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Properly Situating Philosophical Arguments for God

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My aim is to highlight four philosophical presuppositional issues that underlie the questions associated with God-arguments precisely as such.[1] A presuppositional issue is some matter that systematically precedes a question on which one is focusing, and one's stance on the presuppositional issue provides a fundamental (though often overlooked) component of one's stance on that focal question. Moreover, differences between stances on presuppositional issues frequently constitute a basic (though often neglected) part of disputes over stances on focal questions. Finally, *philosophical* presuppositional issues are especially crucial, since they regard one's fundamental horizon – one's basic categories of meaning and criteria of verification. For example, your disagreement with your friend about whether capital punishment could ever be morally good may well arise at least partly from an underlying (and perhaps unnoticed) disagreement between the two of you about just what "moral goodness" means and how its presence in a concrete situation can be confirmed or disconfirmed.

The first of the philosophical presuppositional issues I have in mind is *epistemological*: Do I ever genuinely know anything at all? The remaining issues are *metaphysical*. One is general: What are the characteristics of reality precisely as such? And two are particular: Is utter badness real? Is direct divine self-disclosure real?

In the first of my paper's three parts, I will recount four common stances on these issues that short-circuit the enterprise of attempting to argue philosophically in favor of God before it even gets started. To maintain any of them is to maintain a philosophical presupposition that excludes in advance the potential *rational success* of any particular argument for God, thus leaving every such argument as at most the symbolic expression of individual or collective feelings, experiences, memories, hopes, expectations, and so forth, or perhaps as just a matter of historical interest.

[1] I envision these four as usually the most pertinent philosophical presuppositional issues, but certainly not as exhausting the possibilities.

In the second part of my paper, I will review two other common stances that serve to undercut the potential *religious relevance* of any philosophical God-argument, even if it happens to be rationally successful. These stances constitute philosophical presuppositions that exclude in advance the possibility that what a philosophical argument might establish has any connection at all with what the religious believer means by "God."

Finally, in my paper's third part I will spell out a further set of philosophical presuppositions, all of which, in my view, must be in place if any particular argument in favor of God is to have hope of being rationally successful and religiously relevant. Although maintaining these latter presuppositions does not guarantee the success and relevance of any particular God-argument, it leaves such matters open to being determined argument by argument, rather than having their very possibility dismissed before any particular argument has actually been studied.

I must add three important prefatory notes. First, in this paper what I normally mean by "God" is what is meant by that word in the philosophical tradition typified by the views of Augustine and Aquinas. More exactly, for present purposes let me say that by "God" I mean at least this: a reality that is essentially *spiritual*, *world-transcending*, *all-knowing*, *all-powerful*, and *all-loving*.

Second, my primary purpose in this paper is elucidation, not evaluation. While you will not be surprised to learn that I think the presuppositions discussed in the third part are notably more defensible than those discussed in parts one and two, I am mainly concerned not to justify any specific set of presuppositions but rather to illuminate the role that presuppositions play, whether explicitly or just implicitly, and therefore the importance of taking them into account in order to properly situate particular arguments for God.

Third, my interest in this topic grows out of my own experience in the classroom. An important part of my pedagogical responsibility is to help students understand and assess some of the traditional philosophical arguments for God – cosmological, ontological, moral, and so forth. The propensity of many students to remain unmoved by those arguments stems not from their study of specific features of the arguments themselves but rather from their antecedent assumptions about knowing and reality. That is to say, for many students the crucial philosophical factor in their rejection of this or that particular God-argument is their stance, whether patent or just latent, on some issue that is proper not to philosophy of religion but rather to general epistemology or metaphysics.[2]

[2] Of course I recognize that for other students, antecedent objections may arise from their stances on ethical issues; for still others, from psychological factors; and so forth.

Are Philosophical Arguments for God Rationally Futile?

The first set of philosophical presuppositions comprises four claims, each of which implies the *rational futility* of any philosophical argument for God. To help us properly consider these four presuppositions, I invite you to envision them not just as theoretical possibilities but as basic stances expressly maintained by concrete (albeit just imaginary) people. Thus I shall present them not as presuppositions "a," "b," "c," and "d," but as the basic stances asserted respectively by Ali, Barbara, Chang, and Deborah.[3] (And similarly for the presuppositions in the two remaining sets.)

We begin with Ali. "I am *inherently incapable* of knowing *any* reality," he declares. This is an *epistemological* claim: it concerns Ali's ability to know. More precisely, it is a *negative* epistemological claim: it is a denial that his so-called knowing is ever cognitionally valid, epistemically successful, genuinely manifestive of reality. Ali's stance is one that is much beloved of undergraduates, especially those impressed by Kant's contention that we lack the intellectual intuition that would yield speculative knowledge of things in themselves, or Hegel's contention that we lack the exhaustive understanding that would display the intelligible relations between any given thing and everything else in the universe.

Starting with his basic claim, the full argument Ali offers runs as follows. "I am inherently incapable of knowing any reality. But God is allegedly real. Therefore, I am inherently incapable of knowing God. But the scope of philosophical argumentation is limited to what I know or at least am inherently capable of knowing. Therefore, on *epistemological* grounds, the possibility that any philosophical argument for God might be rationally successful must be ruled out in advance."[4]

Barbara moves a step beyond Ali. "Reality is fundamentally *one*, and it is strictly *material*, in no way immaterial," she contends. This, like the two remaining claims in the first set, is *metaphysical*, for it is about reality. Moreover, like every metaphysical claim, it reflects an underlying *affirmative*

[3] My own experience here suggests that sometimes, though surely not always, there is a certain *negative affective inclination* that can at least partially displace *cognitive evidence* in the thinking of persons whose basic presuppositions imply the rational futility of any philosophical God-argument. People such as Ali, Barbara, Chang, and Deborah sometimes undertake their philosophical studies with an antecedent antipathy toward the very idea that philosophical God-arguments might be rationally successful. This feeling may stem from their high esteem for non-religious and especially scientific modes of inquiry, their relative unfamiliarity or even bad experiences with communities of religious believers, or both. Such persons face the challenge of insuring, as best they can, that this antecedent antipathy does not play a central role in the formation of their basic presuppositions, lest the latter be dogmatic rather than critical.

[4] Paul Ricoeur, for example, affirms the Kantian limitations on speculative knowledge in general and of divinity in particular, though he vigorously emphasizes the positive practical import of religious symbols. See *The Symbolism of Evil* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1967), 347-57 and "Philosophical Hermeneutics and Theological Hermeneutics," *Studies in Religion* 5 (1975-76): 14-44.

epistemological stance, namely that one can and does indeed know at least something of reality. Further, it belongs to *general* metaphysics, for it is about the character of reality precisely as such. In line with many thinkers in the history of explicit philosophy, Barbara maintains that she is inherently able to know reality, and that reality's characteristic feature is materiality, where "materiality" means at least "sentient experienceability." To be real is to be intrinsically susceptible of being sentiently experienced. Hence every so-called immaterial reality ultimately is reducible to what is sentiently experienceable.

It remains that the word "material" in the sense of "sentiently experienceable" has at least three additionally precise but contrasting meanings, meanings that typically emerge in three respective additionally nuanced but opposed claims about what is metaphysically basic. Distinguishing those three meanings and claims will allow us to specify more exactly what Barbara asserts and what she leaves open.

The first and surely the most common meaning appears in the claim that what is metaphysically basic is what is "material" in the sense of "sentiently experienceable and *non-living*, just physical." To be real is to be *physical*. Freedom (envisioned as radical volitional spontaneity)[5] and consciousness and even life are ultimately reducible to what is non-living: they are mere epiphenomena of the physical, and the universe at root is one or more machines. On this view, often labeled simply "materialism" but more exactly labeled "mechanical materialism," metaphysics becomes identical with generalized physics and chemistry. This is the stance of Epicurus, Hobbes, and Paul Churchland.

A second meaning appears in the claim that what is metaphysically basic is what is "material" in the sense of "sentiently experienceable and *living but non-conscious*, just organic." To be real is to be *organic*. Freedom and even consciousness are ultimately reducible to what is living but non-conscious: they are mere epiphenomena of the organic, and the universe at root is one or more plants. On this view, which may be labelled "hylozoism" or "organic materialism," metaphysics becomes identical with generalized botany. There are echoes of it in the stances of Anaximenes and Paracelsus, and in the "Gaia hypothesis" of James Lovelock.

A third meaning appears in the claim that what is metaphysically basic is what is "material" in the sense of "sentiently experienceable and *conscious but non-spiritual*, unfree, just sentient." To be real is to be *sentient*. Freedom is ultimately reducible to what is conscious but unfree: it is a mere epiphenomenon

[5] Freedom as radical volitional spontaneity is more than freedom understood as the absence of all natural necessity or even of just involuntary natural necessity. That is to say, freedom is envisioned here in terms of the account offered not by *indeterminists* nor by *soft determinists* (=*compatibilists*) but rather by *self-constitutionists*. See Michael Vertin, "Freedom," in J. Komonchak, et al., eds., *The New Dictionary of Theology* (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier Books, 1987), 404-406. Cf. Michael Vertin, "Freedom," in M. Downey, ed., *The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1993), 418-19.

of the sentient, and the universe at root is one or more animals. On this view, which may be labelled "hylopathism," "non-spiritual panpsychism," or "sentient materialism," metaphysics becomes identical with generalized zoology. This stance is a restricted version of the "panpsychism" maintained by such thinkers as the Stoics, Giordano Bruno, and G.T. Fechner.[6]

Now, in claiming that reality is strictly material, Barbara aims to assert no more than that reality's characteristic feature is sentient experienceability. That is to say, she intends to leave open the further question of whether metaphysically-basic matter is *non-living*, or *living but non-conscious*, or *conscious but non-spiritual.*[7] By implication, she also intends to leave open the question of whether the label "immaterial" should be understood as denoting (albeit always as just epiphenomenal, never as metaphysically basic) what is *living*, or what is *sentient*, or what is *spiritual* (in the sense of being free, possessing radical volitional spontaneity). However, to leave open the first question is to avoid eliminating even the most ample possible answer to that question and that in turn is to operate at least provisionally with the most restrictive answer to the second question. In other words, for Barbara the distinction between the *material* and the *immaterial* falls at least provisionally between the *material* (in the most ample sense of that word) and the *spiritual*.

As incorporating the foregoing refinements, Barbara's full argument is the following. "Reality is fundamentally one, and it is strictly material. But God is allegedly spiritual. Therefore God cannot be real. But the scope of philosophical argumentation is limited to what is or at least could be real. Therefore, on *metaphysical* grounds, the possibility that any philosophical argument for God might be rationally successful must be excluded from the outset."[8]

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[6] Whereas full-fledged panpsychists contend that what is sentiently experienceable is conscious, not just sentiently but also volitionally, consciousness on the stance I am recounting is limited to sentience.

[7] Another way of putting Barbara's contention is to say that to be real is to be intrinsically susceptible of being known exhaustively through the investigative procedures of the natural sciences, leaving it open whether zoology is ultimately reducible to botany and whether botany is ultimately reducible to chemistry and physics.

[8] It follows that for Barbara the relation between *ordinary* language and *religious* language is *univocal*. That is to say, insofar as the meanings of words are cognitive, expressive of what is, rather than just affective, expressive merely of feelings, the *ordinary* meanings of such words as "real," "good," and "God" and the *religious* meanings of those words are *the same*. (*Mutatis mutandis*, the same consequence holds for Chang, whose stance we treat next.) Some examples may be helpful. Ralph Burhoe contends that to speak of God is fundamentally just an imaginative way to speak of the basic flow of power or energy within the physical universe. See his "Potentials for Religion from the Sciences," *Zygon*, 5 (1970): 110-29; and Review: "Environment, Power, and Society," *Zygon*, 8 (1973): 163-65. By contrast with Burhoe's cognitivist view, A.J. Ayer interprets "God" noncognitively, as a word whose meaning may be emotionally satisfying but is cognitively meaningless. See his *Language, Truth and Logic* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1936). On these matters also see the writings of sociobiologists such as Richard Dawkins, for example, *The Selfish Gene* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), and Charles Lumsden and Edward Wilson, for

Chang's basic presupposition is in continuity with Barbara's but with its scope expanded. "Reality is fundamentally *one*, and it is strictly *spatiotemporal*, in no way transcendent," he says. Like process philosophers such as Alfred North Whitehead and Charles Hartshorne, for example, Chang has no doubt that he is inherently able to know reality, but he envisions reality's characteristic feature not as materiality but rather as spatiotemporality. To be real is to be in space and time, whether as non-living, or as living but non-conscious, or as conscious but just sentient, or even as free.[9] Hence the reality of anything beyond space and time is impossible.[10]

Chang's full argument unfolds as follows. "Reality is fundamentally one, and it is strictly spatiotemporal. But God allegedly *transcends space and time*. Therefore God cannot be real. But the scope of philosophical argumentation is limited to what is or at least could be real. Therefore, the possibility that any philosophical argument for God might be successful must be rejected from the start."[11]

While not necessarily contradicting the basic presuppositions of Barbara or Chang, Deborah takes a different tack. She does not start with a general metaphysical presupposition, a claim about reality as such, but rather with a particular one. "*Utter badness* is *real*," she argues. By "badness" Deborah means both moral evil, the bad things we *do* (such as acts of deceit, torture, and murder), and natural evil, the bad things we *suffer* (such as pain, sickness, and death). And by "utter" badness she means evil that has no redeeming features whatsoever, either in itself or in its consequences. Appealing to specific events such as the slow and painful death of a child at the hands of a sadist and the slow and painful death of another child born with an incurable disease, Deborah contends that such events are far from illusory, that in at least some of those cases there is nothing salutary at all about either the event or its aftermath, and thus that the reality of utter badness cannot be denied. Indeed, like certain sensitive and thoughtful people of every age and culture, she argues that

example, *Promethean Fire: Reflections on the Origin of Mind* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983).

[9] On the specific version of this stance that is maintained by Whitehead and Hartshorne, to be real is to be in space and time *as free*.

[10] Another way of putting Chang's contention is to say that to be real is to be intrinsically susceptible of being known exhaustively through the combined investigative procedures of (a) the natural sciences and (b) human studies (i.e., the social sciences and humanities) in their *this-worldly* dimensions (but not in their *other-worldly* dimensions, if any). Cf. note 7 above.

[11] For an excellent example of this stance, see Schubert Ogden, "The Reality of God," in his *The Reality of God* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1963), 1-70. On Ogden's "neoclassical" reconception, the word "God" has a meaning very different from its traditional one. Although both the primal ground and the ultimate goal of all that is, God is entirely in space and time. Indeed, God includes the world within Godself, and divine omnipotence is identified with the limit dimension of creative cosmic process. See Michael Vertin, "Is God in Process?" in T. Fallon and P. Riley, eds., *Religion and Culture*: *Essays in Honor of Bernard Lonergan* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987), 45-62.

metaphysics that does not begin by affirming the reality of utter badness is both theoretically shallow and morally corrupt.[12]

Deborah's full argument runs as follows. "Utter badness is real. But God allegedly is *all-knowing* (and thus would know about utter badness), *all-powerful* (and thus would be able to eliminate it), and *all-loving* (and thus would want to eliminate it). Therefore, God cannot be real.[13] But the scope of philosophical argumentation is limited to what is or at least could be real. Therefore, on *metaphysical* grounds, the possibility that any philosophical argument for God might be successful must be eliminated from the beginning."[14]

Are Philosophical Arguments for God Religiously Irrelevant?

The second set of philosophical presuppositions includes two claims, each of which implies the *religious irrelevance* of any philosophical argument for God. Our imaginary proponents of these claims are Elena and Federico respectively.[15]

Unlike Ali, but like Barbara and Chang and Deborah, Elena and Federico maintain an *affirmative epistemological* stance: they are confident that they can and do know at least something of reality, that their claims have basic metaphysical import. But unlike Barbara and Chang and like Deborah, Elena and

[12] Though she may not realize it clearly, Deborah's claim is the combination of two distinct claims. The first is that, both in themselves and in their entire aftermath, at least some free deeds are *arbitrary, irresponsible, lacking in moral order*. The limit form of this claim is that the universe as such is *meaningless*, intrinsically lacking any intelligent, reasonable, and responsible direction. The second is that, both in themselves and in their entire aftermath, at least some natural occurrences are *random, chaotic, lacking in intelligible order*. The limit form of this claim is that the universe as such is *absurd*, intrinsically unable to be understood.

[13] One of literature's best-known exponents of this position is Ivan Karamazov in Dostoyevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*. More recently, in his popular *When Bad Things Happen to Good People* (New York: Avon, 1983), Harold Kushner concludes his reflection on the untimely death of his son by denying not divine reality but rather divine omnipotence. Like Ogden, however, Kushner then is left with something quite different from "God" in the traditional sense of the word.

[14] For a perceptive and nuanced account of this argument as advanced by such current scholars as Grace Jantzen and Kenneth Surin, followed by his own constructive reflection on it, see Michael Stoeber, "Transformative Suffering, Destructive Suffering, and the Question of Abandoning Theodicy," *Studies in Religion*, 32 (2003): 429-47. Also see Stoeber, *Reclaiming Theodicy: Reflections on Suffering, Compassion, and Spiritual Transformation* (London and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

[15] Corresponding to a previous observation (see above, note 3), I here suggest that sometimes, though surely not always, there is a certain *negative affective inclination* that can at least partially displace *cognitive evidence* in the thinking of persons whose basic presuppositions imply the religious irrelevance of any philosophical God-argument. People such as Elena and Federico sometimes undertake their philosophical studies with an antecedent disdain for the very idea that philosophical God-arguments might be religiously relevant. This feeling may arise from the exceptionally fulfilling character of their own religious experience (often connected with their participation in the life of a faith community), their relative unfamiliarity with or even apprehension about the demands of rigorous systematic inquiry, or both. Such persons face the challenge of insuring, as best they can, that this antecedent disdain does not play a central role in the formation of their basic presuppositions, lest the latter be dogmatic rather than critical.

Federico begin with a *particular* metaphysical claim rather than a general one. Finally, unlike Deborah, Elena and Federico begin by asserting the reality not of utter badness but of God as directly self-disclosing.

More amply, proceeding in the tradition of such thinkers as Tertullian, Nicholas of Cusa and Kierkegaard, Elena and Federico assert the reality of a being that directly discloses itself as all-knowing, all-powerful, all-loving, and thus totally different from all other beings. That is to say, in addition to the sphere of *ordinary* reality, there is another sphere, that of *divine* reality; and the latter is fundamentally different from the former. The evidential basis of that assertion is the alleged direct self-disclosure of divine reality itself, a disclosure said to be encountered as a divine gift rather than a human achievement, a matter of supernatural revelation rather than natural reason. The disclosure occurs in the context of devout living, mystical experience, and religious faith, rather than of ordinary living, everyday experience, and rational inquiry. And the epistemic validity of the disclosure is supposedly self-evident to one who has had it, though dubious to one who has not.[16]

The difference between the presuppositions of Elena and Federico reflects a disagreement over just where the distinction between God and all other beings should be situated. For Elena, like such thinkers as D.Z. Phillips and William Alston,[17] the key distinction falls between spirituality and materiality. "God, directly disclosing Godself as wholly *spiritual*, fundamentally different from what is *material*, is *real*."[18] Beginning with this presupposition, Elena's full argument runs as follows. "God, directly disclosing Godself as wholly spiritual, is real. But the scope of philosophical argumentation is limited to the sphere of reality that is material. Therefore, on *metaphysical* grounds, the possibility that any philosophical argument might be religiously relevant must be excluded ahead of time: what a philosophical argument might establish has no connection at all with what the religious believer means by 'God.'"

[16] It follows that for Elena and Federico the relation between *ordinary* language and *religious* language is *sheerly equivocal*. That is to say, insofar as the meanings of words are cognitive rather than just affective, the meanings of such words as "real" and "good" as expressive of the *religious* realm are *radically different from* the meanings of the same words as expressive of the *ordinary* realm. In particular, the meaning of the word "God" as expressing what one grasps on the basis of religious faith is profoundly different from the meaning of "God" as expressing what one grasps on the basis of rational inquiry. Cf. note 8 above.

[17] See D.Z. Phillips, *Faith and Philosophical Inquiry* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970), and *Religion without Explanation* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1976); and William Alston, *Divine Nature and Human Language* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), and *Perceiving God* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991).

[18] Another way of putting this claim is to say that immaterial reality is what is intrinsically susceptible of being known through *devout living, mystical experience, and religious faith*, whereas material reality, fundamentally different, is what is intrinsically susceptible of being known through a fundamentally different way of knowing, namely, *the investigative procedures of the natural sciences*. Cf. notes 7 and 10 above.

For Federico, by contrast, like such thinkers as Peter Berger and George Lindbeck,[19] the key distinction falls between transcendence and spatiotemporality. "God, directly disclosing Godself as wholly *transcendent*, fundamentally different from *what is in space and time*, is *real*."[20] Starting with this presupposition, Federico's full argument unfolds as follows. "God, directly disclosing Godself as wholly beyond space and time, is real. But the scope of philosophical argumentation is limited to the sphere of reality that is spatiotemporal. Therefore, on *metaphysical* grounds, the possibility that any philosophical argument might be religiously relevant must be ruled out beforehand: what a philosophical argument might establish has no connection at all with what the religious believer means by 'God.'"

Philosophical Arguments for God are not Necessarily either Rationally Futile or Religiously Irrelevant

The third set of philosophical presuppositions comprises three claims. Collectively they imply that philosophical arguments for God are *not necessarily* either *rationally futile* or *religiously irrelevant*. Let me amplify this point.

As we have seen, each claim in the *first* set of philosophical presuppositions implies an antecedent rejection of the possibility that a philosophical argument for God could be *rationally successful*; and each presupposition in the *second* set implies an antecedent rejection of the possibility that such an argument could be *religiously relevant*. This means that maintaining *any one* of those presuppositions is *sufficient* for establishing the respective rejection. On the other hand, in order to disestablish both antecedent rejections, each presupposition in the third set is essential. That is to say, adopting *all three*

[19] As a sociologist, Berger argues for "methodological atheism," although in his personal life he is a devout Lutheran Christian. See Peter Berger, *The Sacred Canopy* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1967), 179-85; and "Some Second Thoughts on Substantive versus Functional Definitions of Religion," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 13 (1974), 125-33. Lindbeck draws on the later Wittgenstein's work to argue that religious attitudes, words, and actions are shaped at best to accord with the central religious doctrines received from one's religious forebears. See George Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984). Although neither Berger nor Lindbeck explicitly asserts the stance I am using Federico to illustrate, I contend that they agree concretely with Federico in a way that becomes evident insofar as the metaphysical implications of what they do assert are made explicit. See Margaret O'Gara and Michael Vertin, "The Holy Spirit's Assistance to the Magisterium in Teaching: Theological and Philosophical Issues," *Catholic Theological Society of America Proceedings*, 51 (1996): 125-42.

[20] Another way of putting this claim is to say that transcendent reality is what is intrinsically susceptible of being known through *devout living, mystical experience, and religious faith*, whereas spatiotemporal reality, fundamentally different, is what is intrinsically susceptible of being known through a fundamentally different way of knowing, namely, the combined investigative procedures of (a) the natural sciences and (b) human studies (i.e., the social sciences and humanities) in their *this-worldly* dimensions (but not in their *other-worldly* dimensions, if any). Cf. notes 7, 10, and 18 above.

of those presuppositions is *necessary* for showing that philosophical arguments for God are not necessarily either rationally futile or religiously irrelevant.

Our imaginary proponents of these three claims are Georg, Harry, and Indira.[21] I suggest that the stances they voice are ones typically maintained by thinkers in the philosophical tradition of Augustine and Aquinas, though to some extent by thinkers in certain other traditions as well.[22]

For Georg, Harry, and Indira, like all our preceding proponents except Ali, the philosophical presuppositions they voice are *metaphysical*, claims about reality. Of course each of those metaphysical claims reflects an underlying *affirmative epistemological* stance, for to assert something about reality is at least implicitly to claim as well that one knows what one is talking about. Finally, the metaphysical claims of Georg and Harry, like those of Barbara and Chang, are *general*: they regard the character of reality precisely as such.

Georg declares, "Reality is fundamentally *one*, though it is internally differentiated as *material* and *spiritual*; and every sphere of reality is cognitionally accessible in principle, whether directly or indirectly." Unlike Barbara, Georg envisions reality not as solely material but as also spiritual. And unlike Elena, he envisions reality not as including fundamentally different realms but rather as a single realm that is *internally* diversified. To be real is more fundamental than to be material or spiritual. Reality is what material and spiritual realities have in common, and it is more basic than their differences.[23]

Georg's full argument is the following. "Reality is fundamentally one, though it is internally differentiated as material and spiritual; and every sphere of reality is cognitionally accessible in principle, whether directly or indirectly. But God is allegedly a wholly spiritual reality. Therefore, God would be cognitionally accessible in principle, whether directly or indirectly. But the scope of

[21] Corresponding to two previous observations (see above, notes 3 and 16), I here suggest that sometimes, though surely not always, there is a certain *positive affective inclination* that can at least partially displace *cognitive evidence* in the thinking of persons whose basic presuppositions imply that philosophical God-arguments are not necessarily either rationally futile or religiously irrelevant. People such as George, Harry, and Indira sometimes undertake their philosophical studies with an antecedent admiration for every philosophical God-argument that may emerge, whatever its particular features. This feeling may come from their exuberance about what they deem to be the fundamental complementarity of rational inquiry and religious faith, their impatience with what they regard as the equally dogmatic (even though radically opposed) basic presuppositions of atheists and fideists alike, or both. Such persons face the challenge of insuring, as best they can, that this antecedent admiration does not diminish the rigor with which they assess each particular argument they encounter for both rational success and religious relevance.

[22] In what follows I rely upon Bernard Lonergan as an apt present-day expositor of this tradition. See especially his *Insight*: *A Study of Human Understanding* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1957 [fifth edition, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992]); and *Method in Theology* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972).

[23] Another way of putting this claim is to say that reality is what is intrinsically susceptible of being known, whether through the investigative procedures of (a) the natural sciences, (b) human studies in their this-worldly and other-worldly dimensions, or (c) religious faith and the theology that is its development. The same point holds for Harry's claim, to be treated shortly. Cf. notes 7, 10, 18, and 20 above.

philosophical argumentation extends exactly to whatever is cognitionally accessible in principle, whether directly or indirectly. Therefore, the possibility that some philosophical argument for God might be both *rationally successful* and *religiously relevant* cannot be excluded in advance; rather, the success and relevance of each such argument can be determined only by studying that particular argument."[24]

The next person to speak up is Harry. He contends, "Reality is fundamentally *one*, though it is internally differentiated as *spatiotemporal* and *transcendent*; and every sphere of reality is cognitionally accessible in principle, whether directly or indirectly." Unlike Chang, Harry envisions reality not as solely spatiotemporal but as also transcendent, with both spheres able to be known. Again, unlike Federico but like Georg, he envisions reality not as including fundamentally different realms but rather as a single realm that is diversified internally. Finally, although Harry highlights a different internal difference than Georg does, he does not in any way deny the latter. He merely underscores that to be real is more fundamental than to be spatiotemporal or transcendent. Reality is what spatiotemporal and transcendent realities have in common, and it is more basic than their differences.

Harry's full argument unfolds as follows. "Reality is fundamentally one, though it is internally differentiated as spatiotemporal and transcendent; and every sphere of reality is cognitionally accessible in principle, whether directly or indirectly. But God is allegedly a transcendent reality. Therefore, God would be cognitionally accessible in principle, whether directly or indirectly. But the scope of philosophical argumentation extends exactly to whatever is cognitionally accessible in principle, whether directly or indirectly. Therefore, the possibility that some philosophical argument for God might be both *rationally successful* and *religiously relevant* cannot be excluded in advance; rather, the success and relevance of each such argument can be determined only by studying that particular argument."

And finally we arrive at Indira, the last spokesperson not just of our third group but of all three groups. Like Deborah, Elena, and Federico, Indira starts not with a general metaphysical presupposition but with a particular one. Again, like Deborah, her presupposition regards utter badness. Her assessment of utter badness, however, differs from Deborah's. "It is not immediately obvious to us

[24] It follows that for Georg the relation between *ordinary* language and *religious* language is *analogical*. That is to say, insofar as the meanings of words are cognitive rather than just affective, the meanings of such words as "real" and "good" as expressive of the *religious* realm are *partly the same as and partly different from* the meanings of the same words as expressive of the *ordinary* realm. In particular, the meaning of the word "God" as expressing what one grasps on the basis of religious faith is partly the same as and partly different from the meaning of "God" as expressing what one grasps on the basis of rational inquiry. *Mutatis mutandis*, the same consequence will hold for Harry. Cf. notes 8 and 16 above.

that *utter badness* is *real*," she asserts. Unlike Deborah, Indira does not think it justified to move directly from recognizing and sorrowing over this or that particular moral or natural evil to concluding that such evils have no redeeming features whatsoever, either in themselves or in their consequences. Perhaps such a conclusion is correct. However, in order to possess a critical rather than a merely dogmatic basis for affirming it, one would need to understand the concrete role of moral and natural evils not just in some particular context but ultimately in the context of the whole of universal history, future as well as past, an understanding that Indira deems quite beyond her inherent cognitional capability.

Four aspects of Indira's contention deserve to be spelled out more fully. First, she is not denying that the utter badness of evil choices *in themselves* can be grasped as at least privatively real. Rather, her caution regards the utter badness of *all their consequences*. Second, in saying that she cannot declare the utter badness of the latter to be real, she is not declaring it to be unreal: she is simply pointing out the need to leave the question open at the initial stages of analysis. Third, if the existence of an all-knowing, all-powerful, and all-loving reality can be established (whether by philosophical argument or by religious belief), then one of its implications would be that at least one consequence of every evil choice is good. As Augustine puts it, "God draws good out of evil."[25] Fourth, however, even in the latter case no finite knower in this life is ever in a position to know concretely just *what* the good consequences of this or that evil choice are, only *that* there must be at least one. Consequently, no matter how well-intentioned, the effort to explain precisely how the consequences of some evil choice are good is always futile.[26]

Here is Indira's full argument. "It is not immediately obvious to us that utter badness is real. Now God allegedly is all-knowing (and thus would know about utter badness), all-powerful (and thus would be able to eliminate it), and all-loving (and thus would want to eliminate it). Therefore, the possibility of God is not immediately and obviously excluded by utter badness, as would indeed be the case if it were immediately obvious to us that utter badness is real. But the scope of philosophical argumentation extends exactly to the whole of reality. Therefore, the possibility that some philosophical argument for God might be both *rationally successful* and *religiously relevant* cannot be excluded in advance, as would indeed be the case if it were immediately obvious to us that utter badness is real; rather, the success and relevance of each such argument can be determined only by studying that particular argument."

[25] *Enchiridion, sive De fide, spe et caritate*, c. 11.
[26] For more on these matters, see Lonergan, *Insight*, 666-68 [(1992) 689-91].

Conclusion

Let me conclude with two comments. First, in this paper I have limited myself to elucidating three different sets of basic epistemological and metaphysical presuppositions, presuppositions that, so I have argued, determine whether or not particular arguments for God might be rationally successful and religiously relevant. However, I have said virtually nothing about how such presuppositions themselves are to be critically justified, if at all. What, then, is the critical ground, evidence, warrant, if any, on which a basic philosophical presupposition rests?

My own (though far from original) answer to that question is that every non-dogmatic *metaphysical* presupposition rests upon some *epistemological* presupposition, every non-dogmatic epistemological presupposition rests upon some *noetic phenomenological* presupposition, and every non-dogmatic noetic phenomenological presupposition is nothing other than an expression of the features of my own concrete cognitional operations that I cannot deny without involving myself at least tacitly in self-contradiction.[27]

Using the label "cognitional theory" instead of my "noetic phenomenology," and focusing on how to overcome basic philosophical disagreements, Bernard Lonergan articulates this position succinctly:

> The scandal still continues that men, while they tend to agree on scientific questions, tend to disagree in the most outrageous fashion on basic philosophic issues. So they disagree about the activities named knowing, about the relation of those activities to reality, and about reality itself. However, differences on the third, reality, can be reduced to differences about the first and second, knowledge and objectivity. Differences on the second, objectivity, can be reduced to differences on the first, cognitional theory. Finally, differences in cognitional theory can be resolved by bringing to light the contradiction between a mistaken cognitional theory and the actual performance of the mistaken theorist. To take the simplest instance, Hume thought the human mind to be a matter of impressions linked together by custom. But Hume's own mind was quite original. Therefore, Hume's own mind was not what Hume considered the human mind to be.[28]

[27] This type of argumentation may be labeled "transcendental," but in that case the word has a concrete first-person meaning that differs importantly from the meaning of the same word in reference to the argumentation of Kant or of "transcendental Thomists" such as Maréchal, Rahner, and Coreth. See Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, ch. 1. See also Michael Vertin, "Mind," in Michael Downey, ed., *New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1993), 655-58; "Gender, Science, and Cognitional Conversion," in C. Crysdale, ed., *Lonergan and Feminism* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), 49-71; and "Transcendental Philosophy and Linguistic Philosophy," *Method*: *Journal of Lonergan Studies*, 19 (2001), 253-80.

[28] Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 20-21. This contention regarding the relationship of metaphysics, epistemology, and noetic phenomenology is a characteristic feature of Lonergan's philosophical writings. It finds its most detailed expression in *Insight*, chs. 9-14.

Second, and in light of what I have just said, I would argue that both the *first* and *second* set of philosophical presuppositions are fundamentally *problematic* precisely because, in one way or another, each claim in those sets rests upon a *dogmatic* rather than critical ground.[29] This point merits expansion.

If I were to assert in my own name Ali's epistemological presupposition that he is inherently incapable of knowing any reality at all, the content of my claim would be undercut phenomenologically by my performance of asserting that very claim, and epistemologically by the positive epistemic import I would be tacitly attributing to that performance.

Again, if I were to assert Barbara's metaphysical presupposition that reality is strictly material or Chang's that reality is strictly spatiotemporal, the content of those claims would be negated phenomenologically by the spiritual and transcendent features of my performance of asserting the claims, and epistemologically and metaphysically by the epistemic significance and noumenal implications I would be tacitly imputing to those features.

Further, if I were to adopt Deborah's metaphysical presupposition that utter badness is real, the content of my claim would be contradicted phenomenologically by my inherent inability to achieve a concretely detailed grasp of the entire past and future of the universe, a grasp without which I am not in position to declare any evil bad not only in itself but also in all its concrete consequences. And any claims whose contents are contradicted phenomenologically by the impossibility of a requisite element are, by that very fact, contradicted epistemologically and metaphysically as well.

Finally, if I were to assert Elena's or Federico's metaphysical presuppositions of the reality of God as directly disclosing Godself, whether as wholly spiritual or as wholly transcendent, the contents of those claims would be impugned phenomenologically by the inherently discursive rather than intuitive character of my processes of understanding and judging. In other words, at least in this life my cognitional structure is such that I never come to know anything, including God, except through a three-step process of experiencing data, grasping an intelligibility in those data, and affirming the synthesis of data and intelligibility. Hence my cognitional structure excludes the possibility of any awareness on my part of a content that bears the given intelligibility of direct divine self-disclosure plus the self-evident reality of that intelligibility.[30] And, as we have just seen in our treatment of Deborah's presupposition, claims whose

[29] A ground can be dogmatic either by *defect* or by *excess*. In the first case, one's claim directly or indirectly *ignores* some phenomenological factor that *is* actually present. In the second case, one's claim directly or indirectly *assumes* some phenomenological factor that *is not* actually present. In what follows, I suggest that the basic claims of Ali, Barbara, and Chang are dogmatic by defect; those of Deborah, Elena, and Federico, by excess.

[30] In this line, the most that phenomenological reflection brings to light is my awareness of (a) my religious experience, (b) my hypothetical interpretation of that experience as divine self-disclosure, and (c) my at-best-highly-probable affirmation of that interpretation. See Lonergan, *Method in*

contents are contradicted phenomenologically by the impossibility a requisite element are, by that very fact, contradicted epistemologically and metaphysically as well.

Conversely, I would argue that the philosophical presuppositions in the *third* set are *properly justified* precisely because each of them rests upon a *critical* rather than dogmatic ground. Let me explain.

If I were to assert Georg's or Harry's presupposition that reality is fundamentally one, though internally differentiated as material and spiritual or as spatiotemporal and transcendent, in either case the content of my claim would be consonant phenomenologically with the features of my performance of asserting the claim, and epistemologically and metaphysically with the epistemic significance and noumenal implications I would be tacitly attributing to those features.

Again, if I were to assert Indira's presupposition that it is not immediately obvious that utter badness is real, the content of my claim would be consonant phenomenologically with the fact that I do not possess apparent knowledge of the totality of universal history and thus cannot exclude the possibility that ultimately every evil has at least some good consequences. And the content of my claim would also be consonant epistemologically and metaphysically with the epistemic significance and noumenal implications I would be tacitly attributing to my lack of the requisite apparent knowledge.

To reiterate, the most fundamental standard for assessing any philosophical presupposition is its direct or indirect fidelity to the procedurally incontrovertible features of my own concrete cognitional operations. That is to say, the fundamental issue is the extent to which any articulated presupposition directly or indirectly reflects an accurate and adequate response to the Socratic admonition, "Know thyself!"[31] It is my conclusion that, when assessed in this manner, the presuppositions in the first two sets stand out as dogmatic and those in the third set as critical. It remains, of course, that whether readers find my conclusion to reflect their own self-knowledge or, by contrast, to be undercut by it is for each of them to determine.

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Theology, ch. 4; and "Religious Knowledge," in Lonergan, *A Third Collection* (New York: Paulist Press, 1985), 129-45. See also Frederick Crowe, "Lonergan's Universalist View of Religion," in idem, *Developing the Lonergan Legacy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 111-41.

[31] "While the reasonableness of each scientist is a consequence of the reasonableness of all, the philosopher's reasonableness is grounded on a personal commitment and on personal knowledge. For the issues in philosophy cannot be settled by looking up a handbook, by appealing to a set of experiments performed so painstakingly by so-and-so, by referring to the masterful presentation of overwhelming evidence in some famous work. Philosophic evidence is within the philosopher himself. . . . Philosophy is the flowering of the individual's rational consciousness in its coming to know and take possession of itself" (Lonergan, *Insight*, 429 [(1992) 453-54]).