

Agency and Omniscience

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Religious Studies 27 (1991): 105-120

I. Introduction

It is said that faith in a divine agent is partly an attitude of trust; believers typically find assurance in the conception of a divine being's will, and cherish confidence in its capacity to implement its intentions and plans. Yet, there would be little point in trusting in the will of any being without assuming its ability to both *act* and *know*, and perhaps it is only by assuming divine omniscience that one can retain the confidence in the efficacy and direction of divine agency that has long been the lure of certain religious traditions.

Is it possible for an *agent* to be omniscient? We think of agents as capable of intentional behaviour and, thus, able to prefer, select and undertake courses of action, abilities typically joined to a capacity for weighing reasons, determining means, evaluating ends, namely deliberation. While deliberating, however, one's mind is not yet made up, one is in a state of indecision and, as such, there is a sense of uncertainty about what one will eventually do, otherwise there would be no point in deliberating about whether to do it.¹ It follows that a being with complete foreknowledge of the future, specifically, its own future, cannot deliberate, and seemingly, cannot "make up its mind" or decide among options.

Can an omniscient being nonetheless *intend* to do actions? If intending

consists in the mind's being settled upon, or committed to, a particular course of action, must it not be previously unsettled, not only practically but epistemically as well? What could motivate someone to undertake an action unless he or she sensed both a need for the required effort and a chance that it might succeed, and how could this happen if the agent already knew what is to take place? If it is going to occur, no need, and if slated not to occur, no chance. Hence, future-directed uncertainty seems essential to intention, but then, how can an omniscient being will or act intentionally?²

There are, of course, a number of ways to deal with these questions within traditional theological frameworks. One might take a cue from proposed solutions to the traditional problem of divine foreknowledge and human freedom, e.g. that which repudiates the idea that statements about 'future contingents', say, future free acts, can be foreknown or truth-valued. But this invokes controversial assumptions about free action or truth-conditions for future-tensed sentences and, accordingly, has engendered dissent.³ A different account solves the problem by appeal to the timeless eternity of the divine being, removing any doubt about its uncertainty *before* formulating intentions. Despite a respectable history, this view raises difficult problems about timelessness and timeless agency.⁴ Another position is that divine willing does not involve coming to intend, rather, the divine being's intentions are eternal, contemporaneous with its temporal being and without *prior* indecision. Accordingly, everlasting divine intentions are always in place, and the divine being never has the occasion to either deliberate or choose.

The success of this view depends on undermining the argument motivating the uncertainty condition proposed above.⁵ A distinct approach circumvents the problem altogether by conceiving divine agency as radically unlike human agency in being devoid of desire, will, intention, or choice in any of the literal senses of these terms.⁶

It is not the concern of this paper to criticize, defend, or develop any of these views. Instead, an independent argument concerning intentional action will be constructed whose conclusion straightforwardly precludes omniscient agency. Whether it poses an insurmountable challenge, provides a new foil for a particular theological gambit, or can be safely diffused, will be left undecided. What will become clear is that a distinct problem for the doctrine of omniscient agency—and if I am not mistaken, a severe problem—has made its claim for the attention of those taking interest in the merger of divinity with agency.

II. Intentional Action and Intending

If an action or doing is an agent's performance of, or refraining from, an action-type at a time, we distinguish those that are intentional from those that are accidental or instinctual. It is here assumed that agency is exercised only through intentional action, and an action is intentional only if among its causal antecedents is an intending of the agent's -- where an *intending* is a state whose content is an *intention*.⁷ This does not imply that whatever is intentional is intended (Bratman 1987, Mele 1989), nor that every intending is deliberative; rather, what one does intentionally is connected, at least

causally, to one's being settled upon undertaking a particular course of action. However, the causal connection is not sufficient for intentional action since instinctual and accidental doings can also be caused by intendings, e.g. one's inadvertently stepping on a cockroach upon deciding to turn sharply to the right. One must add that the causal link between the intending and the action be of the proper sort, e.g. the action is performed as a result of following an intended action-plan (Brand 1984) Mele 1987, 1989). Also, while intentional actions are typically voluntary and under our control, doings which would otherwise be instinctual or habitual can be subjected to conscious control, as when one intentionally avoids blinking or controls a nervous habit for a time despite consequent discomfort.⁸

Yet, talk about 'intending' or 'having an intention' is ambiguous. A distinction between having an intention (being inclined in a certain way) and consciously intending (voliting) is obvious enough. The former is not just a propensity to act; a baby does not intend to suck or to cry, despite evident tendencies to do so. At best, intendings are a subclass of propensities, distinguished by the fact that one must come to intend at some point in time (Donagan 1987, ch. 6), though this need not be a conscious process of forming an intention (Mele 1989). One cannot intend without having *acquired* an intending attitude, otherwise there is no distinguishing intentional states from innate propensities and no demarcating intentional from non-intentional activity. Though there may be genetically-based dispositions to have intentions of certain sorts and to engage in corresponding types of behaviour,

intentional behavior is not innate, and intention-acquisition must always be a modification of behavioral proclivities.

We thereby distinguish having an intention from acquiring an intention, and this, in turn, from rehearsing that intention, namely consciously affirming an intention already held.⁹ Last night I decided to swim at nine o'clock this morning and upon waking I again thought, in an intending way, of swimming at nine. I did not make up my mind again upon waking; I simply rehearsed an intention already in place. And just as intention-acquisition is not always conscious, it need not involve adopting piecemeal each intentional component of an action-plan one endorses. Finally, while we can distinguish standing inclinations to do certain *types* of acts from intentions to perform their particular instantiates, the former are often causally relevant in the acquisition of the latter.

III. Intending, Efficacy, and Need

The perceptive reader might suspect that a significant concession has already been made if one agrees that intending is possible only by the agent *acquiring* an intending attitude. Not only is a strongly temporal dimension to an agent's thought suggested, the spectre of antecedent uncertainty is reinvoked. While the position has so far been motivated by the need to distinguish intentional from non-intentional behaviour, one might ask whether there are other grounds in its favour.

Recall that conventional wisdom about the origination of intending states

accords a role to cognitive factors as well as conative elements (Brand 1084.). No one acts intentionally from a zero point of view, devoid of antecedent knowledge or beliefs. Every intention is acquired against a background of beliefs, plans, goals, and other intentions, with some idea about the necessary conditions for and probable contribution of the intended action. None of us would intend to swim at the local YMCA without assuming that there is a local YMCA or that it has a pool, nor would we intentionally buy a ticket in order to attend the ballet without believing the purchase to be an appropriate means. In short, because we intend with the aim of realizing our goals, we inevitably consider action-plans by recourse to background presumptions, presumptions that might be tacit, perhaps no more than dispositions to assent to given types of propositions rather than explicitly accepted beliefs. Henceforth, 'presumes' will be used as a generic designation meant to cover this weaker sort of doxastic commitment as well as belief. However vague and inarticulate, these presumptions are the very foundation of rational action, and indispensable to the hope that accompanies expenditures of effort.

The linkage of intentional action with the expenditure of effort is helpful in understanding the cognitive context in which intentions are acquired. If we think of coming to intend as the initial phase whereby we attempt to accomplish something, the envisioned background is likely to include tacit assumptions both that intentional effort is needed to effect the desired change and that there is some chance that the environment will cooperate. Intention acquisition prepares the ground for subsequent exertion by establishing

a propensity to expend effort in a certain way, i.e. to have volitions or to engage in tryings (if not identical to volitions).¹⁰ And if nature does nothing in vain, an analogous principle of least effort' would appear in order: we acquire an intention to do an action only if we presume that we would not be wasting our effort upon undertaking it, that is, intentional effort is something that *needs* to be expended if we are to realize certain ends (the action is not otherwise inevitable) *and* that the action is, as of yet, an *open* alternative for us.¹¹

The principle is probably applicable to rational agency only. Despite the least effort' label, it should not be confused with a principle of universal laziness, nor with one of efficiency; it claims that rational agents exert themselves with the anticipation of thereby furthering certain of their aims, thus, with a sense of both need and possibility for success. In blending connative with cognitive factors, it requires agents to have a concept of intending, at least under the guise of 'exertion'. Some will find this condition excessive (e.g. Donagan 1987; 158), and although it conveniently divides blind exertion from fully-constituted agency, scepticism might only reinforce restriction of the principle to rational agents.

What does such a presumption involve? Apart from being drawn towards a particular course of action, we act intentionally only on the assumption that the action is within our power or under our control, allowing that the appropriate doxastic state be tacit and comparatively lower-level. What does this sense of control include? An obvious candidate is a tacit presumption of

efficacy, one intends to A only by assuming there is some probability of success, that is,

(1) If, at t, X acquires an intention to A at t' then X presumes that there is a chance that he would A (would refrain from A-ing) at t' were he to intend to A (to refrain from A-ing) at t'.

Here, the projected time of intending must fall within the interval bounded by t and t', and it is argued in section V that the time of believing must be appropriate prior to t. The weak probability qualifier may be deleted if X believes his effort is guaranteed success, or, alternatively, if the embedded conditionals harbour a tacit *ceteris paribus* reflecting the improbability of unforeseen intervention.¹² It seems less operative in the distinct, but equally justified,

(2) If, at t, X acquires an intention to A at t' then X presumes that he would undertake (try) A-ing at t' (or earlier) were he to intend to A at t'.¹³

Satisfying the consequents of (1) and (2) is not sufficient for taking A to be under one's control; the least effort model precludes viewing A-ing *as fail accompli*, for we must presume that our A-ing would not occur in the absence of our intentional efforts. A state of intending emerges only with a tacit sense of causal requirement, that is, exertion is required:

(3) If, at t, X acquires an intention to A at t' then X presumes that he would not A at t' unless he intended to A at t'.

To acquire an intention, in short, is to sense its need, to realize, at least tacitly, that what is intended is not otherwise inevitable and that without an appropriate intending some desired state of affairs would not be realized. Even though I might deliberate about something I know I am going to do regardless of what I intend - for example, crash into the concrete barrier that suddenly looms before me -- I deliberate only about *how* to do so, at full speed, say, or intentionally, for here is something that remains to be fixed. Similarly, while I might vote for a Republican in the next election fully confident that the Republicans will win, what I intend is that I so vote, not that I bring about a Republican victory.¹⁴

IV. Intending, Contingency, and Open Alternatives

There is more to the presumption of openness than revealed in conditions (1)-(3). Sometimes an agent removes a course of action from the range of alternatives by prior commitment. Nathan might think he would drink whiskey were he to try, would not do so unless he intended, yet also believe that he will not so choose. He has ruled out drinking whiskey, perhaps for deep-seated moral reasons, and having done so, his mind is already settled and he no longer considers drinking whiskey an *open* alternative, a fact which cannot be explained by the conditional consequents of (i)-(3) alone. Drinking

whiskey is taken to be open only if he takes it for granted that he both can so intend and can avoid so intending, that is, only if he presumes that his decision about the matter, whatever it might be, is as yet *contingent*.

An assumed contingency seems vital, but how is the embedded modality to be interpreted? Mere logical or nomological contingency is too weak; one might recognize that there are many things he or she could do in the purely 'theoretical' sense, i.e. not being prohibited by the laws of logic or nature along, but which actual circumstances rule out. Instead, a course of action is taken to be open only by assuming that both it and its complement are possible given circumstances as they now stand. That is, a suitably concrete or relative modality is at stake - where P is contingent relative to a set of conditions S just in case neither P nor not-P is a consequence of S.¹⁵

The task is now to give a general specification of the set S of conditions relevant to all instances of the contingency presumption. Three candidates are paramount:

(A) all propositions true at t (including those with reference to the past and future);

(B) all states of affairs (facts, conditions) obtaining prior to and including t; or,

(C) all that he or she (the agent) then (at t) believes (or knows).

Each of {A)-(C) has been advocated at one time or another, though it is unimportant for present purposes which is preferred.¹⁶ The doxastic/

epistemic contingency of (C) has the advantage of not rendering a decision-making determinist inconsistent and squares nicely with the response of the deliberator who, when asked if he is aware of anything which determines his eventual decision or what that decision will be, reports: 'Not at all; *as far as I know* it is entirely up to me which alternative I choose.' This minimal type of openness seems, integral to decision-making, in which case C, at least, is assured. It may also be the key to the implicit *ceteris paribus* in some readings of (1), insofar as no one deliberates about A-ing unless able to meet the question, 'Can you really do A?' with the affirmative, 'Yes I can, as far as I can tell.' The qualifiers reveal the agent's *cautious* assumption of efficacy; he must take his choice to be efficacious *within* circumstances as he himself understands them, though he might allow that unforeseen factors will prevent success. Relativization to (C) might also explain why explicit inclusion of the probability factor in (1) is unnecessary and the implicit *ceteris paribus* clause enough.

Still, (C) can be understood in at least two ways depending on whether the phrase 'he (she) then believes' occurs outside or inside the scope of belief. The first-person character of our deliberator's responses suggests an internal occurrence, but the two readings are equivalent when the agent in question is omniscient.¹⁷ Of course, for an omniscient agent, (C) is sufficient for (A) and (B), *since* what it takes itself to know is coextensive with what is the case, so nothing beyond (C) need here be assumed. This in mind, one statement of the minimal contingency presumption is, as follows:

(4) If, at t , X acquires an intention to A at t' then X presumes that his intending to A at t' is as yet contingent relative to what he himself then believes (knows).

where 'as yet', falling within scope of 'believes', expresses X 's own representation of time t .

The contingency need not be indexed by all that the agent in fact believes, only by what he *takes* himself to believe or know. Let us refer to the beliefs so described as the agent's *internal* beliefs. The index may be diluted even further; someone might deliberate about acting in a way that is incompatible with what they have previously committed themselves to doing, a commitment accompanied by an internal belief that they will do that thing. Since one can overlook one's commitments during the course of deliberation, it follows that the modal qualifier in (4) must be indexed to *immediately accessible* internal beliefs, a qualification external to scope of presumption. That is, beliefs can be stratified with respect to retrievability, allowing that one can deliberate about what one already assumes one will not do, so long as this assumption is overridden by a more accessible set of internal beliefs against which contingency remains. While the latter class might be difficult to isolate, it appears indispensable in accounting for such cases of forgetful deliberators.¹⁸

V. Intending and Choosing

Likening intention to an expenditure of effort within the bounds of a least

effort principle effectively equates intention with choice. By conjoining the consequents of (1), (3), and (4), and treating them as constitutive conditions, we obtain a promising analysis of what it is for an agent to take a course of action as an open alternative:

(5) At t , X takes his A ing at t' to be open alternative iff at t , X believes each of the following: (a) there is a chance that he would A (would refrain from A -ing) at t' were he to intend to A (to refrain from A -ing) at t' , (b) he himself would not A at t' *unless* he intended to A at t' and (c) his intending to A at t' is as yet contingent relative to what he himself then believes.

In the broadest sense, choosing is nothing more than selecting a course of action from a range of presumed open alternatives. If a *minimal range* is the pair comprised of X 's doing A and X 's refraining from A , where A is any action-type, a *minimal choice* is a selection of a course of action from a minimal range. From (4), every intention-acquisition is effectively a minimal choice, not necessarily conscious, inasmuch as the agent takes it for granted that his not A -ing is as open as his A -ing, i.e. that each is contingent. This underscores the previous contention that intending emerges from a conception of prevailing circumstances and possibilities as well as from desire, specifically, from a sense of alternatives, however vaguely identified.¹⁹

VI. The Antecedent Presumption of Openness

The consequents in each of (1)-(4) attribute a belief to the agent, but the *times* of these beliefs remains to be fixed. If (5) is correct, they are simultaneous, but how is their temporal locus to be identified in relation to the times of action and intending?

Undoubtedly, the beliefs can be held no later than the time of intention-acquisition. Can they emerge simultaneously? I think not, at least not for an agent who is minimally rational (locally consistent in the relevant beliefs) and self-reflective enough to realize he or she has intended when he or she in fact has. Let us show this by focusing on the contingency presumption (4), recalling what has been said about the accessibility of beliefs, and confining attention to the case where X is minimally rational and self-reflective.

(6) If, at t , a minimally rational being X both acquires an intention to A at t' and believes that he has, then at some time appropriately prior to t , X presumes that his intending to A at t' is as yet contingent relative to what he himself then believes.

Proof. Assume the antecedent and suppose that the only time at which X held the belief mentioned in the consequent was simultaneous with t . Realizing that he has at t the intention to A at t' , then relative to his own beliefs at t , his intending to A at t' is no longer contingent, and, being rational, he could not at t take it to be so. That is, X cannot believe that he will intend to A while at the same time view his intending to A as contingent relative

to what he believes. So, the time at which he takes his intending to A to be contingent must be appropriately prior to time t -- where a commentary on 'appropriately prior' awaits a more detailed study of the temporal parameters of practical thinking. It follows that X cannot come to intend except by *antecedently* presuming his intending to A to be contingent relative to what he then believes.

Assuming that (5) is correct in ascribing simultaneous presumptions of efficacy, need and contingency, the following consequence of the principle of least effort is immediate:

(7) If at t, a minimally rational agent X both acquires an intention to do A at t' and believes that he has, then at some time appropriately prior to t, X presumes that his A-ing at t' is an open alternative for him.

VII. The Presumption of Uncertainty

It would be wrong to assume that a deliberator cannot know in advance what he will do or choose; as previously indicated, agents can forget what they are already committed to and, therefore, what they already know they will do (see note 2). At the same time, decision does seem to involve passing from a state of uncertainty into a kind of knowledge.²⁰ Of course, it strains the imagination to speak of deliberating about *whether* to A while occurrently believing that one will A, still more so if the deliberator is occurrently intending to do A; 'whether' suggests a moment of uncertainty and inde-

cision which precludes having one's mind made up *modulo* occurrent conviction. Perhaps a deliberator's antecedent indecision, ignorance, or lack of doxastic commitment can be restricted to a denial of the relevant occurrent psychological states. But this would be of no help in understanding the state of uncertainty which, like wonder or bewilderment, harbours intentionality. That is, a deliberator is not uncertain in the sense of not knowing what he or she will decide, rather, the agent is cognizant that he or she is not yet settled upon which course of action to undertake in the circumstances. Negation is inside the scope of the agent's uncertainty here, and since conditions that merely prohibit occurrent intendings or believings are expressed with negation having largest scope, then, ascribing no content at all, they are unsuitable as a phenomenological assay of the agent's sense of his own indecision and uncertainty. It is the contentual aspect of the latter which demands scrutiny.

A deliberator who responds to a question about what he will choose may very well say: 'I don't know, I've not yet made up my mind ', implying not indecision, only a *presumption* of such. For a minimally rational agent who takes his A-ing to be consequent upon his so intending, this follows from a further presumption of uncertainty; believing that he himself does not yet know whether he will intend to A at t, then, by (3), he believes he does yet know that he will A -- hence, a presumption of indecision. Such uncertainty is, in turn, a result of the presumed contingency sanctioned by (7):

(8) If, at t , a minimally rational being X presumes that his intending to A at t' is contingent relative to what he himself then believes, then, at t , X presumes both that he does not yet believe that he will intend to A at t' and that he does not yet believe that he will not intend to A at t' .

Proof. Suppose X satisfied the antecedent. Then, by taking his intending to A at t' not to be contingent with respect to a set S , he will not regard S as a set of his own beliefs. Given the rationality proviso, he does not suppose his intending to A to be contingent with respect to any set among whose members is the proposition *that he intends to A at t'* . So, he does not view the latter as a set of his own beliefs, that is, he presumes that he himself does not believe he will intend to A at t' and, by a similar argument, that he himself does not believe he will not intend to A at t' . Therefore, he satisfies the consequent.

VIII. Some Clarifications

The preceding principles govern only the *acquisition* of intentions; they fail as principles concerning their *rehearsal*. However, since little has been said about the mechanisms of acquisition and rehearsal, successful counterexamples remain possible pending deeper probes. For one thing, since intention-acquisition is not necessarily a conscious process, it is not necessary to have consciously entertained an intention before rehearsing it, and given its holistic character, the several propensities to act that are established upon endorsing

a plan of action need not have been separately formulated.

But this leaves unsettled a problem concerning the rehearsal of indexical intentions. If intending a content of the form 'I shall A now' or 'I to do A now' is the proximate cause of action, then one could not have adopted *that* intention prior to the indexically-designated time, yet one could certainly have known in advance that one would A at the time in question (though not *qua* 'now'). A counterexample to (8)? I think not; even granting the irreducibility of indexical reference (Castaneda 1980, Grim 1985), *to foreknow* that one will A *at t*, is not to foreknow that one will A *now*, and insofar as one knows that one will A now it is only because one is at present cognizant of one's intention to A now. If, on the other hand, one can foreknow that one will endorse an indexical intention to A at t, this is probably due to recognition of an already acquired intention to follow a certain action-plan. The upshot is that the notion of rehearsing an intention must be adjusted in such a way that volitioning an indexical intention can still qualify as a 'rehearsal' in virtue of previously adopting a non-indexical counterpart together with certain beliefs linking distinct identifications of the relevant items.

Another problem concerns the presumption of uncertainty (8) and the principles (3), (4) and (6) on which it rests. Some might object to these principles on the grounds that they incorrectly rule out formulating an intention to do something one already knows one will do. For example, at gunpoint you demand that I walk through the door, threatening to force me to do it if I don't do so myself. Hearing this might convince me that I will

go through the door. It would seem, however, that I can still formulate an intention to walk through the door even though I already believe that I will do so one way or the other, a result which goes directly against (3), (4) and (6).

The objection can be met in two ways. For one thing, I might already possess a standing conditional intention to walk through the door when so coerced (or, more generally, to go wherever I am commanded to at gun-point). Then, adopting the intention to walk through the door is concurrent with coming to believe that the relevant circumstance obtains, and it is *hence* that I know (believe) I will walk through the door. But in such a case, knowledge does not antedate intention-adoption, and it remains likely that before I adopted that intention I did not know that I would walk through the door. On the other hand, if I am *deliberating* about whether to comply with the gunman's command, i.e. whether to walk through the door or not, then it is unlikely that I already know that I will *walk* through the door. Being forced through the door is not the same as walking it, any more than someone's forcibly raising my arm is an instance of my raising my arm. Thus, my passing through the doorway *is* necessitated, but the distinct content of my possible intention, my walking through the door, is not; the latter, from my perspective, is an open alternative which I can choose to undertake or not, and if I perform it, it qualifies as an intentional action. In short, what I foreknow will occur is not my intentional action, but only some event involving me.

Finally, it might seem that I can know (believe) that I will adopt an intention to A at some future point even though I do not now intend to A then. God may have told me that I will intend to A then, or I may be so cognizant of my own incontinence that I unhappily predict what I will intend. Nothing in the preceding principles precludes this; what is required is that at *some* point prior to intention-acquisition there is a moment of sensed (believed) contingency, a state which precludes only a consciously explicit belief that A-ing is already fixed, not a tacit belief to this effect.²¹

IX. There is No Omniscient Agent

Satisfaction of the consequent of (8) does *not* imply that an arbitrary agent X does not know, or have a belief about, what he or she will do, for the attributed belief may well be false. This is not so if X is omniscient. That is, if by 'God' we understand an omniscient being, the following equivalences hold:

(9) For any proposition p and time t, God believes at t that p iff God knows at t that p iff p.²²

From this and the principle of excluded middle it follows that for each proposition p either God knows that p or God knows that not-p, namely God's knowledge and belief are negation-complete. Obviously, both are consistent as well.

We now come to the principal result that omniscience precludes the

acquisition of an intention, hence, intentional action itself:

(10) If X is omniscient, then there are no times t and t' and no action type A such that at t , X intends to A at t' .

Proof. Suppose, for *reductio*, the following:

(a) At t , God intends to A at t' (for times t , t' and action-type A).

Then, by the description of intending given in Section ii above, at a time no later than t , God *acquires* an intention to A at t . So, applying (7),

(b) At some time t'' appropriately prior to t , God presumes that his A-ing at t' is an open alternative for him.

Then, according to (5), God possesses each of the beliefs attributed in the consequents of (1), (3) and (4) Since God is omniscient, it follows from (a) and (9) that,

(c) At t'' God knows that at t he will intend to A at t' .

But, from (a) by (3) and (8), we have,

(d) At t'' , God believes that he himself does not yet believe that at t he will intend to A at t' .

and from this, by (g),

(e) At t'' , God does not believe that at t he will intend to A at t' .

By (9), again,

(f) At t'' God does not know that at t he will intend to A at t' .

which contradicts (c). Consequently, if God is omniscient, then the *reductio* supposition (a) cannot be satisfied. It follows that God cannot act intentionally.

X. Conclusion

The principle of least effort and its implicate (7) govern the acquisition of intentions, not their rehearsal. Restricted to minimally rational agents, both are limiting principles that might fail to govern all intentional action, yet which apply admirably to an omniscient being whose beliefs are both consistent and closed under implication. If the foregoing account of intention is correct, there is no refuge in the conception that God is a timeless agent or that God's intentions are fixed from eternity. *Qua* eternal, whether timeless or everlasting, God's propensities to act cannot have been acquired and, therefore, are not intentions at all, rather, inherent dispositions. The latter spawn only instinctual behaviour; the 'actions' they induce, if any, cannot be intentional and God's mode of activity can only be something necessary, a consequence of considerable theological significance.

By the same reasoning, we, as finite agents, are able to adopt intentions and act intentionally because of our self-acknowledged limitations in grasping the world in which we find ourselves. Not only is our remarkable ability to forget the past a prerequisite for action, as Nietzsche so aptly observed,²³ so is our imperfect conception of what *will* be, for our efforts to shape the

future in accord with our desires are as parasitic upon our ignorance as they are upon our expectations. Viewed from within the world as we ourselves understand it, each of us is, to a degree, an 'unmoved mover' facing an incomplete and partly unsettled future. For an omniscient being, on the other hand, no state-of-affairs is epistemically or doxastically contingent and, therefore, it is never presented with options, never enjoys the capacity to acquire intentions, and is unable to act intentionally. Far from being 'free' to choose and act, or unlimited in power, it is, of necessity, omni-impotent.²⁴

Notes

1. That deliberation requires ignorance has been argued by Ginet 1962, Taylor 1966, Prior 1968: 47~8, Goldman 1970, 195, and Denyer 1981, 48. Doubts are expressed in Quinn 1978, Reichenbach 1983 and Kapitan 1986. See Section VII below.

2. That God can neither deliberate nor decide has been argued in La Croix 1976, disputed in Quinn 1978 and reaffirmed in Kapitan 1984., Basinger 1986: 171, and Strawson 1986: 257 Swinburne 1977:172-4, argues that an completely omniscient being could not act freely and, thereby, supports a weakened sense of omniscience. See also, Alston 1988: 278, who admits that the tension between agency and omniscience is part of a 'genuine problem' that remains to be explored. Other recent studies of divine agency include Creel 1986, Kvanvig 1986, Talbott 1988, Hasker 1989, and Wierenga 1989.

3. The common exclusion of 'future contingents' from God's knowledge has a long history. Swinburne 1977: 172-8, limits omniscience by allowing that some future contingents may be true but unknowable. Runzo 1981 and Denyer 1981, on the other hand, contend that such propositions are not truth-valued, in which case there is nothing to be known or unknown. They are opposed by Zagzebski 1985 and Kvanvig 1986. I will not argue against the exclusionary view here, save to point out that it must be accompanied by two developments. *First*, reasons must be provided for concluding that there are no causal chains leading up to so-called 'free actions', or that no compatibilist account of free agency suffices, otherwise it begs the question to label such acts 'contingent' (see Dennett 1984 and Kapitan 1989). *Second*, as long as propositions about future actions exist -- which many do -- then it would seem that an omniscient being must know their truth-values. The denial that they have truth-values must be defended on the basis of an independent account of truth-bearers and truth-conditions.

4. Kretzmann and Stump 1981 champion the Boethian-Thomistic thesis of God as a timeless being, though their solution exacts the stiff price of accommodating timeless agency by allowing *atemporal* activity and will. Burrell 1984 expresses reservations about their account, particularly, the coherence of their notion of 'atemporal duration', and Smith 1989: 322-4, offers an intriguing argument to show that nothing can be eternal or timeless. The timelessness doctrine also confronts a difficult problem about how God can know temporally indexed propositions. See, for example, Prior 1968: 15-44, Kretzmann 1966, Castaneda 1967b, Grimm 1985 and Kvanvig 1986. Grim contends that the argument 'against omniscience' is conclusive, pp. 173-4, though Wierenga 1989: 52-3 and Hasker 1989, 161 have challenged his reasoning. Misgivings about the timelessness doctrine are voiced in Alston 1988: 279, and Hasker 1989: 180-1. Woltersdorff 1975 and Plantinga 1980 drop it altogether.

5. This reply is suggested by Quinn 1978: 236-7 and by Creel 1986: 21, 112. Creel is uneasy about the Boethian-Aquinas thesis of God's eternity, specifically as concerns God's knowledge, though he retains a sense in which God is not a temporal being (p. 205). Compare Kvanvig 1986: 164-7, who, while not rejecting the doctrines of timelessness and immutability, finds that of omniscience to be logically independent, thereby allowing an omniscient being to be both temporal and mutable.

6. The tendency to make a sharp distinction between divine and human agency is characteristic of the Neo-Platonist tradition, Ibn Rushd (Averroes), for example, employs 'will' analogically, arguing that while God does not will as a human does, i.e. because of a *lack*, recognition of which brings about an exertion of effort in the willer, He does will each of his 'acts' in that he both knows and approves of its occurrence (see his *Tahafut at-Tahafat*, trans. Simon van der Bergh, (London: Luzac & Co., 1954), pp. 157-61, 426-7, 438-9, 449-50).

7. I will speak as if intending is a unique mental state, irreducible to a complex of desires and beliefs, though this is not necessary for the subsequent argument. For strong arguments against the reductionist view see Castaneda 1975 Harman 1976, Brand 1984, Gustafson 1986, Bratman 1987, and Mele 1988.

8. While an agent might have no control about whether he will perform a certain action during an interval t , he may very well have control whether or not he performs it during a sub-interval t' , in which case it is partly under his control at t . Let us say that X's A-ing at t is *semi-intentional just* in case his A-ing at t is not intentional but had he intended not to A at t then he would have refrained from A-ing at t .

9. The contrast between formulating and rehearsing an intention is emphasized by Castaneda 1975, 275-8. I will presuppose Castaneda's view that intentions are irreducibly first-personal (pp. 159-72), and will employ 'he himself' and 'she herself' as *quasi-indicators*, namely pronominal devices used to *attribute* indexical reference (see Castaneda 1967a and 1980).

10. That intendings can be acquired passively, without prior formulation, is argued in Mele 1987: 321-2. The precise relation between volitions and tryings is a difficult matter, as indicated by the discussions in O'Shaughnessy 1980, McCann 1975 1986, and Bratman 1987, though I follow the latter in distinguishing intending, trying and intentionally doing.

11. A different principle is that if one believed that a state-of-affairs P is either inevitable or impossible, hence, would occur or not regardless of what one did

intentionally, then one would not acquire the intention to bring about P. This principle does not hold given that agents can be irrational or overlook what they already assume is bound to happen.

12. In light of the points raised in McCann 1986 and Mele 1989, the probability in (i) may be weak, i.e. need not be read as 'more probable than not',

13. Gustafson 1986: 167-8, argues that one must believe that he will *undertake* whatever he fully intends. As the notion is here employed, undertaking is no different from what is otherwise called *trying* or *endeavoring* (Bratman 1987, ch. 9).

14. Compare C. S. Peirce who wrote: ' We can make no effort where we experience no resistance, no reaction. The sense of effort is a two-sided sense, revealing at once a something within and another something without', *The Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*, edited by P. Weiss, C. Hartshorne, and A. Burks, (Cambridge: Harvard, 1935-58). 2.84.

15. Consequence will be understood generically, with both P and not-P being in no sense consequence of S. This formulation is neutral between construing the modality as a dyadic or a monadic operator (albeit indexed). Relative modality has been discussed by several, e.g. Smiley 1962 and Humberstone 1981. In relation to the free will issue, relative modality is treated in Falk 1981, Slote 1982 and Kapitan 1989.

16. With some stylistic variations, (a) is found in N. Denyer 1981, (b) in Taylor 1966 and Van Inwagen 1983, and variants of (c) in Dennett 1984. and Kapitan 1989.

17. See Castaneda 1980 on the contrast between external and internal occurrences of terms within attitudinal scope. Where x is omniscient we have (u) (x bel [P]) iff x bel [(u)P], regardless of the restriction on u (a point brought to my attention by Professor Paul Spade).

18. See Kapitan 1989: 34-35 and Munn 1960: 198-203.

19. Kant's language, that rational beings act only 'under the idea of freedom ' is appropriate here (see Part III of Kant's *Grundlegung*). A similar requirement is noted by Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics* 1112a-1112b, where the alternatives must be within the agent's power, and Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* I, Q13.A2, where it is claimed

that reference to the range of alternatives is necessary to choice.

20. This is claimed in Hampshire and Hart 1958, Ginet 1962 and O'Shaughnessy 1980, vol. 2, 297.

21. I am grateful to Alfred Mele for having brought this point to my attention. In Kapitan 1989 it is argued that the presumption of openness is compatible with tacit beliefs to the contrary, and only in the case of serious, pathological inconsistency will their contraries be equally accessible or 'retrievable'. Expectedly, such inconsistency will not occur in the case of an omniscient being.

22. This principle is set forth and defended in Grim 1983: 263-6. If God does not know by way of having beliefs (Alston 1986), the argument can be recast in terms of knowledge alone, assuming, of course, that we can attribute to God knowledge of particular propositions.

23. See F. Nietzsche, *The Use and Abuse of History*, translated by Adrian Collins (Indianapolis, Bobbs-Merrill, 1957), pp- 6-7: 'Forgetfulness is a property of all action, just as not only light but darkness is bound up with the life of every organism.'

24. I am indebted to Alfred Mele, John Heil and Richard Creel for helpful comments on previous versions of this paper.

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