of the eternal and blessed idea." Elsewhere Philo writes that to fishes God gave principally body, to birds and creatures of the land keen senses, but to man, "God gave mind—the life principle of the life principle, like the pupil of the eye." (***On the Creation of the World*** 66)

Thus Philo sees the two principal qualities of man's likeness to God to be the power of his mind and, as a consequence of his mind, his sovereignty over the world.[15] Philo also mentions as a benefit of mind that man alone has free will. (***On the Unchangeableness of God*** 47-48)[16]

Though it is man's soul which is made in the image of God, man's body is expressly designed for the cultivation of that soul. It is a ***topos*** in ancient literature that whereas other animals walk on fours with their faces towards the ground, man walks upright, with his head raised high so that he can look at the sky, observe the serene order of the heavens, and imitate it in the constancy of his life.[17] This grand notion gives expression to man's superiority over the rest of earthly creatures, and it conforms nicely to a teleological view of the universe. By looking upwards and seeing the slow steady motions of the stars, man learns order, and if he be of a philosophical bent, he learns of the number

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[14] ***On the Decalogue*** 134; ***On Special Laws*** 3.207; ***Who is the Heir*** 230; ***That the Worse is Wont to Attack the Better*** 86, 90.

[15] Philo's understanding of the verse is adopted by nearly all the Church Fathers who discuss it, and the verse is a favorite among them. Those who see man as mind as the image of God include Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Basil, Gregory of Nazianza, Cyril of Alexandria, Eusebius, etc. Among Church Fathers, Irenaeus may be alone in thinking that "image" refers to both body and soul (***Against the Heretics*** 5.16.1).

[16] Jerome, in a discussion of the verse, says that man has free will, for he was made in the image of God (***Epistle*** 21.2).

[17] E.g., Plato, ***Timaeus*** 90a, ***Protagoras*** 321c; Cicero, ***On Old Age*** 77, ***On the Nature of the Gods*** 2.140; Ovid, ***Metamorphoses*** 1.84-86.

behind that order. In the contemplation of the order he becomes like God. The view is expressed also by Philo and by several Church Fathers.[18]

If man is spiritually the image of God, how can he sin? God does not sin; why should one made in God's image, especially if that image be reason, make any mistake whatsoever? Indeed, if man be man by virtue of being made according to God's image, and that image is something supremely good, it would seem a contradiction for there to be a man who sins. To this question Philo answers that there are two races of men, that race mentioned in Genesis 2:7, who was made out of dust, and that mentioned in 1:26, who was made in God's image. The latter lives in accordance with his reason and does not sin: he has no need of commandments or encouragement; he is naturally good and incorruptible. But the other man, fashioned out of the earth, devoted to his senses and the pursuit of pleasure, is the one who sins.[19]

While this answer seems rather too easy, it is actually profound. For if man is made in God's image, how can it be possible that he sin? To argue that God's image is somehow inherently corrupt appears, certainly, to be blasphemous. On the other hand, to argue that man is a combination of body and soul, that the soul is God's image, the body not, but that while the two are joined together man will sometimes yield to temptations of the flesh is no way out of the problem. For it leaves us with the immeasurable problem of why man, the image of God—man's soul—should be inferior to man made out of dust. For, as Philo says, the mind in us is in "the true and full sense" man. (***Who is the Heir*** 231) The argument, I think, is not unlike the argument of Thrasymachus in the ***Republic*** (340e), that the physician insofar as he is truly

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[18] Philo, ***Concerning Noah as a Planter*** 16-17; ***That the Worse is Wont to Attack the Better*** 85. Cf. Lactantius, ***Institutions*** 2.13.

[19] ***Allegorical Interpretation*** 1.90; ***Concerning Noah as a Planter*** 44; ***Who is the Heir*** 56-57. See especially ***Allegorical Interpretation*** 2.4, where Philo bluntly says, "There are two races of men. . . ."

and accurately a physician never errs. Thus to Philo, man, insofar as he is truly man—that is, God's image—never sins.[20]

A question arises of how there can be an image of something that is infinite, namely of God. Of course, we recall that when the word 'infinite' is used of God, it is not used in the sense of expanse, but rather in the sense that, unlike the Torah, God cannot be surrounded by a fence; that is, He is not able to be circumscribed, as the Medievals put it. Any description of God must be a limitation, and any limitation would lessen God's nature and hence be inappropriate or, worse, blasphemous. It is for this reason that the doctrine of negative attributes arose—the referring to God's qualities by denying their opposites; e.g., God is not evil, not spatial, etc.[21] Well, if man is made in God's image, and God is infinite, does man in any sense share in God's infiniteness? While Philo does not directly address this possibility,[22] we have a sense of this idea in rabbinic thought:

> Man unites both heavenly and earthly qualities within himself. In four he resembles the angels, in four the beasts. His power of speech, his discriminating intellect, his upright walk, the glance of his eye—they all make an angel of him. But, on the other hand, he eats and drinks, secretes the waste matter in his body, propagates his kind, and dies, like the beasts of the field. Therefore God said before the creation of man: "I will create man to be the union of the two, so that when he sins,

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[20] Cf. Athenagoras, ***The Resurrection of the Dead*** 12: "To those who bear in themselves the image of the creator, whose nature involves the possession of mind and who partake of rational judgment, God has set apart an eternal existence."

[21] Maimonides interpreted the statement "God is Good" to mean "God is not the opposite of good." See ***Moreh*** 1.51, 52, 55-69; 3.20. Cf. Thomas Aquinas, ***Summa Contra Gentiles*** 1.14.

[22] Philo, faced with God's unlimitable nature and the difficulty of making an image of it, came up with the solution of an intermediary, a solution to be discussed shortly.

> when he behaves like a beast, death shall overtake him; but if he refrains from sin, he shall live forever."[23]

The conception is very much like that of Pico della Mirandola in ***The Oration on the Dignity of Man***—the view that man has an indeterminate nature which can either rise to an angelic level or descend to a bestial level. And while "indeterminate" is not exactly the same as "infinite," in a sense both share a quality of boundlessness.

Is there a difference in the words "image" and "likeness"? The difference between the Hebrew words ***selem*** and ***demut*** has already been discussed. As for the Greek words εἰκών and ὁμοίωσις, there is no discussion of any difference between them in Philo. Indeed, except for when he is directly quoting from the Bible, Philo regularly uses the word εἰκών.[24] W. J. Burghardt maintains that the distinction between "image" and "likeness" is first found among the Gnostics, who believed that the Demiurge fashioned the "earthly" man after God's image, the "psychic" man after His likeness.[25] Paulinus of Nola observes that in verse 1:26 likeness and image are mentioned; in 1:27, only the word "image" is used. He says that this shows foreknowledge on the part of Scripture—that by withdrawing "likeness" Scripture shows a knowledge that Adam was going to sin: "likeness" was withdrawn from Adam and kept for those who "live in Christ" (***Epistle*** 24.9). Cyril of Alexandria, however, aware

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[23] Ginzberg 50. He cites as sources Midrash Bereshit Rabah 12.15 and 31.7; Midrash Shir 39b; and Midrash Pesikta 40, 167a.

[24] A study of this concept in Plato will indicate that Plato does not observe distinctions among the various words for "image." He uses εἴδωλον, φαντάσμα, and εἰκών with such little consistency that Guthrie (***A History of Greek Philosophy*** (Cambridge, 1978) vol. 5, 135 n. 1) has said he is consciously showing a "dislike of technical precision in language."

[25] W. J. Burghardt, ***The Image of God.*** According to Grisez ***et al.***, "recent Church teaching focuses almost entirely on other values, especially chastity, marital love, and the sacred character of virtuous sexual activity in marriage." Ibid., p. 367. ***Cyril of Alexandria*** (Washington, D.C., 1957) 1.

of these and other Christian views on the two words, argues that there is no discernible difference between them.[26]

We come now to the rather difficult question of the intermediate nature of the image according to which man was made. Before considering Philo's views, we may wish to consider the attractiveness of the idea of an intermediary.

God is, by nature, beyond human understanding. Whether we look upon Him as the biblical all-powerful creator of the universe or as the peripatetic unmoved mover, what can we say about His nature? Not only must we, as observed earlier, speak of Him by denying positive attributes, but since, as Parmenides observed, the mind cannot conceive of non-being, once we have thus spoken of Him, we are not left with any kind of mental image. That is to say, when we have denied all attributes to a thing, we are left with nothing upon which the mind can settle. Here of course lies the problem: how can there be an image of something which admits of no bounds or description? How indeed can something completely unthinkable, completely ineffable, be limited or constrained in an image? As Philo himself says, ". . . the Archetype is so devoid of visible form that even His image could not be seen." (***That the Worse is Wont to Attack the Better*** 87) In other words, God's image is itself removed from the world understood by the senses.

Now Philo observes that Moses did not say that man **is** the "image of God," but that man was made "**after** the image" of God (***Who is the Heir*** 231): ἐποίησε γάρ [Μωσυσῆς] φησιν "ὁ θεὸς τὸν ἄνθρωπον" οὐχὶ εἰκόνα θεοῦ, ἀλλὰ "κατ' εἰκόνα." Thus God first made an image of Himself—and this image Philo calls ***Logos***, reason. Thus man "is third hand from the Maker, while between them [man and God] is Reason, which serves as a model for our

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[26] ***On the Giants*** 61. H.A. Wolfson (***Philo: Foundations of Religious Philosophy in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam,*** Cambridge, MA, 1947 271 ff.) says 1) that in the proposal that God did not make man directly but made the image first, God is more like an intelligent human being, planning a project first in his mind, 2) that in having a pattern first God set a good example for man, and 3) that in this way man's sins are not directly attributable to God. (This last idea I shall discuss later, in a consideration of the plural **"**Let **us** make.")

reason, but is itself the effigies or presentment of God." (***Who is the Heir*** 231***)*** Man then stands with respect to God in the following proportion:

$$\frac{man}{Logos} \quad \frac{Logos}{God}$$

The proportion is both enlightening and perplexing. On the one hand, Philo seems to have solved some problems. If man is made according to the Logos, we can see at once the source of the rational quality man possesses. Yet we can also see that for all his excellence and for all his reason, man is still removed from God, though "those who are men of God have entirely transcended the sensible sphere and live in the commonwealth of ideas, which are impenetrable and incorporeal."[27]

On the other hand, the Philonic proposal is not without its own set of problems. First, is the aforementioned proportion a true proportion? Does man stand to Logos as Logos stands to God? To the extent that man is imperfect in his Logos, to that extent is Logos imperfect in its divinity? Moreover, if reason is the image of something, of what is it the image? Plato held that images are imperfect copies of originals—this view formed the basis of his objection to the mimetic arts—for such arts were copies several times removed from the ideas. (***Republic*** 595a-602b) If reason be such a copy, in what way is it imperfect? Is it an imperfect copy of some kind of mystic intuition—like that of Bernard in the ***Comedia***?

I do not think Philo made up his mind on whether an image is inferior to the original, for Philo never discusses the nature of images directly, and what hints there are do not seem consistent. In many places Philo gives the impression that copies are inferior to the original. Thus in ***On Allegorical Interpretation*** (3.96) he says that God's shadow is His world. In ***Moses*** (2.51), laws are the "most perfect" image of the cosmic polity—a "most perfect image,"

[27] Burghardt, ibid.

but not identical.[28] But in a difficult passage in ***On Allegorical Interpretation*** (1.3), he says:

> . . . the numbers 2 and 3 have left behind the incorporeal character that belongs to 1, 2 being the image of matter, and being parted and divided as that is, while 3 is the image of a solid body, for the solid is patient of a threefold division.

Here we may wonder in what sense a number is an image. In accuracy, perhaps, number is deficient as an image (one does not picture matter when one sees the number 3). But number is much purer and much more abstract than any particular matter. Philo's passage here is somewhat reminiscent of the famous passage in the ***Timaeus***, where Timaeus says (37d; translation, Jowett's):

> . . . Wherefore he resolved to have a moving image of eternity, and when he set in order the heaven, he made this image eternal but moving according to number, while eternity itself rests in unity, and this image we call time.

I interpret this passage to mean that number is the pattern; it remains fixed and abiding, and hence is the image of eternity. But the actual heavens, which move, are the image of number. Thus the heavens are three steps away from the eternal: they are images (**moving images**) of numbers, and numbers are fixed images of eternity—and it is in this sense that number is an image. Finally, in ***On the Creation*** (71), Philo says that the Bible emphasizes the accuracy of the image by adding "after his likeness"—Philo's only discussion of ὁμοίωσις.[29]

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[28] ***Moses*** 2.51. See also ***That the Worse is Wont to Attack the Better*** 83 and esp. ***Of Drunkenness*** 133-34.

[29] ***On the Creation of the World*** 71. We may ask whether a separate existence of ideas of Logos is a Hebraic as well as a Platonic idea. Wolfson (vol. 1, 182) suggests that such a Hebraic belief is shown by Exodus 25:9:

If Logos is the intermediary, and the Logos or intelligible world embraces the totality of ideas,[30] is the Logos something created by God or is it co-eternal with Him? For Plato, the ideas are ungenerated and eternal, for they constitute **truth**, and the attributes of truth are universality, unchangingness, and eternality. By the Middle Platonists God was spoken of in these terms, possessing the qualities which Plato had attributed to the ideas.[31] According to Wolfson, Philo here strongly departed from Plato. For Philo, God created the world after the pattern of the Logos, and the pattern of the Logos He also created.[32] Thus the world of the forms—the totality of ideas called Logos—is not for Philo eternal. Logos was the original idea in the mind of God and was created when He decided to create the world.[33]

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> And thou shalt make everything for me according to what I show thee on this mount, according to the pattern of the tabernacle and the pattern of all the vessels thereof, even so shalt thou make it.

Wolfson points out that in ***Questions on Exodus*** 2.52, Philo takes this as a proof-text of the Platonic notion of the existence of ideas. Samuel Sandmel, ***Philo of Alexandria: An Introduction*** (New York and Oxford, 1979) 98-99, also suggests a Jewish ancestry to the notion, found in the idea of wisdom. He cites Proverbs 8:22-32: wisdom was present at the creation and available to God as He fashioned the world.

I am not fully convinced by these sources. Even if the Hebraic source be stretched, it is on the outer fringe of Hebraic thought.

[30] See Wolfson, vol. 1, 227.

[31] See Elizabeth A. Clark, ***Clement's Use of Aristotle: The Aristotelian Contribution to Clement of Alexandria's Refutation of Gnosticism*** (New York and Toronto, 1977) 70.

[32] Wolfson, vol. 1, 228-29.

[33] According to Wolfson (vol. 1, 227), Philo is inconsistent in his technical vocabulary here, using "powers" now as a description of the eternal powers of God, now as a description of the powers created by God when He decided to create the world, now as a substitute for the Logos. Similarly, according to Wolfson (231-32), Philo sometimes uses Logos for the mind of God; since "God is absolute simplicity, His mind and His thinking are all one and identical with His essence." But Philo also calls Logos the ideas when by an act of creation they acquire an existence outside of the mind of God. Thomas H. Billings, ***The Platonism of Philo Judaeus*** (Chicago, 1919) 11, attributes Philo's shifting vocabulary to ". . . the same flexibility of spirit that has confused

In Plato, then, the rational soul, or the rational part of the soul (if we accept the tri-partite division as given in the ***Republic*** and ***Phaedrus***) is eternal and uncreated. It is the one part of the soul that can survive the death the body, for it is in no way linked to the body. It is by developing this part of the soul that the philosopher even while he lives seeks death, or the separation of the body and soul and by so doing becomes like a god. For Philo man and God remain more distant: God's image is the Logos, man's aspiration is the logos. As Sandmel puts it, the Logos is a kind of point of intersection.[34] In this sense one might say that Philo preserves a basic difference between the Hellenic and Hebraic cultures: the gulf between man and God is much greater for the Jews.

The notion that the world of ideas was created is very obscure. Indeed, if we preserve the distinction between idea as "thing known," in which case a knower must exist, and the idea as "form" or "pattern," in which case there is no need for a knower, it is very difficult, nay, impossible, to see how forms in this latter sense could have been created. This is especially true for a theory that sees the ideas as transcendent and as being able to exist apart from any actual thing. Nevertheless, as far as man is concerned, it probably makes little difference: either way, for men the ideas are transcendent and other-worldly. What it means, however, is that for Philo, God is even farther removed from men, acquiring in the Philonic theory a "super-transcendence." A passage in ***On the Confusion of Tongues*** (97) shows this distance well:

> It well befits those who have entered into comradeship with knowledge to desire to see the Existent (τὸ ὂν) if they may, but, if they cannot, to see at any rate his image (τὴν εἰκόνα αὐτοῦ), the most holy Word (λόγον), and after the Word, its

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interpreters of Plato. He sometimes uses the language of religious ecstasy, sometimes that of the philosophical thinker, sometimes that of the mystical poet." But using the same words for different concepts may show rather than inconsistency or flexibility, the difficulty Philo had in stretching the vocabulary available to him. Since the distinctions which Philo is making are being made for the first time he found no ready-made vocabulary from which he could easily draw his terminology.

[34] Sandmel 94.

> most perfect work of all that our senses know, even this world (τὸ κόσμον).

We come now to the extraordinary plural, "Let **us** make man." In the other acts of creation, God had said, "Let there be," but here He seems to deliberate. The presence of the plural, which perhaps may be easily explained by philologists as the plural of majesty, often employed by kings in edicts or as the plural used when one speaks solemnly,[35] has given life to many varied interpretations. Some Christians have seen in the plural a reference to their belief in the triune nature of God; some Jews have seen a reference to an angelic court of assistants.[36]

Like many rabbinic commentators, Philo accepts as the reason for the plural that God is addressing his powers as assistants. Now since, as we have seen, Philo believes in the existence of an intermediary level between man and God, it is not so strange that God address it.[37] For Philo the real question is not **whom** God is addressing, but **why** he needs to address anyone—why, when He created heaven and earth and the seas without help, should he need help now. (***On the Creation of the World*** 72) Philo says he does not know the answer for sure, but he will propose various conjectures. Nowhere, I think, does Philo show his Platonism more than here.[38] For Plato will often say that a question does not admit of human knowledge and then proceed to make up a myth as a probable explanation of the case. For Philo it is a real question why God should need help, for on the surface such a need would seem to limit His omnipotence.

The answer is straight out of Plato's ***Timaeus*** (41-42). In Plato's work, Timaeus reports that the Demiurge did not directly create men, but instead left

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[35] So (acc. to Kasher) R. Saadyah Gaon, S.D. Luzzatto. Also S.R. Driver, ***The Book of Genesis*** (London, 1948) 14.

[36] See Altmann 236 for Christian references. For the Jewish view see Genesis Rabah 8, Sanhedrin 38b, Rashi, Abraham Ibn Ezra.

[37] On the question of whom "our" refers to—whether God or Logos or just the Logos (in the name "powers")—Philo never speaks.

[38] Cf. Billings 11.

that work to subordinates so that he would not be blamed for their vice. Philo's answer does not differ from Plato's. God, Philo says, could make plants and animals, for they are capable of neither virtue nor vice; He could also make the Heavenly creatures, who are capable only of virtue. But men, who have in them both virtue and vice, God left to His assistants, so that men's vice could be attributed to the assistants.[39]

Is God absolved from responsibility for man's evil in this way? Man's evil Philo sees as the result of the struggle between the rational soul, which is created by God, and the irrational soul;[40] yet, as observed earlier, he also sees the pure man—the rational soul—as incapable of vice since he is God's image. I see, therefore, some inconsistency in Philo on this point. For if evil be man's free choice, and free choice be a good given by God, then God, it seems, is free from blame. But the explanation that the assistants might be blamed seems to be mere buck-passing.

For Christians, the question of whether Adam is the divine image is of particular importance. For Jesus is referred to as "the second Adam," (Romans 5:14) is called the "image" (Colossians 1:15, 2 Corinthians 4:4) and "form" (Philippians 2:6) of God. Jesus was seen as the true image of the Father, or as Logos Incarnate. In Christian terms, Jesus as redeemer is connected to Adam's sin.[41] One can easily see either Philonic influence or compatibility with the Church Fathers. In ***On the Confusion of Tongues*** (147) Philo calls the Logos "the eldest image of God": θεοῦ εἰκῶν λόγος ὁ πρεσβύτατος. And in ***On Allegorical Interpretation*** (1.90), he makes it clear that Adam is not the "pure man" he has spoken of elsewhere:

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[39] ***On the Creation of the World*** 72-75; ***On the Change of Names*** 31; ***On Flight and Finding*** 69.

[40] ***On Special Laws*** 4.123-124; ***On the Creation of the World*** 46, 134.

[41] Altmann 246 ff.

> When you hear the word "Adam," you must make up your mind that it is the earthly and perishable mind; for the mind that was made after the image is not earthly but heavenly.

Philo's interpretation of "man the image of God" contains nothing, I think, which is incompatible with Hebrew thought. Surely there are notions that are emphasized in Philo, like the separate existence of a world of ideas, which, if Sandmel and Wolfson are correct,[42] has a very bare existence in Hebrew thought. The idea of a plural creator of man is consistent with Talmudic thought, even if the idea be also Platonic. If Philo must fit the story of man's creation to blend with his philosophical substructure of Platonism, he also adjusts his Platonism to fit his Hebraic notion of an unknowable God.

For those who wish to understand God's nature, the Philonic interpretation provides no encouragement. One might have thought that if man were God's image, by studying man we might arrive at some conception of God, just as if we were to study a fine set of portraits of some individual, we might be able to work our way backwards and deduce what he was like. But, says Philo, man is not the image of God. He is made **after** the image of God, so that the image stands between him and God. Looking at man to see God is like looking at the shadow of a shadow. Philo's conception has added to the mysterious grandeur that accompanies the attempt to understand God's nature. And in this idea Philo perhaps quintessentializes his monotheism.

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[42] See above, n. 29.

# Is Contraception Contralife?: A Critique of Grisez *et al.*

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Since the encyclical ***Humanae Vitae*** in 1968, the issue of contraception has caused great pain and division in the Catholic Church. Contraception is almost universally accepted by modern society and by a large percentage of professed members of the Catholic Church; at the same time, it is condemned by the Teaching Authority of the Church. Perhaps one reason for this division of opinion is the relative inability of Catholic theologians, philosophers, and pastors to convince the faithful of the moral evil involved in contraception.

With the increase in use and acceptance of contraception in modern society, even among averred Catholics, there appears to be a greater need for clear and sound argumentation as to the immorality of contraception. It is to this end that Germain Grisez, John Finnis, Joseph Boyle, and William E. May have proffered their article, "'Every Marital Act Ought to be Open to New Life': Toward a Clearer Understanding" in the July, 1988 edition of ***The Thomist***.[1]

An argument demonstrating the moral malice of contraception must not only identify the aspect of contraception that renders it morally evil but must also show why such an aspect is morally evil. Historically, there have been two main ways of arguing against contraception. In recent times, most ethicists and moral theologians who have condemned contraception have done so on the grounds that it is evil in its relation to marital love and human sexuality. In the Middle Ages, however, the predominant argument located the moral malice of contraception in its relation to life. For nearly eleven centuries (from the fourth to the thirteenth), theologians of Western Europe, without ever being challenged, had considered contraception to be like homicide.[2]

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[1] Germain Grisez, ***et al.***, "'Every Marital Act Ought to be Open to New Life': Towards a Clearer Understanding," ***The Thomist***, Vol. 53, No. 3. (1988).

[2] Cf. Joseph Sommer S.J., ***Catholic Thought on Contraception Through the Centuries*** (Ligouri: Ligouri Pamphlets and Books, 1970), pp. 32, 33.

Nevertheless, St. Thomas Aquinas, writing in the mid-thirteenth century, refused to treat contraception as homicide. According to St. Thomas, contraception—the use of sterilizing chemicals—is a grave act which is against nature but is by no means homicide. Furthermore, he maintained that one should not be considered "irregular" (as one who is guilty of homicide would be) unless abortion is procured of an already formed child.[3] By the 18th century, the traditional argument which compared contraception to homicide, was virtually abandoned. According to John T. Noonan, this argument, as old as Regino of Prum (840?-915) and Burchard (965-1025), as ancient indeed as St. Jerome, had fallen into disuse. Finally, "with St. Alfonsus the homicide approach ended its theological life."[4]

One might describe Grisez ***et al.***'s article as a new and improved attempt to revive, at least in an extended sense, one important aspect of the dated homicide argument. While Grisez ***et al.*** admit that contraception is not homicide, they forcefully maintain that it is similar in one very important respect, viz., they both involve a will that is turned against the basic human good of life.

The principle thrust of their article is to argue that contraception is morally evil primarily because it is "contralife." This argument is significant in that it attempts to show, like the homicide argument of old, that the evil of contraception derives from its rejection of the basic human good of life. If this argument is successful, the conclusion would posit contraception as a different sort of moral evil than was thought by many who have agreed that it is evil. Insofar as contraception can be shown to entail a contralife will, its evil would be comparable to the evil of homicide.

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[3] "***Hoc pecatum quamvis sit grave . . . et contra naturam . . . tamen est minus quam homicidum . . . Nec est judicandus talis irregularis, nisi jam formato puerperio abortum procuret."*** St. Thomas Aquinas, ***Scriptum super Quatuor Libros Sententiarum Magistri Petri Lombardi***, IV, d. 31, q. 2, a. 3ex.

[4] John T. Noonan Jr., ***Contraception*** (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1965), p. 365.

Most people who contracept, however, do not consider themselves to be doing anything even remotely related to homicide. The conclusion for which Grisez ***et al.*** argue, viz., that contraception is morally evil because it is "contralife," seems, ***prima facie***, to be counter-intuitive. In the course of this paper, it will become further evident that the argument presented by Grisez ***et al.*** is not philosophically viable.

In order to develop and defend the argument that contraception is morally evil primarily because it is contralife, Grisez ***et al.*** must answer three questions: First, what kind of an action is contraception? Second, what is wrong with this action? And third, how does contraception significantly differ from Natural Family Planning (NFP)?[5]

I

Grisez ***et al.*** begin their argument with a key distinction. They claim that contraception is not a sexual act and, therefore, conclude that contraception is not a "sexual sin."[6] ('Sin' should be taken here only to mean a morally evil act.) Grisez ***et al.*** state: "Assuming contraception is a sin, it is not a sexual sin, such as masturbation, fornication, adultery, homosexual behavior, and so on."[7] This distinction may appear to have some substance as well as some value for the present discussion; however, on closer examination, it can be shown to be problematic and misleading.

Grisez ***et al.*** point out that one can perform a contraceptive act without performing any sexual act whatsoever or without even willing any sexual action. They present an example in which a dictator attempts to control the population by having a fertility-reducing chemical placed in the public water supply.[8] This makes clear the fact that contraception is not a sexual act, yet their conclusion,

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[5] NFP is "a practice adopted by couples who abstain from sexual intercourse at times when they believe conception is likely and engage in sexual intercourse only at times when they believe conception is unlikely." Germain Grisez ***et al.***, p. 399.

[6] Ibid., pp. 369, 370.

[7] Ibid., p. 369.

[8] Ibid., p. 370.

that contraception is not a sexual sin, does not follow. If a sexual sin can be defined as an offense against the natural ordering of sexuality (i.e., if a sexual sin is a disordering of the sexual act itself, the natural end of the sex act, or the proper meaning of the sex act), then contraception qualifies as a sexual sin. To characterize contraception as a non-sexual sin, therefore, would be erroneous. It is obvious that contraception does, like other sexual sins, prevent the sexual act from reaching its natural end. With this understanding of what a sexual sin is, it would follow that contraceptive action, even that of the hypothetical dictator mentioned above, is a sexual sin. That contraception **is** a sexual sin, in fact, is the position that is held by most in the modern tradition who oppose contraception.[9]

For argument's sake, it may be granted that contraception might be morally evil for reasons other than its sexual offense; however, one should not concede that contraception is altogether not a sexual sin. With this mistaken concession, one would close one's investigation to the possibility that contraception is immoral in its relation to sexuality, and would therefore search, possibly in vain, for some other grounds on which to base its immorality.

Having ruled out contraception as an example of sexual sin, Grisez ***et al.*** proceed to locate the evil of contraception in its "contralife character." They hold that the act of contraception is contralife by definition:

> Contraception can be defined only in terms of the beliefs, intentions, and choices that render behavior contraceptive. To contracept one must think that (1) some behavior in which someone could engage is likely to cause a new life to begin, and (2) the bringing about of the beginning of new life might be impeded by some other behavior one could perform. One's choice is to perform that other behavior; one's relevant

[9] According to Grisez ***et al.***, "recent Church teaching focuses almost entirely on other values, especially chastity, marital love, and the sacred character of virtuous sexual activity in marriage." Ibid., p. 367.

> immediate intention (which may be sought for some further purpose) is that the prospective new life not begin.[10]

They state further that "Since contraception must be defined by its intention that a prospective new life not begin, every contraceptive act is necessarily contralife."[11]

It should be noted that since Grisez ***et al.*** define contraception as contralife, we should not expect to find them presenting an argument to demonstrate the contralife character of contraception, for to do so would be to beg the question. Rather, their argument will accept, as given, that contraception is contralife and will argue that such acts, ***qua*** contralife, are immoral.

II

The argument presented by Grisez ***et al.***, showing that contraception is morally evil because it is contralife, can be restated in the following manner:

l) Contraception always involves the intention (choice) that a prospective life not begin (i.e., contraception involves a contralife will).

2) Choices involving a contralife will are contrary to reason.

3) Therefore, contraception is a choice which is contrary to reason.

4) Choices which are contrary to reason are morally evil.

5) Therefore, contraception is morally evil.

As was mentioned above, Grisez ***et al.*** hold the first premise to be true by definition. This premise states the specific aspect of the nature of all contraceptive acts upon which Grisez ***et al.*** ground the moral evil of contraception. It is this aspect of contraception which, according to them,

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[10] Ibid.

[11] Ibid., p. 371. Cf. also pp. 401, 402.

relates contraception to homicide, and it is this aspect which will be brought under closer scrutiny later in this paper.

The truth of the second premise is shown in the following explanation of what it means to choose contrary to reason. Grisez ***et al.*** state that:

> whenever there is a reason to do something and a reason not to do it, one chooses in harmony with reason by choosing not to do it, but chooses contrary to reason by choosing to do it, unless the reason to do it is **rationally preferable** to the reason not to do it.[12]

According to Grisez ***et al.***, the good of the life of the prospective new person provides the primary reason not to perform a contraceptive act. This good, according to Grisez ***et al.***, is incommensurable; therefore, there can be no grounds for holding any other reason to be rationally preferable to it.[13] The contraceptive (contralife) choice, if indeed it is contralife, is, thus, a choice contrary to reason.

The third premise follows necessarily from the first and second premises. The fourth premise is assumed by Grisez ***et al.*** as a given which "no one is likely to challenge."[14] And the concluding proposition follows necessarily from the third and fourth premises.

**III**

Having examined the grounds on which Grisez ***et al.*** hold the premises to be true, it is necessary to examine the validity of their logical structure. The

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[12] Ibid., p. 377.

[13] Grisez ***et al.*** hold that the basic human goods, e.g., life, play, knowledge, are all natural goods integral to human fulfillment. Each good is incomparably good; therefore, no one of these goods can be placed ahead of any other to the exclusion of the other.

[14] Ibid., p. 374.

inference producing the third premise from the first and second, is a straight forward ***modus ponens***. Whether or not this inference is licit, however, is questionable. Are Grisez ***et al.*** using the term 'contralife' in exactly the same sense in the first and second premises? In other words, are they equivocating on the middle term? In order to answer this question, it will be necessary to evaluate the precise sense in which they use the term 'contralife' in each premise.

In the first premise, the term 'contralife' is defined as the intention that a prospective life not begin. In other words, it denotes direction of the will against the possible good of a possible, but not actual, person. The definition of term 'contralife' operative in the second premise, however, is concerned with either possible or actual goods of an actual person. By examining the justification of the second premise, one notices that the term 'contralife' denotes the opposition of the will to a basic human good, viz., the good of life. An investigation into what is meant by "the good of life" will show that opposition to "the good of life" is not what is signified by the term 'contralife' in the first premise.

In their book ***Beyond the New Morality***, Grisez and Shaw speak of "the good of life" in the following manner:

> The goods themselves are not abstractions, existing "out there" beyond us and other people. Rather, they are aspects of human beings, ourselves or others—aspects which either already exist in actuality or have the potential of being realized. To act directly against one of the fundamental goods is therefore to violate an actual or possible aspect of the personhood of a real person or persons: to violate "life"

> means violating **somebody's** life—for instance, means killing or mutilating someone.[15]

Human goods, therefore, are not "existing out there"; they are aspects, either potential or actual, of real human beings. Thus, qua possible or qua actual, they have their being only in an instantiated actuality. The good of life is, thus, only an actual or possible good when it is an attribute of an actual being. The term 'contralife' in the second, therefore, signifies the direction of a will against a possible or actual good of an actual human being.[16] The term 'contralife' in the first premise, however, cannot mean the same thing because, in this case, there is no actual human being having a possible or actual good.

One might argue that possible life exists ***qua*** possible in the mother and father. This, however, cannot be. Pete's good of life, an aspect of his personhood, can exist only in him. **His** life cannot exist in Joe or Sally, nor could it have existed in his mother and father, ***qua*** aspect of Pete.[17] If anything concerning Pete existed in his mother and father, it would not be Pete's life ***qua*** aspect of him; to say that his good of life existed in them is to assert nothing more than their having the power or faculty to procreate. An act of contraception on the part of the parents, therefore, would not have been against any possible or actual aspect of Pete, since Pete was not actual and could not have had possible or actual aspects; rather, it would have been against their procreative faculty.

The term 'contralife', therefore, as it is used in the first premise does not denote a will which is turned against the basic human good of life. It is

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[15] Germain Grisez, and Russell Shaw, ***Beyond the New Morality*** (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), p. 134.

[16] If a good is to be other than merely conceptual, it must be an aspect of an actual being. In order for something to be other than nothing, it must exist in itself, in another actuality, or in the mind of another actual being; thus it receives its being. The goods do not exist in themselves; therefore, in order for them to exist, other than merely conceptually, they must be aspects of some actual being.

[17] To say that a possible or actual aspect of X, ***qua*** aspect of X, preceded X is absurd.

precisely upon this denotation, however, that the truth of the second premise is based. The argument is faulty because it has equivocated on its middle term.

The act of contraception, therefore, with respect to the true good of life, is not related to homicide in any morally significant manner. The will in contraception and the will in homicide differ not merely in degree but in kind. In homicide, one wills that an actual human being cease to be; in contraception one wills that a mere possibility remain non-actual. In homicide the person wills that an existent being be deprived of a good, whereas, in contraception the will does not bear on the reduction of a good of any actual person. Contraception, therefore, is not contra-the-good-of-life because it is not contra-a-good-of-any-real-person. This accounts for the common intuition that those using contraception are not doing anything remotely related to homicide. They can only be said to be contra "life" in some abstract or metaphorical sense, not in any actual, or morally significant, sense. This, apparently, is the thought of Paul VI, who admits that couples may positively will that a prospective life not begin. Paul VI states the following:

> it is true that in both cases [in contraception and in NFP] the husband and wife agree in positively willing to avoid children for acceptable reasons, seeking to be certain that offspring will not result.[18]

This is not a surprising position, if, as has been shown, contraception, indeed, does not affect the good of life of any real human being.

In response to this objection, namely, that contraception does not affect the good of life of any existing person, Grisez ***et al.*** argue that all human acts affect only the future. They claim that in homicide the victim's entire life is not destroyed; the past and the present are beyond harm. Therefore, homicide

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[18] Paul VI, ***Humanae Vitae***, trans. M. A. Calagari, S.J. (Phoenix: by the translator, 470l N. Central Ave., 1989), 16.

supposedly affects only the future, and thus contraception, likewise, is apparently "only against life that would be, not against life that is."[19]

This talk of future effects should not be allowed to distract from the relevant issue at hand, viz., that the contralife will in homicide is directed against the good of a real person, and that the will in contraception is not. This response, presented by Grisez ***et al.***, therefore, neither addresses nor changes the fact that contraception is not truly contralife.

Grisez ***et al.*** seem to have a further response to the argument that contraception does not affect an existing life. They state that:

> Although the goodness of the [actual] life which is destroyed [in homicide] provides the reason why deliberate killing is wrong, the moral evil of killing primarily is in the killer's heart.[20]

By locating the moral malice in the heart, Grisez ***et al.*** appear to avoid the objection that the contraceptive act does not take the life of an actual person. To demonstrate their point, that morality is in the heart, they explain that a man can commit adultery without touching a woman; in fact, one need not even wish to commit adultery with any real woman. According to Grisez ***et al.***, if one "imagines an ideal playmate and freely consents to his wish that she were real so that he might commit adultery with her, he commits adultery."[21] Analogously, the contralife will of homicide and the "contralife will" of contraception would be, accordingly, grounded in the heart.

A careful comparison with contraception, however, demonstrates the failure of this analogy and the problem with grounding morality almost exclusively in the heart. Unlike in the adultery case mentioned above, a person using contraception does not imagine an ideal child and then freely consent to a

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[19] Grisez ***et al.***, p. 384.

[20] Ibid., p. 372.

[21] Ibid., p. 373.

wish that the child were real so that one could snuff out its life. It might be the case with a murderous intent that one wishes another were real and present so that they could be murdered, but this certainly is not the case in the contraceptive intent. The difference is clear. A murderer must intend to take some real person's life. The person using contraception, however, does not intend that a real person's good of life be taken. In fact, the attractiveness of contraception lies precisely in the result that no life is taken. In abortion, on the other hand, a life is posited, it becomes real, and then is willfully taken.

If people using contraception harbored a truly contralife will, i.e., if their will were truly turned against the life of a real person who may occupy the mother's womb, they would be logically committed to abortion or infanticide, should conception occur. This, however, is not the case; people using contraception are not logically committed to abortion or infanticide.[22]

Although morality may be in the heart, as Grisez ***et al.*** point out,[23] it ultimately must be grounded in the orientation of the heart toward reality. The heart of the person using contraception is not turned against the good of life, either possible or actual, of a person in reality; therefore, with respect to life, it is not opposed to any real goodness. A system of ethics which likens contracepters to murderers is blind to the value of existence; it is blind to reality.[24]

IV

Since Grisez ***et al.*** hold that contraception is necessarily immoral because it is necessarily contralife and that NFP is not necessarily immoral because it is not necessarily contralife, it is helpful to examine how Grisez ***et al.*** attempt to demonstrate that NFP (taken here to mean noncontraceptive NFP

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[22] Although one may argue from sociological data that the contraceptive mindset is linked to the abortifacient mindset, no strictly necessary causal relationship can be shown to exist.

[23] Ibid.

[24] Perhaps, for a Kantian style philosopher, this move might be expected; however, for a realist, it is out of bounds.

unless otherwise specified) is not necessarily contralife.[25] First of all, they admit that the contraceptive intent and the noncontraceptive (NFP) intent may involve the same reasons. The essential way in which they differ, according to Grisez ***et al.***, is in the choices which each involves and the relation of those choices to the benefits and burdens which accompany them. In contraception the choice is to impede the baby's coming to be as a means to an end, which is to realize the goods which accompany the choice to use contraception and/or to avoid the evils which would accompany not choosing to use contraception. In NFP, on the other hand, the choice is not to impede the baby's coming to be; rather, the choice is to abstain from sexual intercourse which could result in (a) the baby's coming to be and the loss of goods and/or avoidance of evils which accompany that baby's coming to be, in order that (b) the goods represented by that reason be realized and/or the evils represented by it be avoided.[26]

In other words, the difference between the two choices, according to Grisez ***et al.***, is that contraception is the choice **to do something** which will impede the coming to be of a baby, whereas NFP is a choice **not to do something** while accepting the side effects, i.e., the baby's not coming to be, as well as the goods, and/or avoidance of evils, which follow. Grisez ***et al.*** claim that contraception, by definition, is a choice to do something to prevent the beginning of a life of a possible person. Yet, NFP is simply to abstain, or not do something.[27]

If contraception is wrong, as Grisez ***et al.*** maintain, because it is contralife, and if NFP is to remain morally non-blameworthy, then NFP and contraception must significantly differ with respect to future possible life. This difference, however, has not been successfully shown.

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[25] Grisez ***et al.*** hold that some instances of NFP may be contralife, specifically, the cases in which the couple does not have a good reason for avoiding pregnancy or when NFP is used as a form of contraception. Ibid., pp. 400, 401.

[26] Ibid., pp. 401, 402.

[27] Ibid., p. 402.

According to Grisez ***et al.***, the difference between contraception and NFP is not necessarily in the reasons but in the choices. Contraception is a choice to do something which will prevent conception; NFP is a choice not to do something which would result in conception. The difference, according to Grisez ***et al.***, is that NFP is not an action which prevents conception; rather, it is a passive acceptance of the effect, namely, no conception.[28]

To consider abstinence merely as a passive acceptance of effects is incorrect, for abstinence cannot always be considered simply a "not doing"; in NFP, it is an active disruption of an otherwise regular (and possibly life-giving) sexual routine. Abstinence, therefore, is not simply a "not-doing." It is an active deterrence of what one ordinarily would otherwise do.[29]

The couple practicing NFP abstain for some intended purpose. They carefully calculate when to abstain, and they choose to put forth the effort to abstain for a reason. The project (intentionally altering a regular pattern of sexual relations) is organized for an end, viz., to prevent the couple from causing a new life (to prevent the sperm from reaching the ovum).

Likewise, in contraception, one takes certain measures at the proper time in order to prevent the sperm from meeting the ovum. Thus, both contraception and NFP are, in a relevant sense, positive acts. Just as the serious abstainer understands that sperm could possibly reach the ovum and thus takes measures to prevent it, so the contracepter sees the possibility that the sperm could reach the ovum and takes measures to prevent it. They are both employing intended precautionary means in order to insure that the sperm will not meet the ovum.

The significant difference between contraception and NFP, therefore, cannot lie in the fact that NFP is a passive acceptance or a "not doing something or other." Furthermore, "not doing" cannot be the significant difference which

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[28] Ibid.

[29] To abstain is to actively turn from an action or practice which one would otherwise perform. If one is not likely to do something he can hardly be said to be abstaining from it. Thus, one who hates meat is hardly said to abstain from eating meat on Friday, and a young child is not said to abstain from sex.

distinguishes the contraceptive act from the noncontraceptive act because so called "contraceptive NFP" would then be equated with noncontraceptive NFP on the grounds that it also is a "not doing." This, however, would be a contradiction, for "contraceptive NFP" would then be noncontraceptive NFP.[30]

Finally, Grisez ***et al.*** hold that NFP, when practiced without good reasons, is contraceptive and contralife. In order to free "non-contraceptive NFP" from the moral blameworthiness of a "contralife act," and thus distinguish it from contraception, Grisez ***et al.*** appeal to the principle of double effect.[31] They explain that a person legitimately using NFP intends only to avoid the burdens which having another baby would impose. The couple may not, according to Grisez ***et al.***, intend the very not-being of the prospective baby.[32]

This appeal to the principle of double effect, however, does not succeed. If it is morally blameworthy to intend that a prospective baby not come to be, then NFP does not meet the criteria for the principle of double effect. The prevention of the baby is the means to the end, namely, absence of burdens. In order to achieve an end one must intend the means. This, of course, is not allowed under the principle of double effect whenever the relevant means themselves are determined to be evil. If it were true, as Grisez ***et al.*** claim, that it is evil to intend that a prospective baby not come to be, then, every form of

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[30] Furthermore, it is not always clear that the doing/not-doing distinction is morally relevant. Consider, for example, the case where the parents poison their child's orange juice, i.e., they do something; then, consider the case where they allow the child to drink orange juice which they know is poisoned, i.e., they do not do something.

[31] The principle of double effect states that, "given the fulfillment of four conditions—**all four—**an action with at least one good effect and with one or more evil effects may legitimately be performed." The four conditions are: "(1) The action itself must be morally good or at least morally indifferent (neither good nor evil); (2) The good effect must not be obtained through the evil effect, i.e., by means of the evil effect; (3) The evil effect must not be intended, but rather only tolerated; (4) There must be a sufficiently serious reason to justify allowing the evil effect." Martin D. O'Keefe, S.J., ***Known From The Things That Are*** (Houston: Center For Thomistic Studies, 1987), pp. 52, 53.

[32] Grisez ***et al.***, p. 401.

NFP would be “contralife” since each intends, either as an end in itself, or as a means to another end, that the prospective baby not come to be.

As was mentioned above, Paul VI recognized that in both contraception and NFP one intends to avoid children that might have otherwise come to be. The difference does not lie in the direction of the will towards the being of a prospective baby, but in the actions by which one goes about avoiding the births of children. Paul VI teaches that the evil of contraception flows primarily from the separation of the unitive and procreative aspects of the sexual union.

**V**

Finally, the logical flaw in the argument presented by Grisez ***et al.*** being apparent, and its having been shown that, with respect to life, contraception and NFP do not significantly differ, it is pertinent to examine two of the many logical consequences which would follow if the “contralife thesis” were true.

First, if the direction of one's will toward the future possible life of a possible person is to be considered on a par with the direction of one's will toward the future possible life of an existing person, at least one absurdity would seem to follow. When a woman in her fertile period is near a possible (and fertile) mate, a future possible life could be actualized. If, however, one's choice concerning the future possible life of an existing person is to be considered as on a par with one's choices concerning the future possible life of a possible person, then the fertile couple who sits watching a movie rather than copulating is failing to promote future possible life, just as the couple who sits watching a movie rather than performing the Heimlich maneuver on their choking child. In both cases, they are choosing the movie over the “good of future possible life.” Both involve the same apathy of the will toward the future possible life.

Clearly, the latter couple ought to stop watching the movie and perform the Heimlich maneuver on their choking child. It is not necessarily true,

however, that the other couple ought to stop watching the movie and copulate. The absurd conclusion follows from the false assumption that the direction of one's will toward future possible life of a possible person is on a par with the direction of one's will toward the future possible life of an actual person.

Furthermore, if contraception is contralife, and if this is immoral, then an unmarried couple who uses contraception would be condemned for having a contralife will. An unmarried couple, however, can hardly be condemned for having a contralife will when it is perfectly normal, in fact expected, that they not will to conceive a child. Although they ought to will the continuation of any existing life, an unmarried couple ought to will not to conceive a child outside of wedlock. Grisez ***et al.*** state that "in itself the coming to be of a new human person is a great human good."[33] This is a true statement, but it is not equivalent to the statement "causing or willing to cause the coming to be of a new human person is always good." Some people, at least those who are not married, should not cause, nor will to cause, the coming to be of a new human person. Contraception, it could be said, is not against the **coming to be** of a new human person, which is always good; rather, it is against **causing**, or **willing to cause**, the coming to be of a new human person, which is not always good. It should be noted that this line of argument does not conclude that an unmarried couple may use contraception. It simply shows that contraception would not be illicit for them, ***qua*** contralife.

## Conclusion

It has been shown that contraception may not be distinguished as necessarily not a sexual sin; thus, it is erroneous to assume that the moral evil of contraception must derive from some other offense, such as an offense against the good of life.[34]

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[33] Ibid., p. 374.

[34] Perhaps Grisez ***et al.*** could find some other good to which they could link the evil of contraception.

It was also shown that the "good of life," which is allegedly opposed in the "contralife act" of contraception, is not the same good of life considered by Grisez ***et al.*** to be an incommensurable basic human good. The "contralife" approach, as shown, confuses the mere possible goods of nonentities with the basic human good of life; the latter is, by definition, a good of an **actual** human being. Contraception, therefore, is not morally evil ***qua*** contralife.

Moreover, the contralife approach fails to significantly differentiate contraception from NFP. Not only do Grisez ***et al.*** fail to adequately distinguish the two, but they seem to have an unorthodox understanding of NFP. According to Grisez ***et al.***, the sin of contraception would be evil in the same respect as the sin of using NFP without a good reason. Contraception, however, seems to be a different kind of act than the misuse of NFP. Contraception is always an attack upon the nature of the sexual union; NFP never is. The use of NFP without good reasons may be a selfish abuse of marriage, but it is not morally equivalent to contraception. Furthermore, Grisez ***et al.*** claim that one may not will that a possible person not come to be, yet one may emotionally not-want a baby which might be conceived while using NFP. This is an odd conception of NFP, for it would seem, to the contrary, that those using NFP **may** positively will that a possible person not come to be, but, apparently, they should never emotionally, or otherwise, not want a baby actually conceived in their sexual union. In other words, they should not be using NFP if they are not willing to joyfully receive any child with which they might happen to be blessed.

Finally, considering the other conclusions which follow from the contralife thesis, it seems that such an approach actually leads to a more confused understanding of the contraception issue. Contraception must be considered in relation to sexuality, yet human sexuality must always be understood in relation to love and the other authentic human values which are essentially linked to sexuality.[35] Although the modern age seems largely blind

[35] The sexual union, which possesses a special mystery and is always the bearer of significant human values, demands an attentive and respectful response. The contraceptive act,

to the genuine values involved in the sexual sphere, a return to the old homicide argument, a la Grisez ***et al.***'s "contralife" approach, is not the answer. Grisez ***et al.*** claim to be answering those who do not accept the inseparability of the unitive and procreative aspects of the sexual union, but why should one think that the contralife thesis is any more acceptable to these people? Since it is difficult enough to convince contemporaries of the contralife character of abortion, why should anyone think that they will be convinced of the alleged "contralife" character of contraception? If actual human life causes no conviction, ***a fortiori*** neither will possible life. But love. If nothing else, love is one thing which still holds a place of reverence. People will go to great lengths for what they think is love. Therefore, by showing what love truly is, and by pointing out the links between love, sex, purity, and reverence, one argues forcefully and convincingly.

Toward the end of their article, Grisez ***et al.*** discuss some pastoral approaches to contraception. Perhaps it is appropriate, likewise, at the end of this article to comment on pastoral aspects of the arguments here discussed. What would the effect be if a confessor were to attempt to explain to a penitent the quasi-homicidal "contralife" aspects of contraception? It is likely that penitents would leave the confessional profoundly confused. From a knowledge of ordinary high school biology, one would know that the contraceptive means do not confront any aspect of an existing human being. One will recognize the difference between contraception and homicide to be as great as the difference between not-building a house and burning down someone's house. Would there not be less confusion in explaining the irreverence of the contraceptive act and the values inherent in the sexual sphere? Would it not be more effective to

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however, entails a disdainful violation of the distinctive mystery of the sexual domain. In the use of contraception, one assumes an irreverent approach to the sexual union, attempting to alter and master it for one's own use. One refuses to recognize or respond to the significant values legitimately demanding an appropriate response, and, thus, one adopts an irreverent approach toward the Creator, the sexual partners, and the values involved in the sexual union. Cf. Dietrich Von Hildebrand, ***The Encyclical "Humanae Vitae"—A Sign of Contradiction***, trans., Damian Fedoryka and John Crosby (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1969).

explain the mystery and values of the sexual union which demand a reverent and pure response? This, indeed, is the approach taken by most ethicists and moral theologians in recent times, for it is the clearer understanding.

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# Making Sense of Indexicals

***Michael L. Anderson***

Estragon: You're sure it was this evening?
Vladimir: What?
E: That we were to wait.
V: He said Saturday . . . . I think.
E: You think.
V: I must have made a note of it. (He begins shuffling through innumerable bits of crumpled paper)
E: (very insidious) But what Saturday? And is it Saturday? Is it not rather Sunday . . . or Monday . . . or Friday?
V: (looking wildly about him, as though the date was inscribed on the landscape) It's not possible!
E: Or Thursday?
V: If he came yesterday and we weren't here you may be sure he won't come again today.
V: But you said we were here yesterday.
E: I may be mistaken. . .
(Samuel Beckett, ***Waiting for Godot )***

The central question addressed in these following pages deals with whether or not indexical terms can have a Fregean sense. Not surprisingly, the answer to this question is bound up with the answer to another question, about just what, exactly, a Fregean sense **is**. Thus I concentrate, not just on exegesis of Frege's writings, but also on one rather controversial, but also rather compelling interpretation of those writings.

The interpretation comes from the pen of the late Gareth Evans, and is born of a response to a paper by John Perry which claims that Frege's theory of language is incompatible with (or at least fails to account for) the peculiar linguistic properties/behavior of indexicals—terms such as ‘here’, ‘now’, and

'today', whose reference depends on the context in which they occur. Evans contends that Perry's arguments rely on a fundamental misunderstanding of the nature and character of the Fregean sense, and his contribution is an attempt to correct that misunderstanding.

Recently, however, Patricia Blanchette has risen in defense of Perry, and while she concedes that Perry's original challenge to Frege was indeed based on a slightly flawed interpretation, she offers a reconstruction of his basic arguments which is free from this defect, thus providing a fresh challenge to would-be Fregeans.

In this paper I take up the banner in defense of Evans (and, ultimately, of Frege). Blanchette's analysis and understanding of Frege is impeccable; her argument, I maintain, fails not because she misinterprets anything Frege says, but because she assumes some things Frege didn't say. Specifically, she seems to have in mind some criteria of understanding a sentence which, although they may have been Frege's, need not have been so, since it is not a topic he ever explored in any detail. I believe that Blanchette fails to fully appreciate the way in which Evans' position fills this gap left by Frege, and how filling it in that way vindicates his interpretation.

I begin with an overview of Frege's position, and an explication of the (alleged) problem posed for his theory by indexical expressions, using the arguments as developed both by Perry and Blanchette. I then turn to Evans' response to the challenge, and a defense of the plausibility of this interpretation. Then follows a brief digression where I treat some of the more general problems of the philosophy of language (questions about reference and meaning) as a way of exploring some of the implications of, and questions posed by Evans' position. I conclude with the original problem, walking through its Evansian solution.

# I
# Frege and the Problem of Indexicals

**1.1 A Fregean Overview**: The most influential and best remembered of Frege's contributions to the project of understanding language and language use is his seemingly simple but formally elusive distinction between the "sense" and "reference" of singular terms, and the corresponding distinction between the cognitive content (Thought) and reference (truth-value) of sentences. This distinction, posited to remedy Frege's self-perceived failure in the ***Begriffsschrift*** (1879) to make his theory of the content of sentences compatible with their supposed truth-compositionality, receives its earliest (and most complete) treatment in ***Uber Sinn und Bedeutung*** (1891). Nevertheless, because a theory is generally best understood from the perspective of the problems it was posited to solve, we will take a brief look at the ***Begriffsschrift*** theory and its problems before tackling Frege's later, more difficult work.

The ***Begriffsschrift*** theory of language holds that the content of a sentence is "that [which] can become a judgment," i.e., that which can be judged true or false. (BG p.12) Roughly speaking, it is that which is conveyed by (the meaning of) the sentence. Frege writes: "In the two propositions 'The Greeks defeated the Persians at Plataea' and 'The Persians were defeated by the Greeks at Plataea'. . . [e]ven if one can detect a slight difference in meaning, the agreement outweighs it. Now I call that part of the content that is the same in both the conceptual content." (BG p.12) That to which one assents and in which one believes when judging the truth of a given proposition is its conceptual content. Blanchette notes: "Because to judge what a sentence expresses is true is to believe what a sentence expresses, [conceptual] contents are the objects of belief. [Conceptual] contents are also the primary bearers of truth and falsehood; the [conceptual] content, not the sentence, is properly said to have a truth-value." (PB p.2)

Now, the principle of compositionality holds that this conceptual content of a sentence is determined by (composed of) the contents of the parts of that sentence, and this relation holds in such a way that terms (parts) of different

form but identical content may be freely substituted for one another without altering the content (or the truth-value) of the sentence as a whole. Since for Frege two sentences have the same content iff. they play the same role in an inferential sequence (hence the intuitive connection between the conceptual content of a sentence and the fact it expresses), substitutions which do not alter this role also leave the conceptual content unchanged.

But, the two roles that conceptual contents are designed to fill—being the object of belief, (that which is understood by a person in judging a sentence true or false), and being the logical content, (that which "influences the possible consequences" of a sentence in a judgment of inference (BG p.12))—can be pried apart with clever utilization of the principle of compositionality. Consider the following pair of sentences:

(1) The morning star is bright.

(2) The evening star is bright.

Given that 'the evening star' and 'the morning star' are co-referential (and since the contents of singular terms are their referents), the two terms are freely substitutable and the two sentences must have the same conceptual content. And, indeed, it seems fairly clear that, insofar as inference is concerned, the two sentences convey the same information and thus have the same "possible consequences" in an inferential sequence. Nevertheless, it seems equally clear that an agent can understand both sentences without knowing that the morning star is the evening star, and thus can believe (judge to be true) sentence (1) while disbelieving sentence (2). If the conceptual content of the sentence is the object of belief, it seems that (1) and (2) must have different conceptual contents. "That is, the belief whose object is expressed by (1) is not the same belief as that whose object is expressed by (2), since one can have the first belief without having the second." (PB p.3) Thus sentences which express the same information, have the same truth conditions and value, and which therefore play the same role in logical inference—whose "logical contents" are the same—may nevertheless express different "belief contents."

The ***Begriffsschrift*** account, which assigned the same entity to expressing "logical content" and to expressing "belief content," thus reveals its inadequacy.

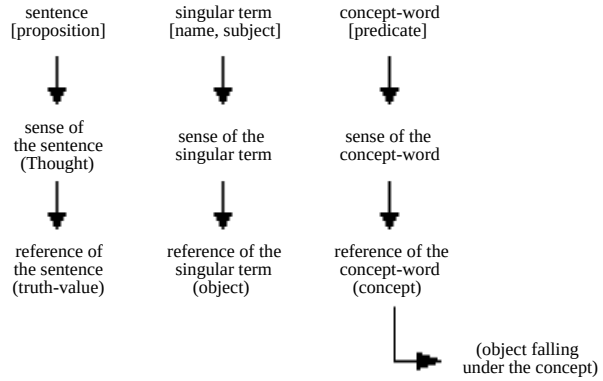
In order to address this failure, Frege proposes the familiar sense/reference distinction (for singular terms) and the corresponding Thought/truth-value distinction for sentences. That part of the content of a singular term which contributes to the "belief content" of a sentence is its "sense," and the part which determines the truth conditions of that sentence (by being the object of predication) he calls its "referent." Frege maintains that for every singular term there corresponds not just an object designated (the referent), but also a "mode of presentation of the thing designated." (SR p.200) This "mode of presentation" is the sense of the singular term, and is roughly the way in which an object is named by the term in question. But more details on this later.

The corresponding entity for sentences is the Thought, which is the sense of a sentence and is therefore, by the principle of compositionality, composed of/determined by the senses of its parts. Frege writes: "a statement contains (or at least purports to contain) a Thought as its sense; and this Thought is in general true or false, i.e., it has in general a truth-value which must be regarded as the reference of the sentence. . . " (FC p.31) Thoughts maintain some of the characteristics associated with the conceptual contents of the ***Begriffsschrift*—**they are what I have informally designated the "belief content" of the sentence, that which is understood, (dis-) believed, or grasped when judging the truth-value of a sentence. They are also that which **is** either true or false, that which (again like the conceptual content) bears the truth or falsity of the sentence. The difference comes in the way Frege treats the rough equivalent of the "logical content" of the ***Begriffsschrift***. The criterion for determining this content is slightly different. Namely, the Thought is that which a sentence shares with all and only those sentences which must be accepted or rejected together, according to a rational agent who understands the sentences in question. Two sentences express the same Thought iff. an agent who understands both is logically bound to assign them the same truth value. Thus, all sentences which express the same Thought play the same role in an

inferential sequence, but not all sentences which play the same role in an inferential sequence (which have the same truth conditions) express the same Thought. It is this split which allows Frege to solve the problem caused by co-referential singular terms.

Of course, from the above it follows that if it is possible for an agent who understands two sentences to judge their truth-values differently, the sentences must express different Thoughts. This is the "criterion of difference" of Thoughts, and is the acid test most often used in Frege scholarship. As Blanchette points out, this criterion entails that "in understanding a sentence one grasps the Thought it expresses," and this grasp must be sufficiently firm so as to guarantee complete and degree-less access to that Thought. (PB p.5) It is not possible to partially grasp a Thought, for in grasping a Thought an agent must be aware of "everything that the sentence expresses which is relevant to the judgment of the truth of what is expressed." (PB p.5) She writes: "If an agent understands a sentence and judges that it expresses a truth, the decision to alter that judgment can only be made on the basis of further information about that sentence or about the world; there can be no further information imparted by the sentence itself." (PB p.5)

A nice diagrammatic overview of Frege's conception of linguistic structure is provided by Frege himself in his letter to Husserl of 24 may, 1891.



Here the sense of the singular term must play the dual role of providing the completing sense that constructs the Thought by combining with the sense of the predicate, and also of presenting the reference of the term. Likewise, the Thought must both reflect the cognitive content of the sentence (be that which is (dis-) believed or understood when judging the truth of a sentence, and that which is shared by all sentences which a competent language user is bound to accept or reject together) and also bear the reference of the sentence (be that which **is** either true of false—that "for which the question of truth arises" (T p.20)—regardless of anyone's judgment on or grasp of the Thought in question). This second, referencing function of Thoughts also entails that the sense be related to the truth conditions of the sentence. Thus, as Blanchette notes, "the sense of a sentence. . . together with facts about the world, determines whether the sentence will refer to the true or the false. Where the truth-conditions of a sentence are whatever facts about the world must obtain if the sentence is to refer to the true, we can see that the sense expressed by the sentence determines its truth conditions." (PB p.9)

This is true, but there is a caution to be observed here: it may be a bit misleading to say that sense "determines" truth conditions. Although the sense of the sentence as a whole (the Thought) presents the truth **value** of the sentence, there is also a relation of presentation between sense and truth conditions. The sense is related to those conditions Tarski style ('The snow is white' is true iff. the snow is white, or, in a Fregean lingo, iff. snow falls under the concept white), by designating the facts about the world—by definition, relations between concepts (like white) and objects (like snow)—which must obtain for the sentence to be true. In this relation, it is important to note that 'snow' presents snow, 'white' white, and the like. As in any relation between the sense and reference of a singular term, these objective conditions of truth are designated **in a way** by the parts of the Thought. Thus, although it is correct to conclude that "if two sentences have different truth conditions, they must express different Thoughts" (PB p.9), since different objects cannot be presented by the same sense, the tempting corollary, that the same truth

conditions indicate sameness of Thought, does not hold. (Prof. Blanchette, it should be noted, neither makes nor implies this erroneous conclusion.)

Central to Frege's theory of language, then, are the following features:

The same entity—the Thought—must both:

(A) "Reflect the cognitive content" of a sentence. This entails that sentences which share cognitive content must express the same Thought.

(B) "Bear the reference" of a sentence. This entails that sentences with differing truth conditions must express different Thoughts.

Likewise, the sense of a singular term must both:

(a) Provide a completing sense which can join with the sense of the predicate to compose a Thought.

(b) Present one (and only one) particular object.

By definition, the sense of the sentence must be equivalent to the Thought expressed, and, in being constructed from the senses of the sentence-parts, must vary iff. they vary. If Frege's theory is to be successful, all these features must harmonize into a complete linguistic picture.

We now turn to a pair of challenges to the consistency of Frege's linguistic schema. Both revolve around the difficulty of integrating indexical expressions into the Fregean whole, but they differ in the focus of their attacks. The first challenge, from John Perry, questions the dual role played by the sense of the singular term. He claims that no indexical can, ***qua*** singular term, play both roles required of it by the Fregean schema. Blanchette's argument, in contrast, focuses on the Thought. As she puts it: "no entity can both reflect the cognitive content of, and bear the reference of, a sentence containing an indexical." (PB p.2) I will treat each in turn.

**1.2 The Problem Of Indexicals:** Consider the sentence

(3) Today is fine.

The sense of this sentence, the Thought expressed, is composed of the sense of the unsaturated predicate '(_) is fine', and the completing sense provided by the indexical singular term 'today'. Let us presume, for the sake of argument, that

June 21st was fine, while June 22nd was not. Uttered on the 21st, then, (3) expresses a truth, while uttered on the 22nd it does not. Sentence (3) must therefore have different truth conditions corresponding to each utterance-occasion and (for reasons we have already seen) express a different Thought on each of those occasions. Since there is no reason to suspect the predicate of having a different sense on the two occasions, we must locate the difference in Thought in a difference in the completing sense of 'today'.

It is immediately clear that the most obvious candidate for today's completing sense—that unchanging linguistic meaning of 'today' which Perry calls its "role" and which consists in something like a method to determine the current referent of the term, or a rule for moving from word to object—must be disqualified exactly because it is unchanging. The other option, that the completing sense is the referent itself, the object to which the indexical leads, is equally unpromising. Although it possesses the desired attribute of changing with the occasion (being the day itself), it cannot provide a completing sense for the Thought. As Perry writes, "a day is not a sense, but a reference corresponding to indefinitely many senses." (JP p.480)

Perry spends much of the rest of his paper with an examination of one final possibility, whereby the completing sense of 'today' "corresponds to an aspect of mode of presentation" of the day. (JP p.490) This mode of presentation Perry takes to be "intimately related to the sense of a unique description" which provides the same value (determines the same referent) as the given indexical. (JP p.485) Perry dismisses this possibility on the basis of the well-documented irreducibility of indexical terms to any set of co-referring definite descriptions. Because these arguments are so well known, I shan't go into details here. The problem, however, is easily demonstrated.

If we assume that the completing sense of 'today' must be equivalent to the sense of some co-referring definite description D, we can express the sense of (3) as

(4) D is fine.

and we must conclude, based on the principle of compositionality and the same-sense assumption, that (3) and (4) express the same Thought. However, an

agent who understands (3) and (4) is only bound to accept or reject them together on the additional condition that she understands and accepts

(5) Today is D.

The question immediately arises: what is the sense of 'today' in (5)? Clearly, reducing it to

(6) D is D.

is unacceptable, for (6) is a tautology, whereas (5) is not. Because (5) and (6) must therefore have different truth conditions, they cannot express the same Thought, and so D cannot qualify as the sense of 'today' in (5). Nor will choosing another definite description E for the sense of 'today' in (5) help us, for now the same word has two different senses (D and E) in the same context, which is specifically forbidden by Frege. (SR p.201) Besides which, the definite description E simply adds another condition 'Today is E' to the list of sentences which must be accepted by the agent if she is to be bound to accept (3) and (4) together.

Now, we have seen that Frege's theory entails that all information relevant to judgments of the truth value of a Thought must be communicated in the act of grasping that Thought; no independent criteria need be met by an agent who understands two sentences in order to determine if they express the same Thought. Thus, since realizing (5) (or any other sentence) cannot be a condition for grasping the Thoughts expressed in (3) and (4), and since, in the absence of this condition, it remains possible for an agent to assign different truth values to the two sentences, (3) and (4) must express different Thoughts. Thus 'today' and any definite description 'D' must have different senses, and no such description can be the completing sense of 'today'.

As an offshoot of this central problem, Perry elaborates three other problems in attaching a completing sense to 'today', and a Thought to (3), which fulfills all the roles required of Thoughts and senses. It may be useful to summarize these problems, since I will later be challenging some of Perry's assumptions about the referencing behavior of, and the way in which Thoughts are connected to, sentences:

(i) The Irrelevancy of Belief: Suppose an agent believes that today fulfills some definite description D. (Perry gives the example of a date.) From this it does not follow that when she utters the sentence 'Today is fine' that she has expressed the Thought 'D is fine', for today may not, in fact, have the same value as D. The Thought expressed, Perry contends, must be related to the actual referent of the singular term (as determined by its linguistic function/meaning); the speaker's belief about the referent of the singular term is irrelevant to its referencing behavior, and therefore irrelevant to the sense of the sentence.

(ii) The Non-Necessity of Belief: Because a Thought is connected to a sentence in virtue of its linguistic properties, an agent can express a Thought with 'today is fine' without associating any definite description with 'today' at all. No belief about the day is needed.

(iii) The Non-Sufficiency of Belief: To express the same Thought as agent A expresses by her utterance of 'Today is fine', it is not sufficient for agent B to associate 'today' with the same appropriately referring definite description as did agent A. For by (ii) there need be no such description, and by (i) any associated definite description is irrelevant to the Thought (and therefore the sense) expressed by the sentence. Since there is no other candidate for the senses of such sentences/terms, this makes it difficult to imagine how two speakers can express the same Thought, and it is important for Frege that such a thing be generally possible. For these and other reasons Perry claims that Frege's theory of language cannot consistently accommodate demonstrative expressions.

Although coming to the same conclusions, Blanchette takes a slightly different path. Wary of Perry's close identification of senses with definite descriptions (an identification not clearly necessitated by Frege), she mounts the argument without it.

Like Perry, she immediately rejects the "role" of today (which she calls its meaning), since we are looking for a component of the Thought expressed by 'Today is fine' which changes at midnight every night. She then turns to a series of possibilities for the sense of today which she collectively titles the

"ways in which the referent is presented to the speaker/listener." (PB p.11) As we have already seen, these ways cannot be collections of attributes or description-like entities associated with the day in question, and Blanchette, echoing Perry's objection (i), quickly reaches the same conclusion. And although she too seems to construe the "sense" of a term as something very much like the collection of attributes of the referent which the speaker/listener associates with the term in question, she nevertheless moves to generalize the problem faced by indexical-containing Thoughts in the following way:

Consider this scenario: A competent language speaker utters the sentence 'Today is fine' at 11:55 pm. At 12:05 am, after having lost track of the time, she utters the same sentence. Given that the speaker associates the same mode of presentation with each token of 'today' as uttered just prior to, and just after, midnight, and is thus unaware of any difference of the Thoughts expressed, the cognitive content criterion demands that the Thought expressed be the same. (Because, as we have seen, cognitive content is that of a sentence which is understood by an interpreting agent, and such understanding entails that an agent be aware of everything relevant to judgments (of the sameness) of the Thought.) However, since the two tokens of 'today' were uttered on different days, they must designate different days. Such variation in reference must be accompanied by variation in sense, and, therefore, a variation in the Thought expressed. It is in this very general bind which Blanchette finds the Fregean Thought when it contains indexical expressions. She writes: "If 'ways of presenting' (whatever they are) are individuated in a way appropriate to the representation of cognitive content (reflecting that which is grasped by a speaker competently uttering the sentence) then they do not vary appropriately with reference; if they vary correctly with reference, then they don't represent cognitive content." (PB p.14, parenthetical expressions mine)

It needs to be realized, however, that the case against Frege depends on the so far undefined notion of "understanding," and the corresponding assumption that the agent truly understands both of her utterances of the sentence, even when she has lost track of the time during which, and therefore

the day on which and the object about which, she is speaking. Blanchette is aware of this fact. She notes: "We might try to salvage the Fregean position by holding that [the agent] will not have correctly understood at least one of the utterances. . . But the only general criterion of understanding which we could give here to take care of all. . . purported counterexamples would be that an agent only understands two such utterances if she realizes whether or not the terms involved refer to the same objects (in this case, days). And such a criterion is clearly antithetical to the Fregean approach." (PB p.11)

I contend, to the contrary, that among the tools Evans provides is a criterion for understanding sentences (and making statements about objects) which is strong enough to disallow our hypothetical agent who is unaware of the day-change from understanding both of her utterances, and yet does not go so far as to require knowledge of the co-referentiality of terms, which I agree is a distinctly non-Fregean epistemological requirement. Thus it is to an explication of the Evansian solution that I now turn my attention.

## II
## Evans' solution

Unfortunately, Evans did not have the benefit of Blanchette's analysis, and so his arguments are directed primarily at Perry and do not always directly answer the concerns put forward by Blanchette's paper. He parses Perry's argument as follows:

Given that the function '(_) is fine' has an incomplete sense, in order to express a Thought the argument inserted in the blank must provide a completing sense. In the case of indexical arguments like 'today', there doesn't seem to be such an entity which can accomplish all the tasks required of a completing sense.

(I) The unchanging meaning of 'today' is not sufficient to designate only one object, since its reference changes with context and, ex hypothesi, the "unchanging meaning" is the same over context.

(II) The reference (the day itself) is not a sense, nor does it correspond to only one sense, so this, too, is unhelpful.

(III) Any set of definite descriptions, which although they are both contextual and sufficient to determine a single referent, will not have the same sense as the indexical, because co-referring non-indexical expressions fail to meet the criterion for the sameness of Thought.

Evans somewhat misleadingly claims (and here he would have benefited from Blanchette's work) that the above argument is bound up with the supposition that senses are definite description-like entities. He implies that if he can show that something else can count as a sense, then he will have defeated Perry's argument. Now, in a way this is true, but it depends on what exactly Evans means by description **like** things. As Blanchette notes, although Perry does seem attached to the association of senses with definite descriptions, the argument against Frege can be constructed without it. Her implication, in turn, is that if the argument against Frege holds without relying on some necessary relation between senses and definite descriptions, then the fact that Evans has kicked that leg out from under the argument is not enough to topple it. This treatment, however, misunderstands the focus of Evans' argument which he, admittedly, obfuscates himself by citing Perry on his reliance on the description-like character of senses.

**2.1 On Sense:** Evans' point is best understood as questioning the idea that a completing sense must be the sort of thing which **determines** reference and contributes to a Thought which **determines** truth-value in the strong sense advocated by Perry. That is, Evans is wary of interpreting senses to be entities which determine their reference in virtue of being associated with and pointing to that referent, but which are nevertheless separate from, or only loosely bound to, the referent itself. Such behavior is characteristic of definite descriptions, which lead to but are independent of the objects they designate, which is why, I think, Evans makes the remark about description- like entities.

The suggestion seems to be that the principle of compositionality allows for the reference of the sentence (the TV) to be **determined** by the reference of its parts (and whether or not the relation between concept and object which they represent obtains) and only **presented** by the Thought itself. Thus he argues that the truth value of a sentence (its referent) can be determined without having to be arrived at through the sense, in the way that one arrives at a referent by "following" a definite description. Although no reference can be known or apprehended apart from sense, this fact does not necessitate that the sense be an entity which leads to or determines its referent. Truth-value attaches to sense (the Thought) only because the sense of a sentence, being the object of belief, is that which is assented to in judgment, not because the Thought determines or provides its attached truth-value.

Evans thinks that the sense of a sentence is best interpreted as the way in which that which a sentence is about—the information which the sentence conveys—must be thought of in order to understand it. According to Evans, Frege's main insight into language is his claim that understanding a sentence involves not just baldly thinking about, directly apprehending, or entering into some other direct epistemological relation to the facts expressed by or the reference of that sentence, but rather thinking about or relating to a reference **in a particular way**. "One is thinking of the value True," he writes, "both when one is thinking of it as the value True, and as the value of the Thought that snow is white." (GE p. 282) This is the case, according to Evans, even when one doesn't know, because of the principle of difference, that one is thinking of the same thing. This way in which the True is thought about (which is represented in the Thought expressed by 'the snow is white') is what constitutes understanding the expression 'the snow is white'; the expression is one sense of the referent True. Putting it another way, the sense of 'the snow is white' represents one way of apprehending or thinking about the value True; namely, that way which is equivalent to an understanding of the sentence 'the snow is white', which designates the True.

**2.11 Can There Be Sense Without Reference?:** In order to be consistent, Evans must make the rather contentious claim that senses cannot exist without referents. Given that a sense is a way of thinking about a referent, there could be no such "way," unless there was some referent about which to think. This is in contrast to a way of finding, locating, or determining a referent (definite description-like) which directs the search but does not guarantee its success. Such ways do not depend on having references.

Evans and Blanchette wage a rather fierce war of citations, each with the intent of showing that Frege could not have held the position attributed him by the other. Evans, of course, wishes to maintain that senses are reference dependent, while Blanchette defends the more conventional view of sense/reference independence. Without joining this well fought battle, it seems reasonable to say that Frege himself was not altogether consistent on this point, and that the question should be settled with respect to the relative coherence of the two views as a part of Frege's overall theory. On the one hand we have such characterizations of senses as "modes of presentation," and it would seem unlikely that such modes could exist without an object to present. (SR p.200) On the other hand, Frege says that singular terms like the 'least rapidly convergent series' or 'celestial body most distant from earth' "have a sense, but . . . not a referent." (SR p.201) And yet, perhaps citing the latter in defense of sense/reference independence is based on a confusion. The 'least rapidly convergent series' is a definite description, which no one is denying can exist without a referent. Such a description corresponds to a "way of **finding**" its referent (which does not guarantee the success of the search), but this way of finding is not necessarily equivalent to the mode of presentation, way of thinking about, or sense of a referent.

The central question for Evans is, in a sentence containing a non-referring definite description or proper name, can the sentence express a Thought? That is, does the definite description provide a completing sense? It is clear, first of all, that when a definite description **does** have a referent it has a sense and, if we stick to Evans' interpretation for the moment, that this sense is

the way in which the referent must be thought about in order to understand the sentence in question. It is also clear that definite descriptions represent a "way of finding" their proposed referents. Thus, if this "way of finding," which is embodied in a DD regardless of whether it refers, is equivalent to the "way of thinking"(sense) embodied in those DD's which do refer, it would be hard to resist the argument that **all** DD's have a sense, whether or not they refer. Further, if having a sense is not dependent on having a referent, and if, thereby, sense is an entity indifferent to the existential status of referents, then no ontological characterizations of the sense of a term (conceptions of what the sense **is**) can be grounded in facts about the referencing of singular terms. If so, sense must be something shared by (which has equivalent manifestation in) **all** such terms, which is likely a "way of finding," "meaning," or "role." If this is so, then indexicals can only have a sense of the type Perry/Blanchette have shown to be incompatible with, and unable to account for, the linguistic behavior of indexicals.[1]

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[1] If we do, in fact, understand all sentences regardless of whether all their parts refer, then, because what is understood in comprehending a sentence is its sense, it must follow that non-referring singular terms provide a completing sense, in exactly the same way that referring terms do. Since non-referring terms provide only a "way of finding," "role," or "meaning," which allows them to exist without referents, all senses must correspond to some way of finding. On this conception, then, senses are constrained to be exactly those entities that are trapped in the Blanchette bind. On the other side of the coin, if we do not understand (in the relevant way) sentences containing non-referring singular terms, then it seems unlikely that "ways of finding," which singular terms possess regardless of whether they refer, and which we can, in fact, gather from such terms, count as senses. This conclusion would open the door for Evans' conception of sense.

That is, questions about what constitutes understanding, and what about a sentence is understood, are bound tightly together. If senses are "ways of finding," then the range of plausible accounts about understanding is restricted in such a way that Blanchette is probably warranted in asserting that there can be no general criterion for understanding that takes care of all purported counterexamples, without unwelcome consequences for Frege's philosophy. If, however, senses are "ways of presenting," and thus cannot exist apart from their referents, then this makes plausible an account of understanding which Evans can use to escape from our erstwhile bind. (see section 2.2) Evans thus has a stake in the answer to question 2.11.

The argument for the equivalence between senses and "ways of finding" might be mounted as follows: Since we understand sentences containing DD's, even those which do not refer, and since the sense of a sentence is that which is understood in this process, all DD's must provide a completing sense in order to make their sentences comprehensible. A similar argument might be mounted in favor of senses for empty proper names, i.e., that since we understand sentences containing them just as we do those containing referring names, all names must have senses. But there are a couple of possible objections to this line of reasoning:

(1) There is no ***a priori*** reason to assume, whatever we **do** understand of fictional definite descriptions (which is probably this "way of finding"), even if it seems equivalent to our understanding of referring Thoughts, that such understanding is actually equivalent to grasping a Fregean sense or Thought. This equivalence, in any case, is not something to be assumed, but must be argued for. And when we consider that the definition of a Thought runs something like "that which a sentence shares with all and only those sentences which must be judged true or false together," it seems less likely that the equivalence holds. For (and this is admittedly quick) if fictional Thoughts do not refer, have no truth-value, it is difficult to see how they can be judged together with anything; even if they are somehow understood they are never judged true or false at all.[2] In so far as this is true, it seems possible that Thoughts attach only to expressions with reference.

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[2] Judging such sentences true is obviously problematic. But so, it seems is judging to be false sentences like 'Sherlock Holmes was a great detective.' There is certainly some way in which this is true (unless you subscribe to the Russellian existensial claim model for assertions). And the most obvious candidate, that it is true by definition (Doyle's definition) is not particularly helpful, for then we have to explain why it is different from a sentence like 'Bachelors are unmarried males', which is also true by definition. Either we need to claim that "by definition" means something different here, in which case we have gotten nowhere fast, or give up our supposition that sentences involving Sherlock are somehow true or false only "in a way." In any case, it is clear that whatever "way" this is, it is not the scientifically rigorous way which Frege had in mind for his definition of Thoughts.

(2) It is unclear that we really do understand non-referring definite descriptions or empty names in the same way we understand sentences, or that we understand them at all. It might be said that we understand them in so far as we know the circumstances which would have to obtain in order for the expression to have a value. But it seems unlikely that this is true, that we understand what would have to happen for there to **be** a least rapidly convergent series, or a unicorn. Take 'unicorn' first: what is it that we are supposed to know about unicorns which allows us the claim that we can name circumstances in which unicorns would have existed? We certainly associate a multitude of definite descriptions with the term, say 'horse with horn'. But a unicorn is not a horse with a horn—What it **is** is a beast of a certain nature or being which can be described in certain ways, but which does not consist in those descriptions; its essence is not captured in or defined by the definite descriptions which it may fulfill. If so, then all we know about what it would be like for there to be unicorns is for there to be unicorns, linguistically speaking that there be something designated by 'unicorn'. (Regardless of whether this designates some essence, or just names something which bears a certain causal/epistemological relation to the speaker.) But this hardly contributes to an argument designed to show that we understand the term 'unicorn', and that this is evidence for the independence of sense and reference.

But perhaps this is not true, perhaps 'unicorn' is really just a truncated definite description 'horse with horn', and so is not unlike such terms as 'least rapidly convergent series'. Clearly, there is in any definite description some linguistic meaning which is a combination of the meanings of the individual terms. In this sense, at least, we do know what would have to occur in order for

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This is not necessarily to say that Frege was right in holding that "fictional thoughts" have some special status with respect to judgments of their truth-values. It certainly seems possible, in so far as all judgments of truth or falsity rely on some framework of accepted axioms/truth-claims (like that provided by a scientific theory), and in so far as the equivalent judgments for "fictional thoughts" rely on accepted facts within the stories in which such thoughts occur, that there may be some parallel to be drawn between truth-judgments based on more universal stories/paradigms like scientific theory, and those based on the limited frameworks embodied in myth and literature.

the circumstance named to obtain. But it is important to note that what we know about what it would take for the circumstance to obtain is for the circumstance to obtain; for there to be a least rapidly convergent series is for there to be some series which converges slower than any other, and for there to be a horse with a horn is for there to be a horse with a horn. There is nothing else we understand about the circumstance described by the phrase besides that it fulfills the description—no object is presented to us for scrutiny. This is hardly an impressive degree of knowledge or understanding. So what we have understood when we "understand" a DD is nothing more than the words which it contains. No one is denying that we can understand the words of the description, which, after all, have their own senses and referents, only that a non-referring description expresses a completing sense or contributes to a Thought. There is no reason to suppose (or, at least it is not necessitated by Frege's writing) that such linguistic meaning is equivalent to or sufficient for a sense to be expressed or a Thought grasped. Especially given Frege's insistence on the distinctness of Thoughts and ideas, one could easily maintain that empty descriptions and sentences containing non-referring singular terms invoke an idea in the hearer, composed as a kind of phantasmal combination of the listener's psychological associations with the description's individual terms. (We might, on hearing 'unicorn' imagine a horse-looking thing with a horn-looking thing on its head.) Since such associations are by definition incommunicable, Frege may mean to reserve "senses" and "Thoughts" to the task of presenting publicly available, objective (and therefore communicable) referents.

A couple of examples to make this clearer:

(I) When we encounter a sentence like

(X) Odysseus was a great guy.

it is unclear that we grasp it in a way sufficient to express a Thought with it. It seems to me that what we understand of this sentence (unless 'Odysseus' is really just a truncated definite description, in which case see example II) is, besides the concept "being a nice guy," that if there were somebody who was Odysseus, then this sentence would apply to him. But it is important to note that

(Y) If there were somebody who was Odysseus, then sentence X would apply to him.

cannot mean the same thing as X (for one thing, it would make sentence X self-referring, which it is not), and in so far as this is true, we fail, in grasping only Y, to understand X. Indeed, the best we can hope for in this case is

(Z) Some (non-)dude is a great guy.[3]

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[3] It might be objected that we know more than (Z) gives us credit for; we know, for instance, that (ZZ) "somebody named Odysseus is a great guy." But presumably this won't quite do either, for the original sentence is not about somebody (anybody) named 'Odysseus', but is about Odysseus. 'Odysseus' is not a class term that ranges over all people bearing that name, it is a singular term with definite reference. While it is true that Odysseus will, in fact, have the characteristic of having the name 'Odysseus', and so, in fact, the original sentence (if it is about anything) must be about someone who has the characteristic, it does not follow that the meaning of the sentence is that someone who has that characteristic is a great guy. (That is, it doesn't follow from the fact that the original sentence entails the truth of (ZZ), that the two have the same meaning. Or, to put it another way, (Oa & Ga)—where O = is named Odysseus and G = is a great guy—does **not** have the same meaning as $(\exists x)(Ox \& Gx)$, even though the truth of the latter is implied by the truth of the former. Nor do either of these have the same meaning as the less existentially insistent $((\exists x)Ox) \rightarrow Gx$ or the universal $(\forall x)(Ox \rightarrow Gx)$, the other possible candidates for the meaning of sentence (X))

The original sentence means, and must be understood in virtue of, picking out some specific individual (Odysseus) named 'Odysseus': (Oa & Ga). That this is imperative can be easily seen in the following two sentences:

(1) Michael is a great basketball player.

(2) Michael is a great basketball player.

The first, uttered by my roommate about me, is not the same as the second, uttered by Chicagoans about Mr. Jordan. Indeed, they are so different that only the second of these statements is true. The sentences must, in virtue of being capable of taking different truth values, express different Thoughts, and so the names must possess different senses. Since their "role" is the same, that cannot be their sense; rather, the sense is different exactly because they present different objects.

There are two objections to be leveled at these assertions. The first is that first names really are not singular terms, and so cannot be expected to refer definitively. If this is true, however, then such names may not have a sense, for a sense is restricted to singular terms; the same sense cannot correspond to more than one object. But this just seems to strengthen the assertion that, until terms refer definitively (which is also to say, refer), they cannot provide a completing sense, and sentences that contain them cannot express a Thought, and cannot, therefore, be understood as such. But do we really wish to say that we do not understand any sentences containing non-unique proper

which, again, is not a reflection of the actual meaning of sentence X (else 'Sherlock Holmes was a great guy', from which we would gather approximately the same information, would mean the same thing as sentence X, which is absurd). Rather, sentence Z reflects our understanding of the predicate, and of the grammatical rule which states that, in general, the predicate applies to the object named by the subject-word. This type of knowledge is clearly insufficient for grasping the Thought expressed by X (if X expresses a Thought; we have yet to discover what, if anything, sentence X actually means), and, as such, is not equivalent to our understanding of sentences with referring subjects, which involves individuation of the designated, existing object. (See section 2.2)

(II) 'The Vulcan ambassador is very talented' presents us with a similar situation. Here we can gather that some individual who is Vulcan and an ambassador is very talented. Again, this is merely a manifestation of our knowledge of the individual sentence-words, and the way in which sentences are generally constructed. Our understanding is of the language, not of the sentence; to understand the sentence we need to know what the sentence is

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names? Surely not, clearly we do understand such sentences, and we understand them in virtue of their ability to actually pick out specific individuals, which implies that they must have different, specific senses.

The second, picking up where the first leaves off, claims that sense simply **is** the "role" of a term, which for a true singular term, can have only one referent, although it need not have one at all. The reason we can understand the names in our above sentences is that they become singular terms **in context**. It may, in point of linguistic fact, be true that we understand both 1 and 2 primarily as "Somebody named 'Michael'. . .", and rely on salient context clues to reveal the referent. In such a case, however, what was communicated by the speech act was something more than the Thought "Somebody named 'Michael'. . .", for, in fact, it communicated information about some particular Michael. On this account, what is understood via communication is not the Thought expressed by a sentence, but something more complicated than that. This challenges Frege's understanding of language on a much deeper level than do our current objections (although, the alleged reliance on context of indexical expressions certainly points to this deeper failure). Whatever the merits of such a challenge, it is not the project of the paper to address them. At most, I write to show that indexical expressions do not constitute a damning anomaly; proponents of this sort of challenge to Frege will have to base their criticism on firmer grounds.

**about**, and this sentence, like all sentences containing fictional DD's, isn't about anything.[4]

This is a specific application of a more general point about understanding sentences. Unless you know what a sentence is about, you thereby fail to fully understand the sentence, fail, that is, to grasp the Thought it expresses. You may have heard that "Frege's distinction between sense and reference is elusive," but if you are not familiar with the philosophy of language, you cannot plausibly claim to have understood. You may remember the sentence and, using the way of finding this referring DD embodies, eventually recognize something as that which was named in the sentence. When this occurs, but not before, grasping the Thought it expresses becomes a real possibility. Thus the "way of finding" embodied in a DD, giving way as it does, in the moment of understanding, to sense, cannot be equivalent to that sense. (I.e., since what is understood before and after the AHA! experience of recognition must be different—otherwise there would be no AHA!—the "way of finding" is not what is understood by the fully comprehending agent.[5]) And sense, which always presents a referent, cannot exist without a referent to present.[6] (The name/description, of course, had a sense all along, but we only grasped it in the act of real understanding.)

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[4] For Evans, and arguably for Frege, **all** meaningful sentences must be about some particular object (be that object a material thing or a class). Thus, to understand a sentence means, among other things, knowing what, in particular, the sentence is about. (See section 2.21 and note 3.)

[5] There must be two levels of linguistic understanding—the first corresponding to the way of finding, a reflection of grammar and context, and the second corresponding to the true comprehension of grasping a Thought (which involves the epistemological relations outlined in part two, among them thinking "in a way" about an object, keeping track of that object, etc.). Since sense is, by definition, what is understood in grasping a Thought, it cannot be the same as a "way of finding."

[6] Besides the arguments presented here (which are mine, not Evans') Evans has a rather neat argument against the possibility that Frege could consistently have held that senses can exist without referents. In ***The Varieties of Reference***, Evans argues (pp. 22-3):

If we are prepared to say that certain sentences have no Truth Value, then we have no business making Truth Values the semantic values of sentences. If the semantic value is supposed

## *Making Sense of Indexicals*

Returning to the task at hand, then, we can explicate the idea that a sense is the way in which the reference of a sentence must be thought about in order to understand that sentence: Grasping a Thought entails coming into a certain epistemological relation with (way of thinking about) the referent of the sentence, an act which requires the existence of that referent. Thus the completing sense of 'today' is that way in which the day must be thought of which constitutes an understanding of a sentence containing that indexical.

But let's relate this back to our original criticisms, so it is clear what Evans is up to, and where he is disagreeing with the Perry/Blanchette position. So far, it seems that while Evans may have scored a few points against Perry and his marriage to the description-like nature of sense, he has yet to meet Blanchette's wider based objections. In order to do this, Evans must show his "ways of thinking about" to be immune to the bind Blanchette has built for them. Recall our original scenario: an agent utters the sentence 'Today is fine' on either side of midnight and thinks, because she has lost track of the time, that she has expressed the same Thought on both occasions. Because the agent

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to be that by and because of which sentences are meaningful entities, then we must claim that sentences with no such value are meaningless. (That, in this case, they have no sense.) If, however, there are meaningful sentences with no Truth Value, then presumably it is not by virtue of possessing a TV that sentences are meaningful, in which case why differentiate sentences with reference from the rest? The answer, for Frege, is that only sentences with reference can be useful in a meaningful, scientific language, and that their reference (TV) makes them meaningful. Frege cannot, however, have it both ways. If sentences are meaningful because they refer, then they may only mean (express a Thought, have a sense) when they refer. If sentences are not meaningful in virtue of referring, then we need to assign something else to their semantic value, but it is central to Frege's theory that TV's count as the semantic values of sentences.

Evans continues (pp. 25-6) with an argument he attributes to Dummett: Frege's theory of sense is necessarily built upon his theory of Meaning (reference). It is impossible for Frege to have had a primitive notion of sense, which might be expressed with a series of linguistic axioms thus: "The sense of S is '___'". Dummett notes: "Indeed, even when Frege is purporting to give the sense of a word or symbol, what he actually states is what the reference is . . . we might borrow a famous pair of terms from the ***Tractatus***, and say that, for Frege, we **say** what the referent of a word is, and thereby **show** what its sense is." (Dummett, ***Frege*** p.227) Thus, sense can only be something like a mode of presentation, which entails the existence of the object presented.

detects no difference in the Thoughts expressed, the Thoughts must be the same. But if this is true, then sense has failed to vary appropriately with reference. As previously noted, this bind depends on the assumption that the agent truly understands both utterances. But in order to claim that one of the sentences was not understood by the agent, Evans needs to provide a general criterion of understanding sentences which invariably binds sense and reference, and yet maintains the distinction between the two.

**2.2 On Understanding:** For Evans, to understand a sentence is to be able to use the sentence to make a statement **about** something. How a statement carries meaning (is about something) is tied up with how we understand that statement—what we understand is, after all, what the statement means—thus the question facing Evans is: in virtue of what is a statement about something? Questions about the nature of understanding, what it takes to use and make meaningful statements (statements which are **about** things), and how these statements, when properly used, **are** about things, are best treated together. Of course, the central entity in this inquiry is the sense of a sentence, the Thought. The Thought not only carries (is) the meaning of a sentence, but it also conveys that meaning by being that which is understood of a sentence in grasping the Thought. As we have already seen, sense is, for Evans, a **way of thinking about** a certain object (the object referred to as the subject of the sentence). Not surprisingly, this way of thinking about the object which the sentence is about—which is equivalent to understanding that sentence—corresponds directly to the **way of presenting** the object (the sense of the sentence) which is the vehicle of meaning for the sentence. In brief, it could be said that, for Evans, when the way in which an agent thinks about an object is equivalent to the way in which the object is presented in a sentence, the sentence is thereby understood by the agent. Thus, dealing specifically with the question at hand, Evans claims that there is, indeed, a special way in which a speaker must think about the day referred to in 'Today is fine', which is equivalent to understanding that sentence, and which also makes that statement about the day, and that is to think of today as 'the current day'. The question then becomes, what makes the

Thought expressed by ‘Today is fine’ about the day when the speaker thinks of it as the current day?

**2.21 What *Does* Make a Statement about an Object?:** This, however, brings up some interesting questions, and so I digress. If a statement is about an object in virtue of an agent thinking about that object in a particular way, which is to grasp the associated Thought, this complicates the referencing behavior of sentences. For Frege, it is important that Thoughts are timelessly existing entities, which do not depend for their meaning on being grasped or interpreted by anyone. Thus, what makes a **Thought** about an object cannot be anything having to do with properties of the grasper, but must depend only on the Thought itself—otherwise ungrasped Thoughts would not be about anything, which is not a position I think Frege would be very comfortable with. We must be clear, then, that the speaker's ability to make statements about an object depends on his way of thinking, exactly (only) because this way of thinking allows him to come into the proper epistemological relation to the (appropriate) Thought about the (appropriate) object.

But with this clarification, a new set of tensions arises for Evans' theory. If the Thought expressed by ‘It's nice here’ is to be about something before it is grasped or uttered by anyone at any place, it must already be about a particular object. The Thought must, without any help from the grasper, pick out one particular place. However a Thought does this, it is this relation we are called upon to epistemologically mimic when we grasp it. But the question immediately arises: is this a plausible description of the relation between Thought, statement, and object? The two possibilities for how a Thought is about something (how it picks out its subject-object) are tied up with what it takes to make a statement about something, which are, in turn, tied up with what it takes to understand that sentence:

(1) It seems reasonable to suppose that, if making a statement about an object (by naming the object) requires individuating that object, and referring to that object requires the same, that understanding a statement made about an

object also requires this individuation and, if the Thought is that which is understood in understanding a sentence, that the Thought must have individuated the object **before** being understood.[7] That is, if the Thought is that which is understood of a sentence, and understanding requires individuating a particular object, **and** if everything in the Thought must exist prior to its being grasped, then this object must be individuated by the Thought itself, without help from the context of its grasper. This would lend credibility to the position that Thoughts (even those containing indexicals) refer on their own in virtue of picking out one particular object. Likewise, if Thoughts must pick out objects independently of the context of their being grasped, then it would seem likely to suppose that the same would be required (the ability to pick out a given object) of a person who wishes to grasp the Thought.

(2) If, on the other hand, understanding and using such terms does not depend on picking out some particular object, but only (for instance) on the most basic grasp of grammar, and the "way of finding" suggested by the surface meaning and grammatical structure of sentences, or only on making certain language-like sounds at a particular place, (both of which let the context of the utterance define its meaning) it would seem unlikely that grasping the Thought expressed would require anything more stringent.

On first inspection, possibility two seems most plausible. All that is required in my referring to here with the word 'here' is that I be some place—I needn't know where that place is, or know anything about that place. Now, this

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[7] A more general feature of language begins to emerge: Language is, at its root, an ontological framework. That is, it is built upon, and imposes, a particular set of object-differentiations. We name that which we perceive as separate or (conceptually) separable, and everything so separable about which speech is desired/required, we name. In this way language provides the means to talk about every**thing** there is (to talk about). Alternately, we can say that no**thing** outside of language strikes us as a **thing**, or, at least, as thing enough to speak of. (Or that, in so far as language here defines thing-ness, there is nothing outside of language.) But language also, in requiring a certain mind-set for its understanding, imposes a particular way of differentiating the world into objects (that is, into nameable things): precisely that way which corresponds to the names in a language and their extension. And in this way language structures our understanding of, and approach to, the world.

is true as far as it goes, but it means only that I need not know any descriptions which co-refer to the place, or know where this place is in relation to some other known place (like 300 miles south of New Haven). It does not necessarily imply that I can refer to here without knowing that it is different from there, which seems to entail the ability to individuate/differentiate and pick out the particular object-place "here."

It should be clear that sentences (linguistic items) refer only by virtue of the **Thoughts** they express. They have no independent referencing ability. For symbols are only connected arbitrarily to a given Thought, and so derive their reference from that connection. Thus 'It's nice here' could just as easily mean "all baby seals are cute and white" as it could "it's nice here." Indeed, we might imagine such a case, where an American tourist gets off a plane to be greeted by his native Indo-Alaskan speaking guide. The tourist, thinking to be friendly says 'It's nice here', which the guide takes to mean "all baby seals are cute and white." So the guide responds 'Yes, beautiful', meaning "but unfortunately they are endangered." The point is not that the two have utterly failed to communicate, but rather that even though they have so failed, they have not failed in expressing Thoughts by their utterances. There is no reason to suppose that they have not understood what they themselves have said, thus attaching a Thought to their own utterances, and even attached (quasi-appropriate) Thoughts to the utterances of the other. If this is true, Thoughts are associated with sentences in virtue of a certain community of language users attaching certain Thoughts to certain symbol-strings, by using those symbol strings to indicate a certain epistemological state in which one must be to grasp the appropriate Thought, and are **attached** to sentences in virtue of the epistemological state of the speaker, which allows grasp of a particular Thought. Although Thoughts may refer in and of themselves, sentences only refer by expressing Thoughts, and only express Thoughts in virtue of being attached to that Thought by a language user who grasps the Thought as a condition of

uttering, or in appropriate response to hearing, the sentence (as a result of his knowledge of the language).[8]

Thus a parrot who makes the sounds 'It's nice here' does not thereby attribute any properties to any place, nor make a statement about or refer to any object, in fact, does not express a Thought at all. We take the parrot to have made a statement because we, in interpreting the sounds, attach it to a certain Thought, but neither the parrot, nor the sentence itself, has referred. But what does the parrot lack? Why is there no Thought expressed by the sounds? Obviously, the parrot does not grasp a Thought or associate it with the sounds. But what would it take to grasp the full Thought normally attached to the English sentence 'It's nice here'? If it is to be a different Thought than simply "It's nice" (which is what the sentence must mean if no knowledge of which particular object the sentence is about is required to understand or properly use the sentence. And presumably 'It's nice here' **must** mean more than simply 'It's nice', since the same arguments apply to 'It's nice now' which must, too, be a different Thought than 'It's nice', otherwise 'It's nice here' and 'It's nice now' would express the same Thought (mean the same thing), which clearly they do not.) but also a different Thought than 'It's nice someplace' (which, again, it must since the truth conditions for 'It's nice someplace'— $(\exists x)(Px\&Nx)$— are different than those for 'It's nice here' (Na)) then it must be so in virtue of identifying some **particular** place which is nice. If, however, the Thought identifies some particular place, it stands to reason that the same place must be identified in order to understand the sentence. Thus, grasping a Thought entails knowing what the sentence is **about**, and knowing what it is about depends on

[8] Just to get the vocabulary straight: A Thought is **grasped** by a speaker in virtue of his epistemological state. A Thought is **expressed** by a sentence in virtue of being attached to that sentence by a language-user who grasps the Thought, associating it with a certain symbol-string. It is **attached** to the sentence by being used in conjunction with grasping a Thought. To communicate that Thought: a Thought is **communicated** in virtue of community language standards which specify which symbol-strings shall be used to indicate the epistemological state in which the hearer must be in order to grasp the same Thought as that grasped by the speaker and expressed by the sentence.

being able to pick out the object referred to. To express a Thought with 'It's nice here', one must be able to **identify** here, not just be there.

It is difficult to imagine that this ability to pick out some particular place can exist without the requisite ability to differentiate it from some other place. To pick out some place entails that, if one picked out a different place, it would be recognized as such. If not, this casts some doubt on whether one has identified any place at all. That is, it seems impossible to be able to pick out only **one** place; to pick out an object and identify it is to identify that particular object as opposed to some other object, to differentiate that object from its neighbors, to mark it off from its surroundings; it is to be aware of what counts as that object and what doesn't, to recognize its boundaries. This entails **at least** the ability to differentiate two objects: that which is the object identified, and that which is not the object.

So Thoughts it seems must, in order to be that which is understood/meant by given utterances, pick out particular object in virtue of their own, independent, referential properties. Likewise, in order to grasp these Thoughts, the agent must possess and exercise an ability to differentiate objects, and must, in order to understand a sentence, know what it is **about**, differentiating objects (and thinking about them) in a way which mirrors the way of the attached Thought. Even, it seems, in cases like here, now, and today.

**2.22 Keeping Track of Objects: Identification and Re-Identification:** Evans has a couple more things to say on the subject of understanding. He first of all subsumes that which allows a speaker to grasp a Thought about a particular object under the speaker's disposition to make correct judgments about the object in question in accordance to how the object observably is. What makes a person grasp the appropriate Thought about a day is his active ability to correctly evaluate sentences containing 'today' and the Thoughts they express (i.e., his proper use of the term 'today'), according to how things observably are on the day in question—the current day. The speaker's location, combined with his disposition to judge according to observation, provide that in

virtue of which a given sentence/statement is about a particular object. Evans writes ". . . I should want to place in a central position in any account of what makes a man's thought concern a particular place in the way in which is required for understanding sentences containing the term 'here', a knowledge of which place is in question which at least partly consists in a disposition to judge that Thought as true or false according to how things observably are at that place—a disposition which he can have vis a vis just one place in the universe in virtue of occupying it. . . ." (GE p.289)

The ability to make judgments about an object based on observation is, of course, based on an ability to observe the object in question and this, Evans claims, must be grounded in an ability to differentiate the object from other objects, and an ability to keep track of the object through any motion it may have, whether in time or space. That is, one cannot form beliefs like 'It is now X' without an ability to differentiate now from then, and without the ability to form beliefs like 'It was X' and 'It will be X'. Further, one must be able to keep track of now (thought of as the current moment) as it moves through time, constantly changing value. As Evans writes: "Frege's idea is that being in the same epistemic state may require different things of us at different times; the changing circumstances force us to change in order to keep hold of a constant reference and a constant thought—we must run to keep still." (GE p.293) The movement of an object in time or space relative to the speaker can change the way in which that object must be thought about in order to make judgments about it and to understand sentences pertaining to the object. Thus we may have to change the way a statement looks (the way it is rendered into language) in order repeatedly to apply the same description to the same object. That is, the sentences 'today is fine' and 'yesterday was fine' may be manifestations of the same belief if they are uttered under the proper conditions.[9]

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[9] This raises an immediate question: do 'Today is fine' and 'Yesterday was fine' express the same Thought when they are co-referring? Under Evans' interpretation they cannot, for since today the sense of D is "the current day" and tomorrow the sense of D will be "the previous day" (or something), and since the principle of compositionality must hold, the Thoughts must be different. This fact makes problematic our previous claim that the Thought is the object of belief, for although

Now, the obvious objection to make to this is that the two sentences 'Today is fine' and 'Yesterday was fine' will not bind a speaker to accept or reject them together unless one knows when the two terms 'today' and 'yesterday' co-refer. Likewise, one will only know when one must judge similarly with respect to two utterances of 'Today is fine' when one knows whether or not today is the same day on both occasions. Frege, of course, specifically disallows knowledge of the co-referentiality of terms from being part of a criterion of understanding. But knowing about the co-referentiality of terms is not specified as part of Evans' criterion of understanding, although such

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these two sentences express different Thoughts, they can certainly be manifestations of the same belief. The psychology of belief is a bit more complicated than this one to one correspondence recognizes.

Thoughts are, most importantly, ways of understanding or knowing certain facts (relations between concepts and objects). An individual may know a given relation in one or many ways, all without realizing that, ultimately, the relation underlying these Thoughts is the same. If, however, the individual does, in fact, know of the co-referentiality of some of the singular terms, then his epistemic state—his belief—might equally well be expressed by him with any of the Thoughts containing the known-to-be-co-referential terms. We might analogize this by saying that, although the object of belief is the sense/Thought/way of thinking about the object, once one knows that certain ways present the same object, these ways can be psychologically merged. Knowing separately that Cicero is a great orator and that Tully is a great orator, I express different epistemic states with my utterances of the respective sentences. However, when I realize that Cicero = Tully, I will be in the same epistemic state, that is, believe the same thing, when using either expression. This is not to say that I suddenly have privileged, direct access to the object, nor that 'I believe the "same thing"' means the object of belief is really some combination of the object itself with the concept (the notion Frege originally made problematic) but rather that when I am aware, in expressing it one particular **way**, of the other particular **way**, then since this is the same for both ways, I am in the same epistemic state when expressing it either **way**. My belief at the time, when I believe that Cicero is a great orator, is equally well expressed (for me, so far as corresponding to my belief-state) with either of the two possibilities. Where I may wish to choose one way over the other is when I am trying to **communicate** my belief to an individual with different knowledge, and who might thereby understand one sentence in the **way** in which I intend, but not the other.

Much more needs to be said about the relation of Thoughts and epistemic states, (see, for instance, my "Proper Names and the Epistemology of Third Person Reference," in which I examine one possible conception of the psychological and epistemological role of singular terms in language and comprehension) but this outlines the direction I would take the inquiry.

knowledge would be had in this case by a speaker who understood both utterances. Evans' criterion is simply that the speaker know which day the two sentences are about; a person would only fail to know this if he lost track of time. Since for Evans having a belief depends on identifying and differentiating the object of the belief, which, in turn, depends on keeping track of that object, losing track of time means that the agent loses that in virtue of which his Thoughts can be about an object, and so fails to understand (at least) one of the utterances. Epistemic conflicts under these conditions fail to cut against Frege's theory, or Evans' interpretation.

Consider again the scenario we have been working with throughout the paper. Our erstwhile agent makes two utterances of 'Today is fine' on either side of midnight, losing track of the time in between. Our alleged bind requires that the speaker's lack of recognition of any difference in the Thoughts expressed entails that the same Thought is expressed, while the reference of the sentences entail that the Thoughts must be different. However, because she has lost track of time, Evans would hold that she fails to understand at least one of her utterances, thereby failing to grasp the Thought it expresses. As such she is in no position to judge the sameness of the Thoughts expressed by the sentences.

One final concern remains in the way of a complete picture of the epistemological requirements for the use and understanding of sentences. That is, can there be a way of keeping track of objects which does all we need it to, while still being a plausible requirement of language use? In keeping track of an object we must be vigilant enough that when we think we have re-identified an object with sufficient confidence to make (or repeat) a statement about it, that we have, in fact, re-identified the same object. Likewise, when we encounter an object, we must be able to recognize whether it is or is not an object we had previously identified. And yet, our vigilance cannot be so implausibly strict as to require that we keep track of all the objects which we encounter, until we know all its possible modes of presentation and identifying characteristics, before we can make statements about them; as in keeping track of the evening

star all night until one could discover that it was, indeed, the morning star, before one felt comfortable in making statements about either one.

Unfortunately, I must confess that I am not going to settle this problem here. Justifying the existence of an appropriate account of keeping track of objects, although important for an overall, general account of language use, takes us a bit far afield from the direct concerns of this paper, and into the realms of the psychology of perception and identity theory. I do think that there is such a way of keeping track of objects, and that it is the sort of thing that we do every day. Just as we keep track of ourselves and our own motion relative to desks, rooms, houses, streets, and even days, so we also keep track of the motions of these objects with respect to one another. It is this ability which, along with a disposition for re-identifying objects which we, of necessity, lose track of (say, when we fall asleep, or as an object leaves the range of our senses), that allows us, with great measure of success, to make, and continue to make, statements about objects, same or different. No such account will provide a set of epistemological conditions which describe a foolproof method for the proper use and understanding of language. But any account of language describing a mistake-free epistemological process will, to the extent of its perfection, fail to describe language as it is, and as it works. Rather than being a detriment to a theory of language, the possibility of its practical application leading to mistakes could be a theoretical triumph, as long as it leads to the correct, actually observed mistakes. In general, illumination of why, and in what way we are likely to make linguistic and epistemological errors is as important to a proper theory of language as is an explanation of our communicative triumphs, and theories for which possible (probable) linguistic errors are an indication of theoretical failure (as was alleged in the case of Frege's theory of language) are almost surely influenced by grave misconceptions about the nature of language.

## III
## Conclusion

**3.1 Summary:** Frege introduced his famous distinction between sense and reference as a result of the realization that the same object could be presented in numerous ways, and that each of these ways represented a different cognitive content; sentences differing only in the way of presenting the subject were understood differently, could even be judged differently with respect to their truth values. Accordingly, Frege proposed that each singular term had both a referent, and a sense corresponding to a way of presenting that referent. He also introduced an entity called the Thought, which was the sense of a sentence, composed of the senses of the sentence's parts.

I noted, in explicating this central feature of Frege's philosophy of language, that:

The same entity—the Thought—must both:

(A) "Reflect the cognitive content" of a sentence. This entails that sentences which share cognitive content must express the same Thought.

(B) "Bear the reference" of a sentence. This entails that sentences with differing truth conditions must express different Thoughts.

Likewise, the sense of a singular term must both:

(a) Provide a completing sense which can join with the sense of the predicate to compose a Thought.

(b) Present one (and only one) particular object.

By definition, the sense of the sentence must be equivalent to the Thought expressed, and, in being constructed from the senses of the sentence-parts, must vary iff. they vary.

According to Blanchette's analysis, no entity can do both (A) and (B) (or (a) and (b)) for sentences containing indexical expressions, for even when an agent understands two sentences containing indexical expressions it is always possible that the Thoughts expressed by the two sentences will be the same by Criterion (A), but different by criterion (B). (As in our running scenario) I have argued, however, that this contention rests on an implicit notion of

understanding which can be challenged, and that Evans provides the proper tools for this challenge.

I argued first that the way in which we understand, and what we understand of, sentences implies that all the terms of a comprehensible sentence must refer. That is, senses must, as "ways of presenting," be reference dependent. This is important, for referent independent senses imply an account of understanding such that a conception of language built on referent independent senses fails to elude the Blanchette bind. (see note 1) Having established this dependence, I moved to an explication of Evans' conception of understanding which requires, among other things, that the object which the sentence is about be identified, differentiated, and kept track of by the individual wishing to understand the sentence in question.

If we agree that the most important features of Frege's theory are embodied in the sense/reference distinction, the principle of compositionality, and the criteria (A), (B), (a), and (b) above, then Evans' interpretation is true to Frege's philosophical intentions. Admittedly, the stated conditions of understanding, the relation between epistemic states and Thoughts, and the examination of the referencing behavior of Thoughts and sentences extrapolates far beyond Frege's own writings, but such investigation is of just the type necessary to help unravel the baffling complexities of natural language.

**3.2 Solution:** Let us put this all back together with our working scenario. Our friendly neighborhood language-user says, at 11:55 pm "Today is fine," and then again at 12:05 am, "Today is fine." The agent believes she has expressed the same Thought, and so, it seems, by the cognitive content criterion, **has** expressed the same Thought. However, given that the reference of 'today' changed five minutes before her second utterance, the reference bearing criterion demands that the Thoughts expressed must be different.

We have a couple of options in dealing with this scenario. We may claim, first of all, that the reference bearing criterion does not, in fact, demand that the statements made express different Thoughts. That is, since the Thought

expressed by a speaker depends on her epistemological state (the Thought she is grasping), and not merely on the sounds which she utters, (since language is primarily a communicative indication of that epistemological state), the fact that she has lost track of time, and has thus failed to alter her epistemological state in response to her changing circumstances, means that she has likewise failed to attach her Thought to an appropriate utterance, and has therefore failed to express the Thought she wishes to express. (Indeed, it seems unlikely that she has **expressed** a Thought at all.) We may **take** her to have expressed a Thought about this particular day, but this is only because we, in attaching the utterance to its linguistically appropriate Thought, take the words as an indication of a certain epistemological state; unfortunately, in this case, it is not the epistemological state of the speaker, and she has thereby failed to communicate. It happens. In other words, Thoughts do, in fact, bear reference. Utterances, however, do not without being attached to a Thought. Since our speaker has lost track of time, she has lost that disposition for object-tracking necessary for attaching utterances to Thoughts, has not referred by way of a Thought, and so has not referred. No conflict involving referencing behavior arises.

But if we stipulate (as a critic might) that our agent has made her judgment based on the way things observably are at the time, it would be difficult to maintain that she lacks the capacity by which her Thoughts can be about the day. We could specify that she is thinking of it as the current day. So, although perhaps she cannot correctly differentiate today from other days because she does not know the day's boundaries, she can (we suppose) in virtue of having a grasp on "now" and the relation of this indexical to other, derivative indexicals (today = the day it is now), make a statement about today. I would contend, and I believe Evans would agree, that in making a statement derivatively she has, at most, made a statement about now, and not about the day at all.[10] But for someone who is unconvinced by this (and by the arguments

[10] That is, since the speaker has (supposedly) grasped the thought 'It's nice the day it is now' without knowing which day it actually **is** now (without differentiating the day from its temporal neighbors), the most that can actually have occurred is that she has grasped the thought 'It's

of section 2.21), Evans has another, clearer option in dealing with the above scenario.

The problem arises not necessarily in having a belief about a specific time, but rather in relating this belief to those held at other times. In simply repeating her words ten minutes apart, she has failed to manifest the persistence of the same belief over a stretch of time, for she has (in losing track of time) lost the disposition whereby such a manifestation is possible. In losing track of time, she loses touch with her previously held belief—she does not follow the object of belief as its relative temporal position changes—and so, by losing that capacity whereby she can express beliefs (epistemological states) by attaching utterances to Thoughts, she also loses the capacity to truly understand her previous utterance. Having thus lost contact with her previously held belief (which now must be expressed by 'Yesterday was fine') she is in no position to judge that it is best expressed by 'today is fine', and so is not in the position of grasping two indistinguishable (and therefore, by the cognitive content criterion, identical) Thoughts. (Indeed, she is not grasping the previous Thought at all.) Again no epistemic conflict arises.

Expanding this back to a general condition for understanding sentences, a language user who wishes to understand a given sentence must enter into a certain epistemic state in relation to the reference of the sentence and the references of its parts—a **way of thinking** about these referents—which is equivalent to the sense of the sentence and its parts—a **way of presenting** these referents. Like Frege, who noted that language presents objects in particular ways, Evans' central insight into language and understanding is that language also has a built in system for **differentiating** objects in a particular way. Understanding involves mentally mimicking not just the mode of

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nice now'. Thus her thoughts (and her Thought) are really about now. Given that she utters the words 'It's nice today', while being attached to the Thought 'It's nice now', the most she can have done is made a statement about now. It seems more likely, however, that because the linguistic attachment between 'It's nice today' and its Thought is in conflict with the epistemic attachment between the speaker's utterance and 'It's nice now', that the speaker has failed to express or communicate either Thought, and so has not made a statement about anything.

presentation, but also the system of differentiation, represented by individual statements. Because entering into this epistemic state entails that a person differentiate objects in a way which mirrors the differentiations of the Thought, the individual must have the active capacity to differentiate and identify the object-referents in question. This ability requires, in turn, that the individual keep track of the individuated object, as it moves through space and time, changing one's epistemic relation as this movement requires. To lose track of an object is to lose the ability to judge when successive statements about an object are statements about the **same** object, and when they are not. It can also mean losing the ability to actually **make** successive statements about the same object, since the speaker is no longer capable of making (with respect to the intended referent) that particular connection of Thought and sentence in virtue of which statements are about particular objects. Because language use and understanding centrally involve knowing what (objects) a statement is **about**, losing track of time (or space)—which produces an inability to delineate the boundaries of time-objects like days, and therefore an inability to **identify** such objects (differentiating them from the objects which they are not)—entails, through losing that capacity for identifying what a statement is about, that one lose the capacity, until re-orientation, for fully understanding statements. To understand a sentence is to know what a sentence is about, which is to be able to identify its object, which, in turn, requires that the object be differentiated from its surroundings (in that way appropriate to the Thought), and which, finally, requires that its boundaries be monitored with respect to oneself; and, at least in the case of days, this requires keeping track of time.

This condition for the competent use and understanding of language effectively captures the middle ground between the overly-inclusive condition of (roughly) the ability to make coherent, grammatical utterances and the implausible, overly-restrictive condition of knowledge of the co-referentiality of singular terms. The conditions outlined here for language use seem not only reasonable in their own light, but also serve to rescue Frege (or at least contemporary Fregeans) from the problem of indexicals.

There is, as always, much more to be said. A more thorough investigation of the extent and degree of diligence required in keeping track of objects is called for, along with an explicit examination of just how Fregean Evans' interpretation is. For now, however, I hope to have provided some reason to believe that such investigation is worthwhile, and that Evans has provided a plausible, interesting, and fruitful interpretation of Frege's philosophy.

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# Plantinga and the Two Problems of Evil

***Xavier O. Monasterio***

In his famous ***Memorial***, Pascal opted for "the God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob . . . , the God of Jesus-Christ" against "the God of philosophers." Since then the discussion has raged periodically as to the meaning and legitimacy of such a distinction. I want to return to that issue.

For this purpose I have chosen to focus on Alvin Plantinga's work. My reasons for doing so are the following. First, the God of Plantinga's philosophical theology seems to me to be a paradigmatic instance of what Pascal rejected under the name "the God of philosophers." Second, Plantinga's approach to the issues of God's existence and of the rationality of believing in his existence is often considered as a philosophical model. Indeed, I do not think that the following quotation is either uncharacteristic or overstated:

> Alvin Plantinga is widely recognized as the most important philosopher of religion now writing. Indeed, his work is the principal reason for the rebirth and flowering of philosophical theology during the past twenty years.[1]

It seems only fair, if I am to challenge the adequacy of a philosophical approach, to judge it by the results it yields when practiced by one of the most competent of its representatives. Finally, Plantinga is avowedly a Christian philosopher and his approach serves as a model to other Christian philosophers.[2] Since I believe that, contrary to his and their honest conviction, Plantinga's philosophical approach misses the God of Christian revelation, the faith in whom I share with them, the question I am raising is of much more than

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[1] James E. Tomberlin and Peter Van Inwagen, editors, ***Alvin Plantinga*** (Boston: D. Reidel Publishing Company, l985), p. 3.

[2] See, for instance, Alvin Plantinga, "Advice to Christian Philosophers," ***Faith and Philosophy*** 1, number 3 (July 1984), pp. 253-271.

purely academic interest to Plantinga, to other Christian philosophers, and to myself, whatever interest it may have for philosophers in general.

My question, therefore, concerns Plantinga's philosophical approach to the issues of God's existence and of the propriety of believing in Him. In this paper, however, I will limit myself to his understanding of the problem of evil, both as symptomatic of his approach and as a concrete instance of it. We might, perhaps, on this avowedly limited basis, start getting some idea of what the Pascalian rejection of "the God of philosophers" was about.

## I
## The Existential and the Philosophical Problems of Evil

In a recent piece devoted to explaining his own philosophical itinerary, Plantinga matter-of-factly introduces a distinction between two different problems related to evil: the existential problem and the philosophical problem. Sometimes, Plantinga informs us, some of the people who believe in God, and specifically those who believe in the God of Christian revelation, are troubled in their faith by considerations concerning the suffering that goes on in the world whose creation they attribute to a loving God. Plantinga, himself a Christian, admits that considerations of this sort "have troubled me with respect to belief in God, and have been a source of genuine perplexity."[3] "Why does God permit all this evil, and evil of these horrifying kinds, in his world?" he asks. And he answers very honestly—and very truly, too, in my opinion: "the Christian must concede that he does not know."[4] Of course, the result of this realization, as Plantinga says,

> can be deeply perplexing and deeply disturbing. It can lead a believer to take towards God an attitude he himself deplores;

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[3] James E. Tomberlin and Peter Van Inwagen, editors, ***Alvin Plantinga***, p. 34.

[4] Tomberlin and Van Inwagen, p. 35.

> it can tempt him to be angry with God, to mistrust God, to adopt an attitude of rebellion.[5]
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> A Christian or other theist, therefore, may find that evil presents him with a problem: the problem of maintaining an attitude of love and trust towards God in the face of the evil his own life or the world at large may contain. But this problem—a pastoral or religious or existential problem—is not what usually goes under the rubric "the problem of evil."[6]

Following Plantinga's own suggestion, let us identify the above problem as the "existential" problem of evil, and let us see now how it differs from what we might call the "philosophical" problem of evil, the one that philosophers discuss under the rubric "the problem of evil," which Plantinga immediately proceeds to characterize by contrasting it to the former:

> The latter has to do instead with arguments for the nonexistence of God or—what is quite another matter—for the irrationality or impropriety of believing that there is such a person as God. It is these arguments—"atheological arguments" as we might call them—in which I have been interested.[7]

Plantiga's distinction seems to come to the following. The existential problem of evil regards the believer and it consists in the difficulty of maintaining certain attitudes towards God in the face of evil. The philosophical problem, by contrast, regards philosophers and concerns the validity of arguments against God's existence or against the rationality of believing that

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[5] Tomberlin and Van Inwagen, p. 35.

[6] Tomberlin and Van Inwagen, pp. 36-37.

[7] Tomberlin and Van Inwagen, p. 37.

God exists, given the undeniable reality of evil. The former, as it emerges from Plantinga's characterization, is a sort of psychological difficulty, whereas the latter is the truly substantive, rational problem posed by evil.

The distinction is introduced so matter-of-factly by Plantinga that one feels tempted to go along with him without any further consideration. It might be worthwhile, however, to probe the validity of the distinction. After all, I must confess that I had never thought that there were two distinct problems of evil and that philosophers were supposed to deal with one of them only. Obviously, whether there are two problems of evil or one only depends on the legitimacy of Plantinga's distinction. Leaving, however, this issue for later, let us begin by inquiring whether Plantinga's characterization of the existential problem of evil does justice to the facts of the crisis undergone by certain believers in the face of evil.

## II
## The Existential Problem of Evil

The existential problem, Plantinga tells us, results from the realization that God permits the horrifying kinds of evil we encounter in the world, for such realization "can lead a believer to take towards God an attitude he himself deplores; it can tempt him to be angry with God, to mistrust God, to adopt an attitude of rebellion."

I find it highly significant that Plantinga avoids considering a more radical outcome of the existential problem, namely, the loss of faith in God's existence. Yet, such an outcome is not inconceivable or unheard of. In his novel ***The Plague*** Camus offers us a perfectly plausible example: "Tarrou . . . remarked that he had known a priest who had lost his faith during the war, as a result of seeing a young man's face with both eyes destroyed."[8]

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[8] Albert Camus, ***The Plague***, trans. Stuart Gilbert (New York: Vintage Books, 1972), p. 23.

If we apply to this priest the words in which Plantinga describes the existential problem, his description, I think, will ring hollow: "This priest, therefore, may find that seeing the young man's face with both eyes destroyed presents him with a problem: the problem of maintaining an attitude of love and trust towards God in the face of such evil."

Why does Plantinga's description ring hollow? Because it makes it sound as if the believer had a mere problem of attitudes, as if this priest could conceivably have continued to believe in God's existence while finding it impossible to love and trust God. In fact, this priest could not. He was not led simply to take towards God an attitude he himself deplored, to be angry with God, to revolt against Him. He lost his belief in God altogether.

This, it seems to me, raises a serious question concerning the adequacy of Plantinga's distinction. Supposedly, the existential problem is just a difficulty the believer experiences in maintaining certain attitudes towards God in the face of evil; by itself, it has nothing to do with the rational propriety of believing that God exists. This is, in fact, the reason that Plantinga could not include among the possible outcomes of the existential problem the loss of belief in God's existence. Yet this priest, as other believers confronted with the evil of this world have, lost his belief in God's existence when he found it impossible to go on loving and trusting God. In fact, if Plantinga's distinction were right, the difficulty this priest experienced in loving and trusting God should have not affected his belief that God exists, since it has nothing to do with the rational propriety of believing in God. Does Plantinga's position make sense? In order to answer the question we have to analyze more carefully than Plantinga the attitudinal aspect of the problem of evil.

The problem of maintaining an attitude of love and trust towards God that the priest of Camus' novel had is very different from having a stomach problem. If I have a stomach problem, if, for instance, I experience a difficulty in retaining the food I ingest, I have a physiological problem. Since I am not a physician and physicians are supposed to be knowledgeable about the **causes** of this sort of problem, I would go to a physician. Obviously, however, this priest should not have gone to a physician, since his problem is not a physiological

problem. But should he have gone to a psychologist, since psychologists are supposedly knowledgeable about psychological problems? Only if his difficulty in maintaining certain attitudes were a matter of **causes**, as a physiological problem is; but not if it is a rational problem, a matter of "rational propriety," to use Plantinga's idiom. Indeed, suppose that this priest, while believing firmly in God and having **no reason** to doubt the propriety of loving and trusting God, had started experiencing a great difficulty in maintaining those attitudes. In that case, I would say, he had a psychological problem comparable, ***mutatis mutandis***, to a stomach problem, and perhaps a psychologist or a psychiatrist might have discovered its cause and cured him. But that is not the typical problem of believers in general and of this priest in particular; for, if it were, this priest would not have found it impossible to believe in God, he would simply have found himself incapable of loving and trusting God.

In fact, I claim, the believer's problem, insofar as attitudes towards God are concerned, is very much unlike a stomach problem. It is not a problem of causes but a rational problem—**a problem concerning the rational propriety of the believer's attitudes towards God**. How so?

It is to be noticed that this priest's problem did not appear out of the blue or, for instance, when he happened to hear the telephone ring, as a stomach problem might well appear. It appeared when he saw the poor young man with his eyes destroyed, and in strict correlation with that event. But why should this priest experience a difficulty in loving and trusting God in relation to the young man's tragedy rather than to the ringing of the telephone? Because the latter has nothing to do with the rational propriety of loving and trusting God, while the former seems to constitute a rather serious reason not to love and trust God. In other words, this priest did not find it **psychologically** impossible to go on loving and trusting God; he found it **rationally** impossible—whether rightly or wrongly matters little for our purposes. What this priest realized was that the attitudes towards God he had so far entertained were rationally improper, that it does not make sense at all to love and trust a God who wills or permits a youth to lose his eyesight.

Let us pause here. If I have made my case, the existential problem of evil is the problem of the rational propriety of the believer's attitudes towards God, not a psychological difficulty in maintaining certain attitudes towards God rather than certain other attitudes, as Plantinga's characterization of the existential problem seems to suggest. My question is: If it is a problem of rational propriety, on what basis does Plantinga exclude the attitudinal aspect of the problem of evil from "the philosophical problem of evil"? To say simply that it is "not the problem with which philosophers deal under the rubric 'the problem of evil'" would not do. After all, the problem of evil is the problem of evil real people have. Moreover, Plantinga himself does not think that the problem of evil can be defined arbitrarily, since, in order to make his distinction between what constitutes and what does not constitute the problem of evil with which philosophers are supposed to deal, he took the trouble to refer himself and his readers to the way in which real believers encounter the problem of evil in their lives. Thus, the only reason I can fathom that Plantinga would feel entitled to separate the attitudinal aspect of the problem of evil from "the philosophical problem of evil" is that he considers what he calls "the existential problem" believers have to be a psychological problem, a merely emotional difficulty, not a question of rational propriety. Needless to say, a distinction which implies a misunderstanding of the phenomenon with which the distinction deals is a mistaken distinction. Or would Plantinga be satisfied if I proceed as follows: Humankind is constituted by males and females; philosophers, whose object of study is rational beings, should study exclusively males, leaving the study of females to psychologists or to pastoral theologians?

## III
## The Philosophical Problem of Evil

All I have shown so far is that, inasmuch as attitudes are involved in the problem of evil, the problem concerns the rational propriety of the believer's attitudes towards God. To the extent that Plantinga's characterization of the existential problem makes it look like a psychological problem rather than a problem of rational propriety, I find his characterization of the problem to be incorrect. It does not do justice to the facts of the believer's crisis in the face of evil. I have not shown, however, that there is anything wrong with Plantinga's characterization of the philosophical problem of evil. Perhaps, after all, the priest of Camus' novel had **two** different problems at the same time; on the one hand, a problem concerning the rational propriety of his attitude of love and trust towards God, however badly Plantinga may have mischaracterized that problem; on the other hand, a problem concerning the rational propriety of his belief in God's existence, which is the philosophical problem of evil as defined by Plantinga. Having reached the conclusion that it is rationally improper to believe in God's existence, this priest ceased to believe in God. In that case, the loss of his belief in God was independent from his existential problem. And this, after all, is Plantinga's central point about the philosophical problem of evil: that it is a problem that can and should be treated independently.

In order to ascertain whether this explanation is viable it will be useful to have a more precise idea of the way in which Plantinga sees the relationship between belief and attitudes. For that we have to move to another of Plantinga's writings.

In 1983 Plantinga published one of his most important and celebrated articles, “Reason and Belief in God.” In ***God and Other Minds*** Plantinga had concluded that God's existence can neither be strictly proven nor strictly disproven.[9] “Reason and Belief in God” is devoted to showing that the belief in

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[9] Alvin Plantinga, ***God and Other Minds: A Study of the Rational Justification of Belief in God*** (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1967), p.21.

God's existence is nonetheless rationally proper. Before dealing with this matter, however, Plantinga carefully prepares his way by means of a distinction between "belief in God" and "belief that God exists." Given the central significance of that distinction for Plantinga's notion of the tasks of "philosophical theology," it seems only fair to let him speak for himself at length. This is what he has to say:

> But how shall we construct "theistic belief" here? I have been speaking of "belief in God"; but this is not entirely accurate. For the subject under discussion is not really the rational acceptability of belief **in** God, but the rationality of belief that God exists, that there **is** such a person as God. And belief in God is not at all the same thing as belief that there is such a person as God. To believe that God exists is simply to accept as true a certain proposition: perhaps the proposition that there is a personal being who has created the world, who has no beginning, and who is perfect in wisdom, justice, knowledge, and power. According to the book of James, the devils do that, and they tremble. The devils do not believe **in** God, however; for belief in God is quite another matter. One who repeats the words of the Apostle's Creed "I believe in God the Father almighty . . ." and means what he says is not simply announcing the fact that he accepts a certain proposition as true; much more is involved than that. Belief in God means **trusting** God, accepting God, accepting his purposes, committing one's life to him and living in his presence. To the believer the entire world speaks of God. Great mountains, surging oceans, verdant forests, blue sky and bright sunshine, friends and family, love in its many forms and various manifestations—the believer sees these things and many more as gifts from God. The universe thus takes on a personal cast for him; the fundamental truth about reality is

> truth about a **person**. So believing in God is indeed more than accepting the proposition that God exists. But if it is more than that, it is also at least that. One cannot sensibly believe in God and thank him for the mountains without believing that there **is** such a person to be thanked and that he is in some way responsible for the mountains. Nor can one trust in God and commit oneself to him without believing that he exists; as the author of Hebrews says, "He who would come to God must believe that he is and that he is a rewarder of those who seek him." (Hebrews 11:16)
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> So belief in God must be distinguished from the belief that God exists. Having made this distinction, however, I shall ignore it for the most part, using "belief in God" as synonym for "belief that there is such a person as God." The question I want to address, therefore, is the question whether belief in God—belief in the existence of God—is rationally acceptable. But what is it to believe or assert that God exists? Just which belief is it into the rational acceptability of which I propose to inquire? Which God do I mean to speak of? The answer, in brief, is: the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; the God of Christian revelation: the God of the Bible.[10]

The parallelism between this distinction and the one we have been dealing with is striking. Here again belief is carefully isolated from attitudes, and the rational propriety of the belief that God exists is made into the philosophical problem—that is, the problem that concerns philosophers—leaving

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[10] Alvin Plantinga, "Reason and Belief in God," in ***Faith and Rationality: Reason and Belief in God***, Alvin Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff, eds. (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), pp. 18-19.

aside the attitudes towards God, which nevertheless are acknowledged to be an important constitutive of the faith of the faithful.

Here again the distinction is made so matter-of-factly that one has hardly an inkling of what may hinge on its legitimacy; one glides over it easily. Yet, as we shall see, on its legitimacy depends nothing less than the way in which the issues related to God's existence and religious belief are to be dealt with by philosophers. Probing, therefore, the validity of this distinction might well turn out to be more than an idle academic exercise.

Belief **that** God exists and belief **in** God are "not at all the same thing," maintains Plantinga. However, they are not entirely different things either. Indeed, if they were, when philosophers explore the rational propriety of the belief **that** God exists, which is the task Plantinga allots them as their specific task, they would not be exploring the belief of the people who believe **in** God. Now, most certainly, Plantinga as a philosopher wants to deal with the belief of believers, since he is interested in the rational acceptability of the belief in "the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; the God of Christian revelation: the God of the Bible." How, then, does the belief **that** God exists differ from belief **in** God, without being entirely different? Very simply. Belief **that** God exists is a component of belief **in** God, but it is not the only component. Indeed, belief **in** God is constituted by two different components: a propositional component, namely, belief **that** God exists, and an attitudinal component, such as "trusting God, accepting God, accepting his purposes . . . ." Thus, the belief of believers amounts to belief that God exists plus attitudes towards God.

Let us move a step forward. According to Plantinga, philosophers are to concern themselves **exclusively** with the belief that God exists. This presupposes, however, that such belief is totally independent from the attitudinal component, for otherwise it would be impossible to deal with it separately. Plantinga claims that, whereas the attitudinal component of belief **in** God depends on the belief **that** God exists, the belief **that** God exists is itself independent from the attitudinal component. Such are the two halves, so to say, of his argument.

The first half is obvious. One cannot **sensibly** entertain any attitude towards God without believing that God exists. Therefore, the attitudinal component depends on the propositional component.

What about the second half? Is the belief that God exists independent from the attitudes towards God? Clearly so, answers Plantinga. According to the book of the Apostle James, the devils believe that God exists but they do not love and trust God, as those who believe **in** God do. Thus, the belief **that** God exists is independent from the attitudes towards God, and its rational propriety can therefore be dealt with by philosophers without taking attitudes into account. ***Q. E. D.*** Indeed, this is ***quod erat demonstrandum***. But has Plantinga demonstrated it? I, for one, find the second half of his argument far from satisfactory.

A first observation. The only example Plantinga brings to support his case seems to me particularly ill-chosen and suspect. After all, neither Plantinga, nor I, nor anybody I know has any idea of the way in which the devils believe in God's existence. Do they see God? In that case their belief that God exists is not comparable to ours in any significant way, for most certainly we do not see God. Just this possibility, which cannot be discarded ***a priori***, suffices to render highly suspect the only basis on which Plantinga supports his claim that the belief that God exists is independent from the believer's attitudes. Perhaps it is independent in the case of the devils and not in our case.

A second and, I think, more important observation. When Plantinga claims that one cannot sensibly entertain an attitude of love and trust towards God without believing that God exists, what he means is that such an attitude cannot conceivably subsist without believing that God exists. Indeed, without such belief the attitude would not be an attitude **towards** God, for there would be no believed God towards whom the attitude would be addressed. In that case, the attitude would not be an attitude at all, for attitudes are attitudes-towards; it would be a mere feeling, a sensation. And certainly the attitudes of those who believe **in** God are attitudes **towards** God, not mere feelings like pain

or pleasure. And certainly when Plantinga speaks of attitudes he is not speaking of mere feelings, for one can have feelings without believing that God exists, whereas Plantinga rightly claims that one cannot love and trust God without believing that God exists. Now, the example of the devils would show, at best, that the belief that God exists can subsist in the absence of an attitude of love and trust towards God, not that it can subsist in the absence of all attitudes towards God. In other words, Plantinga fails to notice that the first and the second halves of his argument are asymmetric, and that they would have to be perfectly symmetric for him to win his case. For if one can believe that God exists without loving and trusting God but not without entertaining some attitude towards God, then Plantinga has not shown that the belief that God exists is independent from attitudes and, therefore, that when philosophers deal with a belief **that** God exists that involves no attitude at all they would be dealing with the kind of belief in God that people (or devils) have. The asymmetry in Plantinga's argument is the following. One cannot entertain **any** attitude whatsoever towards God in the absence of the belief that God exists. This is the first half, which I readily grant. But can one believe that God exists without entertaining **any** attitude whatsoever towards God—be it love and trust, or fear, or hate? With the example of the devils Plantinga would show at best—how successfully I will inquire in a moment—that one can believe that God exists without loving and trusting God, **not** in the absence of all attitudes towards God. Even the devils cannot, apparently, pull the trick of believing that God exists in the absence of all attitudes towards God, for they tremble before God, that is, they are afraid of Him. Thus I am not persuaded by this example that the belief **that** God exists is independent from attitudes. This is why I consider the example not only suspect but ill-chosen.

However, if we want to proceed securely, we will be well-advised to forget the devils and refer ourselves to the case of human believers, with which we are really familiar. The priest of Camus' novel is a case in point. Let us see how well Plantinga's argument fares when applied to it.

The priest believed **in** God before he witnessed the young man's tragedy. According to Plantinga, the priest was doing two different things at the

same time: believing **that** God exists, and loving and trusting God. The latter depended on the former, since the priest could not sensibly love and trust God without believing that God exists. The former, however, did not depend on the latter. Consequently, this priest could sensibly, when he found it impossible to love and trust God in the face of evil, have continued to believe that God exists and simply have ceased to love and trust God. Could he, really? Is that conceivable?

Let us take Plantinga at his word and assume that, whereas the attitudes towards God depend on the belief that God exists, the belief that God exists is independent from the attitudes towards God. If that were the case, I maintain, the whole predicament of the believer in the face of evil becomes unintelligible. First of all, why should this priest have had a problem concerning God's existence at the same time he had a problem of attitudes, given that his belief in God was supposedly independent from his attitudes towards God? Why did he not have just a problem of attitudes? Why does every believer who in the face of evil develops a problem concerning his or her attitudes towards God also develop a problem concerning God's existence, if the belief that God exists is independent from the attitudes towards God? In short, if Plantinga is right, this priest should have had no problem concerning God's existence. But he did, as all believers who have a rational difficulty in maintaining an attitude of love and trust towards God in the face of evil do. Secondly, if the belief that God exists is independent from the believer's attitudes towards God, the difficulty this priest had in continuing to love and trust God in the face of the young man's tragedy also becomes unintelligible. For the difficulty arises from the believer's conviction that the attitude of love and trust is the rationally proper attitude towards God. That is why the believer tries to maintain that attitude in the face of evil. But, if, as Plantinga holds, the belief that God exists is independent from the attitudes towards God, not only could and should this priest have had no problem concerning God's existence, but he also could and should have considered **any** attitude acceptable, since after all his attitude towards God had nothing to do with his belief that God exists.

It seems that Plantinga wants to have it both ways. When he claims one cannot **sensibly** love and trust God without believing that God exists, he is claiming that there is a coherence of the rational order between believing that God exists and the attitudes one entertains towards God. And this makes a lot of sense. For, if it were not so, there would be no reason why those who believe that God exists would entertain attitudes towards God at all. In other words, without this **sensible—**that is, rational—dependence of the attitudes on the belief **that** God exists, the attitudinal component of belief **in** God, whose reality Plantinga admits, would become totally unintelligible, a mere accidental addition to the belief **that** God exists, an addition that might as well not be there. And, in that case, loving and trusting God would be no more appropriate than hating God or entertaining no attitudes towards God at all. Now, surely Plantinga does not want to say that, for in his description of belief **in** God he admitted the importance of the attitudinal component in the faith of Christians. Moreover, Plantinga cannot possibly say that without contradicting himself, because in his reference to the existential problem of evil he characterized it as a difficulty on the believer's part in maintaining an attitude of love and trust towards God. But if there had to be no rational coherence between the belief that God exists and the attitudes towards God, believers would never have an existential problem at all; when confronted with the young man's tragedy, the priest of Camus' novel would have had no reason to try to maintain an attitude of love and trust towards God and, consequently would have simply and unproblematically changed his attitude towards God or ceased entertaining any attitude at all, while placidly continuing to believe **that** God exists.

So far, so good. In maintaining that the attitudes towards God depend on the belief **that** God exists Plantinga makes a lot of sense. Unfortunately, he fails to notice that the dependence is of the rational order, a matter of rational coherence between the belief **that** God exists and the attitudes towards God, a dependence without which the believer would have no reason to entertain any attitudes towards God, much less an attitude of love and trust. Since Plantinga fails to notice this, he also fails to notice why it does not make sense to say that the belief **that** God exists is independent from attitudes. For to claim that the

attitudes towards God depend on the belief **that** God exists amounts to claiming that what renders rationally proper the belief that God exists necessarily renders rationally proper the attitudes towards God which are characteristic of belief **in** God. But to claim that the belief that God exists is independent from the attitudes towards God amounts to claiming that what renders rationally improper the absence of the attitudes towards God which are characteristic of belief **in** God does not render rationally improper the belief **that** God exists. This is to say that those who believe that God exists can **sensibly** entertain towards God any attitude whatsoever or no attitude towards God at all. Well, I contend that Plantinga cannot have it both ways. **Either** what counts for the believer as a reason for believing that God exists counts as a reason for loving and trusting God and what counts as a reason for not believing that God exists counts as a reason far not loving and trusting God, but in that case what for the believer is a reason for loving and trusting God is by the same token a reason for believing that God exists and what is a reason for not loving and trusting God is a reason for not believing that God exists, **or** believing **that** God exists is independent from attitudes towards God and what renders the belief **that** God exists rationally proper does not render rationally proper any attitude towards God, in which case one can entertain towards God whatever attitude one pleases, or no attitude, if one pleases. And then one does not see why believers, when confronted with evil, would have a problem concerning the rational propriety of believing **that** God exists, and even why they would have a problem of attitudes at all, since they may entertain any attitude whatsoever towards God or no attitude at all. Of course, that did not happen in the priest's case. Neither, ***pace*** Plantinga, could it have possibly happened, the reason being that the priest's attitudes towards God were as dependent on the rational propriety of his belief in God's existence as his belief in God's existence was dependent on the rational propriety of his attitudes towards God. Attitudes towards God and **belief** that God exists are interdependent, inseparable aspects of belief **in** God. Either one believes **in** God, or one does not believe at all. There is no such thing as belief

**that** God exists, the sort of belief to whose philosophical justification Plantinga has devoted his intellectual life.

Plantinga may want to object. Arguments, he could say, are powerless against undeniable facts. There are in fact people who, confronted with evil in their own lives—the death, for instance, of a son or a daughter—continue to believe that God exists and hate God for the evil He permits. After all, this is a more intelligible version of the example of the devils. There are Christians, Plantinga might continue, who believe that God exists and yet show no sign of loving and trusting Him. My answer is that this amounts to a confusion. For the question concerns what believers can do **sensibly**, whether they can find it **rationally proper** to hate God or not to love and trust Him and continue to find it rationally proper to believe that God exists. As long as these people are believers, the attitudes they entertain towards God appear to them as rationally improper. Their case is just a more acute case of most of us, believers who are sinners, believers who often fail to maintain towards God an attitude of love and trust while at the same time realizing that those are the appropriate attitudes towards God. But this case is very different from the one under discussion here. The priest of Camus' novel, unlike these people, found it rationally improper to love and trust God and, by the same token, as he could not help doing, found it rationally improper to believe that God exists. Indeed, he could not conceivably have continued to believe that God exists, for what makes it rationally improper to love and trust God makes it rationally improper to believe that God exists. We sinners, by contrast, find it rationally proper to love and trust God and, by the same token, rationally proper to believe that God exists; we simply fail to live up to our faith. Our belief is defective belief **in** God rather than, as Plantinga would have it, perfect belief—since it is full-fledged belief **that** God exists—and a bundle of feelings which for unfathomable reasons are to be considered defective. In fact, if Plantinga reread James's Book or letter, he might realize that the Apostle is telling his flock that if their belief is mere belief **that** God exists, that is, the belief that Plantinga attributes to Christians and that James for his own purposes attributes to the devils, it is not Christian belief at

all; for either the God in whom Christians believe is worthy of their love and trust, or it is not their God.

## IV
## The Real Problem of Evil and Philosophical Theology

We may at last return to the issue with which we started: Plantinga's interpretation of the problem of evil. What are we to conclude?

My first conclusion is that Plantinga is wrong in distinguishing two problems of evil. There is only one problem of evil, and it is the problem with which believers are confronted. Can they **sensibly** love and trust God in the face of evil? If they cannot, they will lose their faith in God altogether, as the priest of Camus' novel did, for one cannot find it rationally improper to love and trust God and rationally proper to believe that God exists. Were Plantinga right in distinguishing two problems of evil, not only would it be perfectly possible to keep one's belief in God's existence while finding it rationally improper to love and trust Him, but the difficulty believers experience in loving and trusting God in the face of evil would never put at stake for them their belief in God's existence, since the latter is supposedly independent from the former.

My second conclusion, which is a corollary of the first, is that Plantinga is wrong about both what he defines as "the existential problem of evil," and what he defines as "the philosophical problem of evil." Indeed, insofar as the problem of evil regards the believer's attitudes towards God it is not a psychological problem but a problem concerning the rational propriety of his or her attitudes, and insofar as the problem regards the rational propriety of believing in God's existence it is not independent from, but interdependent with, the rational propriety of loving and trusting God. The two are inseparable and interdependent because, ***pace*** Plantinga, they are aspects of one and the same problem, namely, the problem of believing **in** God in the face of evil.

I must confess, however, that my intention in challenging Plantinga's understanding of the problem of evil goes far beyond this particular issue of

philosophical theology. Indeed, such distinctions as the ones Plantinga makes between the philosophical and the existential problems of evil, between belief **that** God exists and belief **in** God, against whose legitimacy I have been arguing, define by implication the nature of the issues concerning God's existence and religious belief and prescribe by implication the way in which they are to be dealt with by the practitioners of philosophical theology. For Plantinga, philosophical theology is an academic discipline that deals with religious belief and its rational propriety as if believing in God were believing **propositions about** God, much as one believes propositions about triangles, towards which triangles no attitudes are either called for or even conceivable. Needless to say, I have a very different notion of the nature of religious belief and, consequently, of the way in which philosophical theology is to be practiced, as the reader of this article may well surmise. In a further article I intend to probe systematically Plantinga's notion of philosophical theology through his actual practice of it in the concrete issues of God's existence and "properly grounded belief." For the present I can only state my disagreement with him on the grounds of his interpretation of the problem of evil and can only suggest that what Pascal dismissed as "the God of philosophers" and could not identify as "the God of Jesus-Christ" in whom he believed may well have been the sort of God and the sort of belief with which Plantinga concerns himself in his philosophical theology.

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# The Ethical Project of Alasdair MacIntyre: "A Disquieting Suggestion"

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The aim of this paper is to present an introductory explanation of the ethical project of Alasdair MacIntyre and a brief examination of that project in light of the scholarly critique by his peers. A thorough account of his multifaceted theory and a comprehensive survey of the scholarly critique would be a vast undertaking and beyond the scope of this paper. MacIntyre has published three volumes, together numbering almost 1,000 pages, and the scholarly critique is as broad and various as the theory itself. And so the limited aim here is to present a general account of the core features of his theory and a sampling of the scholarly review with the intention not to reach decisive conclusions and evaluations, but to open discussion of an interesting and potentially important philosophical project.

## *I*
## *After Virtue*

In 1981, Alasdair MacIntyre published ***After Virtue***, a book which would become the best-selling philosophical work of the decade. (Farrell, 96) The critics of ***After Virtue***, even those who disagree with its tenets and conclusions most insistently, all agree that the book is provocative and interesting. Charles Taylor calls ***After Virtue***, ". . . an extremely rare work—a book on moral philosophy which is actually exciting to read." (Taylor, 301) The narrative quality of the book coupled with its bold hypotheses immediately captures the attention of the reader and holds it until the end.

Though the argumentation and conceptual development of ***After Virtue*** is often difficult to grasp, MacIntyre states his thesis clearly at the beginning and keeps the reader posted regarding its development throughout the course of his argument. In an opening chapter fittingly entitled, "A Disquieting

Suggestion," he unleashes the hypothesis that a catastrophe concerning moral language and practice has occurred.

> The hypothesis which I wish to advance is that in the actual world which we inhabit the language of morality is in the same state of grave disorder as the language of natural science in the imaginary world which I have described. What we possess, if this view is true, are the fragments of a conceptual scheme, parts which now lack those contexts from which their significance derived. We possess indeed simulcra of morality, we continue to use many of the key expressions. But we have—very largely, if not entirely—lost our comprehension, both theoretical and practical, of morality. (***After Virtue***, 2)

The remainder of ***After Virtue***, which is a development of this thesis, contains two broad divisions, each concluding with a chapter that presents a choice between the respective moral philosophies of Nietzsche or Aristotle. These two divisions, though they provide distinct trajectories of analysis, arrive at the same conclusion.

In the first section, MacIntyre takes as his starting point the nature of moral disagreement today and works his way back in time to show its source in the Enlightenment. In broad strokes, what are the salient points of his argument?

For MacIntyre, contemporary moral philosophy and practice is characterized by the interminability of moral argumentation and the inability to reach consensus on moral issues.

> The most striking feature of contemporary moral utterance is that so much of it is used to express disagreements; and the most striking feature of the debates in which these

> disagreements are expressed is their interminable character. I do not mean by this just that such debates go on and on and on—although they do—but also that they apparently can find no terminus. There seems to be no rational way of securing moral agreement in our culture. (***After Virtue***, 6)

MacIntyre traces the cause of our plight to two factors: the development of "emotivism" as the prevalent moral philosophy and the continued use of objective moral language. Emotivism, for MacIntyre, has undermined the possibility of securing a rational justification for morality because of its claim that moral utterance is nothing but the expression of preference or feeling. And yet we still go on using moral language as if there were a rational accounting for objective morality. Thus we find our moral utterance frustrating and insoluble.

MacIntyre offers a refutation of emotivism as a moral philosophy, but he is more concerned to reveal it as the product of a historical development, a development that has left emotivism unable to understand its own past or to sort out contemporary moral issues rationally.

In order to justify this thesis, MacIntyre recounts the history of the Enlightenment project's attempt to find a justification for morality. Yet his point is much more than that Kierkegaard, Kant, Hume, and Diderot all failed to provide a convincing and defensible foundation for morality; his contention is that the attempt they made **had** to fail. "All [these philosophers] reject any teleological view of human nature, any view of man as having an essence which defines his true end. But to understand this is to understand why their project of finding a basis for morality had to fail." (***After Virtue***, 54) Because they cast off the notion of a ***telos*** for man, these moral projects were doomed to failure. Ethics, for MacIntyre, is the science which enables man to understand his passage from "man-as-he-happens-to-be" to "man-as-he-could-be-if-he-realized-his-essential-nature." (***After Virtue***, 53) To reject this teleological scheme, so central to Aristotle and his successors, is to reject any possibility for establishing a grounding for ethics.

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Having traced our present moral confusion to its roots in the Enlightenment project, MacIntyre retraces his steps to the present, indicating along the way the historical sequence of the vain attempts to resuscitate the doomed Enlightenment project, particularly the categorical imperative of Kant and the Utilitarian philosophy of Bentham and Mill, each of which, in his view, failed. It is important to note here that for MacIntyre there is a close interrelationship between moral philosophy and thinking on the one hand, and moral practice and social structure on the other. His critique of contemporary moral philosophy is a critique as well of a social structure which reflects and supports it and the social sciences which so ably preserve and advance it.

Toward the close of this first main section of ***After Virtue***, MacIntyre restates and expands his central thesis:

> A key part of my thesis has been that modern moral utterance and practice can only be understood as a series of fragmented survivals from an older past and that the insoluble problems which they have generated for modern moral theorists will remain insoluble until this is well understood. If the deontological character of moral judgments is the ghost of conceptions of divine law which are quite alien to the metaphysics of modernity, and if the teleological character is similarly the ghost of conceptions of human nature and activity which are equally not at home in the modern world, we should expect the problems of understanding and of assigning an intelligible status to moral judgments both continually to arise and as continually to prove inhospitable to philosophic solutions. (***After Virtue***, 110-111)

For MacIntyre, the true endpoint of Enlightenment philosophy, or rather of its failure, is the philosophy of Nietzsche. Once the notion of a ***telos*** has been

abandoned, eventually all that will remain is an ethics of will and power. It is the brilliance of Nietzsche to have perceived this. All other attempts to re-establish a grounding for ethibs have failed, and what remains is the superficial veneer of meaning-laden moral language, beneath which is an ethics of will and preference.

It is here that MacIntyre offers a ray of hope, a suggested way forward out of the moral morass we are in. He suggests a return to some form of Aristotelian moral thought in which the virtues play a key role. "If a premodern view of morals and politics is to be vindicated against modernity, it will be in **something like** Aristotelian terms or not at all." (***After Virtue***, 118) It is the concern of the second section of ***After Virtue*** to develop the concepts of ***telos*** and virtue, and to present an alternative to our contemporary, emotivist morality.

In the second part of ***After Virtue***, MacIntyre offers his account of virtue in the context of a historical survey of the tradition of virtue from Homeric Greece until modern times. From its origin in the epic saga, the notion of virtue is traced through the golden age of Athens and through medieval developments until the rejection of the tradition of virtue by the Enlightenment and its successors.

The crux of this survey is the place of the virtues in traditional society and their role in the very formulation of moral rationality. In this tradition of virtue, MacIntyre views Aristotle as the key player whose account of the virtues "decisively constitutes the classical tradition as a tradition of moral thought." (***After Virtue***, 147) It was Aristotle who best solved the questions concerning virtue internal to the Greek tradition, and it was his account of virtue that served as a jumping off point for the medieval developments.

With the survey of the tradition of virtue in place, MacIntyre formulates the positive pole of his thesis concerning the possibility of an Aristotelian-like moral theory.

> The question can therefore now be posed directly: are we or are we not able to disentangle from these rival and various claims a unitary core concept of the virtues of which we can

> give a more compelling account than any of the other accounts so far? I am going to argue that we can in fact discover such a core concept and that it turns out to provide the tradition of which I have written the history with its conceptual unity. (***After Virtue***, 186)

MacIntyre marks out three stages of conceptual development necessary for the demonstration of his thesis: the nature of a **practice**, the notion of a **narrative order** in human life, and an account of what constitutes a **moral tradition**. His development of these concepts is intricate and complex, and cannot be reduced to a few short statements without serious loss to their intelligibility. Yet an attempt to summarize his conclusions briefly can be attempted. The Aristotelian tradition, as it developed over centuries, maintained an indispensable role for the virtues which were oriented to the internal goods of the practices of society, and which were also necessary to sustain the individual in his quest for the "good" life, the ***telos***. And all this took place in and through membership in a community as the necessary context for moral inquiry and development.

As the argument concludes, MacIntyre once again draws the two possible alternatives which remain to us: either Nietzsche or Aristotle.

> My own conclusion is very clear. It is that on the one hand we still, in spite of the efforts of three centuries of moral philosophy and one of sociology, lack any coherent rationally defensible statement of a liberal individualist point of view; and that, on the other hand, the Aristotelian tradition can be restated in a way that restores intelligibility and rationality to our moral and social attitudes and commitments. (***After Virtue***, 259)

It is important to recognize here the full repercussions of MacIntyre's thesis. He is not merely arguing for one ethical theory over another, modified Aristotelianism over emotivism. He digs far deeper than this, overturning the soil, roots and all, of the entire foundation for contemporary moral theory and practice. His claim is that the rejection of a teleological view of human life as embodied in Aristotelianism and as characterized by the virtues has led modern society onto a path of an increasing moral blindness that cannot be cured from within, but requires the very elements which it previously rejected to rescue it from ongoing incommensurability. MacIntyre's own belief is that the change he is calling for will not likely take place soon on any broad scale. He concludes ***After Virtue*** by recommending "the construction of local forms of community within which civility and the intellectual and moral life can be sustained through the new dark ages which are already upon us." (***After Virtue***, 263)

## *II*
## *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*

In the Postscript to the second edition of ***After Virtue***, Alasdair MacIntyre gives recognition to the gaps and omissions in his thesis and he promises to address them in a successor volume. Published in 1988, ***Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*** fulfills this promise. The intent of this volume is made very clear in the Preface:

> I promised a book in which I should attempt to say both what makes it rational to act in one way rather than another and what makes it rational to advance and defend one conception of practical rationality rather than another. Here it is. (***Whose Justice? Which Rationality?***, ix)

In order to carry out this aim, MacIntyre undertakes a lengthy and dense historical analysis of three distinguishable, but related, traditions: Ancient Greece (with the emphasis upon Aristotle), the Medieval development

(with the emphasis upon Thomas Aquinas), and the Scottish Enlightenment (with the emphasis upon David Hume). The three case studies constitute the core of ***Whose Justice? Which Rationality?***, and are followed by four chapters which offer an extended conclusion to the argument contained in the historical narratives.

What are the significant developments or improvements of his thesis that MacIntyre offers in this successor volume to ***After Virtue***? First of all, MacIntyre offers a corrective to the implication given in ***After Virtue***, that he was recommending a "morality of virtues" in sharp contrast to a "morality of laws." On the contrary, MacIntyre states that any morality of virtues requires as a counterpart a morality of laws, and he promises to make the relation between the two a "preoccupation" of this volume.

Secondly, there is a significant development of the relation between virtue (and particularly the virtue of justice) and practical rationality as such. By means of the historical narratives, MacIntyre argues that not only the conception of a virtue, but even practical rationality itself is tied to the development of a tradition. The concept of a neutral, abstract, tradition-free rationality is a phantom for MacIntyre.

> There have been of course recurrent attempts, of which certainly the greatest was Kant's, to deny this. But the history of the attempts to construct a morality for tradition-free individuals, whether by an appeal to one out of several conceptions of utility or to shared intuitions or to some combination of these, has in its outcome . . . been a history of continuously unresolved disputes, so that there emerges no uncontested and incontestable account of what tradition-independent morality consists in and consequently no neutral set of criteria by means of which the claims of rival and

> contending traditions could be adjudicated. (***Whose Justice? Which Rationality?***, 334)

But this conclusion, that practical rationality is tradition-dependent, gives rise to the charge of relativism. How can a rationality, formed entirely within its own historical situation, make a claim to be rationally better than any other? MacIntyre answers this challenge through an involved account of the development of a tradition: how a tradition is able to develop rationally from within itself over time, and how it is able, when encountering other traditions, to recognize the superiority of another tradition's claim to rationality according to **its** own internal criterion of rationality. By its own standards it can judge another to be better (or worse) and so is not locked into itself. Yet MacIntyre is modest in his claims. Though a tradition can rationally justify its own moral claims as the best to come along thus far, or as the most successful in explaining and answering the questions posed, it cannot make the claim that no better moral tradition or development will ever arise.

And finally, in this volume MacIntyre offers hope for translation of one tradition into another, and even hope for someone to "enter" a tradition from the position of an outsider. The effort to enter a tradition is long and difficult, but according to MacIntyre the failure to make the attempt, failure to reason from within a coherent tradition, will result in that type of individual, characterized by MacIntyre as,

> . . . [the] self which has too many half-convictions and too few settled coherent convictions, too many partly formulated alternatives and too few opportunities to evaluate them systematically, [and which] brings to its encounters with the claims of rival traditions a fundamental incoherence which is too disturbing to be admitted to self-conscious awareness except on the rarest of occasions. (***Whose Justice? Which Rationality?***, 397)

MacIntyre concludes with the contention that his thesis, if true, only offers a starting point for the kind of deliberation that needs to go on between rival traditions. Though he has certainly advanced the Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition in the course of his historical narrative, he considers that his primary argument has been for the kind of moral inquiry that must occur between rival traditions if any real progress is to be made toward an answer to the questions "Whose justice? Which rationality?"

## III
## Scholarly Review

The popularity and broad appeal of ***After Virtue*** and ***Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*** can be seen in the large number of periodicals, covering many different disciplines, which sponsored reviews of these volumes. For example, Donald L. Levine in the ***American Journal of Sociology*** critiques ***After Virtue*** on sociological grounds. Thomas B. Farrell and John D. Peters each present a critique of MacIntyre's thesis on rhetorical grounds, arguing that a role for rhetoric would enhance the moral theory put forward by MacIntyre. MacIntyre's thesis is so vast that it has attracted the attention of scholars from disparate disciplines, all commenting on a single thesis from their own points of view.

This summary of the scholarly review will focus on the critique of MacIntyre's thesis specifically as an ethical theory, and will do so under five headings: (1) The relationship of philosophy to history; (2) The issue of relativism; (3) The charge of inconsistency in the thesis; (4) The criticism of over-intellectualism; and (5) The validity of his prescriptions.

**(1) The Relationship of Philosophy to History**: William Frankena of the University of Michigan takes MacIntyre to task for confusing the domains of history and analytic philosophy. While he applauds certain historical analyses and allows for their bearing on philosophic questions to a degree, he criticizes

MacIntyre using historical analysis to draw conclusions which belong to the province of analytic philosophy. Contrary to MacIntyre's historical philosophy, Frankena claims that,

> . . . I can, if I have the right conceptual equipment, understand **what** the view is without seeing it as the result of a historical development; and, so far as I can see, I can also assess its status as true or false or rational to believe without seeing it as such an outcome. (Frankena, 580)

In the Postscript to the second edition of ***After Virtue***, MacIntyre responds to this criticism directly:

> Against this view [of Frankena's] I am committed to maintaining that although arguments of the kind favored by analytic philosophy do possess an indispensable power, it is only within the context of a particular genre of historical inquiry that such arguments can support the type of claim about truth and rationality which philosophers characteristically aspire to justify. (***After Virtue***, 265)

MacIntyre insists that apart from purely formal logical inquiries, there no longer exist universal necessary principles to appeal to in philosophy, and that arguments cannot become objects of investigation in abstraction from the social and historical circumstances which gave them rise. The historical inquiry is needed not only to understand the given argument or position in its own terms, but also to see if it was successful in its own time relative to its rivals.

A mirror-image criticism is raised by Abraham Edel who criticizes MacIntyre for bringing **too** much analytic philosophical baggage into an otherwise useful social and historical analysis. In the face of criticism from both sides, MacIntyre defends his particular method of philosophical history (or

historical philosophy), arguing that both analytical philosophy and social history are necessary for the kind of moral inquiry that he is advancing.

**(2) The Issue of Relativism**: One of the more weighty objections against MacIntyre's thesis is that it inescapably includes some form of relativism. Downing Lyle and Robert B. Thigpen question the grounding for MacIntyre's account of the ***telos***. If it is not grounded in the biological science of Aristotle (which grounding MacIntyre rejects), then what can be the source of its validity except social convention in a tradition. If the ***telos*** is not grounded in nature itself, but in tradition, how can it bear the weight of MacIntyre's thesis? If it is grounded in nature, then exactly **where** in nature is it located? (Thigpen/Lyle, 22)

Samuel Scheffler, Stanley Hauerwas, and Paul Wadell raise the issue of relativism on different grounds. They argue that MacIntyre's theory of the nature of the virtues could yield a situation in which two or more rival conceptions of the virtues are at odds with each other and are unable to establish rational superiority. Either there must be an independent standard of rationality or there is no rational way to judge between such rival traditions.

MacIntyre's rejoinder is characteristic of his nuanced view of traditions and their interactions. According to him, while a situation might occur in which no rational way to adjudicate between two rival traditions could be found, he raises the possibility that the adherents of each tradition may be able to evaluate by their own standards of rationality the positions advanced by the rival tradition, and so make a "rational" judgment between the rival views. The standard of rationality must always derive from the particular tradition, but that standard may judge the opposing tradition to be better—it need not always favor its own solutions. (***After Virtue***, 276-277)

MacIntyre's response is a clever one and not unreasonable, but his case would be strengthened by a further elucidation of the interaction between traditions and a historical example of just such an encounter as he describes. (He might claim that this is just what he does do in ***Whose Justice? Which***

***Rationality?***) His account of the ***telos*** also needs to clarify the grounding for the ***telos***, if not in Aristotle's biology, then in some aspect of human nature or society.

**(3) The Charge of Inconsistency**: Several reviewers take MacIntyre to task for the inconsistency of his historical critique. Specifically, they charge him with a failure to apply the same standards of critique to traditional societies that he uses against the Enlightenment and contemporary moral philosophy. An even-handed critique, they say, would show traditional society to be quite similar in many key respects to contemporary society, thus blurring the lines of sharp demarcation MacIntyre draws between them.

William Frankena asserts that the charge of moral insolubility laid at the door of contemporary moral philosophy and practice is true also for fifth century B.C. Athens, but that MacIntyre fails to note this parallel in his account. The Athenians, like the moderns were attempting to establish clarity and coherence out of rival and contending views of virtue and rationality. (Frankena, 580)

Charles Larmore criticizes MacIntyre on two counts. First, that **all** past traditions made the claim to a kind of universal rationality which MacIntyre ascribes only to the Enlightenment project. Secondly, he accuses MacIntyre of positing an air-tight barrier between the traditional world and modernity in order to make his telling critique, but then later in the argument introducing many parallels and links between them in order to show that modern liberalism is a tradition in its own right. (Larmore, 440)

The charges of inconsistency are not without some merit. At certain points, MacIntyre does portray the contemporary moral situation as all but completely cut off from its past and as blind to its predicament. At other points, particularly when he discusses the theory of moral traditions, a stronger link with the past is implied. Yet those who charge MacIntyre with inconsistency also miss the particular quality of his critique of modernity. The Enlightenment project, for MacIntyre, had as its specific aim the establishment of morality apart from authority and tradition. While past traditions may have claimed a rationality and a set of virtues which were universal (and not dependent on their

traditions), none of them discarded tradition as such. But the Enlightenment **did** consciously jettison its authoritative tradition, and so left contemporary society anchorless in a way previous traditions were not. MacIntyre's claim is that the moral insolubility of contemporary society is of a different kind than in past societies. Because of its deliberate break with authority and tradition-based morality, it can never break free from insolubility on the strength of its own resources. This fact, for MacIntyre, distinguishes contemporary society from past ones and gives it its unique status.

**(4) The Critique of Over-Intellectualism**: A further complaint by certain critics is that MacIntyre relies too much on the analysis of ideas and not enough on historical facts. According to John D. Peters, MacIntyre's thesis is too intellectual and ahistorical, resulting in the idealizing of traditions. (Peters, 83) Richard John Neuhaus, though he praises much of MacIntyre's project, argues that the modern world is more complex and nuanced than MacIntyre's account would indicate. He expresses his gratitude that "the history of ideas is not the master of history," (Neuhaus, 67) meaning that the historical account of the development of ideas does not determine the actual course of history.

To his credit, MacIntyre is insistent on the dynamic relationship between ideas and history, believing that ideas have a profound effect upon history, and history upon ideas. But he does show the inclination to move from ideas to history, from the development of ideas to predictions of which leave little room for complexity. For the sake of a tradition based model, at times he does appear to simplify the historic reality. In such a sweeping project as this, perhaps this kind of simplification is unavoidable. In his own response to such criticism, MacIntyre acknowledges the many inadequacies in his thesis: "So the content of my narrative once again requires addition and emendation in a number of ways if the central conclusions that I derive from it are to sustain their claim to rational justification." (***After Virtue***, 278)

**(5) The Validity of his Prescriptions**: Even among those who are most supportive of MacIntyre's thesis, few rally to acclaim his prescriptions.

His talk of a "new dark ages" akin to that period which followed the downfall of Rome and his belief that the "barbarians" have already been ruling us for some time now has not won many adherents. His prescription to form "local forms of community" seems to imply an abandonment of hope for society at large. (***After Virtue***, 278)

Downing and Thigpen judge that MacIntyre's views on the necessity of social roles, community, and the ***telos*** are too radical to be widely accepted in the modern world. (MacIntyre would fully agree with them.) Charles Taylor suggests that MacIntyre's thesis handles the dark side of the contemporary moral landscape with "brilliance and insight," (Taylor, 306) but he finds this view too one-sided. He agrees with MacIntyre that our modern bureaucratic society is very inhospitable to the best moral thinking of which we are capable, but he believes that it **is** possible to achieve moral thinking that goes against the grain of the society, and that we need to recognize where new expressions of the virtues are arising as well as where they are being abandoned.

Richard John Neuhaus sees a development in MacIntyre's attitude, from "resignation" in ***After Virtue*** to "resolution" in ***Whose Justice? Which Rationality?***, and he welcomes the renewed hope for change which he perceives in MacIntyre. (Neuhaus, 64) It is true that in his second volume MacIntyre offers a new hope for dialogue between rival traditions, and that he suggests a way for someone to "enter" a tradition not formerly one's own. Through careful translation and painstaking re-education, he offers hope for progress toward a tradition-based rationality. Still, his prognosis for contemporary society is not highly optimistic. If the lines of his critique are followed relentlessly to their endpoints, and if his thesis regarding the necessity of tradition and community-based rationality is true, then the prospects for a turn of events on a large scale in the near future are dim. Whether his predictions and prescriptions are valid will only be shown by the actual course of our society in the years to come.

**Conclusion**

## *The Ethical Project of Alasdair MacIntyre: "A Disquieting Suggestion"*

Toward the close of ***Whose Justice? Which Rationality?***, Alasdair MacIntyre acknowledges a "massive debt" to John Henry Newman, though he states that his theorizing is done independently of Newman. As Newman did in his ***Essay on the Development of Doctrine***, MacIntyre has undertaken in these volumes a rather prodigious (and controversial) intellectual effort. His primary concern is ethical philosophy, but he has incorporated many cognate disciplines in his thesis, and all is done on a grand scale. And in similarity to Newman, I find MacIntyre to be "usually convincing, always provocative," (Neuhaus, 67) even where his argumentation is incomplete or when his conclusions seem hasty.

I am in full agreement with his evaluation that contemporary moral utterance and practice is confused and that moral argumentation is interminable and insoluble. And his narrative history of ideas and society is both captivating and full of insight. The thesis he puts forward for the development of rationality and virtue within a tradition is quite provocative and filled with good ingredients, but requires, I think, greater intelligibility and clarity, particularly in response to the charge of relativism. Likewise, the particular tradition MacIntyre recommends, one based upon an Aristotelian-Thomistic account of virtue and rationality, will benefit from the tough-minded criticism it is now receiving from his peers. In any case, the fertility and freshness of his thesis is likely to spawn many offspring in the future even if particular parts of his thesis come to be left behind.

This last likelihood is particularly fitting, because it reflects MacIntyre's own understanding of the development of a tradition through critique and questioning from within and challenge from without. He himself considers his moral theory to be "a work still in progress," which has benefited greatly from the criticism of his peers in many fields. (***After Virtue***, 278) They, in turn, have paid him the highest compliment by giving serious consideration to his "disquieting" philosophical thesis.

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