

DIPOLARITY AND MONOPOLARITY IN THE IDEA OF GOD

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The decision of classical theism to view God as changeless in every respect, drawing on Greek, Arabian, and Jewish antecedents was, in effect, a decision of Western culture. The basic argument supporting the decision was that of Plato's *Republic*, Book II: perfect being must be changeless for change in such a being would necessarily be change for the worse. Every God must therefore remain "absolutely and forever in his own form" (*Philosophers Speak of God*, p. 41).¹ Aristotle and Philo Judaeus (*Ib.*, pp. 67-8 and 80) offered similar arguments which reached their definitive form in Thomas Aquinas (*Ib.*, pp. 120-21).

But if Plato supported the idea of changeless being in the *Republic*, his more mature work contains a succession of experiments combining permanence with change in the divine nature: "As children say entreatingly 'Give us both' so he [the philosopher] will include the movable and immovable in his definition of being and all" (*Ib.*, p. 51 but cf. the entire stretch from pp. 44-54).

The position of the *Republic* remained invincible, and that of Plato's later work invisible, until modern times—rising to the surface in Socinus (*Ib.*, 225-26) and Lequier (*Ib.*, 229-30), gaining strength and clarity in recent thinkers including Fechner (*Ib.*, 243-54), Whitehead (*Ib.*, 277-82), and most of all Charles Hartshorne (*Ib.*, Intro., 1-25, Epilogue, 499-514 and passim).

It is my purpose to show that the less conspicuous doctrine of the divine nature, which I shall call dipolarity, successfully resolves the problems generated by the dominant view of classical theism, which I

¹ All references in the text are to Charles Hartshorne and William L. Reese, *Philosophers Speak of God* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1953; Midway Reprints, 1976). Through the first three-quarters of the paper it is the argument of this book which I am following.

Diálogos, 41 (1983) pp. 51-58.

shall call monopolarity; but that the sub-species of dipolarity, known as panentheism, while resolving some problems generates others.

Monopolarists affirmed of God but one pole of the ultimate categorial contrasts, the "strong" pole consisting of the properties of changelessness, as we have suggested, but in addition absoluteness, actuality, eternality, independence, unity, causality, activity, and necessity. The dipolarists, on the other hand, affirm in God the presence of both poles of these contrasts: change as well as changelessness, relativity as well as absoluteness, potentiality as well as actuality, temporality as well as eternality, dependence as well as independence, complexity as well as unity, effectuality as well as causality, passivity as well as activity, and contingency as well as necessity.

The problems which classical theism could not resolve were set out by Plato as early as the *Parmenides* (*Ib.*, 42-44): "...if God has this perfect authority and knowledge, his authority cannot rule us, nor his knowledge know us, or any human thing; just as our authority does not extend to the gods, nor our knowledge know anything which is divine, so by parity of reason they, being gods, are not our masters, neither do they know the things of men". If God is absolute (without relations to the world), unitary (without the complexity of personality), actual (without the potentialities of growth and change),² causal (without being affected or effected by anything), then God cannot know us, or rule us, or relate to us in any way; and we cannot know or make reference to Him. The penalty, then, of affirming in God the monopole categories is the complete separation of God from the world.

Aristotle (*Ib.*, 65-68) was able to retain consistency while holding the monopole categories, by following out the implications of the argument. God is absolute and changelessly perfect, but knows only his own nature, and neither knows nor relates to the world.

Aquinas made an effort to turn the point of the criticism. He argued that the relation between God and the world is one-sided. The world is related to God, but God is not related to the world (*Ib.*, 120-21). This would mean that we are related to God and dependent upon him for our creation, but God is not related to, nor dependent upon, us. In fact, however, the relations in question cannot be one-way relations. Knowledge requires that one's mental content be shaped by, and in this sense be dependent on, what is known. Rule requires knowledge of the ruled. To have caused something unaware would be chance or accident, not creation. Love features a still more intimate relationship to what is

² The point about potentiality was made by Averroës, and Aquinas had it from him. The point is, however, implicit in Plato.

loved. Continuing St. Augustine's placement of the archetypal forms in the mind of God, Aquinas argued that in knowing the essences of things in eternity God has proper knowledge of all things (*Ib.*, 123-38). But the claim is consonant neither with his theory of individuation, nor with his theory of the double composition of essence and existence. In terms of these theories, in knowing his own nature God could know only the types of things that occur, not things in their individuality.

Since the arguments of Aquinas do not affect the criticism, the God of Aquinas is in the Parmenidean situation. God cannot know, rule, or relate to us; and we cannot know or refer to Him. And the source of the trouble is the monopolar ascription of changelessness to perfection. If changeless perfection requires either inconsistency or else a grotesque conception of the divine, that, one might argue, is too high a price to pay. Perfection in knowledge, love, or rule requires maximum relatedness to, sensitivity toward, and dependence on the object of knowledge, love, or rule. Strictly speaking, this requires change in the knower, lover, ruler insofar as there is change in the known, loved, or ruled. Note that the categories making sense of perfection are from the weak side of the list of polar opposites. The moral is clear that one makes sense of perfection only by combining categories from the strong and weak sides of the list, that is, by a dipolar approach.

So far from the truth, then, was the Plato of the *Republic* in his conception of perfect being, that one cannot even think consistently of a changeless perfect being. But if "changeless perfect being" harbors inconsistency, is not "changing perfect being" inconsistent as well? It is, indeed, if one means by this a being changing in every respect. To affirm this would be to affirm monopolarity from the weak side of the polar contrasts. What perfection requires, as we have already suggested, is dipolarity, a changeless changing being. A "changeless changing perfection", to be sure, would likewise be inconsistent did not the dipolarist mark a difference of level in the two ascriptions. The dipolarist, wishing to ascribe to God both "strong" and "weak" categories, insists that the paired categories from the two sides can be jointly affirmed without contradiction because they are (for the most part) of different level.³ The strong categories are abstract, the weak categories "concrete". What perfect being requires is a changing being with changeless intentions, certainly not a contradiction; in the same way and without inconsistency there can be a being both absolute and relative, both eternal and temporal, both independent and dependent, both unitary

³ Cause and effect, activity and passivity are on the same level. I don't stop to consider the implications of this.

and complex, both cause and effect, both necessary and contingent, both actual and potential. Indeed, there could be a supreme being in no other way. And such a being, unlike the absolute God of Plato's *Parmenides* or Aquinas' *Summa* could create, know, and rule us; and we could know and refer to Him.

When St. Augustine in the *Confessions*⁴ revelled in the inconsistencies in the idea of God, these were inconsistencies from the standpoint of the monopolist alone. In fact, St. Augustine was coupling categories from both sides of the list of polar opposites, while assuming no difference of level, or none that would make a difference.

To this point we have used the phrase "perfect being" as though there were no polar contrast between being and becoming. "Being" was chosen by Aristotle as the indefinable *summum genus*. Since there is no more encompassing term to contain this one, the most one can do is distinguish the more or less analogous types of being from within, as it were. Aristotle's categories stressed being and its properties, the things that can be affirmed of that which primarily is, i.e., substance. But being is a curious term to use in this connection since all of the ordinary instances of being are involved in various processes of becoming. The ambiguity in Aristotle's usage is that being is allowed to include both the changeless and the changing, even though in the supreme case change is excluded. The definition of perfect being excluding change, there could be no becoming in the divine instance. In thinking, then, of the actual-potential contrast, it was reasonable to think of God as pure actuality with no admixture of potentiality. And although *actus purus* is the medieval name for God, so considered, the idea fits Aristotle's view as well. To be in potency in any sense was viewed as a defect, notwithstanding the obvious consequence that the absence of potentiality would preclude the possibility of growth or development. But from Aristotle on, actuality was also equated with activity and potentiality with passivity, whatever might be the inconsistencies in the consequences flowing from this determination. Activity should be on the strong side of the list and passivity on its weak side so that, in addition to whatever else, God should also be characterizable as the most active of all beings. Aristotle found this to be consistent with changelessness (*Ib.*, 64-67) by evoking the image of circular motion, always issuing from itself, and equating this with a thinking on thinking, thus making God into something like a great logician. (The move was consonant, of course, with divine obliviousness to the world.) The Middle Ages seems to have had no particular ins-

⁴ At the very beginning of Book I.

piration for handling the nature of the divine activity, or the activity of pure actuality, and the problem was more or less ignored. If Aristotle's process which goes nowhere fails to reconcile change with changelessness, as I now presume, then Aristotle must stand with changelessness alone in the supreme instance of being. And if in ordinary cases the pattern of the supreme case is to be followed, taking being as excluding change, then being and becoming would stand as polar opposites. What now would be our situation? Would we find ourselves with two terms, each its own *summum genus*? I think we should. Would we then have two indefinables? The new arrangement may have solved that problem. It may be said that our polar opposites define each other by negation, by the limitation each places on its counterpart. More even than that, the polar opposition of being and becoming allows both to be defined by genus and difference, although these are definitions by negative genus and positive difference. And if all determination is negation, the determination of being as all that is not becoming, and becoming as all that is not being, is a genuine, if negative, determination. The positive differences are respectively the positive qualities of being and becoming.

We have seen that just as there is no larger genus in which to place being so there is no larger genus in which to place becoming, thus making them polar opposites defining each other by way of contrast. But if each of these terms is its own *summum genus*, the same is true of all other polar opposites. If being records that a thing is, the additional terms record how the thing is, its mode and style of being/becoming; and each in its lack of qualification is as much a *summum genus* as being and becoming. There is nothing more general than time in which to place temporality, more encompassing than eternity in which to place the non-temporal, nothing more actual than actuality, more potential than potentiality, etc., on through the list. Insofar as being/becoming simply records the fact that a thing is, the additional categories—each as general as being in its own way—record *how* the thing is, its mode and style of being/becoming. And as time is the negative genus of its exclusion from eternity plus its own positive differentia, and eternity its exclusion from time plus its own positive quality, so actuality and potentiality, permanence and change, unity and multiplicity, cause and effect, absoluteness and relativity, activity and passivity, participate in a mutual delimitation and definition by negative genus and positive difference.

It is in this way that we come upon a set of polar opposites, recognized fitfully by Aristotle, although not granted anything like categorial status. The categorial elevation of such opposites was left to Kant and

Hegel who, however, obscured their nature enfolded them in largely specious triadic relationships.

One might argue that it is not being and becoming which are polar opposites but, à la Hegel, being and nothing. The argument, however, founders. In his first deduction Hegel has it that the polar opposites of being and nothing yield becoming; but the advance is gained by equivocation on the terms being and nothing. Being as totally abstract and contentless is supposed to have turned into nothing, and then the contrast of being and nothing (now it has turned back into something) is expected to yield becoming, the passage back and forth between the two terms. The passage from being to nothing is a passage from something to *ouk on* (nothing at all). The passage from nothing to being is a passage from the *me on* (potential being) to something. When the equivocations on the two terms are removed it is clear that the contrast before us isn't that of being and nothing but, once again, the polar contrast of being with becoming, a contrast not resolvable into some third thing. To be sure, just as one can speak of the being of a thing or the becoming of a thing, one can speak of its non-being.⁵ But as Aristotle had already recognized, change does not occur between being and sheer nothingness, but in terms of a potency or potentiality becoming actual. Hegel's becoming, then, likewise is a coming to be of actual, out of potential, being. The explanation has invoked an additional pair, actuality and potentiality. Presumably, in a similar fashion each pair would lead to another until the set of polar opposites is complete.

In the dipolar approach, we begin to see, God is the supreme exemplification of the categories rather than their supreme exception, as in classical theism. This allows the inference that, as there must be temporality, relativity, dependence in the divine, so must there be a degree of absoluteness, atemporality, actuality, independence, unity, causality, activity, and necessity, in all things. And God differs from all the rest precisely in the supremacy of his categorial exemplifications.

Now classical theism, we had argued, lost contact with God by separating Him too completely from the world; and dipolarity provides a correction, restoring contact. But, one might argue, if classical theism errs on the side of remoteness, dipolarity errs on the side of intimacy, bringing God and the world too closely together, thus falling into pantheism. It is true that, in making its correction, the dipolar view does approach, and go a long way with pantheism (*Ib.*, 165-210). Spinoza had, in effect, posited thought and extension as polar contrasts, char-

⁵ I leave the question open whether references to non-being can be solved by Platonic "othering" (cf. my "Nonbeing and Negative Reference", *Process and Divinity* (ed. Reese and Freeman, La Salle, Ill.: Open Court Publishing Co., 1964), pp. 311-24.

acterizing all that is. Both Fechner and Hartshorne accept the pair, viewing God as extended, and everything in the world as at least dimly sentient. We might term this the intension-extension pair. Whitehead, it would seem, accepts the first attribution, since feeling is for him a universal category, while rejecting the second.

But Hartshorne, picking up Krause's term, "panentheism," proposes that the dipolar approach avoid pantheism in the following manner: In pantheism all is identical with God, while in panentheism all is within God but not identical with him. Hartshorne accepts Fechner's suggestion that the world (reality) is God's body, and we are something like cells in the divine organism. Our spatial inclusion in the divine is thus taken literally. It is interesting to note, however, that Whitehead, who is Hartshorne's inspiration generally, would not accept the doctrine that God literally includes the world. The principle of relativity is ultimate for Whitehead, and any two contemporaries relate only through a common past, and neither Whitehead nor Hartshorne would allow God to stand as an exception to the categories.

It follows that God cannot literally contain the world in any present moment. Whitehead would accept the point but not Hartshorne. It follows that Whitehead, although a dipolarist, is not a panentheist and that Hartshorne, avowing panentheism, is (in this respect) non-Whiteheadian. Hartshorne's doctrine of divine inclusiveness returns from Whitehead to a Newtonian world where there can be an absolute present moment, namely the divine awareness of, and in, the present. Finally, then, it also follows that if modern physics is correct, panentheism and Hartshorne are in error.

The argument suggests that although pantheism stresses the divine inclusiveness in a literal fashion, dipolarity should not. It suggests, further, that the polar contrast we seek is not intension-extension, which should not be stressed as a polar contrast, or at least not in the way Fechner and Hartshorne do, but transcendence-immanence. God is at each moment immanent in the world and also transcendent over it. Every other thing is in its own way also immanent in and transcendent over, some aspect of the world in the present moment. This option does not return us to classical theism, however, since that doctrine has no provision for divine immanence, although it must continue to affirm it. We may perhaps, however, gain some hint of the manner of the divine immanence from classical theism. Teilhard de Chardin suggests that God "invades" the world "as a ray of light does a crystal," that his presence is "very near and very distant at one and the same time."⁶

⁶ Teilhard de Chardin, *The Divine Milieu* (New York: Harper and Row, 1960), pp. 46-7.

The analogy allows a transcendent-immanent, but not an intensive-extensive, contrast. One would hardly say the crystal is included in the light; nor, I think, would one want to say that the light is included in the crystal. Photons are included in the crystal, but the quality of light requires a relation to some percipient. This allows the relation of God and world to follow the lines Whitehead has laid down in his principle of universal relativity, since my awareness of the light which bathes the crystal is a relation of an immediately past state of the crystal to an immediately past state of my body. I do not literally engulf the crystal nor the crystal me. Worked out, I believe the analogy would support a dipolar approach in the Whiteheadian mode which does not fall into panentheism. It would also allow us to move Buber (*Ib.*, 302-306) with his sense of relation closer to the mainstream of the dipolar analysis while ridding ourselves of the sense of the uncanny which for many pervades the panentheistic analysis.

From my point of view, then, the panentheism chapter (*Ib.*, Ch. 7, 233-334) must be read selectively, since it includes both panentheists, and dipolarists who are not panentheists. Since dipolarity does not require—indeed, in the final accounting does not allow—panentheism, possible dipolar relations should likewise be sought in other types of temporalistic theism (*Ib.*, Ch. VIII-X, 335-408). One could of course say with some forms of temporal theism that God has extension without saying that he extends over the entire spatial-temporal world. The manner of such extension is unimaginable to me; but Whitehead's fallacy of misplaced concreteness does hold that to be is to be somewhere, and this would seem to require extension of some sort.

The upshot, then, is that the monopolarity of classical theism leads to impossible consequences and must be abandoned, while the dipolarity of panentheism stands in contradiction to at least one of the primary insights of process philosophy. This result diminishes the advantage of turning from classical theism to panentheism. But there are, it would seem, other forms of dipolarity without the disadvantages of panentheism. It is one of these alternatives to which one must turn in turning away from classical theism.

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