

I have argued elsewhere (Notebooks, 16 May 2003) that “God and the world are at each other’s service.” But in the light of my recognition of the distinction between “instrumental” and “constitutive” good, it’s obviously important to understand that the “service” that God and the world perform for each other is not merely instrumental but constitutive.

The service in both cases is constitutive because God is co-constitutive of the world, even as the world is co-constitutive of God. In this sense, God does “for the world as well as for Godself what only God can do,” even as the world does “for God as well as for itself what only the world can do.”

Of course, this mutual constitutive service belongs to the symmetry between God and the world, which in turn involves a more fundamental and inclusive asymmetry. For, although God is indeed constituted by the world as well as Godself, the world that is thus co-constitutive of God is not this, that, or any other particular world, but simply *some* world of which God is the primal source and the final end. What co-constitutes the world, by radical contrast, isn’t simply some God—the idea of “some God” being self-contradictory—but rather *the one and only* God there could even possibly be, whose nonexistence is ~~a~~ inconceivable as that of some world.

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God and the world are at each other's service— God doing for the world as well as for Godself what only God can do; and the world doing for God as well as for itself what only the world can do.

But if this mutual service belongs to the symmetry between God and the world, this symmetry in turn involves a more fundamental and inclusive asymmetry. For although God does indeed require a world in order to be God, what God requires is not this, that, or any other particular world, but simply *some* world of which God is at once the primal source and the final end. What the world requires, on the other hand, isn't simply *some* God—the idea of "some God" being self-contradictory—but rather the one and only God that there either is or could be, whose nonexistence is as inconceivable as that of some world.

Because the nonexistence of God is thus inconceivable provided only that "God" is properly defined as the concrete whole of reality, and so the one universal individual from whom and through whom and to whom are all things (cf. Rom 11:36, 1 Cor 8:6), there can be a valid ontological argument for God's existence. Assuming only that the concept of God so conceived is coherent, one cannot consistently deny or even doubt God's existence.

And there are at least two other valid arguments for God's existence if "God" is thus properly defined and the concept of God can be consistently conceived. There is, first, the argument for God as the primal source of all things, but for whose existence no world sufficiently ordered to be a world at all could be so much as possible. Depending on what is stressed in the argument—whether the sheer "*that*" of the world's existence or the sheer "*what*" of its existence as necessarily ordered—this first argument can take the form of either a valid cosmological argument for God as the ground of being or a valid argument for God as the principle of order. Then, second, there is the argument for God as the final end of all things, which—again, depending on how it is developed—can take the form of either a valid teleological argument for God as the all-inclusive consequence or a valid argument for God as the ground of all meaning or significance.

Dewey speaks, rightly, of two conceits relevant to religion. "There is a conceit," he says, "fostered by perversion of religion which assimilates the universe to our personal desires; but there is also a conceit of carrying the load of the universe from which religion liberates us" (*Human Nature and Conduct*: 331). It seems to me that there must somehow be an important connection between this insight and the notion that God and the world each serve the other, albeit each in its own irreplaceable way. The unique function of God is to liberate us from the "conceit of carrying the load of the universe," whether this load be to provide either the ordered being of the universe or its final meaning. Because God is both the primal source and the final end of all things, we can entrust unreservedly both their being and their meaning to God and live in unqualified loyalty to God and to all things in God. At the same time, if true religion, as distinct from its perversion, means that we are to assimilate our personal desires to the universe instead of the other way around, part of what it means to be religious is to look, not to God, but to ourselves and our fellow creatures to do whatever can be done to realize such of our personal desires as can and should be realized, abstracting, of course, from our deepest desire for an ordered world in which we can be and become ourselves in solidarity with all our fellows and for an ultimate meaning or significance to our world that neither we nor any other creature can conceivably provide.

The other connection I think I dimly see but am less confident about is with Wittgenstein's distinction between faith and superstition. Faith in the sense of trust is allowing God to be God, i.e., the primal source and the final end of all things, while superstition in the sense of a false science based in fear is expecting God to do what we and our fellow creatures can and must do for ourselves and one another if it is to be done at all.

What remain clear beyond any question, however, are the ideas of mutual service between God and the world and of the asymmetry that it involves.

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