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INTEGRATING PLENITUDE, AXIARCHISM AND AGENCY*

In this paper I integrate three ways of understanding: plenitude, axiarchism and agency. At the outset, let me warn readers that this is an exercise in speculative metaphysics, something I have defended elsewhere (FORREST 2007, introduction). I argue using four assumptions.

1. The rejection of Naturalism, understood as the willingness to accept without further understanding the universe and the natural order it exhibits.

2. A corresponding sympathy for the intuition behind the Principle of Sufficient Reason.

3. Belief that sometimes agents act with what I call radical freedom. This is explicated below, but here it suffices to say that it is not compatible with any form of determinism.

4. The rejection of a regress of explanations as a way of understanding.

The last of these assumptions implies that all explanation terminates in ultimate ways of understanding, that is, those that do not themselves require further explanation. I consider three candidates for ultimate understanding.

1. Theism: the familiar idea of understanding the existence and nature of the universe as created by God for good reasons.

2. Axiarchism: the initially counter-intuitive idea that goodness (i.e., non-instrumental value, including beauty) explains contingent reality.

3. Plenitude: the thesis, held in a strong form by David Lewis, that all possible types of situation are real (1986). I take it to imply that there are many universes, which Lewis calls worlds. These might either be spatio-temporally unrelated, as Lewis holds, or parts of one all-encompassing Hyperverse.

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After some initial clarification, I note the problems with axiarchism, and offer solutions. These solutions require the unification of space and time as space-time, and the consequent introduction of what might be called hyper-time, but which I take to be true time—Time with an upper case “T”. After that, I note some problems with agency as an ultimate way of understanding. I solve these by means of a theory of agency as completing axiarchism, the *Good versus Good* theory.

1. CLARIFICATION

AXIARCHISM

John Leslie, who began the current debate, introduces the term “axiarchism” for the thesis that things are as they are because they should be that way (LESLIE 1979). It would seem to be what Pseudo-Dionysius means when he or she says that goodness is diffusive of itself. There are different ways of making it more precise. Later, I shall introduce what I call the axiarchic narrative, but, for the moment, I concentrate on five explications of the clause “because it should be that way”.

1. “Because it is good that they be this way.” This is Hugh Rice’s version (RICE 2000) and is the most straightforward.¹

2. “Because it is beautiful.”² In this paper I treat beauty as part of goodness, so do not distinguish this version from Rice’s.

3. “Because it is ethically required.” This is Leslie’s formulation (1979).

4. Because it is not merely good but uniquely the best. This is Rescher’s *axiogenesis* or optimalism (RESCHER 2010), based on Leibniz’s Best of All Possible Worlds thesis. It would seem to be the version criticised sympathetically by Parfit (2014, 633–34).³

5. Because it is not merely good but there is none better. I call this maximalism. It differs from optimalism because there can be multiple possibilities than which none is better.

¹ It coheres with the identification of the Good with an impersonal Godhead, as in Hugh Rice’s development (RICE 2000). Given that identification, Goodness/Godhead both explains and is ontologically prior to the Christian Trinity.

² This used to be my preference. In FORREST (1991) I used the phrase “aesthetic understanding.” I now think this misleading.

³ Partially defended by John Russell Roberts (2014), who, however, does not address the Problem of Evil.

In addition, we may distinguish noetic from causal versions. Noetic axiarchism is the *understanding* of why things are because they should be that way. Causal axiarchism is the thesis that the way things should be *causes* things to be as they are.⁴

The case for noetic axiarchism is that goodness includes beauty, and:

1. In the choice between empirically equivalent theories, believing the more beautiful is a rival to the appeal to simplicity.
2. Believing the more beautiful combined with reliance on Inference to the Best explanation implies noetic axiarchism.
3. The appeal to simplicity depends on the assumption of a natural way of classifying things, and hence has no advantage over noetic axiarchism.
4. Unlike the appeal to simplicity, noetic axiarchism coheres with the Principle of Sufficient Reason, because it is not absurd to hold that the way things are is one of the ways than which there is none better, but it is absurd to hold it is the simplest way things could be, which would be the absence of anything concrete.

Note that noetic axiarchism is reflexive in the sense that we can understand why it is the case because it should be the case. This might be taken by some as showing why noetic axiarchism is necessary if true.

By causal axiarchism I mean the thesis that how things should be (ethical requiredness according to Leslie) is the first cause, bringing about a God, or many gods, or a Universe without gods (LESLIE 1979).

AGENCY

This differs from mere behaviour in that an agent is conscious of several ways of behaving and has reasons for the choice between them. Often these reasons imply the choice of just the one way of behaving. In these cases, freedom may well be compatible with determinism. I assert, however, the libertarian thesis that sometimes we act with *radical* freedom in the following sense:

1. The agent is in a *practical dilemma*. That is there are reasons for and reasons against, neither of which overcome or “trump” the other, and which but for the opposing reasons would specify the outcome without further deliberation; and

⁴ I am here considering an efficient cause, but in their theory of euteleology John Bishop and Ken Perszyk (2014) consider goodness a telos or final cause.

2. The decision is neither chance nor causally determined, nor unduly hampered by sub/unconscious impediments to freedom.

A familiar example is the choice between career and family. We may suppose that accepting job A will probably be a better career move, but accepting job B will probably be better for your family. I ask readers to fill in details so that they do not think the choice trivial or that one option is morally obligatory.

PLENITUDE

Plenitude asserts that all possible types have instances. As Nozick has pointed out, plenitude—“fecundity”—is reflexive—“self-subsuming”—in the sense that one of the possibilities is plenitude itself (NOZICK 1981, 132). In this respect it is like noetic axiarchism.

David Lewis’s Modal Realism explicates plenitude as the thesis that all possible universes exist—although he calls them worlds. I follow Lewis in taking these universes to be spatio-temporally complete. For simplicity of exposition, it is easier to think of these as having the geometric structure of 4D Minkowski space-time.⁵ Each universe is fully determinate at all times, including the future. Hence if there was just the one of them, then reality would be the “block universe” of eternalist theories of Time.

I further assume that the mental is correlated of (metaphysical or physical) necessity with the physical, but, unlike Lewis, I suppose that any conscious mind is extended across many universes. This avoids positing duplicate minds. Hence, what is actual relative to a mind is indeterminate between those universes.⁶

HYPERTIME, THAT IS, TIME

I modify plenitude by introducing hypertime, which I take to be Time, that is true time. The manifest image is of a spatial world that changes with respect to time. Relativity unifies space and time into space-time, with change being reduced to variation with respect to the time-like path of the observer. This is a shift in thinking prefigured by the classical theists’ idea

⁵ Readers can adapt this to incorporate the idea of curved space-time and the six or more extra dimensions of speculative physics.

⁶ Among topics of interest not relevant to this paper is whether the mind-relative actuality is genuine rather than a substitute, the “actual”.

of God surveying past, present, and future like someone on top of a hill seeing the travellers on the road winding round it (BOETHIUS 2001, Book 5). Our experience rebuts this as too static. Our intuition also rebuts it as fatalistic. In response, we may introduce so-called hypertime. (cf. BRIGGS and FORBES 2012). I do so by taking the lesson of Relativity to be the de-coupling of the quantitative from the ordinal aspects of the manifest, common-sense idea of time. The quantitative aspect is measured in seconds years, etc. It has been unified with space, whose measure is in light-seconds, light years etc. The ordinal aspect of time, Time, is that there is a succession of Events, some after others, one of which is Now. I submit that these Events are ordered sequentially as Moments T_0 , T_1 , etc. one of which is Now. I say that all universes of the plenitude are real and endure through all moments up to and including some T_n . Those for which T_n is earlier than Now are said to be *terminated*. That is not to say they are no longer real; they are real but have less span.

What is actual is relative to a mind, being indeterminate between all universes to which that mind belongs, and which have not been terminated (as of Now.) At the macroscopic level this implies that the past (understood as a region of space-time) is determinate, and the future indeterminate except in so far as it is determined by the determinate past. Quantum theory suggests, though, that there is some indeterminacy of the past especially at the very small scale.

The rate of passage of time then corresponds to the difference between the boundaries of the approximately determinate past with respect to successive Moments.⁷

There would be no succession of Moments (so reality would be Eternal) just in case no universes were terminated, contrary to the assumption that in some cases we act with radical freedom. For consider counterparts with exactly similar pasts, who are faced with the sane choice between A and B. Eternal Plenitude requires at least one counterpart to choose A, and at least one to choose B. But they are radically free, so it is possible, even if unlikely, for all of them to choose A.

That some but not other universes have terminated shows that radically free agency is compatible with the natural order: the laws, whether deterministic or otherwise, hold in each universe and agents select some from among those available by terminating the others. There is no multiplicity of

⁷ Just what a mind is conscious of, and why, is beyond the scope of this paper, except to say that anything we are aware of seems determinate.

counterparts after the choice, even though the one remaining continuant of the pre-choice agent extends across many universes with differing futures.

NECESSITY AND UNDERSTANDING

By the Principle of Sufficient Reason, any ultimate way of understanding must be necessary. Not all necessary truths can be understood without further explanation, however.⁸ And merely positing or hypothesising that some proposition is necessary is no explanation. That applies equally to theism, axiarchism, and genuine laws of nature.⁹

We can, however, understand why plenitude is necessary if the correct metaphysics of modality requires the existence of a plenitude and if the correct modal logic is S5, implying that modal status is itself necessary. In addition, there is the above-mentioned reflexive character that some readers might hold explains its necessity.

2. FROM AXIARCHISM TO AGENCY

In this section I state and solve some problems with axiarchism, noting the role of agency in the solutions.

A DILEMMA FOR LESLIE'S VERSION

I shall ignore Leslie's ethical requiredness version, because of the following dilemma.

Either:

1. We rely on consequentialist ethics. In that case, saying that something is ethically required in the absence of a morally responsible agent adds nothing to saying it is the optimal. Hence Leslie's version collapses into optimalism.

Or:

2. The moral order presupposed by ethics itself requires a natural order so that certain kinds of acts tend to have certain kinds of consequences. But this natural order is one of the things axiarchism is supposed to explain.

⁸ Theorems that no mathematician would suggest should be axioms, say Pythagoras', provide obvious examples of necessary truths that both need and have further explanation.

⁹ Genuine laws hold of necessity, as opposed to mere Humean regularities. See CARROLL (2020). It is a matter of further discussion whether this is metaphysical necessity (CARROLL 2020, §8.).

RESTRICTING OPTIMALISM

Derek Parfit's criticisms of axiarchism are directed at the optimalist version, and include the Problem of Evil. More specifically, let us consider those free choices that we ordinarily judge as wrong because selfish. In such cases, I hold that there are conflicting goods, including the ones that we judge to be selfish, in which case we might perhaps defend the thesis that worlds with selfish choices are nonetheless ones than which none are better. It is, however, indefensible to say that every selfish decision in fact has better consequences than the unselfish one would have. That refutes the application of optimalism to free choices. This refutation, however, merely restricts optimalism to those unusual circumstances in which there is a unique best.

THE NOETIC VERSUS CAUSAL DILEMMA

The argument from theory choice shows that their goodness enables us to understand truths that are necessary, or, if contingent, true at all times and places. Variable features cannot, however, be understood without an (efficient) causal explanation, and so require, it seems, *causal* axiarchism. But how, we might ask, can goodness or even Plato's form of the Good bring something about? Here Aquinas' response seems common sense: Goodness is a final not an efficient cause (*Summa Theologiae*, §1.5).

This problem is solved by denying that *goodness* literally causes anything. Instead, we may propose the endurance thesis that *good things*, once they exist, tend to endure, but bad things do not. What counts as a "thing" in this context is a further topic, but for present purposes I shall restrict the endurance thesis to universes and to bundles of universes.

INTEGRATING PLENITUDE WITH AXIARCHISM

Assuming, then, that causal axiarchism cannot explain why good universes exist, an axiarchist should rely on *noetic optimalism* to understand what is the case at Time T_0 . That is the best initial state, with optimalism ceasing to apply thereafter because there is no unique best. There are several rival theses about this initial state:

1. A "perfect being" in the Anselmian sense of a greatest possible being (see MORRIS 1987).
2. An initial act of bringing the universe into existence ex nihilo.

3. Less mysterious, the termination of the non-good universes of the plenitude.
4. The Plenum Bonum, by which I mean the sum of all good universes. The role of plenitude as truth-makers for modal, truths would then have to be revised.¹⁰ Assuming that revision succeeds, we may hold the Plenum Bonum to be understood as being the uniquely best Initial state. It is not, however, best that nothing changes. Instead, optimalism enables us to understand why there is a succession of Moments, with increasing determinacy, resulting in the passage of time.

This section concerns the problems with axiarchism whose solution that requires agency. The next concerns problems with theistic agency that require both axiarchism and either complete plenitude or the Plenum Bonum as an Initial state. Moreover, the Plenum Bonum is a better candidate for the Initial divine body than a complete plenitude of all possible universes including ugly ones. I conclude that we need an integrated account of axiarchism, plenitude and agency.

INSUFFICIENT REASON

The Principle of Sufficient Reason can accommodate radically free acts because the sufficient reason need not be necessary. For, if there are several possibilities than which none is better, then that is a sufficient reason for an agent to have chosen any of them. I take it as true by definition that random events lack a sufficient reason and, hence, they would be counterexamples to even this weakened version Principle of Sufficient Reason. In many cases we may suppose apparently random events have better consequences than the alternative, providing a sufficient reason. In other cases, some divine or diabolic agent may make a choice for reasons we cannot comprehend on a case-by-case basis. This would be providence or its opposite.

This weakening of the Principle of Sufficient Reason to accommodate radically free acts, but not random events, shows why axiarchism must be supplemented by agency, leaving scope for theism.¹¹ I assume that if reality

¹⁰ I propose a fictionalist theory of possible worlds in which the worlds are precisely those entailed by a clear, fictional, principle together with non-fictional truths, such as those made true by the Plenum Bonum. I hold that a recombination principle will do this, as in Armstrong's combinatorial theory (1979). Armstrong does not propose enough factual truths to achieve this, but Plenum Bonum rectifies this problem.

¹¹ I have argued previously (FORREST 2020) against any genuinely chance or random events. In this respect I follow Boethius (2001, Book 5).

is to become more determinate, there are often outcomes neither better than the other. An agent can choose for the reason supplied by the goodness of the chosen outcome.

THE PROBLEM OF UNENDING SEQUENCES

William Rowe (2004) presents an argument that God would have to create the best, or, as I prefer to express it, an argument that the act of creation must be one than which there is no better. There is, however, the prospect of an unending sequence of ever-better possible acts of creation, with the paradoxical conclusion that God must not create at all. Maybe it is proposed that for the sake of creating something good, God should ignore the prospect of what is better. In that case we might reach the equally repugnant conclusion that a good God might create in a way that was good in a mediocre way because of the impossibility of a best. Indeed, if there was a least good possible act of creation maybe its salience would force God to create it.

The same problem holds for axiarchism. If there is an unending sequence of ever better possibilities, then neither optimalism nor maximalism could operate. resulting in no change from the indeterminacy of the *Plenum Bonum*. If, however, we restrict ourselves to saying that what happens is good then we would have to concede that ours might be the worst of all good worlds.

In reply to this objection, I note two ways in which unending sequences of better and better possibilities might arise: the extensive and the intensive. The extensive way assumes that more is better. That holds, I submit, only when the greater number of similar good things allows for variety. Suppose there is a large but finite number—call it a bezillion—of good ways of being a “rational animal”, that is an organism capable of reflection and free action. Then a billion bezillion would seem worse, or at least no better.

The intensive way of proposing the unending sequence is illustrated by the idea that there is no limit to the state of blessedness of a mind, and so, whatever the state there could be a better. This problem is solved by the idea of progress. For instance, consider the possible stages of, say, divine blessedness. They are all real but at Moment T_m there is indeterminacy between all but the first $F(m)$, where if $m < n$, $F(m) < F(n)$. If it be said that progress could always be speeded up, I reply that: (a) the succession of Moments is discrete with none between T_m and T_{m+1} : and (b) it is better to go through the stages rather than skip them.

I anticipate a further response to my reply to the Unending Sequence objection, namely that both the judgement that more is not always better and the judgement that it is better not to skip stages of progress express a preference for one good over another that is neither better nor worse. My rejoinder is that reply assimilates the problem of unending sequences to the previous problem with the Principle of Sufficient Reason: there are competing goods none better than the other, any of which provides a sufficient reason.

THE PROBLEM OF UNFAMILIARITY FOR AXIARCHISM

The chief defect of axiarchism is its unfamiliarity. Anyone who goes around offering axiarchic explanations of every day events would seem as naïve as someone who said they were the will of God. It is not our experience that goodness rules.

This problem is solved by showing that axiarchism is an integral part of agency as we ordinarily think of it, which has, I shall be speculating, both a positive and a negative component. The positive is the way axiarchism results in *narratives*, described below, that provide the context for agency. There is also an over-arching axiarchic narrative comprising: the Initial Plenum Bonum; the tendency of good universes and narratives to endure; and its being for the best that there are choices. The negative aspect of agency is that these choices (volitions) terminate some narratives and hence many universes.

Axiarchism is therefore a component of something familiar, namely agency, which completes rather than replaces it. Hence, it need not be restricted to the optimalist understanding of the Initial State. As mentioned above, the theistic theses (1), (2) and (3) cannot solve the problem of unfamiliarity in this way.

3. PROBLEMS WITH AGENCY, BOTH DIVINE AND HUMAN

Because axiarchism needs supplementing by agency, we might consider whether positing a divine agent renders axiarchism, even Initial Optimism, redundant. In this section, I consider four problems with divine agency, the first requires either plenitude or axiarchism, the second only admits a partial solution, and the last two of which will be solved by the Good versus Good theory of agency, which completes axiarchism showing it is not redundant.

UNDERSTANDING DIVINE NECESSITY

First, though, I note a problem that is soluble using plenitude without axiarchism. Suppose the ultimate explanation is one or more gods who act for valid reasons. Then, by the Principle of Sufficient Reason, their existence and nature must be necessary, which is, in any case, traditional. In our experience, however, agents are not the sort of thing that exists necessarily. Some further explanation is required, therefore, either using axiarchism or plenitude. Using axiarchism, we may follow A. C. Ewing (1966) and say that God exists and seeks the good because it is good there be such an agent. In particular, assuming that Initial Optimism is itself necessary, then anything it entails is necessary. In this case, there is no problem with necessary agents, God or some gods, whose existence is understood by means of Optimism. Moreover, if good things tend to endure and if there is no conceivable reason for divine self-destruction, then in another sense it is necessary that they endure forever.

An alternative way of explaining the necessity of a divine agent is to invoke plenitude and assert that agency and consciousness necessarily arise whenever there is a suitable physical embodiment. Then we could take plenitude as a necessary divine body with which divine consciousness and agency is correlated.

THE THREAT OF ARBITRARINESS

Faced with either a radically free choice or an unending sequence of ever-better possible outcomes, it is, I submit, good that a sentient being aware of the possibilities extends the duration in space-time of that agent's determinate history by making a choice, which explains why that choice is made. But although the choice has sufficient reason and so, by definition, is not random, we may describe it as arbitrary, and wonder why it is morally significant whereas a random event is not.¹²

THE PROBLEM OF THE HUMAN PRECEDENT

We are entitled to posit agency as an explanation only because of the paradigm of human agency. There are, however, several problems that arise

¹² This is not to be confused with the non-random decision to use some random device such as a toss of a coin.

when we extrapolate from the human to the divine case. One of these is that our agency is embodied, in that any physical effects occur because of a bodily movement, of which we are aware by proprioception. A second problem is that the reasons an agent has are based not on the *actual* value of the outcome so much as what *seems* valuable, together with *beliefs* about what is the likely outcome. The third is that what seems valuable is itself relational. That is, it is not what seems valuable absolutely but what seems valuable for the agent in question, or for something else the agent has concern for, such as a community.

Next, there is the problem of contrition, which I distinguish from remorse, which is regret solely due to a mistaken prediction of the outcome—“it all went wrong.” By contrition I mean the judgement that the choice was wrong at the time even assuming the predictions were correct. In a radically free choice whatever outcome is chosen it had a sufficient reason, so why be contrite?

Finally, there is the all too familiar problem of weakness of will. In extreme cases this results in inability to act as intended, e.g. intending not to take a drug you are addicted to. There is a continuum between that case and effortless choice. In between the two extremes, we fail, although free, because we did not “try hard enough” to counter a tendency towards unintended behavior. For example, on a fine summer’s evening, a professor might fail to read and comment on another chapter of a rather boring thesis, using the excuse that the lawn needs mowing.

THE AGENCY TRILEMMA

The *Stanford Encyclopedia* entry on “Agency” (SCHLOSSER 2019) lists three metaphysical hypotheses: the event hypothesis that acts are caused by events that are not themselves acts; the agent hypothesis that acts are caused by agents not by events; and the volition hypothesis that there is a special class of uncaused acts, *volitions*, which begin the processes that are acts in the broader sense. On the volition hypothesis, if an act is radically free, the correlated brain processes would be misdescribed as random if considered in purely neurophysiological terms.

The event hypothesis, which is reductive and naturalistic, denies radical freedom. The agency hypothesis coheres well with an Aristotelian metaphysics in which substances are causes, but that in turn fails to cohere with physics, and especially with the interpretation of Relativity as spatializing

space-time. The volition hypothesis is unsatisfactory if it implies that “the agent is merely the subject or the bearer of volitions” (SCHLOSSER 2019, §3.1) I shall counter this by defending a version of the volition theory in which volitions are *constitutive* of the agent. An additional problem is that volitions are often thought of as causing bodily movements (GINET 1990, 15–22). In that case, either volitions are neurophysiological processes, implying the reductive event hypothesis, or they are not, leading to the familiar worry about how the non-physical/physical causal connection coheres with physics.

The solution to all these problems is abstraction: a simple theory of agency that can both be applied to the complex human situation and used as the precedent for the divine case. My proposed abstract theory of agency could be understood dialectically: bundles of universes form narratives governed by values; these narratives clash; and the good outcome is a persisting agent.

4. THE GOOD VERSUS GOOD THEORY OF AGENCY

The idea is as follows. All things are governed by goodness, but different goods are not always compatible, and, abstracting from some complexities, an act or volition is the choice of one good over another, when neither is better. Moreover, it is good that such acts occur, resulting in agents capable of choosing a coherent narrative.

To state this theory of agency in greater detail, some preliminaries are required.

PHYSICAL PROCESSES, NARRATIVES AND AGENTS

The fundamental laws of nature might turn out to be metaphysically necessary, and hence hold throughout the plenitude, or they might hold throughout the Plenum Bonum. Otherwise, we might suppose that all the universes that are not terminated at the first Moment obey the same laws. Or maybe there are many good laws holding in different regions of space-time. Regardless of these details I assume there are physical processes that are constrained by the laws.

A physical process, together with any sentience that supervenes, is governed, in accordance with axiarchism, by what is good. There might be cases in which the causal processes are overdetermined by the values and laws of

nature, which independently imply the same results. Where that is not so, there might conceivably be processes that are contrary to any good outcome. I assume these either belong to universes terminated at an early Moment or never occur because there is the Plenum Bonum rather than unrestricted plenitude. This leaves the non-trivial cases in which the laws fail to determine the process but axiarchism does, by terminating some universes in which the outcome is not good.

What is good is, I assume, good for something; but if the something is the whole of reality, then it is good absolutely. Otherwise, what is good is relative to some part of the whole, which leads to one type of clash of values. For example, what is good for the predator is not good for the prey. Another type of clash occurs when there are incommensurate goods for the same thing, what is good in one respect might not be in some other, without either being better than the other. By a *narrative* I mean a process for which such incommensurability fails to arise.

A NOTE ON INCOMMENSURATE VALUES

Where there are distinct values, that is respects of goodness, with none objectively better or worse than, or equal to, the others we may rank them subjectively without being objectively mistaken. What is objective is the relation $X \leq Y$ that sometimes holds between values X and Y, namely that either X and Y are of equal value, or X is less valuable than Y. An example of lack of such objective ranking is the comparison between a comfortable life with one in beautiful surroundings.

ON TELE AND FLOURISHING

A familiar idea is that a process can have a telos: that for which it occurs. If the telos is assumed to be an end state, this is too narrow. Instead, we may consider (something with) a narrative that *flourishes* if what is good for it occurs. Unless the process is associated with sentience, we might well deny that there can be something good for it. Many natural processes, such as the paradigmatic example of the acorn growing into an oak tree, would then not be narratives, and only *as if flourish*. That is interesting but of no relevance to this paper.

Because of the competition between different narratives, many fail to flourish. They may also fail because of associated mistaken beliefs about what will promote the values of the narrative.

AGENTS AS POLYTELIC COMPLEXES OF NARRATIVES

I submit that a normal adult human being, or any other agent, is a complex process composed of many narratives, who can flourish in many ways, some other than God—assuming there is a God—might desire.¹³ Some of these narratives are sub-personal, some super-personal and the human situation is not just complex but complicated. Any agent is aware of some of the competing narratives and hence competing tele (ways of flourishing) but, like other things of which we are aware, they do not always appear as they are.

The abstract core of an act is a *volition* interpreted not as an intention to act but as the ranking of different values and hence the cherishing of one narrative rather than some other(s). An action is the resulting behavior in accordance with the non-terminated narrative.

A straightforward case is the choice to act for the sake of self, for some small community, e.g., family, or for some larger one, maybe humanity a whole. But there can be sub-personal narratives as well resulting in it seeming to us that we are “parcel[s] of vain strivings”.¹⁴

5. SOLVING THE PROBLEMS WITH AGENCY

The threat of arbitrariness is partly averted by noting that what was chosen was better for *the agent as it has come to be*, because the rival narratives have been terminated. Hence, the agent may properly be held responsible. This partial solution requires the thesis that although a conscious agent may well remember the distant past, direct awareness is located in an extended present that cannot go further back than attention to a continuing narrative.¹⁵

¹³ I am here assuming that obedience to God is something we give out of love, not because failure to do so prevents our flourishing.

¹⁴ THOREAU (1966): “A Parcel of Vain Strivings Tied”.

¹⁵ This attention is not itself an act, but better described as mental behaviour. In the divine case, I posit a single choice, at the first Moment, of how to rank values, and a single narrative, with unbroken attention to it. The associated divine existential choice is to love in the sense of

This only helps retrospectively. While making the choice, there is the *actish quality* noted by GINET (1990, 11–14), which is the way the decision seems to the agent, and it does not seem like a random event. I grant, however, that when we contemplate some future choice, it is hard to distinguish volition from chance.

The problems of the human precedent are solved, as foreshadowed, by the abstract character of the theory of agency. First consider embodiment. We are embodied in two different senses. One is that a person's continued existence as a person, with consciousness and agency, depends on the continued functioning of a certain organism, the body. The other sense is location of the content of proprioception, with our actions having proprioceptive feedback. Something like the latter sense may be attributed to God, although if we take God to be a perfect being only the good universes would be part of the initial divine body, supporting the Plenum Bonum thesis.

I submit that the problem of God not being locally embodied should be turned around. The problem is how localised processes come to be agents. This is solved by the occurrence of localised values resulting in a multiplicity of narratives in addition to the divine. I propose that a volition is the subjective ranking of some values at the expense of others that are objectively neither better nor worse. As a consequence, an act cherishes some but not other narratives, that is, it promotes their persistence and flourishing. This may be seen as an "existential choice" as to which of various possible future continuants will, in hindsight, be judged the same person as the one choosing.

It could be objected there are often objectively mistaken judgements of what is valuable. Some such cases are judgements others consider silly or morally wrong, which are nonetheless in accordance with what is good for that narrative, say a short hedonistic life or one of unbridled ambition. Others may be cases in which there is no choice made at all, as in cases of addiction or some uncontrollable craving.

Another complication is the possibility of contrition, related to the confused and confusing topic of conscience. It may be understood as the continuance of "ghost" narratives, similar to the terminated ones but involving a change of heart. A later choice to favour the "ghost" is a repentance. Unless we link conscience to divine inspiration, there remains the possibility that someone repents of a choice that we generally agree is noble or virtuous.

agape. Because agents are constituted by their chosen narratives, we may say with St John the Evangelist that God is love.

Weakness of will can be understood by denying that volitions are intentions that cause acts. Instead, volitions are rankings of objectively incommensurable values, but the intention is part of a narrative in which it is fulfilled, which might in some cases be determined, in others (apparently) random, and in others again one of several narratives between which a choice is made. Weakness of will occurs when a genuine intention does not result in the intended outcome. In cases in which the outcome is (apparently) random the chance of the intended outcome is proportional to the proportion of universes in which it occurs.¹⁶

Finally, the Agency Trilemma is resolved by the proposed Good versus Good Theory, which implies that an agent is constituted by narratives and volitions.

CONCLUSION

I have shown how we can integrate the various ways of understanding. Axiarchism and plenitude are combined into the Plenum Bonum hypothesis. Agency is neither reduced to axiarchism nor a competitor, but rather extends and completes it by resolving clashes between different values.

There is an overarching comprehensive axiarchic narrative that includes the Plenum Bonum, the endurance thesis, and its being for the best that there is agency.

I concede, however, that even if we deny the occurrence of genuinely random events the intuition behind the Principle of Sufficient Reason is not fully satisfied because future choices seem too much like random events.

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¹⁶ An insight I owe to Graham Oddie. If there are no genuinely random events but instead the effects of divine or diabolic agents, then ignorance of the details of such providence or anti-providence implies a probability proportional to the number of universes. If, however, there is genuine randomness then there is an objective physical probability equal to that proportion.

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INTEGRATING PLENITUDE, AXIARCHISM AND AGENCY

Summary

I consider three candidates for ultimate understanding: (1) ultimate agency, the familiar idea of understanding the existence and nature of the universe as created by God for good reasons; (2) axiarchism, the initially counter-intuitive idea that goodness is the first cause of contingent reality; and (3) plenitude, the thesis that all possible types of situation are real.

After some initial clarification, I note the problems with axiarchism, and offer solutions. These solutions require the unification of space and time as space-time, and the consequent introduction of what might be called hypertime, but which I take to be true time—Time with an upper case "T". I note how axiarchism and plenitude may be combined into the Plenum Bonum

thesis that all and only good universes are real. Next, I note some problems with agency as an ultimate way of understanding. Finally, I solve these by means of a theory of agency as completing axiarchism, the Good versus Good theory.

Keywords: agency; axiarchism; plenitude; space-time; theism; Time; understanding.

INTEGRACJA PEŁNI, AKSJARCHIZMU I SPRAWCZOŚCI

Streszczenie

Rozważam trzy potencjalne wyjaśnienia ostatecznościowe: (1) ostatecznościowe sprawstwo, czyli znaną ideę, że istnienie i natura wszechświata zostały stworzone przez Boga na podstawie dobrych racji; (2) aksjarchizm, czyli początkowo niezgodną z naszymi intuicjami ideę, że dobro jest pierwszą przyczyną przygodnej rzeczywistości; oraz (3) pełnię, czyli tezę, że wszystkie możliwe typy sytuacji są rzeczywiste.

Po uwagach wstępnych określam problemy aksjarchizmu, a następnie proponuję ich rozwiązania. Rozwiązania te wymagają połączenia przestrzeni i czasu w czasoprzestrzeń, a w konsekwencji wprowadzenia tzw. hiperczasu, który nazywam prawdziwym czasem — czasem przez duże „C”. Wskazuję, jak aksjarchizm i pełnię można połączyć w tezę Plenum Bonum, zgodnie z którą rzeczywiste są wszystkie i tylko dobre wszechświaty. Następnie identyfikuję niektóre problemy ze sprawczością jako ostatecznym sposobem wyjaśnienia. Na zakończenie rozwiązuję te problemy za pomocą pewnej teorii sprawczości dopełniającej aksjarchizm, którą nazywam teorią Dobro versus Dobro.

Słowa kluczowe: sprawczość; aksjarchizm; pełnia; czasoprzestrzeń; teizm; Czas; rozumienie.