

God as Creative-Responsive Love*

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I. Traditional Theism

God is completely impassive – without sympathy or other emotions.

Anselm held that being compassionate and being passionless were both great making properties, and so should be properties of a maximally perfect being. Anselm resolves the apparent contradiction inherent in saying that God is compassionate and passionless by distinguish what is true (a) in our experience and (b) in God's being.

God is compassionate in our experience, but is passionless in his being. This means that God only *seems* to us to be compassionate, but in reality he is not.

Moreover, Anselm (and Aquinas) understand God's seeming to be compassionate to mean that God brings about effects that are the kind of effects that compassionate persons bring about. While inner feeling or emotion may motivate action, God brings about the effect without having the emotional state to motivate his action.

II. Objections To Exclusively Creative Love

If God's love just means God's doing good things (for creatures), then God's love is exclusively creative. There is no sympathetic aspect to God's love.

Aquinas based this in part on Aristotle: "To love anything is nothing other than to will good to that thing." This does not require sympathy or compassion.

- A. If God's love is exclusively creative, then if God loves all beings equally (as the Scriptures appear to teach), then God should be willing equal goods to all people. But people are not equal in having good things. Hence, we would have to conclude that God does not love all beings equally, which is contrary to Scripture.
- B. The idea of exclusively creative love is based on the assumption that all forms of dependence or relativity detract from perfection. But this is incorrect. (1) Promoting the greatest good for all people depends on being informed by the feelings of others and responsive to their needs and interests. (2) The goodness of states of enjoyment depends in part on the condition of those around us. For example, joyful parents whose children are suffering would not be admirable.

III. Dipolar Theism (Process Theism)

According to this view, there are two aspects to God, so that the divine life includes both independence (in the abstract essence of God) and dependence (in the concrete actuality of

* Based on John Cobb and David Ray Griffin, "God as Creative-Responsive Love" in Andrew Eshleman (ed), *Readings in Philosophy of Religion: East Meets West*, 36-42.

God). This applies to other attributes as well. God's omniscience means that God knows everything that is knowable at any given time, but there are unforeseen events, dependent on human decisions and actions, that only become knowable when they happen. So in God there is divine absoluteness and relativity. These co-exist in God.

III. What is Creative-Responsive Love?

A. God's love *includes* creative activity. God's actions include our good actions, by which God is present to us and acting through us.

B. God's love *also includes* responsiveness, to the needs and feelings of created beings.

1. Creative Love as Persuasive: Traditional theism affirms that God is a controlling power and typically then as fully determining history, but process theism emphasizes God's *persuading* us towards open possibilities. Cobb and Griffin make the psychological point that if we truly love someone we do not seek to control them, for example, with promises of reward or threats of punishment. Rather we introduce them to possibilities that they find intrinsically rewarding or not.

2. Creative Love as Promoting Enjoyment: Traditional theism maintains that God is a cosmic moralist, primarily concerned with creatures developing moral behavior. This view marginalizes, if not repudiates, the idea of enjoyment, the enjoyment of human experience. Cf. traditional theism is often coupled with the view that the primary (if not exclusive) function of sex is procreation. Sex solely for enjoyment has been rejected or diminished in significance.

"Process theology sees God's fundamental aim to be the promotion of the creatures' own enjoyment. God's creative influence upon them is loving because it aims at promoting that which the creatures experience as intrinsically good." (Cobb and Griffin, ed. Eshleman, p. 41)

Moral development is important. However, according to Cobb and Griffin, we seek to develop moral qualities in order to maximize the enjoyments of future actualities. So moral development is derived from a more fundamental good or value, the good of enjoyment.

On the process view, God wants us to experience the good of enjoyment but also, in doing so, to promote the good of enjoyment in others.

IV. Masculine and Feminine in God

Cobb and Griffin also claim that traditional theism's emphasis on absolute power and knowledge (and the denial of emotional life in God) has resulted in a concept of God based almost entirely on stereotypically masculine attributes. The process view, inasmuch as it involves the equal importance of relativity and dependence in God, entails a concept of God that integrates stereotypically female attributes. Essentially, process theology aims to view dualities as perfectly integrated aspects of reality.