And the Christian philosophical community ought to get on with the philosophical questions of importance to the Christian community. It ought to get on with the project of exploring and developing the implications of Christian theism for the whole range of questions philosophers ask and answer. It ought to do this whether or not it can convince the philosophical community at large either that there really is such a person as God, or that it is rational or reasonable to believe that there is. Perhaps the Christian philosopher can convince the skeptic or the unbelieving philosopher that indeed there is such a person as God. Perhaps this is possible in at least some instances. In other instances, of course, it may be impossible; even if the skeptic in fact accepts premises from which theistic belief follows by argument forms he also accepts, he may, when apprised of this situation, give up those premises rather than his unbelief. (In this way it is possible to reduce someone from knowledge to ignorance by giving him an argument he sees to be valid from premises he knows to be true.)

But whether or not this is possible, the Christian philosopher has other fish to fry and other questions to think about. Of course he must listen to, understand, and learn from the broader philosophical community and he must take his place in it; but his work as a philosopher is not circumscribed by what either the skeptic or the rest of the philosophical world thinks of theism. Justifying or trying to justify theistic belief in the eyes of the broader philosophical community is not the only task of the Christian philosophical community; perhaps it isn't even among its most important tasks.

Philosophy is a communal enterprise. The Christian philosopher who looks exclusively to the philosophical world at large, who thinks of himself as belonging primarily to that world, runs a two-fold risk. He may neglect an essential part of his task as a Christian philosopher; and he may find himself adopting principles and procedures that don't comport well with his beliefs as a Christian. What is needed, once more, is autonomy and integrality.

IV. Theism and Persons

My third example has to do with philosophical anthropology: how should we think about human persons? What sorts of things, fundamentally, are they? What is it to be a person, what is it to be a human person, and how shall we think about personhood? How, in particular, should Christians, Christian philosophers, think about these things?

The first point to note is that in the Christian scheme of things, God is the premier person, the first and chief exemplar of personhood. God, furthermore, has created man in his own image; we men and women are image bearers of God, and the properties most important for an understanding of our personhood are properties we share with him. How we think about God, then, will have an immediate and direct bearing on how we think about humankind.

Of course we learn much about ourselves from other sources-from everyday observation, from introspection and self-observation, from scientific investigation and the like. But it is also perfectly proper to start from what we know as Christians. It is not the case that rationality, or proper philosophical method, or intellectual responsibility, or the new scientific morality, or whatever, require that we start from beliefs we share with everyone else-what common sense and current science teach, e.g.-and attempt to reason to or justify those beliefs we hold as Christians. In trying to give a satisfying philosophical account of some area or phenomenon, we may properly appeal, in our account or explanation, to anything else we already rationally believe- whether it be current science or Christian doctrine.

Let me proceed again to specific examples. There is a fundamental watershed, in philosophical anthropology, between those who think of human beings as free-free in the libertarian sense-and those who espouse determinism. According to determinists, every human action is a consequence of initial conditions outside our control by way of causal laws that are also outside our control. Sometimes underlying this claim is a picture of the universe as a vast machine where, at any rate at the macroscopic level, all events, including human actions, are determined by previous events and causal laws. On this view every action I have in fact performed was such that it wasn't within my power to refrain from performing it; and if, on a given occasion I did not perform a given action, then it wasn't then within my power to perform it. If I now raise my arm, then, on the view in question, it wasn't within my power just then not to raise it.

Now the Christian thinker has a stake in this controversy just by virtue of being a Christian. For she will no doubt believe that God holds us human beings responsible for much of what we do, and thus properly subject to praise or blame, approval or disapproval. But how can I be responsible for my actions, if it was never within my power to perform any actions I didn't in fact perform, and never within my power to refrain from performing any I did perform? If my actions are thus determined, then I am not rightly or justly held accountable for them; but God does nothing improper or unjust, and he holds me accountable for some of my actions; hence it is not the case that all of my actions are thus determined.

The Christian has an initially strong reason to reject the claim that all of our actions are causally determined-a reason much stronger than the meager and anemic arguments the determinist can muster on the other side. Of course if there were powerful arguments on the other side, then there might be a problem here. But there aren't; so there isn't.

Now the determinist may reply that freedom and causal determinism are, contrary to initial appearances, in fact compatible. He may argue that my being free with respect to an action I performed at a time, for example, doesn't entail that it was then within my power to refrain from performing it, but only something weaker-perhaps something like if I had chosen not to perform it, I would not have performed it. Indeed, the clearheaded compatibilist will go further. He will maintain, not merely that freedom is compatible with determinism, but that freedom requires determinism. He will hold with Hume that the proposition S is free with respect to action A or S does A freely entails that S is causally determined with respect to A-that there are causal laws and antecedent conditions that together entail either that S performs A or that S does not perform A. And he will back up this claim by insisting that if S is not thus determined with respect to A, then it's merely a matter of chance-due, perhaps, to quantum effects in S's brain- that S does A. But if it is just a matter of chance that S does A then either S doesn't really do A at all, or at any rate S is not responsible for doing A. If S's doing A is just a matter of chance, then S's doing A is something that just happens to him; but then it is not really the case that he performs A-at any rate it is not the case that he is responsible for performing A.

And hence freedom, in the sense that is required for responsibility, itself requires determinism. But the Christian thinker will find this claim monumentally implausible. Presumably the determinist means to hold that what he says characterizes actions generally, not just those of human beings. He will hold that it is a necessary truth that if an agent isn't caused to perform an action then it is a mere matter of chance that the agent in question performs the action in question. From a Christian perspective, however, this is wholly incredible.

For God performs actions, and performs free actions; and surely it is not the case that there are causal laws and antecedent conditions outside his control that determine what he does. On the contrary: God is the author of the causal laws that do in fact obtain; indeed, perhaps the best way to think of these causal laws is as records of the ways in which God ordinarily treats the beings he has created. But of course it is not simply a matter of chance that God does what he does-creates and upholds the world, let's say, and offers redemption and renewal to his children. So a Christian philosopher has an extremely good reason for rejecting this premise, along with the determinism and compatibilism it supports.

What is really at stake in this discussion is the notion of agent causation: the notion of a person as an ultimate source of action. According to the friends of agent causation, some events are caused, not by other events, but by substances, objects-typically personal agents. And at least since the time of David Hume, the idea of agent causation has been languishing. It is fair to say, I think, that most contemporary philosophers who work in this area either reject agent causation outright or are at the least extremely suspicious of it. They see causation as a relation among events; they can understand how one event can cause another event, or how events of one kind can cause events of another kind. But the idea of a person, say, causing an event, seems to them unintelligible, unless it can be analyzed, somehow, in terms of event causation. It is this devotion to event causation, of course, that explains the claim that if you perform an action but are not caused to do so, then your performing that action is a matter of chance. For if I hold that all causation is ultimately event causation, then I will suppose that if you perform an action but are not caused to do so by previous events, then your performing that action isn't caused at all and is therefore a mere matter of chance.

The devotee of event causation, furthermore, will perhaps argue for his position as follows. If such agents as persons cause effects that take place in the physical world-my body's moving in a certain way, for example-then these effects must ultimately be caused by volitions or undertakings-which, apparently, are immaterial, unphysical events. He will then claim that the idea of an immaterial event's having causal efficacy in the physical world is puzzling or dubious or worse. But a Christian philosopher will find this argument unimpressive and this devotion to event causation uncongenial. As for the argument, the Christian already and independently believes that acts of volition have causal efficacy; he believes indeed, that the physical universe owes its very existence to just such volitional acts-God's undertaking to create it. And as for the devotion to event causation, the Christian will be, initially, at any rate, strongly inclined to reject the idea that event causation is primary and agent causation to be explained in terms of it. For he believes that God does and has done many things: he has created the world; he sustains it in being; he communicates with his children. But it is extraordinarily hard to see how these truths can be analyzed in terms of causal relations among events. What events could possibly cause God's creating the world or his undertaking to create the world? God himself institutes or establishes the causal laws that do in fact hold; how, then, can we see all the events constituted by his actions as related to causal laws to earlier events? How could it be that propositions ascribing actions to him are to be explained in terms of event causation?

Some theistic thinkers have noted this problem and reacted by soft pedaling God's causal activity, or by impetuously following Kant in declaring that it is of a wholly different order from that in which we engage, an order beyond our comprehension. I believe this is the wrong response. Why should a Christian philosopher join in the general obeisance to event causation? It is not as if there are cogent arguments here. The real force behind this claim is a certain philosophical way of looking at persons and the world; but this view has no initial plausibility from a Christian perspective and no compelling argument in its favor.

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