

CONTINGENT CREATIVITY AS NECESSARY

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ABSTRACT: The purpose of this essay is to explore the concept of contingency in neoclassical or process metaphysics. Two metaphysical claims are defended in the essay.

KEYWORDS: Necessity; Contingency; Metaphysics

1. INTRODUCTION.

The purpose of the present essay is to explore the concept of contingency as it operates in neoclassical or process metaphysics. In the course of this exploration I will have occasion to summarize neoclassical or process metaphysics in general in that the metaphysical stance in question centers on the dipolar contrast and complementarity between the necessary and the contingent. We will see that eminent reality exists necessarily, but also necessarily has some contingent features or other. The label “neoclassical” is appropriate because, although process thought is not usually thought of as perennial philosophy, its metaphysics is worked out in intimate relation to the tradition.

Various ideas have been proposed as ultimate in the history of metaphysics. The neoclassical or process proposal is to see creativity as the basic concept that is applicable to all of reality. The term “creativity” refers to the unpredictable character of the real whereby causality from the past provides the necessary but not sufficient condition for what happens in the present. Each event is an addition to the definiteness of reality seen as an emergent whole. That is, reality is predictable insofar as it is not creative, but rather mechanical or habitual. Metaphysics exists so as to restore a reticulative perspective whereby we can understand reality as both somewhat predictable *and* creative.

Focus on the most exalted types of creativity should not hide from us its humbler contingent versions that are always there, like the character in Moliere who spoke prose all of his life without realizing it. There is nothing but creative experience, on this view, once the inadequacies of both dualism and reductionistic materialism are in full

view. I will not detail these inadequacies here, but rather assume the ultimacy of creativity and the cogency of panpsychism. I realize that for some thinkers this is quite an assumption to make. For the purposes of discussion here, however, I can only say that the panpsychist view I assume does not commit one to the implausible view that stones feel, only to the claim that there is some degree of self-motion in the microscopic constituents of the stone.

On the view I am defending, it is contingent becoming or contingent creativity that is itself necessary, not any particular becoming or creative act. Here “metaphysics” refers to a priori statements regarding existence, with “a priori” referring not to the complete absence of experience (whatever that might be), but rather to a statement that contradicts no conceivable experience. It is observational falsifiability that distinguishes empirical from metaphysical statements. Metaphysical truths are those that are compatible with any experience in that they are non-contingent. The main difference between contingent and necessary truths is that the former conflict with at least some conceivable experiences. Of course an *allegedly* metaphysical statement may really be empirical and hence contingent, but genuinely metaphysical statements are strictly necessary.

2. SOMETHING EXISTS.

I will cite two examples of metaphysical statements: something exists and God exists. This section will deal with the former statement. I will be claiming that no experience can count against these statements. To say that there might have been *absolutely* nothing is to contradict oneself in that the absolute non-existence whose existence is being nominally imagined would, after all, be *something*. This nonetheless leaves open the possible existence of *relative* non-being, as in the statement that this ear of corn is nothing like that peach. This is merely to say that the two, although existent, are different from each other.

The necessary truths that metaphysics seeks to clarify are highly abstract, but it would be incorrect to conclude from this that they have some sort of ultra-Platonic status devoid of concrete embodiment. Rather, the opposite is the case. Metaphysical truths are concretized in *every* conceivable experience. On the view I am defending, metaphysics is the study of the abstraction “concreteness,” it concerns necessary truths regarding “contingency” as such. Abstract reality is derivative from the ubiquitous world of concrete contingencies.

The task of metaphysics is to describe the necessarily non-empty universe of the common aspects of all states of affairs. Contingency as such could not be unexemplified. It is in this light that metaphysics can be seen as the theory of

contingency as such. Strict nominalism is quintessentially anti-metaphysical because it denies the very distinction between necessity and contingency on which metaphysics is developed. In process metaphysics in particular being is defined in terms of becoming in that “being” refers to what is common in the cumulativeness of several moments of becoming strung together in serial order. In metaphysics we are seeking generic understanding, rather than (as in science) prediction regarding specific contingent definiteness.

Only unconditionally necessary truths are metaphysical in that in this discipline we are not looking for particular, contingent facts, but for the principle of factuality itself. There can be no alternative to contingent alternativeness itself. Once again, the a priori character of necessary, metaphysical truths means that they cannot be derived from special kinds of experience even if they can be derived from *any* experience that is accompanied by reflection.

It should be emphasized that “a priori” is not synonymous with “certain.” Instead, it refers to the necessary, non-restrictive aspect of reality, concerning which we might make mistakes. One way to avoid such mistakes is to keep in mind that a denial of a metaphysical truth (as in “something exists”) is merely verbal and inevitably leads to contradiction, in contrast to contingent truths that can easily be denied without contradiction.

There is no implication here that necessary truth about reality leads to *all* truth about reality. The opposite is actually the case: To see all truth as metaphysical is not to take the unique contribution of metaphysics seriously. Granted, historically there was a tendency in some rationalist philosophers to hyperbolize the degree to which the world could be explained metaphysically. This was, quite frankly, a sort of intellectual imperialism. This does not mean, however, that we should move to the opposite sort of intellectual imperialism that is currently popular whereby the contingent truths discovered by scientists are seen as hegemonic. There is something unstable in both sorts of empire: Metaphysics cannot long survive if it swallows up science and the empirical method will soon falter if it tries to adjudicate metaphysical disputes. Metaphysical truth is only one small portion of all the truth there is, but its modest stature is nonetheless extremely valuable due to its rarity. There is no need to support an exaggerated empirical reaction to exaggerated rationalist pretension.

The position defended here tries to mediate between the rationalist tendency to overemphasize necessity and the empiricist tendency to hyperbolize regarding contingency in that there are both necessary and contingent aspects of reality. This mediation is related to the effort to adjudicate between complete determinism, on the one hand, and complete freedom, on the other. In this regard, causality should be seen

as providing necessary but not sufficient conditions for what happens at the level of concrete singulars.

It is nonetheless understandable why some philosophers have tried to deny the necessary truth of “Something exists.” Once one gets used to denying the existence of this or that particular thing, one can then posit the non-existence of a whole species of things, then whole genera, etc. Some thinkers unfortunately convince themselves that this process of denial can go on infinitely to the point where absolute nothingness...exists. Herein lies the rub. When we think or talk about *it* (absolute nothingness) we thereby contradict ourselves. Indeed, any thinking or speaking about absolute nothingness involves a performative self-contradiction: thinking or speaking about *it* necessarily puts one in an unenviable logical position.

“Something exists” is unfalsifiable in that it is verified at every moment, even when there is an attempted falsification of the claim. It is knowable as true and only as true. It is implied by every true proposition. It is a metaphysical truth because it expresses what all possibilities of existence have in common, both restrictive, contingent, existential truths and non-restrictive, necessary, existential truths, the latter of which will be explored in the next section.

The unintelligibility of absolute nothingness has implications not only for cosmic beginnings, but also for cosmic endings. It might be asked, what keeps the creative advance of the world going on, instead of petering out, so that after a certain moment there would be nothing going on at all? There can be no first actual occasion for the reason that what it *means* to be an actual occasion is to receive influence from the past (toprehend it or grasp it, rather than intellectually apprehend it), and then to exhibit self-motion in decisive response to such influence so as to bequeath such a decision to future actual occasions. Hence, there cannot be a last actual occasion in that what it *means* to be an actual occasion is to be a subject that becomes an object (a superject) for future subjects, a contributor to what comes after. No moment can make itself the last moment in that such a feat would violate what it means to be a moment in the systole and diastole of the processual character of the universe.

These considerations have implications for the God-world relation. A merely creaturely or a merely divine process would explain nothing. The former has no principle of order, no direction to enable creative events to produce anything but meaningless chaos—but the cosmos is not a meaningless chaos. The latter has no content in the sense that God without creatures would be a power-to-do without any doing, as in an omnibenevolent being with no one to love. What could this possibly mean? The upshot here is that the necessary and the contingent are themselves necessary to each other. Or again, the necessity that there be *some* contingent things or

other is entirely consistent with the genuine contingency of these things.

3. THE EXISTENCE OF GOD.

The subject matter of the previous section is not far from the question of theism. The reason why there is a tight connection between metaphysics and natural theology is that the existence of deity cannot be contingent. However, if much of what God would know *is* contingent, then the God in question would have to be quite different from the unmoved mover, pure actuality, changeless, utterly non-contingent God of classical theism. It is not my desire as a metaphysician (in partial contrast to my desire as a philosopher of religion) to get tangled in thorny and divisive religious questions. Instead, I am especially interested in the claim that when one is thinking metaphysically one is very close to explicit thinking about God.

Consider the following modal version of the ontological argument:

1. Modality of existence is a predicate.
2. There are three (and only three) modes of existence:
 - a. impossible (cannot exist);
 - b. contingent (may or may not exist);
 - c. necessary (must exist).
3. 2b contradicts the logic of perfection.
4. Therefore, the existence of God—the greatest conceivable being or a perfect being—is either impossible or necessary (preliminary conclusion).
5. The existence of God is not impossible (conclusion from other theistic arguments, including the argument from religious experience).
6. Therefore, the existence of God is necessary, or, at the very least, the non-existence of God is inconceivable (ultimate conclusion).

Because the ontological argument is probably the most analyzed and criticized argument in the history of philosophy (!), my aim is obviously not to deliver a definitive version of the argument, nor even to defend each of the premises (although in a different context I would certainly be willing to do so), but rather to make a few modest points regarding the role of contingency in the argument.

The key insight in the argument can be found in step 3 regarding the great Anselmian discovery that contingent existence and perfection are mutually exclusive. It is this discovery that the greatest conceivable could not have merely causally conditioned existence, or a merely possible existence, or could have something (e.g., evil) prevent its existence, that is noteworthy. It is this discovery that leads to the preliminary conclusion at step 4, which follows from steps 1-3. If step 2 is correct that

there are 3 and only 3 modal alternatives, and if, in the divine case, one of these drops out (contingent existence), then one can legitimately conclude that God's existence is either impossible or necessary.

I can easily understand why someone might want to rest content with the argument at step 4 without going any further to steps 5-6. The preliminary conclusion in step 4, after all, is quite an accomplishment in that it helps us to clarify the theistic question as a properly metaphysical one and not a scientific one amenable to contingent empirical corroboration or falsification. Or again, up to step 4 the ontological argument is not so much an argument for the existence of God as an argument that attempts to clarify the theistic question regarding the contrast between the necessary and the contingent.

It will be noted that I refer to the ontological argument, not the ontological proof. The latter designation demands too much, given the fact that the argument is located within a highly contested dialogical context (despite its appearance as a deductive argument). It is understandable that the defender of the argument is usually in the witness box, but step 4 makes us aware of the fact that it is also understandable to engage in friendly questioning of the argument's opponent: exactly what is impossible about the existence of God?

Regarding step 5, along with most process philosophers I think that the God of classical theism *is* impossible for various reasons. I will cite two infamous ones. The classical theistic God (who is omnipotent, omniscient, and omnibenevolent) would be incompatible with the existence of evil in the world; but there *is* evil in the world; therefore there is no classical theistic God. And second, the classical theistic God is omniscient in the sense that this God is said to know, with absolute assurance and in minute detail, the outcome of what are (at least from a human point of view) future contingencies; hence this sort of knowledge is in disequilibrium with both future contingency and the possibility of human freedom; but human freedom seems to be required for practical life, on the process/pragmatic view, as in holding people responsible for their actions, in contrast to the determinist view; therefore, there is no classical theistic God.

I realize that these two problems are notoriously difficult. My aim here is to indicate why I think it is understandable that neoclassical or process theists, along with many agnostics and atheists, hold that the God of classical theism is impossible. That is, if we are to make progress regarding steps 5-6 in the above argument, it is crucial to develop a concept of God that avoids the contradictions found in classical theism. Once the contingency of the existence of God is eliminated as a logical possibility, intellectual space is opened up for a careful consideration of a concept of God that is logically possible; and, if possible, then necessary, via the modal logic of the ontological

argument.

4. DIPOLARITY.

The role of contingency in neoclassical or process metaphysics is nonetheless more important than the previous section would seem to indicate. Very early in the history of philosophy a certain bias became entrenched wherein one pole of dipolar contrasts was favored at the expense of the other pole. To cite just two examples: being was favored over becoming and necessity was favored over contingency. These biases seem to have been due to at least two different factors. One was the discovery in ancient Greece of pure mathematics and the understandable enthusiasm for very abstract ideas that resulted from this discovery. The other was a certain fear and despair regarding the vagaries of concrete living. Because a human being's future is always uncertain, and because individual human beings and even human institutions are fragile and ultimately die, an attack on change and contingency resulted, as the following simple diagram indicates:

Being (good)	-	Becoming (evil)
Necessity (good)	-	Contingency (evil)

The roots of this monopolar prejudice are complex, but it seems that one of the motives behind it is a sort of escapism. We have seen previously that becoming itself does not become and does not pass away, nor is contingency itself contingent. Here I am calling attention to the hegemonic monopolarity of the history of metaphysics that is best countered not by a competing monopolarity wherein change is seen as superior to stability and contingency is seen as better than necessity. If "necessity" is a term of laudation and "contingency" implies denigration, then certain crucial features of reality, in general, and divine reality, in particular, are lost. What is necessary is that contingency have instances, hence it makes sense to try to improve on traditional monopolarity by paying sufficient attention to *both* the necessary *and* the contingent, as the following more complex diagram indicates:

Being (either positive or negative)	-	Becoming (either positive or negative)
Necessity (either positive or negative)	-	Contingency (either positive or negative)

The terms on the right side of this diagram can, in fact, involve negative features

like fickleness, fragility, or undependability. Monopolar metaphysicians thus commendably avoid these negative features, but they pay a price for their style of avoidance. They miss out on the positive features of becoming and contingency, like sensitivity, responsiveness, adaptability, sympathy, and the like. Likewise, monopolar metaphysicians rightly notice the positive features that are often associated with the terms on the left side of the diagram, like stability, dependability, solidity, etc., but they pay a price for failing to notice the negative features that can also be associated with the terms on the left side: wooden inflexibility, mulish stubbornness, inadaptability, unresponsiveness, and the like. The task when thinking carefully about the concept of God is to attribute all excellences to God (both left *and* right sides) and not attribute to God any inferiorities (both right *and* left sides).

It is no accident that there should be accidents and it is predictable that unpredictable, contingent events will never cease. These claims are true regarding reality generally, but also regarding the divine case. There is a famous Hartshornian distinction in neoclassical or process metaphysics between *existence* and *actuality*. The former refers to the idea *that* God is necessarily, whereas the latter refers to *how* God exists from moment to moment. In short, God's actuality is contingent even if God's existence is necessary. Whereas the ontological argument tries to establish that God's existence is necessary, on the neoclassical or process appropriation of the argument (in contrast to Anselm's classical theistic appropriation of it), God's actuality is contingent due to previous divine decisions, the decisions of creatures that affect God, chance mutations, and many other factors that cannot in principle be predicted beforehand due to ubiquitous partial creativity.

In a way, contingency includes necessity due to the asymmetrical character of temporal process. It makes sense to say that I am causally affected by what happened to me yesterday, but several difficulties arise when I say that I am now causally affected by what might happen to me tomorrow. This is because the outcome of future contingencies is not here yet to exert causal influence. The term "necessary" in the usage favored here refers to the inevitability of some contingencies or other being decided at each instant, but which ones? God's existence is present in all possible worlds or in none of them, given the incompatibility between divine perfection and contingency of existence. But God's actuality is pervasively affected by the contingent, otherwise divine knowledge of creaturely contingencies and divine love for creatures whose lives are dominated by contingencies, like illness and premature death, would be unintelligible. The necessary refers to what all contingencies have in common.

The ancient saying *Deus est caritas* is obviously religiously rich, but it is also a metaphysical claim that is understandable only if divinity is the supreme instance of

relational existence that is affected not by this or that case of sentient reality, but by all of them. The following triad points out the grave defects in the classical theistic God who is devoid of any contact with contingency or responsive love:

X loves Y.

Y, who previously did not suffer, starts to suffer.

X remains strictly unmoved by Y's suffering.

If X refers to God, and Y refers to creatures, the need for a revised or neoclassical concept of God becomes apparent. It is one thing to claim that God's existence is necessary, but to claim that God is necessary in every respect is to create all of the contradictions and inadequacies for which classical theism has become infamous over the past three centuries.

God is both necessary and contingent. But these contrasting predicates apply to different aspects of the divine nature, hence the principle of non-contradiction has not been violated. This is the neoclassical or process metaphysical doctrine of dual transcendence. In effect, neither necessity nor contingency have been properly understood in the history of metaphysics, on my view. The tendency in classical theistic metaphysics, once the importance of both necessity and contingency is noted, is to conclude to some version of cosmological dualism, as in the belief that God, or what is metaphysically primary, is necessary, whereas the creatures, or what is secondary, are contingent. But it is a mistake, I think, to say that the relationship between the contrasting poles necessary and contingent is a mere conjunction designated by "and." Rather, the contingent contains the necessary. This is a version of the Aristotelian principle that the concrete or contingent contains the abstract or necessary, respectively. Hartshorne calls this the *principle of inclusive contrast*.

5. ULTIMATE CONTRASTS.

Ultimate or metaphysical contraries (not contradictories) consist in two poles that contrast with each other, but which nonetheless stand or fall together. One such contrast is that between necessity and contingency. Though these polar opposites are ultimate or metaphysical, they do not have an equal status. Contingency is the inclusive pole, necessity the included one. That is, to suggest that there are ultimate dualities is not to defend dualism in that contingent, concrete occasions of experience (and abstraction away from these) constitutes the whole of what is. Likewise, being marks what is permanent in the flux of becoming. This is true even in the divine life where God *always changes*, with both words crucial.

The principal intellectual challenge to the view I am defending here is determinism, which tries to explain away temporal asymmetry by replacing it with bi-conditional necessity and an aggressive version of necessary *and sufficient* conditions for everything that happens. Granted, a cause is a *sine qua non* that is required for a later event, but in its full actuality or concreteness an event is at least partially contingent. This is why an event depends on antecedent events, yet is largely independent of subsequent ones. This does not mean that the future cannot be predicted, but such prediction must take the character of statistical generalization rather than algorithmic assurance in minute detail. In principle we cannot know the future in detail, whereas if we are ignorant of the past such nescience is due to lack of epistemological industry or accidental lack of evidence. It is a vain hope to think that if we discovered the “real causes” of things we could explain and predict *everything*. Present creative experiencing is basic.

Regarding deity at least two mistakes plague monopolar classical theism. First, necessity has been given an honorific status not given to contingent, creative, synthetic experiencing wherein the many causal influences from the past are brought together in a novel way in the present. And relatedly, necessity *simpliciter* has been used to designate deity, in contrast to the dipolar effort to find the appropriate place for both necessity and contingency. There is no need to make pessimism a metaphysical axiom by insisting that causes have to be greater than their effects if reception of causal influences from the past and advancing beyond them itself is a creative, progressive effort. The contrasting deterministic view largely depends on confusing a difference in degree between high and low levels of experiencing with a difference in kind between mind and mindless, inert matter, the latter of which is amenable to mechanistic and deterministic explanation.

Necessity can only be discovered in what is always found in the contingent. Even in the divine case, necessary existence is an everlasting series of contingent, temporal states. There just is no dualism of necessary things versus contingent things, only necessary constituents of a series of contingent events. The class of this series cannot be empty. The principle of inclusive contrast is supported by the following consideration: If we assume that “X is necessary and Y is contingent” is true, then this truth itself is contingent rather than necessary due to the latter part of this claim. As before, the contingent contains the necessary, but not vice versa. Classical theistic worship of the necessary aspect of deity *as* deity was a type of idolatry allied with a similar mistake: etiolatry (worship of causes) in contrast to neoclassical or process thinkers’ worship of *both* eminent activity *and* supreme passivity.

On the neoclassical or process view, modality is both temporal and ontological.

This is related to the discovery that theism either involves hopeless contradiction or it points to a necessary truth. That which is necessarily always is, that which is contingently happens at a particular time. The past is wholly fixed and is no longer open to decision; and the future is a mixture of the already settled (in very abstract terms) and of possibilities open for literal decision (where some are cut off and rejected while others remain). Statements regarding contingent things must specify the temporal stage within which they are alleged to hold. The claim that neoclassical or process metaphysics involves ontological as well as merely verbal necessity, as well as ontological as well as merely verbal contingency, positions us well to steer a moderate course between the claim that *everything* is necessary and the claim that strictly speaking nothing is necessary.

God's existing necessarily does not conflict with the idea that divine existence proceeds by way of a series of concrete states or experiences that in themselves are contingent. The necessity here is equivalent to the claim that the class of divine experiences could not be empty. By contrast, *we* are contingent both in terms of existence and actuality. We are contingent through and through. But even God's concrete experiences are contingent in that they involve feeling of (divine or creaturely) contingent feeling.

The idea that *all* existential statements are contingent is problematic for several reasons. One of these is that some existential statements are impossible if they contain contradictions. Existential contingency is a distinct way of existing (in contrast to existing necessarily) rather than a redundancy. The necessity of God's existence, as we have seen, does not have to apply to the entire divine reality. The necessity deals with the very abstract characteristics that all contingencies have in common, whereas the contingent deals with the most concrete truths or entities. Indeed, competitiveness is the key to contingency in that what it means to be a contingent truth is that it could have been otherwise if some other decision had been made or some other factor had gotten the upper hand.

6. THE PERVASIVENESS OF CONTINGENCY.

From the above it should be clear why it is legitimate to claim that, despite the necessity of something existing and of deity existing, contingency is pervasive. This realization is crucial for several religious reasons, as in the fact that on a neoclassical or process view (wherein divine omnipotence is denied), widespread suffering in the world is an understandable result of widespread contingency and the inadvertent clash of conflicting freedoms. For example, if A chooses to go to point X at time Y and if B chooses to go to point X at time Y, the resultant crash at X at time Y might not be

anyone's fault. In different terms, there is no exact or ultimate "why" for the contingent in its somewhat arbitrary and not strictly deducible character, contra the doctrine of sufficient reason.

From the pervasiveness of contingency, however, we should not go so far as to deny altogether the concept of necessity or attempts at rational demonstration. The contingent and the necessary are hardly like oil and water or attempts to bind contingent human emotions to the fetters of Euclid, or again, like the attempt to submit the waters of Grasmere Lake to mathematical analysis. For example, the thinker on whom the present essay relies most heavily, Charles Hartshorne (especially his *Creative Synthesis and Philosophic Method*, but other works as well), was not only the person most responsible for the rediscovery of the ontological argument in its modal form, but also an author of two books in empirical science that emphasize the experiential and the contingent. One of these books is still consulted widely by ornithologists. There is much that militates against the view that the formal or the necessary dominates his philosophy, not least of which is the importance placed in his thought on religious experience (see step 5 in the modal version of the ontological argument given above). In fact, Hartshorne's major complaint against the British empiricists was that their thought was ironically insufficiently empirical.

The pervasiveness of contingency in neoclassical or process metaphysics is not meant to hide the crucial role for the formal/necessary. Three alternatives should be considered: (1) there are no necessary truths; (2) there are necessary truths, but we cannot in principle know them; and (3) there are necessary truths and it makes sense for us to try to know them. A major problem with the first alternative is that on its basis not only does "necessary" have no application, but "contingent" also loses its meaning. The two terms are correlative and can only be defined in terms of each other. Likewise, if the second alternative were correct then when we speak not only of necessary truths, but also of contingent ones, we would not know what we were talking about, once again due to the fact that "necessary" and "contingent" are correlative terms. The most defensible alternative is the third one. This option points us toward those features that would have to be found in any possible world (necessary truths); it also helps us to secure an understanding of the contingent.

Necessary truths have developed a bad name because of certain historical mistakes, as in the assumption that necessary truths have to concern *eternal* realities that are beyond time altogether, rather than being concerned with *everlasting* realities that endure through all of time. The eternal is so abstract that it cannot have internal relations with that which becomes. Another mistake that has given necessary truths a bad name concerns confusion between the necessity of a proposition and our knowledge of it. Our knowledge of a necessary truth, if we have such, is not itself

necessary but contingent. A third mistake is the dangerous assumption that if one does know a necessary truth one can then deduce contingent truths from the necessary ones. But this would end not only creaturely creativity, but also process itself. Even with knowledge of necessary truths under one's belt, one would still have to await the outcome of contingent events. It is one thing to know *that* a decision must be made, another to know which decision.

If God's knowledge of creatures is a type of prehension, a feeling of the creature's feelings, then it would not be possible for God to know the future feelings of creatures if they depend on at least partially free decisions not yet made. The ancient view of the issue in the famous sea-battle example seems to be that propositions regarding future contingents are neither true nor false, but indeterminate. The main alleged problem with this view is that it violates the law of excluded middle.

But this law need not be violated. The indeterminacy of the future is to be represented not in the truth-value of propositions, but in three different predicates relating to the future itself (*de re* modality rather than *de dicto*). For example, for any event causal conditions either require it (will be), exclude it (will not be), or leave it undecided (may or may not be). These three alternatives exhaust the logical possibilities. If any one of these is true of the event, the other two are false, thus preserving the law of excluded middle. The region of "may or may not be" is quite large, even for God, and cannot be reduced to "will be" or "will not be" merely by virtue of knowledge of *some* truths that are necessary.

To altogether abandon the effort to discover the necessary aspects of reality is also to give up on the effort to understand the contingent and emergent aspects of reality, which have their full sense and definition only in relation to the necessary. But because universal agreement is not possible within any area of philosophy, including metaphysics, our very efforts to persuade each other of what we take to be necessary truths have a contingent character. That is, the effort to defend belief in necessary truths is not to be equated with the quest for dogmatic certainty in epistemology or with essentialism.

The twin evils of ontolatry (worship of being) and gignolatry (worship of becoming) can be avoided in a judicious theory of being and necessity as aspects of becoming and contingency, respectively. The aforementioned distinction between eternity and everlastingness is an attempt to avoid monopolarity. Indeed, being and necessity have been more insightfully explored in the history of metaphysics than the correlative concepts becoming and contingency. My hope is that the present essay, in which God is seen as immutably mutable and as the greatest conceivable being who everlastingly becomes, helps to remedy this imbalance.

Pervasive contingency is opposed not only by those who explicitly defend necessitarian determinism, but also by classical theists who nominally admit contingency, yet who implicitly affirm determinism or who should be determinists given their muscular version of omniscience. To claim that God knows *everything* that will occur in the future with absolute assurance and in minute detail is to fall into predeterminism. A more defensible version of omniscience would claim that the greatest knower would know past actualities as already actualized, present realities in their presentness (subject to the laws of physics), and future contingencies *as contingent*. To claim to know a future contingency as already actualized is not an exhibition of the greatest knowledge. In this regard, the neoclassical or process God is not “ignorant” of the future if future contingencies are not here yet to be logically known. Or again, the tyrant God of classical theism is at odds with chance in reality in that all supposedly chance events would ultimately be the result of God’s omnipotent will. But there *are* chance events in reality (as detailed in quantum physics and evolutionary biology), hence there are good grounds to doubt the existence of the classical theistic God.

7. A CONCLUDING IRONY.

I would like to close by noting a certain irony in the project I have presented. On the one hand, I have characterized the contribution of metaphysics as “modest” and “unique” in that it deals with only a “small portion” of all the truth there is. This *deflationary* tendency is due to the facts that metaphysical truth is necessary truth and most of what is true deals with the enormity of, indeed with the sublimity of, the contingent. On the other hand, although I have concentrated on only two metaphysical claims, they each have far reaching consequences, which my critics will no doubt see as *inflationary*.

First, if the claim “Something exists” is, as I allege, necessarily true, then we are rescued from a worldview in which *everything* is contingent. In this regard we are in a position to reach rapprochement with several other implicitly metaphysical traditions from around the world. These views are metaphysically incompatible with absolute or “oukontic” nothingness and each seems to logically entail the claim that necessarily something exists. There is an infinite power of existence in the depth of things, a metaphysical backbone for a global *philosophia perennis*.

This widespread agreement obviously does not in itself justify the claim that “Something exists” is necessarily true, but it does help to counteract the widely held thesis that metaphysicians are all over the map and that no general agreement can be found in this discipline. Sheer non-being (in Greek, *ouk on*) is unintelligible such that any logical system presupposes non-emptiness in its universe of discourse. Indeed, non-

emptiness is a requirement of logical coherence. Another way to put the point is that “There is something” is not one thesis among other happenstance theses, but a presupposition for having theses at all. Or again, without the realist assumption of a primary icon, we fall hopelessly into solipsism.

The world of *esti* or “it is” is always instantiated, but it is instantiated by contingent natural entities of various kinds. “The world is” is not contradicted by the claim that there are mutable and contingent entities within the world that is. The idea that absolute nothingness exists is thus incoherent even as the description of a possible world in that there is no way this claim could possibly be known or determined to be true or false. The insight here is not refuted by some (but not all) contemporary physicists who argue that the natural world came from “absolute nothingness” through a quantum tunneling event in that a quantum vacuum is *not* absolute nothingness, but a very unusual somethingness.

Second, of course none of these considerations in themselves entail theism or the deification of necessarily existing reality, hence the need for the ontological or some other theistic argument or for fideistic commitment in order to defend the reasonableness of theistic belief. On the basis of a neoclassical use of a modal version of the ontological argument, however, the necessity of *some* world existing and God’s necessary existence do not really differ; the contingencies of this particular world need not exist, but *some* world contributing to a dipolar God has to exist. I would like to dissuade those who are skeptical of, or perhaps even hostile to, theism that my purpose here is not to offer the supposed consolation dispensed by classical theism, as in the promise of personal immortality or the anodyne contained in the alleged assurance that everything will turn out well in the end. Due to pervasive contingency, life is tragic both for us and for God. No doubt the classical theistic objection will be that the neoclassical or process view is problematic because it leaves human existence in too fragile a state. The proper response should be to admit that human existence *is* fragile, once again due to pervasive contingency, therefore there is nothing wrong with noting this fragility. That is, human existence is not *too* fragile but fragile and hence very often tragic.

Nonetheless there is *some* consolation that comes from neoclassical or process metaphysics, in addition to the intrinsic value found in an accurate description of the real in its most abstract aspects, in its necessary and contingent features properly understood. This consolation is located against the backdrop provided by the process commonplace that the real root of tragedy is not found in the conflict between good and evil (although this conflict is real enough and the source of much grief), but in the transitoriness of contingent good. Momentary pleasure or virtue is gone almost as soon

as it arrives, unless, of course, there is someone with an accurate memory and moral sensitivity to vicariously keep it alive. Human memory, however, is notoriously attenuated and sieve-like, in contrast to divine memory. God lives on even when we are gone, hence any immortality that might be available consists in being remembered by such an omnibenevolent being. Some of us do not wish for more than this.

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