

sence that our imaginations cannot let go of. It is spurious because it claims to know what is unknowable. To return to C S Lewis (this time with approval). Late in life, he married a woman who was dying of cancer. During his bereavement, in *A Grief Observed*, he reflects on the fact that he has kept no good photograph of his dead wife. If he had done so, he writes, he might have been tempted to recall and love the resemblance of her, rather than the real woman. This thought has implications for religious 'likenesses' as well:

'Images of the Holy easily become holy images – sacrosanct. My idea of God is not a divine idea. It has to be shattered time after time. He shatters it Himself. He is the great iconoclast. Could we not almost say that this shattering is one of the marks of His presence? . . . And most are 'offended' by the iconoclasm; and blessed are those who are not.'⁸

Biblical references are taken from the Jerusalem Bible.

- 1 Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love*, trans by Clifton Walters. Penguin 1966, chap 60.
- 2 Quoted in an interview with Polly Toynbee, *The Guardian*, 20 April 1981.
- 3 C S Lewis, 'Priestesses in the Church?' in *God in the Dock, Essays on Theology*, ed Walter Hooper, Fount Books, 1979.
- 4 Augustine, 'On the Holy Trinity', quoted in Julia O'Faolain and Lauro Martines, *Not in God's Image*, Virago, 1979, p 142.
- 5 Phyllis Tribble, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, Philadelphia 1978; Leonard Swidler, *Biblical Affirmation of Woman*, Philadelphia 1979; Marianne Katoppo, *Compassionate and Free*, Geneva, 1979.
- 6 Pauline Webb, *Where are the Women?* Epworth, London, 1979.
- 7 E L Mascall, *Whatever Happened to the Human Mind?* S P C K, 1980, p 150.
- 8 C S Lewis, *A Grief Observed*, Faber, London 1966, p 52.

The Intelligible Universe

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The Intelligible Universe: A Cosmological Argument, by Hugo Meynell. Macmillan, 1982. pp 153. £15.00

Many philosophers would agree that the Cosmological Argument for the existence of God has been one of the major theistic arguments in the history of philosophy. And some of them actually support it. But ask them to define 'the Cosmological Argument'

and they are likely to become cagey. Most probably they will say: 1) that the Argument tries to prove the existence of God on the basis of the existence of a world or universe; and 2) that the Argument can be found in writers like Aquinas, Descartes, Locke and Leibniz. However: 1) Intelligibly to say that something exists is normally to refer to the existence of something with distinguishing characteristics or properties. To say that there exists a world or universe is to say that there is something which can be described in certain particular ways. So the Cosmological Argument, on the above understanding, is surely an argument for God based on the existence of the world or universe considered as a thing of such and such a kind. Yet that is what the so-called 'Argument from Design' is supposed to be. So what is the difference between the Cosmological Argument and the Argument from Design? 2) The arguments commonly cited as historical examples of the Cosmological Argument are all notably different in various respects. The Cosmological Argument is, for example, often said to be found in texts of Leibniz such as his paper *On the Ultimate Origination of Things*, and in the first three of Aquinas's Five Ways. But Leibniz's essay invokes a principle of sufficient reason not used by Aquinas in the Five Ways. And while Leibniz argues for the existence of a God who is a logically necessary being, Aquinas does no such thing. The Cosmological Argument of Leibniz comes from the pen of a man who accepted the Ontological Argument as you can find it in Descartes. But Aquinas considers an argument that seems to be the same as this, and rejects it. Not surprisingly, therefore, Professor Antony Flew can write: 'Present usage of the expression "the Cosmological Argument"' is most unsatisfactory. There is, apparently, no consensus about either its connotation or its denotation. People do not agree, that is to say, what it ought to mean nor to what it should be employed to refer. Worse still, those who employ the phrase rarely appear to be aware of the extent of this confusion' (*The Presumption of Atheism*, London, 1976, p 53).

Flew proposes that 'the Cosmological Argument' is an expression that should be defined with reference to distinctions made by Kant. The relevant passage comes in the first *Critique*, in Section 3 of Chapter III of the Transcendental Dialectic:

There are only three ways of proving the existence of a Deity on the grounds of speculative reason. All the paths leading to this end either begin with determinate experience and the special constitution of the world of sense-experience and rise, in accordance with the laws of causality, from it to the highest cause existing apart from the world; or they begin with a purely indeterminate experience, i.e. some empirical existent; or abstraction is made of all experience and the existence of a sup-

reme cause is inferred from a priori concepts alone. The first is The Physico-theological Argument, the second is The Cosmological Argument, and the third is The Ontological Argument. There are no more, and more there cannot be.

In terms of this classification, Hugo Meynell's argument is not a version of the Cosmological Argument. As Flew says, if we follow Kant, a Cosmological Argument will rely heavily on the premise that something exists. It will not be concerned with the nature of this something, and its main interest will be questions like 'Why is there anything at all?' or 'Why does the universe exist at all?' But Professor Meynell argues for the existence of God by noting that the world has a nature which forces us to suppose that there is a God. How the world is, not that it is; that is Meynell's real concern. His argument is what Flew, following Kant, would call a version of the 'Physico-theological Argument'.

Meynell's argument can be stated as follows:

- 1 Knowledge if possible.
- 2 The world is nothing other than what knowledge, actual or potential is of.
- 3 The world's capacity to be known entails something about its overall nature and structure.
- 4 The fact that it has such an overall nature and structure is best accounted for on the supposition that it is due to the *fiat* of some one entity analogous to the human mind; which is roughly what is commonly meant by 'God'.

In Meynell's view there must be an explanation of the fact that the world or universe is knowable or intelligible. And the existence of an extra-mundane mind is the explanation. 'The basic structure of the world is not due to our minds; but it is and cannot but be due to something analogous to our minds' (p 119). Here Meynell seems to be echoing Bernard Lonergan, according to whom arguments for God's existence have the following general form: 'If the real is completely intelligible, then God exists. But the real is completely intelligible. Therefore, God exists' (*Insight*, London, 1957, p 672).

If there is no world to know, then Meynell's argument clearly collapses at the outset. But Meynell, of course, is aware of this and, in developing his case, he offers a whole chapter on knowledge and experience. I have little to say about this, except that it is an exceptionally clear treatment of its subject which steers clear both of naive empiricism and of the view (sometimes, though mistakenly attributed without qualification to Wittgenstein) that to know something is just to be able to use language in certain ways. Meynell argues that we can come to know objects and situations as they really are; he holds that one view can be more reasonable than another; he notes that we can frame hypotheses and seek to

explain facts; he observes that 'Knowledge is not possible' and 'There is no truth' are self-destructive. And in all this I think he is right. But I cannot see that he has shown it more reasonable than not to believe in God. And this brings me to the really crucial stage in his argument – the move from knowledge to God as cause of the knowable world.

Meynell's point is that the existence of a knowable world calls for explanation. There must be some reason which accounts for the fact that the knowable world is there. So we can ask: 'Why is there a knowable world?'. But one cannot, says Meynell, answer this question by appealing to a 'natural' explanation. Why not? Because 'it is precisely what is presupposed in the possibility of all "natural" explanation that the question is about' (p 71). Yet we would, says Meynell, have an acceptable answer to the question if we attributed the existence of the knowable world to 'the *fiat* of an intelligent will which conceives all possible worlds, and wills the one which we actually inhabit' (p 70). And: 'We have a very obvious model of the nature of such a being, and the causal relation he is supposed to have to the world, in the capacity each one of us has to envisage a range of possible states of affairs, and to bring one of them about' (p 70). This argument, says Meynell, is similar in structure to typical scientific arguments. It 'proceeds by advancing an explanation for a given state of affairs; and eliminating rival explanations as inadequate' (p 70).

But now consider this extra-mundane intelligent agent whose existence, in Meynell's view, is reasonably postulated as an explanation of the knowable world. One needs to ask several questions about it:

- 1 Is it knowable?
- 2 Can one intelligibly ask why it exists?
- 3 Is there good reason for calling it creative?

It seems that Meynell does suppose that the God for whose existence he argues is indeed knowable. We can know that he exists. We can say that he explains the existence of a certain state of affairs. We can also say that he is able to know and will. Yet Meynell is arguing that the knowability of the world requires an explanation in the nature of something other than the knowable world. In that case, however, it would seem that, in order to be consistent, Meynell must ask why his God exists. And it seems that he must suppose the answer to lie in something other than this God. If the knowability of the world is puzzling, why should a knowable God be any less puzzling? If the world needs to be explained in virtue of its knowability, the same is surely true of a knowable God. One may reply that there has to be an explanation of the fact that there is a knowable world. And I do not here wish to

contest that suggestion. But an explanation of X which shares with X the property by virtue of which X needs to be explained itself requires explanation. Meynell defends himself against the charge that the notion of a self-explanatory being is not incoherent (cf pp 90 f); and I do not wish to say that he is wrong to do so. But it does seem to me that, on his own principles, Meynell has grounds for saying that the God for which he argues is not 'self-explanatory'.

This suggests that Meynell's own answer to the second of the above questions ought to be 'Yes'. If the knowability of the world is a reason for asking why the knowable world exists, then one ought to be able intelligibly to ask why Meynell's God exists. But, passing over this point, is there any reason for supposing that the existence of the God to which Meynell concludes itself raises a question which Meynell ought to consider?

What does Meynell say about the God for whose existence he argues? I think one can reply that, according to Meynell, God is a being with understanding and power, a being to be thought of as like a human mind, a being who can be counted numerically as one of the things that exist. 'There is', says Meynell, 'something analogous to human intelligence in the constitution of the world' (p 68). Later he writes:

There is no reason why one should not ask whether there is reason to suppose that the absolute totality of things and states of affairs . . . includes that which is related to the rest of it much as the human conscious subject is related to his actions and products . . . We are asking whether there is evidence for the existence of a being who understands all possibilities, and who effects all those which actually obtain, much as we ourselves choose to bring into effect some among the possibilities which we have envisaged. (pp 72 f)

But suppose we now ask a question pressed some time ago in this journal by Fr Herbert McCabe O P (cf *New Blackfriars*, October 1980). Suppose we ask not why are things thus and so, but 'Why is there something rather than nothing?' This is the question typical of exponents of the Cosmological Argument as understood by Kant and Flew. And if it is a legitimate question, then it can be asked of the God for which Meynell is arguing. For that God is evidently a thing of some kind.

But is the question legitimate? Meynell does not raise it, but, in view of what he says about God, I presume that he does not think so. He does consider the question 'Why is there a world?' but it should be obvious that this is not the same question. By 'world' Meynell means 'spatio-temporal universe', and one can ask why that exists without asking why anything at all exists, which is

exactly what Meynell is doing. All the same, 'Why is there anything at all?' or 'Why is there something rather than nothing?' (which I take to be equivalent) is, I think, a significant question. And one can complain that Meynell does not ask it.

Philosophers, of course, have often been unwilling to ask why anything at all exists. And one can see how a case might be developed in support of such an attitude. One might, for example, argue that to ask the question is to suppose that 'Something exists' makes sense, which it does not. Expressions of the form '— exists' must, so it has been argued, be construed as saying that some first order predicable (which '— exists' never is) can be attached to a subject: thus, 'President Reagan exists' needs to be analyzed in some such way as 'For some man, M, M is a President of the United States and M is called "Reagan"'. But no such analysis can be given of 'Something exists'. On this view, existence is not some quality or capacity or whatever shared by all things; and from this it follows that existence as such is nothing to worry about.

Another line of thinking might urge that it is just not clear what is being asked if one asks 'Why is there anything at all?'. Is the question one about the purpose of all things? But why suppose that all things have a purpose? Or why suppose that they have any one purpose? Is the question about the efficient cause or the efficient causes of all things? But must not an efficient cause of all things itself be something? And does that question not suggest a vicious regress? Or if all things have several efficient causes, must not all of these be things? And, in any case, are we really clear about causality? More particularly, are we so clear about causality that we can be sure of making sense when we talk about a cause, or about causes, of all things?

There are real problems here. I find it particularly difficult to see what exactly people are worried about when they are worried about the 'sheer existence' of things. And the notion of some causal agent or set of circumstances bringing about the existence of everything is exceptionally bewildering. It would be folly to say otherwise. Yet it does not seem incoherent to say that there might have been nothing at all. Parmenides held that one cannot think what is not; and nothing at all is not anything. It makes no sense to speak as though there could be something called 'absolutely nothing'. But it does seem fair to say that if I can say that something or other exists (which I can, even if '— exists' is never a first-level predicable), then it makes sense to say 'This thing might not have existed'. And one might well wonder why I can say of all distinguishable things that now are that they are. In this sense one might well wonder why I can say that anything exists. In other words, the fact that we can pick out individuals and make true

statements about them is not obviously self-explanatory. And this, I think, is true no matter what individuals are in question and no matter what is truly said of them. And if the existence of no individual is self-explanatory, then why not ask why there are any individuals at all? Why not ask 'Why is there something rather than nothing?' The question is an extraordinary and difficult one; but that is not a reason for refusing to ask it.

So, returning now to Meynell's God, I think one can ask why this God exists. Why is there an intelligent cause like a human mind and able to explain why there is a knowable world? Meynell, in other words, can press his cosmological reasoning further than he has done. Even if we grant him his cause of a knowable world, we can still ask why there is such a cause. Meynell might reply that there is no reason to go any further than a cause of the world's knowability. But given Meynell's way of talking about this cause, given the way he speaks of it as a being alongside others, one analogous to human minds, this reply, I suggest, is questionable. Meynell thinks it arbitrary to say that the existence of a knowable world is a brute fact not calling for any explanation. But is it less arbitrary to say that there is a being alongside others, one analogous to human minds, one who accounts for the knowability of the world, and that this is a brute fact beyond which we cannot go? If we do go beyond it we will find ourselves slipping and sliding about with something less manageable than 'one entity analogous to the human mind' (p 118). But so what?

A likely reply is: 'That would take us away from belief in God, for God is an entity analogous to the human mind'. Yet, while I do not wish to protest against the use of analogy in talking about God, one must avoid the trap of pressing the comparison between God and a single human mind. That trap is one which modern philosophers of religion are particularly prone to fall into, which is why Professor Richard Swinburne, for example, can currently be regarded as a major philosophical spokesman for belief in God though his discussions presuppose that 'God' means a 'person without a body', and 'that God is a person, yet one without a body, seems the most elementary claim of theism' (*The Coherence of Theism*, Oxford, 1977, pp 1 and 99; cf also Swinburne's *The Existence of God*, Oxford, 1979, Ch 5). But while one can see why people say this kind of thing, one must also protest that it is basically inadequate and misleading. Consider, for instance, what the First Vatican Council says about God. It maintains:

There is one true, living God, Creator and Lord of heaven and earth, omnipotent, eternal, infinite in intellect and will and in every perfection. As he is one unique spiritual substance, wholly simple and unchanging, we must acknowledge him to be really

and essentially distinct from the world, totally blessed and elevated above all things which are and can be thought apart from him. (Denz. 1782)

On this view, God simply defies definition or classification. And to talk of him as if he were a member of the world, to talk of him as something alongside all other things, is straightforward nonsense. On this view of God is the cause of all diversity, the cause of all change. Do not be misled by Vatican I's phrase 'one unique spiritual substance, wholly simple and unchanging'. The reference here is not to a single invisible mind or person. The Council's teaching is that God is by nature incorporeal, that God is not some kind of being composed or made up from different elements, that God is not an individual with attributes distinct from himself, as you and I are. Here we have the classical doctrine of divine simplicity according to which no distinction can be made between God and his attributes. In terms of this doctrine God does not *have* knowledge, wisdom, power and goodness. God *is* his knowledge, wisdom, power and goodness. And all these are not, in God, distinct from each other. As Aquinas puts it: 'God . . . is not composed of matter and form (and is) identical with his own godhead, with his own life and with whatever else is similarly said of him' (S.T. Ia, 3, 3). In the words of St Anselm:

But undoubtedly, what ever thou art, thou art through nothing else but thyself. Therefore, thou art the very life whereby thou livest; and the wisdom wherewith thou art wise; and the very goodness whereby thou art good to the righteous and the wicked; and so of other like attributes. (*Proslogion*, XII)

So one can, I think, go further than ask with Meynell 'Why is there a knowable world?'. And this point leads me to ask whether Meynell is justified in speaking of his God as creative, which he does. I have been suggesting that one can ask why there is anything at all; and for a tradition of belief in God the answer to this question is 'God'. On this account God is indeed the Maker of all things, the reason why there are any individuals. On this account, therefore, creation is the bringing into existence of all things. Thus, for example, Aquinas can say that in thinking about creation one is thinking of 'the production of existence entire by the universal cause of all beings, which is God' (S.T. Ia, 45, 3). In Aquinas's view, 'to produce existence absolutely, not merely of this thing or of that sort of thing, belongs to the meaning of creation' (S.T. Ia, 45, 5). 'Properly speaking', he argues, 'to create is to cause or produce the existence of things' (S. T. Ia, 45, 6). According to Meynell, however, 'Divine creativity is to be conceived on the model of human agency. But where human beings can conceive only a restricted set of possibilities, and bring into being one of a still more

restricted set, God is supposed to understand and to be capable of realising all mutually consistent sets of possibilities, and among them all to will to bring about the world which actually exists' (p 70). This suggests that creation is like my act of bringing about some state of affairs – that there is a pen on my desk, for example. But states of affairs are composed of things, of individuals, in relationship. And if it makes sense to say that God is the reason why there is anything at all, he can be said to bring about states of affairs in a way that I cannot. And that is surely the point of the doctrine of creation according to which God is the Maker of all things. This doctrine cannot mean that God brings about states of affairs only as I can. My bringing about a state of affairs, presupposes that there are already things in existence, including myself. God making all things presupposes the opposite of this.

In other words, if creation is the bringing about of all things, then Meynell's account of it, in terms of which it is compared with the bringing about of a situation that is part of a world of things, is inadequate. I take it that Meynell would agree that God creates everything apart from himself; so he would, presumably, reply that his analogy between divine creativity and human agency must not be pressed too far. But in the context of his discussion it does, I think, need to be challenged. Meynell's account of God arguably leaves us with something that someone who believes in creation can think of as created. And that leaves one asking to what extent Meynell's account of creation ought not to be developed further.

I wonder in the end whether Meynell would not have done better to reflect on a version of the Cosmological Argument as defined by Kant and Flew. At one point he implies that he is partly doing this, for he explains that 'what is at issue is the general property of intelligibility which one might say that things have to have to be things, that the world has to have to be a world' (p 83). This suggests that to be is to be knowable, from which one can ascribe to Meynell the view that the fact that there is anything is reason for believing in God. Yet, as I have said, Meynell's God seems to be knowable. And I want to ask why one cannot ask why this knowable God exists. To Meynell he seems a brute fact. To me he is a source of wonder.