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GOD. Since the topic *God* is unmanageably immense, this article will simplify matters by a division between the biblical data and the philosophical problems they raise. Of course, this division is slightly arbitrary. Biblical theology must systematize its material to some degree; and systematic theology, if definitely Christian, constantly appeals to the text of Scripture. Nevertheless there is a difference. Biblical theology stays closer to the text in its chronological development and is easier to understand; systematic theology follows a logical order, draws out implications and can become highly technical.

I. BIBLICAL THEOLOGY

A. *The Names of God.* The first word for God in the OT is *Elohim*. It is also the most general and least specific in significance. Thus it would correspond to *Theos* in Greek and to *God* or *Deity* in English. Unlike *Jehovah*, explained below, *Elohim* can be used for pagan gods (Gen. 31:30; Ex. 12:12).

Since it is so used and since it is a plural noun, some critics have seen in it an indications of an original polytheism. This theory is not well founded because the singular form, *Eloah*, is poetic and rare. In prose the plural has to be used, whether polytheistically or monotheistically, because there is not other suitable word. Therefore its use cannot prove an underlying polytheism in biblical religion.

On the other hand, some Christians have explained the plural as an anticipation of the Trinity. But again, without a commonly used singular no one in OT times could have developed trinitarian ideas from the word alone. The plural would suggest polytheism more readily than trinitarianism were it not for hints other than the word itself being used with a singular verb. This is not to say that material in the OT cannot hint at some distinctions within the Godhead.

The plural form is better understood as indicating a plenitude of power. Though the etymology is obscure, the word may have come from a root meaning *strong*. Its poetic singular, *Eloah*, seems to mean an object of terror. In any case, this name is used chiefly in connection with God's governance of the world and mankind in general.

Another word, *El*, which is not related directed to *Elohim*, occurs more than 200 times, chiefly in Job, Psalms, and Isaiah. It is often accompanied by some descriptive term or such combinations as *El-Shaddai*, God Almighty, or *El-Elyon*, God Most High.

In contrast with this most general name of God there stands *Jehovah*, the most specific. *Jehovah* is an artificial English word put together from the four Hebrew consonants JHVH and the vowels of the Hebrew word *Adonai*, or Lord. Before the time of Christ the Jews developed a superstitious dread of

pronouncing JHVH; when they came to it in the text, they pronounced Adonai instead; then later the vowels of Adonai were written into the manuscripts, and in modern times people have been saying Jehovah. The original pronunciation was probably Yahveh.

A basic explanation of the name is given in Ex. 3:13-15: "I am that I am," or, better, "I will be what I will be." The Hellenistic Jews wrongly identified JHVH with the Pure Being of Greek philosophy. Quite the reverse, whereas Elohim designates God's universal action, JHVH is the name used in connection with God's choice of, revelation to, and special care for his covenant people. It is the term almost always used in theophanies, and almost always revelation is "the word of JHVH." Or, more briefly, JHVH, is the redemptive name of God.

Higher criticism has often tried to maintain that one author could not possibly have used both names for God, and that therefore the first chapter of Genesis was written by one man and the second by another. The theory of two authors is not needed to explain the use of these two names. The first chapter tells of God's general relation to the world, and then the second begins to relate his special care for men who by Adam's fall soon were in need of redemption. God in his wisdom furnished these two names as a convenient method of summarizing what the Scriptures teach about God: *Elohim*, his work of creation, and *Jehovah*, his work of redemption.

B. *God as Creator*. The Bible opens with the account of God's creating the universe. The first chapter of Genesis gives the impression that, aside from God himself, everything that exists has been created. God alone is self-existent. Nothing else exists of its own right, independently, or without beginning. This initial impression is corroborated by many later passages. Neh. 9:6 states, "Thou, even thou, art Lord alone; though thou hast made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth, and all things that are therein, the seas, and all that is therein, and thou preservest them all; and the host of heaven worshippeth thee." Cf. Ex. 20:11; Isa. 42:5; John 1:3; Heb. 3:4, *et al.*

The expression of Scripture as to the extent of God's creative act are so comprehensive that we say God created all things *ex nihilo*, out of nothing. Before any natural processes began, God created absolutely. He made no use of prior existing material to fashion the universe as a sculptor makes a beautiful statue out of an ugly block of stone; but "By the word of the Lord were the heavens made, and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth" (Ps. 33:6) and "God said, Let there be light, and there was light" (Gen. 1:3), "for he spake, and it was done" (Ps. 33:9). This is usually called *fiat* creation (*q.v.*). This is not to say that after bringing the universe into existence, God did not use previously created substance in completing his creation. The Bible specifically states, for example, that "God formed man of the dust of the ground."

Since speaking and creating are voluntary actions, the first chapter of Genesis teaches the personality of God. God is not a physical, inanimate, mechanical First Cause. Nor is he a descriptive principle abstracted from the phenomena of nature. He arranged the parts of the universe for a purpose (Gen. 1:14, 16, 26, 28). Intelligence and volition are personal.

Most religions have preserved some notion of a personal God. In modern times even pantheists, like Spinoza and Hegel, though they deny creation and identify God and the universe, consider their All of Absolute a living being. In antiquity Aristotle taught that the First Mover thinks. All these views show a trace of personality, but only a trace. Spinoza denied that God had a will, and Aristotle denied that God knew history. In fact, the polytheists often seem to have a better appreciation of personality, even if their divine persons are more limited and human than divine. It may also be said that a universal creation presupposes, not polytheism, but the unity of the Godhead.

There are levels or degrees of heathen idolatry. The Ephesians (Acts 19:35) believed that Diana herself lived above. Jupiter was supposed to have thrown down to earth a wooden image of Diana. In Paul's day the Ephesian silversmiths had developed a lucrative trade making small replicas of this image. Thus the Ephesians clearly distinguished between the goddess and the images. But in other cases the depravity of the idolatrous mind was such that, though its psychology is an enigma to us, the distinction between the inanimate idol and the god or goddess became blurred. Somehow or other the two were practically identified. If and when this identification was made, the Psalmist's sarcasm would be exceptionally biting when he says, "Their idols . . . have mouths but they speak not; eyes have they, but they see not; . . . they that make them are like unto them" (Ps. 115:4-8). Cf. Isa. 44:17 45:20; 46:7. See also GODS.

In contrast with both ancient paganism and modern pantheism, the Scriptures ascribe to God a full and complete personality. Not only did he create all things, not only does he control the universe, not only does he think and know, not only does he hear the prayers of his people, but most particularly and in a manner impossible in the systems of Spinoza and Hegel, he speaks to man. We learn the nature and attributes of God, not by a scientific study of nature, but by a verbal revelation (*q.v.*). The idea of revelation or divine communication of knowledge, as well as the righteousness and love by which that revelation so sharply distinguishes God from the imagination of the heathen, comes to clearest expression in the works of providence and redemption. For the moment, however, the implications of creation require further development.

If God has created all things of nothing, simply by his word, his fiat, his command, it follows that he is omnipotent. Neither a greater power nor a more impossible task is conceivable. The biblical

concept of God Almighty differs radically from paganism and idolatry. Where there are many gods, each limits the others. Since no one of them is the creator of all, no one of them is in complete control.

The Lord God Almighty, who created the heavens and earth, has a power and control that is universal in extent and total in depth. Omnipotence, first seen in creation, is stated and exemplified throughout the Bible. All the miracles come to mind. When Abraham despaired of having a son by his wife Sarah, God introduced his promise by saying, "I am the Almighty God"; and, "Is anything too hard for the Lord" (Gen. 17:1; 18:14). Because Abraham believed this, he was willing later to sacrifice Isaac, "accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead" (Heb. 11:19). After Abraham there were Moses' dealings with Pharaoh, the water in the wilderness, the capture of Jericho, the works of Elijah, Hezekiah's shadow, and the miracles of Christ and the apostles. Conversely the attacks on miracles by secular authors are uniformly, though not always explicitly, based on a prior rejection of omnipotence.

In addition to these examples of omnipotence there are many doctrinal or abstract statements of it. "I know that thou canst do all things, and that no purpose of thine can be restrained" (Job 42:2, ASV). "Whatsoever the Lord pleased, that did he in heaven and in the earth" (Ps. 135:6). "He doeth according to his will in the army of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand or say unto him, What doest thou?" (Dan. 4:35). "Who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will" (Eph. 1:11). Cf. Deut. 32:39; I Chron. 29:12; Ps. 62:11; Isa. 45:5-7; Jer. 32:27; Matt. 19:26; Rom. 9:18-24; *et al.*

Omniscience, as well as omnipotence, is involved creation. The one cannot be separated from the other. At the very least, if an omnipotent God could be thought to be ignorant of something, he still would be able to learn it; otherwise there would be something he could not do. But even a momentary ignorance would be a momentary limitation upon omnipotence. Therefore the two attributes are inseparable.

Omniscience is more particularly related to creation in that the works of creation and providence follow a plan eternally existent in the divine mind. Control of all things presupposes knowledge of all things. "Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world" (Acts 15:18). This knowledge includes the minutest details: "The very hairs of your head are all numbered" (Matt. 10:30). Volitional and purposeful action (Eph. 1:11), since it initiates a series of concatenated events, requires a knowledge of the future. Isaiah speaks of God as "declaring the end from the beginning" (46:10). Apart from knowledge and control of all future details there could be no trustworthy prophecy. Hence all the predictions in Scripture exemplify this point. A few other statements of omniscience are: "All things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we

have to do” (Heb 4:13). “He that planted the ear, shall he not hear? He that formed the eye, shall he not see? (Ps. 94:9). “The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good” (Prov. 15:3). Cf. Ps. 139:1-6, 12: 147:5; Prov. 15:11; I John 3:20.

Creation exemplifies another of God's prerogatives. Actually it is an aspect of omnipotence, though not usually thought of as such. In the Genesis account God is presented not only as creator of the physical universe, but also as the creator of moral distinctions. When God created Adam and Eve and placed them in the garden, he made certain demands upon them. Adam was to cultivate the garden; with one exception Adam and Eve were to eat of the fruit of the trees; and they were to reproduce and populate the earth. The “covenant of works,” including the threat of penalty for disobedience, is the original moral legislation.

The prohibition to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil displays the inmost essence of moral obligation. It was a test of pure obedience to divine authority. Had God commanded Adam not to murder Eve, he might have obeyed because she was so fair, or he might have disobeyed because she was a shrew. In either case his action would have had mixed motives. But the tree was as indifferent as an object can be. No motive could be involved except that of obedience to the Creator. The rightness and the wrongness were purely a matter of divine legislation. There was nothing in the tree itself to make the eating wrong. God could have well have chosen another tree. Similarly the Mosaic ritual became obligatory by divine legislation. The appointments of the tabernacle and the details of the sacrifices could have been quite different. They were what they were, and they were to be observed, only because of their divine imposition.

Devout Christians who have been brought up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, imbued with the principles of monogamy, honesty, and truth, sometimes think that these obligations are independent of the divine will. They suppose that God could not have created a race for which polygamy would have been beneficial; it escapes their attention that God might have made men like the angels, without marriage, so that the fifth and seventh commandments would be null and void. Yet non-Christians today remind us that God might have approved of destroying the ill and aged, and might not have approved of private property. We must remind them in return that although God might have done so, actually he did not. The commandments for this world are established.

To view morality as fixed independently of God's will is inconsistent with the concept of omnipotence. Plato and Leibniz attempted to conceive God as subordinate to independent moral principles. Thus they limited God by a reality external to him. No such view is countenanced in the Bible. The highest norm of morality is the law of God. It is God's command that makes an act right or wrong. This is substantiated throughout the Scriptures by the threat of punishment, as in the case of

Adam, by the promise of reward, as in the case of Abraham and many others; and by the constant insistence on obedience to God's precepts.

For this reason secular philosophies fail to solve the problem of ethics by their appeals to a categorical imperative, to the greatest good of the greatest number, or to values allegedly discovered in experience.

C. *God as Redeemer.* Thus far God has been considered only as Creator. Biblical theology reveals much more about God as Redeemer. Naturally the two attributes often exhibit the same divine attributes. For example, the biblical plan of redemption would necessarily presuppose the personality of God; some conceivable plans even though they involved future events might not necessarily require omniscience and omnipotence; but there is no question but that the biblical plan does. At the same time, redemption reveals much more than these particular attributes.

There is one factor, obvious but only implicit in the account of creation, which, though explicit and emphasized in the plan of redemption, is not always so obvious to sinful minds. It is divine sovereignty over all – absolute sovereignty. As no external force compelled or motivated God to create, so also the initiation of redemption is God's choice alone. When Adam violated the covenant of works, God with perfect justice could have executed the full penalty immediately. No obligation rested upon him to talk to Adam again. Nor did Adam seek God and beg for a visit. On the contrary, Adam tried to avoid the meeting. “There is none that seeketh after God . . . no, not one” (Ps. 14:2; 53:2; Rom. 3:11-12). The initiative is God's alone.

Abraham is another example. God called the idolatrous Abram; Abram did not seek God. God might have called some other citizen of Ur; or he might have called an Egyptian. The initiative and choice was entirely God's. “Blessed is the man whom thou chooseth and causeth to approach unto thee” (Ps. 65:4). “Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you” (John 15:16).

This initiative is love, a divine attribute pervasively emphasized in both the OT and NT. The love is unmotivated by any worth in its object. God does not love anyone because of what he is, but in spite of what he is. The merits of man are “as filthy rags” (Isa. 64:6). Man is an enemy of God (Col. 1:21); but yet while “We were enemies, we were reconciled to God” (Rom. 5:10). “God commandeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom 5:8).

Whoever draws an antithesis between a wrathful God of the OT and a different loving God of the NT, evinces a blindness to the actual words of Scripture. Divine love and choice are combined with human unworthiness in the verses: “The Lord thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people . . . The Lord did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number . . . but because the Lord loved you . . .” (Deut. 7:6-8). “In his love and pity he redeemed them” (Isa. 63:9). “When

Israel was a child, then I loved him . . . I drew them with cords of a man, with bands of love” (Hos. 11:1, 4). “Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love” (Jer. 31:3). And the loving-kindnesses and tender mercies set forth in the Psalms are too numerous to mention. They are all summed up in the statement, “God is love” (I John 4:8).

In both the OT and the NT the love of God is depicted under two figures of speech. Sometimes God is called the father of his children; sometimes the husband of a wife.

The fatherhood of God (*q.v.*) is a most important idea. It exhibits God's love for his children. Jesus taught his disciples to pray, “Our Father . . .” (Matt. 6:6, 8, 9). The fowls of the air neither sow nor reap, but “your heavenly Father feedeth them . . . for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things” (Matt. 6:26, 32). “If ye then being evil know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?” (Matt. 7:11). Cf. Matt. 10:20, 29; 13:43; 18:14; 23:9.

Like all important biblical concepts the fatherhood of God has been distorted. First, God has been regarded as the Father of all men. This misinterpretation confuses the relation between Creator and creature with the relation between God as redeemer and the elect. Since the gospel requires men to be born again, natural birth is clearly not sufficient for entrance into the family of God. The Epistles make use also of the idea of adoption (*q.v.*). “They which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God” (Rom. 9:8). “For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God; for . . . ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father” (Rom. 8:15). Cf. Rom. 9:4; Gal. 4:5; Eph. 1:5. Then, too, Jesus rebuked the unbelieving Jews, “Ye are of your father the devil” (John 8:44). The idea of a universal fatherhood of God is thus inconsistent with the Scripture and is destructive of grace and redemption.

A second misunderstanding of the fatherhood of God occurs when it is made a new idea enunciated in the NT by Jesus. On the contrary, the fatherhood of God is an OT idea, and the essential identity of the message of both Testaments should not be broke. “He shall cry unto me, Thou art my Father” (Ps. 89:26). “Thou art our Father” (Isa. 63:16; 64:8). “Yet shall call me, My Father” (Jer. 3:19). Cf. II Sam. 7:14; I Chron. 29:10; Mal. 1:6.

Usually the fatherhood of God relates to the redeemed individually and distributively; but when the people or the church is conceived collectively, God is pictured as a husband or bridegroom. This figure of the marriage relationship is a particular application of the pervasive notion of the covenant (*q.v.*). God made a covenant with Noah, Abraham, David and with their seed after them. When this posterity is thought of as a nation, God is pictured as the husband, the nation as the wife, and the individuals as the children. The interpretation of the covenant as a marriage bond is especially

prominent in Hosea; but it also occurs in Isa. 54:1; 62:5; Jer. 31:32; Ezek. 16:8. Yet it is not a late invention of the prophetic age. Implicitly it underlies the condemnation of idolatry as “going a-whoring after other gods” (Ex. 34:15, 16; Lev. 17:7; Num. 15:39; Deut. 31:16). For this reason strange worship, like adultery, is a violation of the law. The terms of the contract have been broken (Hos. 4:1; 8:1; Amos 2:4).

All this sharpens the concept of God as a jealous God. Strange as it often appears to modern minds, jealousy is one of the attributes the Bible ascribes to God. Ex. 34:15, 16, referred to above, is introduced by the command “Thou shalt worship no other god: for the Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God” (Ex. 34:14). This idea, of course, is embedded in the Decalogue (Ex. 20:5). Cf. Deut. 4:24; Nah. 1:2. This concept of jealousy is consistent with the sovereignty of God. Any ascription of divine prerogatives to another is a violation of the first and basic commandment. “I am the Lord . . . and my glory will I not give to another” (Isa. 42:8).

In the NT the covenant idea retains the same importance (Gal. 3:6 ff.), but its appearance in the form of a marriage vow is not so prominent. However, the church is said to be the bride of Christ (II Cor. 11:2; Rev. 21:2; 22:17). No quite so explicit are Matt. 25:1-13, John 3:29; Gal. 4:26-28; Eph. 5:23-25)

The covenant interpreted as a marriage contract emphasizes another aspect of God's nature. The marriage contract, however much it may reflect the love of the parties, is at the same time a legal obligation. Violation results in liability to punishment. Beyond the covenant relation as well, man is subject to God's laws, and their infraction carries with it a penalty. Thus the Scriptures represent man as being under the wrath and curse of a righteous God. The Christian concept of God, the plan of redemption, and even the love of God, cannot be understood apart from the attribute of righteousness. God therefore is not of a character simply to forgive and forget. Forgiveness alone could be unrighteous. And when a human judge frees a guilty criminal, the act of mercy may in some sense be justified by extenuating circumstances, but the strictness of the law has been ignored.

Since God is righteous, his plan of redemption must maintain the majesty of the law. Righteousness and a bare disregard for sin are incompatible. Therefore the penalty must be executed. An atonement (*q.v.*) or satisfaction must be made. This was the teaching of the Mosaic ritual; this ritual also taught that God provides a substitute to suffer the penalty. The Atonement therefore is an expression both of love and of righteousness. For the purpose of redemption God set forth Jesus Christ to be a propitiatory sacrifice in order to declare, publish, and exemplify his righteousness, so that God, when he justifies a sinner, might remain just in doing so (Rom. 3:25; 5:8; II Cor. 5:21; I Peter 1:18-19; I John 2:2 *et al.*).

The crucifixion of Christ as a sacrifice of the Lamb of God to satisfy the justice of the Father brings out one further feature of deity. At the beginning the personality of God was pointed out. Now it is evident that God is not one Person, but more than one. If the Son is sent from heaven, while the Father is not sent; if the Father loves the Son and the Son loves the Father, if the Son sacrifices himself or pays a ransom to the Father; it follows that the Father and the Son are different Persons. Thus, with the other biblical material on the Holy Spirit, the concept of God is the concept of a Trinity (*q.v.*).

Some dim anticipation of the Trinity can be found in the appearances of the Angel of the Lord to the patriarchs. Since the definite article is used, this Angel must in some way be different from other angels. When the Angel appeared to Hagar, she called him the Lord and spoke of him as God (Gen. 16:7-13). In an appearance to Abraham the Angel calls himself the Lord (Gen 22:11, 15). When the Angel spoke to Jacob, he again called himself God (gen. 31:11). The passages indicate a unity of and a difference between the Angel and the God who sends him. Neither these passages nor later ones concerning a coming King, a Messiah, a suffering Servant, were explicitly enough to produce the trinitarian concepts in the minds of the Israelites. The NT clarifies the obscurities of the OT. All the passages that teach the deity of the Christ bear on the doctrine of the Trinity (Matt. 11:25;27; John 1:1, 14; Rom. 9:5; Phl. 2:6; Col. 1:13-19; 2:9 *et al.*) The well-known benediction also (II Cor. 13:14) would be incongruous unless these three Persons were equal in Power and glory in the one Godhead.

II. PHILOSOPHICAL THEOLOGY

A. Theology Proper. The first half of this article has been a brief summary of what the Bible says about God. Its statements are deceptively simple in form; the ideas are profound and their implications have puzzled many minds, both devout and irreligious. Therefore the descriptive method of biblical theology must give way to a more systematic and philosophical analysis. But, again, as the descriptive summary was brief, so too this second half can barely indicate the labor of centuries on these problems. Only three types of problem will be mentioned: theology proper, science, and ethics.

Since the Bible everywhere asserts the existence of God, the first question of systematic or philosophic theology concerns the proof of this assertion. Does our belief in God's existence depend solely on scriptural authority, or does it depend on some sort of proof? If the latter, is the "proof" a direct mystical experience of God, or is it a syllogistic process that starts with observation of nature?

The Thomistic philosophy of the Roman Catholic Church, derived from Aristotle, begins with sensory experience of bodies in motion and by an intricate series of arguments concludes with the existence of an Unmoved Mover, God. The language of Thomas Aquinas indicates that he thought the

whole argument to be formally valid and that the conclusion necessarily follows from the premises. The philosophers David Hume and Immanuel Kant contended that the “cosmological argument” was a fallacy. Some Protestant theologians seem to accept the argument, while others admit that it is not “mathematical” (strictly logical), but that it is of some value. The present writer believes that the argument is worthless because (1) it is circular, in that the existence of God is itself used to disprove an infinite series of causes, which disproof is necessary to prove the existence of God; (2) its premises use the term existence in a spatial and temporal sense, while the conclusion uses the term in a different sense; and (3) an argument from effect to cause can assign to the cause only sufficient attributes to account for the effect by which alone it is known, and this would give us a God who is neither omnipotent, omniscient, nor perfectly righteous.

St. Anselm at the beginning of the twelfth century constructed the “ontological argument” for God's existence. It is not based on an observation of nature but on an analysis of the concept of God. As a man who would deny that a triangle contains 180 degrees simply does not understand the meaning of triangle, so one who denies the existence of God has not grasped the concept of God. God, as the being than whom a greater cannot be conceived, cannot be conceived not to exist; for if God could be conceived not to exist, it would be possible to conceive of an existing being greater than God; but to conceive of a being greater than the being than whom a greater cannot be conceived is a self-contradiction.

Immanuel Kant did not like the ontological argument either, but his underlying prejudice that God is beyond the grasp of human concepts is itself highly vulnerable.

A mystical assurance of God's existence is difficult to discuss, for mysticism is a very ambiguous term. Loosely it could refer to jumping to a conclusion by a hunch; in the strictest meaning of a non-rational trance, it has nothing intelligible to communicate.

If then rational arguments do not demonstrate the existence of God (as one demonstrates a theorem of geometry by valid inferences from axioms), then we must accept God's existence solely on scriptural authority, or we must take it as the first and therefore indemonstrable principle of our thought; and these two may be the same thing.

Some philosophers virtually imply that the existence of God is not such an important issue as is commonly thought. Spinoza and other pantheists identify the universe as God. We grant that the universe exists. Professor H. N. Wieman has defined God as “that character of events to which man must adjust himself in order to attain the greatest good and avoid the greatest ills.” We grant again that events have characters. And so, by a sort of ontological argument, i.e. by definition, God must exist. Atheism has become impossible.

The important question therefore is not, Is there a God? Of course there is. But the important question is, What is God? And this returns us to the description of biblical theology.

Although the proofs of God's existence have been prominent in theological discussion, they are but part of a more general problem: Can God be known? Some secular philosophers, e.g., Kant and Spencer, have asserted the existence of unknowable entities. A philosophic Absolute may be thought to be so transcendent as to be beyond thought. Or, as in Thomas Aquinas, the human mind, taking its rise from sensory experience, may be essentially incapacitated to know much if anything of an eternal Being. Or, more popularly, the finite mind cannot grasp the infinite God, simply because the finite cannot grasp the infinite.

Those who assert the existence of unknowable objects seem to contradict themselves, for if the object were quite unknowable, one could not know either that it existed or that it was unknowable. Then too this type of philosophy is usually suspected of making all knowledge impossible, even knowledge of arithmetic and the weather. Skepticism is thus self-destructive.

Those who, like Thomas Aquinas, base knowledge on sensory experience find it necessary to assign an important role to mental pictures or visual images. Some philosophers have taught that all knowledge consists of sensory images. If so, man could never have a concept of God because God is not a sense object and no image of him is possible. Either than a believer in God must reject empiricism and find some a priori basis of knowledge, or he must struggle, as Thomas did (with such little success) to bridge the chasm between concepts abstracted from sensation and a knowledge of the timeless and spaceless Spirit.

The impossibility of knowing what God is has also been argued from a theory of definition. When an apple tree or a squirrel is defined, it is placed in a genus. An apple tree is a species of rose, and squirrel is a species of rodent. But God is not a species of any genus. "To whom then will ye liken me, or shall I be equal? saith the Holy One" (Isa. 40:18, 25). Since knowledge of what a thing is, is its definition, it follows that God cannot be known. The theist, to avoid this conclusion, must produce a different theory of definition; and its desirability may be emphasized by pointing out that if species only can be defined and known, genera, especially the highest genera or genus, remain unknown.

But can the finite hope to grasp the infinite? The negative assertion flies int eh face of ordinary mathematics. Infinite series are perfectly well understood; their infinity does not prevent us from knowing the law of their construction, their sum or limit when they have a limit, "and many other cheerful facts about the square of the hypotenuse." Whatever else may be the case, it is not God's infinity that keeps us from knowing him.

Plato and Hegel constructed theories of knowledge which, if pressed to their logical extreme,

imply that man must be either omniscient or completely ignorant. If every item of knowledge is so intimately connect with every other that its true nature cannot be seen except in its relation to all, then either we know all or we know nothing. Plato and Hegel both had a hard time escaping this dilemma.

Now Moses said, “The secret things belong unto the Lord our God; but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children forever” (Deut. 29:29). The Bible therefore, both here and everywhere, assumes that we can know some truths without knowing all truths. Accordingly it is incumbent upon us to develop an epistemology in which the relationships are not such as to limit us to the disjunction of total ignorance or omniscience.

The epistemology may follow Augustine's view that Christ is the light of every man: that is, mankind possess as an a prior endowment at least the rudiments of knowledge, so that whenever anyone knows anything he is in contact with God, who is truth. Or, the epistemology required may be more skeptical as to geometry and science and simply insist that God, being omnipotent, can by a verbal revelation make his truths understandable to me[n?]. See also EPISTEMOLOGY.

For a dictionary article of this type these subjects are too technical to pursue further. The aim here can be merely to call attention to some of the more important issues.

In the twentieth century the discussion concerning our knowledge of God has assumed a different form; and because of its timeliness some special mention of it will not be out of place.

Reaction against the ambitious rationalism of Hegel and later disillusionment with the superficial optimism of modernistic theology have in these days produced the so-called school of neo-orthodoxy (*q.v.*). Barth and Brunner teach that rational language expresses abstract knowledge about things, while there is another sort of knowledge not rationally grasped in concepts. This is direct confrontation with a person. Therefore biblical concepts, apart from any historical errors that destructive critics may allege, cannot be knowledge of God. Intellectual concepts can be only pointers – they cannot be the real truth. When we talk *about* God, we are not talking about *God*.

Barth in particular holds that all religious expression is figurative or symbolic. Logic and mathematics are merely human constructions, and perhaps this allows of literal meaning; but all language about God is a parable. Since an interpretation of the parable would itself be a parable (for this too would be religious language), or, in other words, since the explanation of a symbol would itself be symbolic, does it not follow that a literal knowledge of God is impossible? Not only so, but there is no literal norm by which to test the adequacy of parables and symbols, the Koran would seem to be as satisfactory as the Bible.

The Hegelian system, with its completely knowable Absolute and its prior rejection of the idea of creation, is a form of pantheism. The divine principle is not outside the universe. No doubt the

universe depends on it, but also it depends on the universe, as a tree depends on its leaves and its leaves depend on the tree. Thus the Absolute (or God) is an immanent and not a transcendent principle.

Opposing his pantheism as destructive of true religion and humble worship, as blind to the reality of evil in human nature, and as disdainful of free grace, the neo-orthodox stress the transcendence of God and deny his immanence. At one time some of them were designating God as the Wholly-Other. But this takes God completely out of the world, negates the image of God in which man was created, and reduces the whole religious problem to an insoluble paradox (*q.v.*).

Orthodox Christianity sees no conflict between immanence and transcendence. The sovereignty of the creative fiat is evidence of transcendence; and because of creation God's power extends everywhere. This is his immanence. In fact, instead of saying that God is in the world, it is better to say that the world is in God, for in him we live and move and have our being.

Let this suffice for an example of the problems of theology proper. The Trinity and other subjects are discussed under separate headings.

B. *Science*. The next type of problem is scientific. With the rise of modern mechanistic science in the seventeenth century the possibility of miracles was called into question, and with the popular acceptance of evolution (*q.v.*) since the middle of the nineteenth century the whole theistic world-view has been subjected to a massive attack. What had previously been a naturalistic speculation was now presented as an assured result of infallible science.

A Christian might reply that the evolutionists have produced no empirical evidence that life spontaneously arose from inanimate matter. He might also remark that operationalism no longer looks on science as infallible or as descriptive of antecedent reality. At the same time he might humbly admit that he was mistaken in supposing the fixed species of Linnaeus to be the special creations of Genesis. And finally he might very well claim that as the opponents covertly assume the falsity of theism in order to undermine creation and miracles (and thus beg the question), these latter points cannot be profitably discussed until all the presuppositions are brought into the open.

C. *Ethics*. In addition to theology proper and science a third area in which problems arise for theism is that of morality and evil. The biblical concept of God as sovereign Creator and in some instances all concepts of God have been repudiated because of the manifest evil in the world. Early in Christian history the objection was stated: either God wants to but cannot eradicate evil, or he can but does not want to; in the first case he is good but not omnipotent and in the second he may be omnipotent but he cannot be good. In modern history John Stuart Mill, even more than David Hume, vigorously attacked Christianity on this score.

Roman Catholics and some Protestants have made feeble replies by trying to account for evil as

the result of the free will of Satan or Adam. This of course does not answer the objection, for if God be omnipotent he still could eradicate the evil if he wanted to – in fact, he could have prevented it in the first place by creating a different type of world or even none at all.

The problem is so vexing that many Christians decide not to think about it in hopes that their opponents will not bring it up.

The paradox of God's goodness and the manifest evil, with the aggravation of the pains of hell forever, is partly the result of a theme taken from pagan nature religions. Primitive heathenism generally looks upon God as a God of nature. Sometimes God is identified with nature. Therefore when reflection has proceeded a little distance and some notion of nature's regularity is grasped, it is concluded that God must treat everyone alike. Nature is everywhere uniform. Then if goodness is attributed to God, it follows that God must be good to all.

The divine impartiality not only conflicts with the idea of grace, but more fundamentally it denies divine sovereignty by implying that creatures impose a moral obligation on the Creator.

The Scriptures, however, teach that God is the potter, who, from the very same lump of clay, can fashion one vessel for honor and another for dishonor. "Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God' (Rom. 11:22).

Now, finally, the problem of evil (*q.v.*), so far as human conduct is concerned, centers in the identification of right and wrong. It was shown in the first part of this article that right is what God commands and that sin is any want of conformity unto or transgression of the law of God.

If some phases of philosophic theology are embarrassing when we confront modern unbelief, this is one where the enemy is soon put to rout.

When modernism, following its founder Schleiermacher, repudiated the Scriptures to base its theology on experience, it believed that it could still preserve Christian value. In the development the crucial point became the identification of the values. Can many articles of the creed be discarded as the husks and historical trappings of Christianity, while Schleiermacher's feeling of absolute dependence preserves what is essential? Or must this early modernist value give place to the later ideal of integration of personality? Should the Trinity be abandoned and God be defined as "that character of events to which man must adjust himself in order to attain the greatest goods and avoid the greatest ills"?

Humanism developed out of modernism because modernism did not consistently base its ideals on experience. Modernism had an inconsistent attachment to Jesus. Rejecting this irrationality, humanism concluded that Jesus had no appreciation of intelligence or of science, that he had no political theory, and his view of labor relations was positively bad! Honest requires us to accept other ideals. The Christian life is at best a semi-moral life.

Humanism claims that its ideals (a collectivist society, independence of an imaginary God, materialistic security, etc.) are found in experience. Yet even humanists admit that ideals change from age to age. There are no absolute norms, no fixed truth, no universal principles. Ethics, and therefore economics and sociology are relativistic.

In actual history this reduces to the simple question as to whose ideals will dominate a given age and society. Dictators answer this *in concreto*.

Socialistic destruction of political liberty with the brutality that totalitarian governments have always exercised forces attention on a point that humanists hardly consider. Regardless of which set of ideal an individual or society may accept, is it worth the trouble trying to realize them? Or, in other words, is life worth living?

In times of relative peace, prosperity, and freedom the question is set aside as silly or perverse. Life is pleasant. But in ethical theory it is basic. The mere fact that several people or a great many find life pleasant does not make it universally worthwhile. This is merely personal preference, not normative theory. On the humanistic position why should I not shoot my best friends to end their futile exertions and then commit suicide.

To this humanism has no answer. The only theory which guarantees value to life itself and makes suicide immoral is a theory in which God has forbidden murder and punishes disobedience in a future life. Normative ethics depends on sovereign legislation and omnipotent sanctions

If other phases of theology, philosophy, and science are sometimes hard to work out, here at least biblical theism is easily vindicated.

See also ATTRIBUTES, THE DIVINE.

GORDON H. CLARK