

Metaphysics and a Personal God

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Abstract: Many people think of God as similar to a human being, but without various limitations and defects, and with much greater powers. They hold that although much that we say when likening God to human beings is either analogical or metaphorical, much is not: it is literally true that God has beliefs, intentions and other mental states, in the same sense, or in close to the same sense, as when we say that human beings do. This paper defends this view by arguing that it is consistent with thinking of God as God's incorporeal, omniscient, immutable, and timeless. It is inconsistent with the claim that God lacks a plurality of properties; but one does not need to hold anthropomorphism to find simplicity with respect to properties implausible.

IN THIS ESSAY I APPROACH THE NATURE OF GOD from a purely theoretical direction. My discipline is philosophy rather than theology, and I will not be concerned with the spiritual and practical implications of our thinking about God. These matters are of course important, but I believe that it will be useful to set them aside temporarily for this exercise in metaphysics.

TWO DISTINCTIONS

Many people think of God as similar to a human being, but without various limitations and defects, and with much greater powers. For example, human beings have the power to directly influence various parts of their bodies, and to indirectly influence a fair amount more; God has the power to directly control everything that goes on in the universe. Although much that we say in likening God to human beings is metaphorical or analogical, much is not. Talk of God's face is plainly metaphorical.¹ However, it is literally true that God has beliefs, intentions and other mental states, in the same sense, or in close to the same sense, as when we say that human beings do.

Other people reject such anthropomorphism. Sometimes this is for metaphysical reasons. They maintain, for example, that anthropo-

¹. For example, Psalm 17:15.

morphism is incoherent because beliefs and intentions can in principle be possessed only by embodied beings but God is supposed to lack a body. Sometimes anthropomorphism is rejected on the grounds that it inadequately meets the needs of religious piety: it makes God sound like an advanced creature dwelling in a different galaxy, and thereby fails to reflect the mysteriousness and holiness of God.

Cutting across the distinction between anthropomorphic and non-anthropomorphic views of God, there is a related distinction between conceptions of God as complex and changing, and conceptions of God as metaphysically simple and unchanging. On the latter view, the multiplicity of things we say, and say correctly, about God does not reflect any corresponding multiplicity of properties God possesses; God does not change in any real respect, and indeed does not exist in time at all; God lacks any potentialities. (Of course one might generate intermediate conceptions between these two.)

The two distinctions drawn above may not coincide. Perhaps even if God changes in many real respects, and the divine nature is complex, nevertheless the anthropomorphic view is mistaken. Perhaps even if God is metaphysically simple and unchanging, we can nevertheless truly and literally speak of God as personal.

INCORPOREALITY AND OMNISCIENCE

Many of the personal predicates that we apply to God are used analogically or metaphorically. This is obvious in the case of "father" Moreover a literal interpretation with respect to God of such matters as changing one's mind, regretting things done earlier, and so on, seems ruled out by any strong doctrine of divine perfection which includes infallible and complete foreknowledge. But what about "believes", "intends", "regrets", "loves", "punishes", and so on?

Here are two arguments in favour of saying that these words must also be used analogically or metaphorically if they are applied to God. These arguments do not appeal to the assumption that God is simple and unchanging.

Firstly, the primary, literal meaning of psychological predicates like "believes" is partly specified in terms of aptness to produce human bodily behaviour; there are conceptual links between what it is to believe that snow is white and how the believer's body is likely to respond in various circumstances. But these conceptual links cannot hold in the case of God, since God does not have a body. So psychological predicates cannot apply to God in the same sense that they apply to human beings.

Secondly, the primary, literal meaning of psychological predicates like "believes" is partly specified in terms of conceptual links to other psychological predicates – in terms of the place of each predicate in the

intricate web of what we take to be true assertions about minds. Now, on the supposition of possessing infallible omniscience, God is not apt to form false beliefs under the sway of sensory illusions and hallucinations, misleading evidence, wishful thinking, careless observation, or errors in reasoning induced by fatigue, anger or other distorting factors. So God's cognitive states do not belong to the same web of mental states that human beings have; they lack the same complex conceptual links to other mental states. Therefore "believes" does not apply to God in the same sense that it applies to human beings; and similarly for other psychological predicates.

These arguments are not strong. Consider the word "key", in that use or range of uses which is connected with locking, rather than, say, with playing a piano or interpreting a diagram. Perhaps at one time the relevant meaning of the word "key" was explained in the following way: a key is a tool which fits in to the mechanism of a lock in such a way as to enable the bolt or bolts to be moved, and the lock thereby opened or closed. If so, then any use of the "key" to cover magnetic-stripe cards, which work electronically rather than mechanically, involved introducing a different sense of the word. It does not follow that the two senses remain two today. The word's meaning is now normally explained in more abstract terms, so that it applies univocally to two different kinds of key. Similarly, even if the words "believe" and "intend" were originally conceptually linked to human bodily behaviour, and are still explained to children via those links, they are used in the same sense when we talk variously of human beings, horses, the Greek gods, and the Judaeo-Christian God.

For a moment, let us look at things from a functionalist point of view: let us suppose that the meanings of the words "believe" and "intend" are given by the roles that beliefs and intentions play in the lives of the beings who have them, according to common convictions about these matters. Well, it is commonly believed that horses have beliefs and intentions, that if some new kind of animal is discovered in a remote valley then members of that kind may well turn out to have beliefs and intentions, and that if the Judaeo-Christian God exists then that God has beliefs and intentions. So the meanings of the words "believe" and "intend" are given by the roles that beliefs and intentions are commonly thought to play in the lives of human beings and various species of higher animals – roles specified in such a way as to leave open the possibility that they are performed in beings of various newly discovered kinds. Our beliefs about the actual lives of humans, of horses, and so on, and about the possible lives of beings of other kinds – including beings lacking some of our senses while possessing others, beings possessing extra-sensory perception, and beings whose cognitive processes are never distorted by emotion – all contribute to the appropriate specification of the belief-role and the intention-role. Just as

the roles of a key which works mechanically and a key which works electronically can have very different descriptions at one level, but receive a unified treatment at a more abstract level, and it is the latter which counts for fixing the current meaning of the word "key", so the role of a belief in a human being and the role of a belief in a horse, or in God, can have very different descriptions at one level, but receive a unified treatment at a more abstract level.

One does not need to be a functionalist to hold that it is a conceptual truth that in human beings beliefs and intentions are apt for the production of certain kinds of bodily behaviour, and typically interact with other mental states such as emotions in various ways. One might at the same time hold it to be a conceptual truth that in horses beliefs and intentions are apt to produce rather different kinds of bodily behaviour and interact with other mental states in rather different ways. What we should not conclude is that since horses exhibit quite different bodily behaviour to human beings, and since they have different cognitive capacities, emotional make-up, and so on, it is not literally true that they have beliefs and intentions.

Similarly for God. Hence the arguments from incorporeality and omniscience sketched above do not establish that the words "believe" and "intend" have different meanings when applied to God and human beings.

IMMUTABILITY AND TIMELESSNESS

If God is timeless, then how wide a range of things people say about God must be understood as non-literal? Consider talk of God's responding to someone's prayer. Someone might argue: "Surely the normal meaning of the word "respond" involves the implication that what is responded to occurred earlier than the responding. But if God is outside time, then nothing occurs earlier than any of God's supposed mental states or actions. Moreover the normal meaning of the word "respond" implies a change in what does the responding. But if God is in time yet immutable, and we say that before the prayer God did not respond to it but did respond after the prayer, then we must find some way of declaring that there has been no real change in God. In either case, whether we say that God is outside time or in time but immutable, the word "respond" cannot have the same sense that it has when we talk of human beings responding to events and states of affairs."

But does the normal meaning of the word "respond" guarantee that what is responded to occurred earlier than the responding? Can a human being respond now to a future event, or merely to the prospect of the future event, to past or present signs of it?

It might be claimed that the normal meaning of the word "respond" guarantees that if someone responds to something, then there must be a

causal chain leading from the thing to the response. But why should we believe this? After all, we speak of people responding to nonexistent entities, to non-actual states of affairs – for example, a reader’s responding with tears to the death of Anna Karenina. If someone insists that in these cases what is responded to is not the nonexistent entity or nonactual state of affairs but rather its actual depiction, then let us not quarrel with them: let us consider only cases in which the thing responded to exists or is actual. Suppose that you are watching a live television coverage of a friend whose parachute has failed to open and who is plummeting to her death. Just before she hits the ground, you are overwhelmed by horror. We would naturally say, “You are responding to the fact that in a moment your friend will die.” Does the normal meaning of the word “respond” permit us to say this, and also to say that you are responding to your friend’s death (before it occurs)? Surely yes – even though there is no causal chain leading from your friend’s death to your response.

Maybe there is *a* meaning of the word “respond” such that one thing responds to another only if the first is causally affected by the second. If so, then this sense is obviously not involved when we say “You are responding to the fact that in a moment your friend will die.” So it cannot be maintained that *the* normal meaning of the word “respond” involves the implication that what is responded to occurred earlier than the responding. So we have been given no good reason to say that “God is timeless” is logically incompatible with “God responds to prayer”, when the word “respond” is used literally rather than metaphorically or analogically.

Let us narrow prayer down to petitionary prayer.² If some human being prays on Day 1 to be given a certain good on Day 2, then an immutable God can know this and can cause her to receive the good on Day 2, without undergoing any change. The reception by the petitioner of the good constitutes God’s response because the praying played a vital role in God’s reasons for deciding that the petitioner would receive the good, and God produced the good at least partly in order to grant the request.

This account might seem to omit the genuine dialogue between God and human beings portrayed in Biblical passages like in Genesis 18: 22-33. Suppose that you predict that a friend will telephone you tomorrow morning to ask a specific question. You leave a device which waits until it detects the right sound pattern on the phone, and then plays back your recorded voice to your friend, with the information that is being sought. Surely there is no personal interaction here, even if we suppose

² While writing the next three paragraphs I learned a great deal from William P. Alston, *Divine Nature and Human Language* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989) Chapter 7.

that a number of follow-up questions and follow-up answers are added to the original pair.

But your recorded answers are played back to your friend quite independently of your mental state at the time your friend telephones. She would get the same answers even if you were dead or incapacitated, and would get no answers, or inappropriate ones, if she asked different questions from those you predicted. This is why we feel that there is no conversation taking place. But none of these circumstances can hold if a timeless or immutable God gives Abraham a series of experiences appropriate to divine responses to his questions and requests. God cannot die or become incapacitated or hold false beliefs. In these respects God is not distanced from Abraham in the way you are from your friend at the time she telephones with her questions. We do not have the same reasons to deny that God and Abraham conversed.³

I have taken divine responsiveness as an illustration of my thesis that, although belief in divine immutability and eternity might commit us to regarding some ways of talking of God as metaphorical or analogical when otherwise we would have regarded them as literal nevertheless the extent to which this is so may not be as great as is sometimes supposed. That is, many predicates may be applied to divine and human actions and states of mind in the same senses.

MILLER ON DIVINE SIMPLICITY AND ANALOGICAL PREDICATION

The doctrine that God is metaphysically simple has typically involved the following four claims:

- God has no spatial parts, and does not endure through time
- all of God's non-relational properties are essential to God
- there is in God no real distinction between one property and another
- there is in God no real distinction between God, God's essence and God's existence

³. The argument relied on the assumptions that God knows the contents of people's prayers and that God cannot hold false beliefs. If so then either God has infallible foreknowledge of human prayers, or else God has infallible timeless knowledge of human prayers that are future relative to us. Does it follow that human beings do not act freely when they pray? There is no contemporary consensus on the answer to this question. For example, the most influential argument for the incompatibility of divine infallible foreknowledge and human freedom employs the so-called Transfer Principle: *Suppose that p and that no-one has (or ever had) any choice about whether p. Suppose also that if p then q, and no-one has (or ever had) a choice about whether if p then q. It follows that q and no-one has (or ever had) any choice about whether q.* (To see the relevance of this principle, let p be "God knew one million years ago that yesterday I would pray for rain" and let q be "Yesterday I prayed for rain".) People who hold a compatibilist position on freewill and determinism will all reject the Transfer principle, whereas libertarians and hard determinists are likely to accept it. There are lots of compatibilists around.

In this section and the next I will concentrate on the third of these claims. Sometimes the four of them have been based on the intuition that simplicity is more perfect, more valuable, than complexity; it is argued that on the grounds of being maximally perfect, maximally valuable, God must be simple. In other writers, such as Aquinas, divine simplicity is presented as a corollary of arguments for the existence of God. In the *Summa Theologiae*, the Five Ways⁴ are followed by a series of arguments to the effect that the being whose existence has just been proved – first cause, necessary being owing its necessary existence to nothing other than itself, and so on – must also be simple, good, limitless, loving etc., in senses of these words not identical with but closely related to their normal meanings.

At this point we must digress to settle a terminological matter. Some writers, such as Barry Miller, use the term “property” to mean “whatever is attributed to something by a predicate”.⁵ Thus whenever you say truly of an object that it is coloured, or colourless, or famous, or beautiful, then the object possesses, correspondingly, the property *being coloured*, or *being colourless*, or *being famous*, or *being beautiful*.⁶ Miller distinguishes two kinds of properties, real and “Cambridge”, by giving an example: being \$2 a kilo is a Cambridge property of butter, whereas being melted (that is, liquid) is a real property.⁷ Other people use the word “property” in a more restricted and ontologically serious way. According to D. M. Armstrong, for example, when someone says truly of an object that it is F, there may or may not be a property of Fness denoted by the predicate “F”. Armstrong agrees that someone can say truly that the sky on a sunny day is blue, but denies that there is any such property as *being blue*. Properties are objectively existing universals to which the truths we assert may have no direct connection; all that we can say is that the sentence “The sky on a sunny day is blue” is made true by the universe’s overall distribution of properties amongst individuals, whatever those properties may be. Whether *being melted* is a property of butter is not something that is knowable merely via our understanding of the English words “melted” and “butter”. It is a matter of the roles that talk of melting and butter would play in an idealised empirical science. From now on I will use the word “property” in an ontologically serious fashion, while avoiding commitment to any specific metaphysical theory of properties; I will ignore nominalism.

⁴ Part I Question 2 Article 3.

⁵ Barry Miller, *A Most Unlikely God: A Philosophical Enquiry into the Nature of God* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press 1996) 19n.

⁶ That is, as we sometimes say, the object possesses *colour*, or *colourlessness*, or *fame*, or *beauty*.

⁷ Miller, *A Most Unlikely God*, 15n. On p.18, Miller gives *being famous* as another example of a Cambridge property.

The claim that there is no real distinction in God between one property and another is hard to develop in a coherent and plausible way. We assert that God is loving and is omnipotent, but there seem to be decisive objections to supposing that the universal *being loving* is identical with the universal *being omnipotent*.⁸ William E. Mann has recently reformulated the claim in terms of the technical notion of a property-instance.⁹ A property-instance is neither a universal nor an individual; it is a feature or aspect whose identity is tied to the one and only individual that possesses it. Mann defends the thesis that there is no real distinction in God between one property-instance and another; God has just one property-instance, and God is identical with this property-instance.

In this section I will consider a new contribution to the discussion by Barry Miller, in his book *A Most Unlikely God*.¹⁰ Miller's overall theory of the nature of God has important implications for the analogical or metaphorical character of predicates commonly ascribed to God, and is sufficiently original and stimulating to deserve careful and extended attention.

Miller offers an account of God as metaphysically simple. His account is plainly non-anthropomorphic in the sense explained above, while he endorses, or at least hopes to provide room for the legitimacy of, metaphorical and analogical talk of God as personal. Miller aims to avoid various difficulties to which earlier formulations are subject, and so he departs from the classical tradition of Augustine, Aquinas and others in various technical respects.

Miller's theory pivots on a distinction between a *limit simpliciter* and a *limit case*: the limit simpliciter of an F is an F, whereas the limit case of an F is not an F. Consider the limit case instance of a polygon: the polygons can be ordered as the series *triangle, quadrilateral, pentagon...*, and this series has a limit case, namely the circle, which is not a member of the series, since the circle is not a polygon. Miller now gives sense to the expressions "limit case instance of an individual", "limit case instance of existence", "limit case instance of power", and "limit case instance of knowledge". He argues that it is reasonable to suppose that individuals, and property-instances such as *the existence of Socrates*, can be ordered in such a way that there are limit cases of an individual and of existence respectively. He identifies God with the limit case instance of an individual, which is in turn to be identified with the limit case instance

⁸. Some of these objections are discussed by Alvin Plantinga, *Does God Have a Nature?* (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 1980).

⁹. William E. Mann, "Divine Simplicity", *Religious Studies* 18 (1982) 451-471, and elsewhere.

¹⁰. See note 5 above. There is some overlap between the statements made in the next few pages and those contained in my review of Miller's book, in *The Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 77 (1999) 515-16.

of existence, and also the limit case instance of power, the limit case instance of knowledge, and so on.¹¹

Of course power is not identical with knowledge, but this does not entail that the limit case instance of power is not identical with the limit case instance of knowledge. Thus Miller avoids various objections to the doctrine of divine simplicity as formulated by Aquinas and others.

Miller argues that it follows from the foregoing that God is not an individual, has no potentialities, is immutable, and is not causally affected by anything else. It also follows that God is neither powerful nor knowledgeable. That is, God is neither literally powerful nor literally knowledgeable. But, Miller says, because God is the limit case of power and knowledge, we can properly speak of God, analogically, as powerful and as knowing everything. Here is an account which is strongly non-anthropomorphic, while retaining important echoes of traditional affirmations about God.

To assess the seriousness of Miller's challenge to anthropomorphism we need to consider his arguments in greater detail. I will not attempt a wide-ranging number of analyses, but will rather focus on part of his argument, on pages 84-89, for saying that God is the limit case of power and so is not literally powerful. The part I have in mind is his sub-argument for the claim that power has a limit case (as contrasted with no limit at all, or a limit simpliciter).

Miller invites us to consider a series of instances of powers in which increasingly more of the effects produced is due to the power employed and increasingly less to the materials on which the power is expended. The limit of this series of powers is a power which produces the effects with *no* causal contribution from any materials on which the power is expended. This limit is not a member of the series, and so is a limit case rather than a limit simpliciter. Miller then declares:

Precisely because the limit case instance of power requires no materials whatever on which to operate, nothing could ever frustrate or inhibit its exercise nor even modify the effects of its exercise. In producing its effects it is wholly independent of anything else; and that means that the limit case of power can be ascribed to Subsistent Existence [that is, to God] without thereby imputing any bound to it. ("Bound" is a term of art whose precise meaning we need not go into here.)

Miller then claims that in virtue of what he has so far argued the limit case instance of power is entitled to be called "omnipotence".

¹¹ See, for example, Miller, *A Most Unlikely God*, 83. Amongst the respects in which Miller differs from Mann is the fact that Miller denies, while Mann affirms, that there are such property instances as *God's power* and *God's knowledge*. For it is plain, from the way that Miller introduces the distinction between a limit case and a limit *simpliciter*, that a limit-case instance of power is not a property-instance of power.

Consider, in place of Miller's single series of instances of powers, the following series: (1) one in which an increasingly greater proportion of the effects produced is due to the power employed and increasingly less to the materials on which the power is expended; (2) one in which an increasingly greater proportion of the effects produced is due to the power employed and increasingly less to the contributions of other agents; (3) one in which effects are produced, or perhaps can be produced, at increasingly greater distances from some central point; (4) one in which an increasingly greater variety of effects is produced, or can be produced; (5) one in which the same effects are produced, or can be produced, despite increasingly great opposition. What Miller says might persuade us that series 1 and 2 have limit cases, but I can see no way of showing that series 3, 4 or 5 do. Nor do I see why, if there is a limit case of series 1 and of series 2, then these are identical. Nor do I see why if there is a limit case of series 1 nothing could ever frustrate or inhibit its exercise, nor even modify the effects of its exercise, and in producing its effects it must be wholly independent of anything else. Hence Miller's reasoning in favour of saying that power has a limit case, and that this deserves the name "omnipotence", is at best seriously incomplete: as it stands, it does not succeed.

At other crucial places there are defects in Miller's ingenious arguments developing and defending his overall theory. I now wish to discuss a substantial objection to Miller's doctrine of divine simplicity, and therefore to his entire non-anthropomorphic account of the nature of God. This is the *objection from modal uniformity*, especially as it arises in connection with divine willing and creating. Miller analyses God's omnipotence as the limit case of power, and the divine omniscience as the limit case of knowledge; let us also suppose that God's creating the world can somehow be analysed in terms of a limit case,¹² and so attributed to God. If God is identical with each of these limit cases, and these are all identical with each other, then God's identity with omnipotence and God's identity with the divine creation of the universe must either both be necessary or else both be contingent. God is necessarily identical with the divine omnipotence. Therefore God is necessarily identical with the creation of the Universe. Therefore God necessarily creates the Universe. But this last assertion must be rejected. So we must reject the doctrine of divine simplicity.

Thomas V. Morris had earlier raised a version of the objection, directing it against the views of Mann, but Miller dismisses Morris's version

¹² Strictly speaking, to reflect Miller's view as formulated, say, in *A Most Unlikely God* 86, I should say "...can somehow be analysed in terms of a limit case *that is zero-bounding*, and so attributed to God". But I want to simplify the exposition by bypassing various technical ideas like *zero-bounding*.

as unsound.¹³ In response to Morris, Miller makes a number of significant points, such as that “It is a contingent truth that God creates the particular possible world that is actual “ does not entail “God has the ability or potentiality to create some different possible world.” (Miller may be correct here. After all, “It is a contingent truth that 9 numbers the planets” does not entail “9 has the ability or potentiality to not number the planets”.)

Miller’s main line of reply to the objection, however, involves the claim that although the relation of creatures to God is a real one, as opposed to a Cambridge relation, the relation of God to creatures is not real. God’s creating the Universe, and God’s willing to create the Universe, are not real properties of God, but are Cambridge ones.¹⁴ That God wills God’s own goodness is necessary, and that God wills the creation of the Universe is contingent; nevertheless there is no real difference between God’s willing the divine goodness alone, on the one hand, and willing both the divine goodness and the creation of the Universe, on the other. So, while God possesses all real divine properties necessarily, it remains contingently true that God wills to create a Universe and, at that, a Universe which contains tigers, and so on.

It surely follows from the foregoing defence that the objects of God’s willing and creating are not fixed by – do not supervene upon – solely the real, that is non-Cambridge, properties of God. If God had willed that snow be red rather than white, then the content of God’s willing would have been different from what it actually is, but the real properties of God would not. It is contingent that God’s will has the content it has, but this does not imply that God’s real properties are contingent, or involve any potentiality.

What then fixes the content of God’s willing? Upon what does this content supervene? Not God and the real divine properties. The only possibility seems to be: the Universe and its real properties. But in this case the truth that God wills to create the Universe with such-and-such properties, and that God does create it with those properties, cannot supply the explanation of why the Universe exists and has the properties that it does. Theists are likely to find this result unsatisfactory; indeed, Miller himself should. If the best prospects for a defence of Miller’s theory of God’s nature from the objection from modal uniformity involve commitment to the consequence that the

¹³ Thomas V. Morris, *Anselmian Explorations* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press 1987) Chapter 6.

¹⁴ Miller, *A Most Unlikely God*, 106-112. What Miller informally describes as properties, or property-instances, possessed by God are being understood as limit case instances of properties possessed by created things.

objects of God's willing and creating are not fixed by God's real properties, then we have good reason to reject Miller's theory.

IS GOD'S HAVING ONLY ONE PROPERTY COMPATIBLE WITH BEING
PERSONAL?

Let us leave Miller's account of God's attributes in terms of limit cases, and consider the more general doctrine that God possesses no plurality of properties. Does this doctrine by itself entail a non-anthropomorphic view of God, that is, entail that very few, if any, personal predicates are true of both God and human beings in the same sense, or in close to the same sense?¹⁵

Some philosophers, known as physicalists, hold that the only properties are the fundamental physical properties (and conjunctions of these). Nevertheless, they assert, this very limited stock of properties, distributed across many particular things, in some way grounds a very large and rich body of truths – truths of chemistry, geology, biology, psychology, history, and so on. If this is so, might not a very sparse stock of divine properties – in fact, just one divine property – somehow ground a large and rich array of truths about God? Why should the severe limitation of the number of divine properties preclude the generation of complex truths about divine beliefs, intentions, and so on?

To answer this question adequately, we really need a theory of the grounding relation, that is, a theory of truthmaking. The general idea is that the truths depend, non-causally, on what properties are possessed by what individuals: there is no difference between possible worlds with respect to truth without a difference between the possible worlds with respect to the distribution of properties, and the latter difference is responsible for the former. Notice that the relevant grounding relation is not a matter of *semantics*: the question "What distribution of properties between individuals makes it true that this insect is male?" is distinct from the question "Why is the word 'male', uttered on such-and-such an occasion, true of this organism?" Human psychology and sociology are relevant to the latter question but not to the former.

Let us see whether progress can be made without filling out the content of truthmaking theory in greater detail.

Consider two candidate ways in which God's having just one property could ground a large and rich array of truths about God. Firstly, God's having the property might occupy a truthmaker role jointly with other properties possessed by other individuals. The truth that God chose Moses to lead the Israelites from Egypt is grounded in

¹⁵ Centrally important personal predicates include "believe", "intend", "prefer", and "evaluate". If a being has beliefs and intentions, and is able to evaluate its own intentions and actions in the light of moral considerations, then that being is a person (though the converse may not be true).

God's having the single property together with other individuals having their properties. It could have been true that God did not choose Moses to lead the Israelites from Egypt: if so, then the distribution of properties amongst individuals would have been different because although God would still have possessed the one property, other individuals would have had different properties.

There are difficulties for the foregoing suggestion. One is that, according to widespread belief, there would have been a rich array of contingent truths about God even if there had existed no other individuals at all. For example, even if God had decided not to create anything, it still might have been true that had human beings been created, they would have been the objects of divine love.

Another difficulty is that some truths about God – for example, that God decided to create matter – seem to have explanatory priority to any non-hypothetical truths about the created Universe, and, if this is so, then it is hard to see how the distribution of properties amongst creatures can be an indispensable part of the truthmakers for *these* truths about God. In pressing this point, I need not rely on the general claim that if some state of affairs *S* makes it true (metaphysically) that *x* is *F*, then *x*'s being *F* does not cause *S*. The crucial point rather concerns the direction in which information must be supposed to flow, if that flow is to explain why things are as they are. Consider the assertion that it is the structure of the finished house that makes it true that a certain architect had intended the house to have three bedrooms. We ask: what wisdom and authority guided the builder? Not the architect's. Similarly with God.

There is a second way in which, it might be thought, God's having a single property could ground a complex body of truths about God. Maybe for *some* truths about God, the ground consists of God's having the single property together with other properties possessed by other individuals – for example, "God is such that Jones exercised libertarian freedom on a certain occasion", and perhaps also "God knows that Jones exercised libertarian freedom on a certain occasion". For all other truths about God, the sufficient ground is *divine perfection*, which is identical with the single property God possesses.

Now I pointed out earlier that physicalists say that the distribution of fundamental properties amongst individuals grounds a large and rich array of truths about the world. The relevant sense of "grounds" is not causal. It is often explained in terms of the notion of supervenience, in the sense that it is logically impossible that the rich array of truths should vary while the distribution of fundamental properties remained the same. Similarly, to say that divine perfection suffices to ground a certain body of truths about God implies that the body of truths supervenes on divine perfection. Thus if *p* is included in this body, then there is no possible world in which God is perfect but it is not true that

p. For example, let us suppose that the truth "God intends to create hydrogen" is grounded solely in God's perfection; then there is no possible world in which God is perfect but it is not true that God intends to create hydrogen.

For reasons that should be clear from a few paragraphs ago, the foregoing, together with the assumption that God is necessarily perfect, implies that all truths about God which have explanatory priority relative to truths about the created world are necessary. Since the truths "God intends to create a physical world" and "God intends that there be tigers" surely have such explanatory priority, it will turn out that "God intends to create a physical world" and "God intends that there be tigers" are necessary. This result is sufficiently unappealing to cast a deep shadow over the second suggestion as to how one divine property could ground a complex body of truths about God.

It is plain, then, that if there is no plurality of properties (or property-instances) in God then there cannot be a rich array of truths about God. Simplicity with respect to properties rules out anthropomorphism.

It also rules out those non-anthropomorphic views which affirm a complex body of truths about God. These include accounts by those theologians who affirm the truth of sentences in which personal predicates are applied to God in analogical or metaphorical senses. Such theologians hold that the assertions "God is our heavenly father", "God believes that snow is white", "God intends that there be a physical world", "God forgives our wrongdoings" are all true, while adding that the meanings of key words, in their occurrences in those sentences, are metaphorical or analogical. I have argued that all such theologies are false given divine simplicity with respect to properties. People who want to speak of God in personal terms, thereby uttering truths, should reject divine simplicity with respect to properties, whether or not they regard their assertions as metaphorical and analogical.

CONCLUSION

This essay has constituted a partial defence of what I have called anthropomorphism with respect to God. The view that many personal predicates are true of God and human beings in the same sense may still be true even if God is incorporeal, omniscient, immutable, and timeless. It cannot be true if God lacks a plurality of properties, but one does not need to hold anthropomorphism to find simplicity with respect to properties implausible.