

II: There Is an Uncaused Entity

4: Provisional Statement of the Argument

Introduction

The argument that there is an uncaused entity which I propose at the end of this chapter is provisional in the sense that it must be completed by points considered in chapters five to seventeen. In the first two sections of chapter five I try to establish two necessary and especially difficult steps in the argument. In part three—chapters six to thirteen—I offer an exposition and criticism of leading modern and contemporary philosophic alternatives to the position, which I defend, that there is a sound argument for the existence of an uncaused entity. Part four—chapters fourteen to seventeen—includes a reflection upon and a clarification of the meanings of the words used in saying that there is an uncaused entity which causes other states of affairs to obtain.

The word “God” has many meanings. The argument I propose here concludes that there is an *uncaused entity*. In the argument itself I do not use the word “God” at all. In the final section of chapter five I distinguish various meanings of the words “God,” “god,” and “gods.” Whether one who accepts the soundness of the argument that there is an uncaused entity will regard it as establishing that God exists will depend upon what he means by “God.”

I do not claim that the argument I propose here was developed by autonomous reason. I think that in my own childhood experience, reconstructed in chapter two, some nonformal reasoning was prior to faith. But I doubt that I would have arrived at the present formulation, even though I think it articulates my earliest reasoning, except in the light of faith. More-

over, readers familiar with Thomas Aquinas's treatise *On Being and Essence* might notice similarities between the present argument and one which he proposes.¹

Religious authority and the opinions of previous thinkers do not settle anything in philosophy, since philosophy seeks to test beliefs, not to proceed from them. But the argument I propose does not appeal to authority. The subjective genesis of an argument and its logical force should not be confused. As Peter Achinstein notes, many philosophers of science distinguish between the contexts of discovery and of explanation:

Questions pertaining to the discovery of a hypothesis are empirical matters best left to the psychologist. Questions pertaining to the justification of a hypothesis once it is discovered are matters for philosophical scrutiny; it is in this context that the scientist reasons and that his reasoning can be appraised.²

While Achinstein insists that similar reasoning can appear in both contexts, he does not reject this useful distinction. It surely applies to philosophical inquiry and argument as well as to science. If one keeps this distinction in mind, one will avoid the fallacy, often committed in philosophical debate, of impugning arguments and positions because of their suspect origins.³

Cosmological argumentation originates in wonder at the reality of the world around us. This wonder is expressed by questions, and one important difference among cosmological arguments is the diverse questions from which they begin. To forestall confusion, it will help to consider some questions which are similar to, but distinct from, the question from which the argument I propose begins.

J. J. C. Smart examines some versions of cosmological argumentation and comes to the conclusion that all of them involve irremediable logical faults. Yet, while he sees no difficulty in supposing that particular entities might exist without an ultimate explanation of their existence, toward the general question "Why should anything exist at all?" Smart expresses a different attitude:

Logic seems to tell us that the only answer which is not absurd is to say, 'Why shouldn't it?' Nevertheless, though I know how any answer on the lines of the cosmological argument can be pulled to pieces by a correct logic, I still feel I want to go on asking the question. Indeed, though logic has taught me to look at such a question with the gravest suspicion, my mind often seems to reel under the immense significance it seems to have for me. That anything should exist at all does seem to me a matter for the deepest awe. But whether other people feel this sort of awe, and whether they or I ought to is another question. I think we ought to.⁴

Smart adds that this raises a further problem, "What sort of question is this question, 'Why should anything exist at all?'" Absolutely excluding as illogical an interpretation after the manner of a cosmological argument, Smart concludes: "All I can say is, that I do not yet know."⁵

Smart's remarks may have been inspired by some similar thoughts of Wittgenstein, who rejects "I wonder at the existence of the world" as a misuse of language, but who nevertheless regards such a sentence as a futile attempt to express something both inexpressible and important.⁶ Martin Heidegger also regards as important the question "Why are there existing entities, why is there anything at all, rather than nothing?" Like Smart, but for other reasons, Heidegger rejects treating this question as a point of departure for an argument that God exists.⁷

The wonder at being which is thus expressed by contemporary philosophers already found expression in Leibniz's version of the cosmological argument for the existence of God. Leibniz maintains that the present state of the world raises two questions: *how* the world came to be as it is, and *why* there is a world rather than no world. The first question, Leibniz thinks, can be answered by a description of the previous states of the world and of how the world as it is developed from those earlier states. But the second question must be answered by reference to a being beyond the world and all its successive states. If one asks why the earth exists and is told that it was spun off from the sun, one can go on to ask why the sun itself exists. Wonder at being is finally put to rest only if the question "Why is there a world rather than no world?" is answered by saying that there is a cause of the world, God, who exists of himself. Since he exists of himself, God needs no cause; thus the question "Why does God exist?" can be answered: "Because God is God." This answer prevents further questions.⁸

The questions raised by Smart and Heidegger on the one hand and by Leibniz—and perhaps Wittgenstein—on the other are not exactly the same. Smart and Heidegger ask why *anything* exists, while Leibniz asks why the *world* exists. To ask why anything exists rather than nothing presupposes that it could have been true that nothing at all exists; to ask why the world exists assumes at most that the world might not have existed. The first question is peculiar in ways in which the second is not.

For example, it has been plausibly argued that the supposition that nothing exists is logically coherent. But if nothing exists, it seems to follow both that the proposition that nothing exists is true, and that there is no such proposition. The latter would follow because, no matter what one thinks is necessary for there to be a true negative proposition, clearly something must exist if there is to be any proposition at all.⁹ Again, Heidegger entertains the supposition that nothing at all might exist, but at the same time he takes for granted principles of existing entities—namely, Being (which for Heidegger is

not God and is not any existing entity) and Man. Man, Heidegger holds, constitutes the ontological space in which existing entities gain and have their actuality.¹⁰

Thus even if the question “Why is there anything rather than nothing at all?” is not meaningless, still it seems to involve a presupposition from which one cannot think consistently except, perhaps, by positing ontological principles which are neither existing entities nor reducible to existing entities.

If one assumes only that the world, including one’s own thinking, might not have existed, one can suppose that if such were the case the truth about the situation would be known to God. This supposition, of course, is compatible with an attempt like Leibniz’s to explain the existence of the world by reference to God.

Thus the argument I propose here does not begin from the question “Why is there anything?” In fact, I do not even set out from the question “Why does the world exist?” If one assumes that the world is all there could be, then the latter question becomes equivalent to the former and shares its peculiarities. However, if one assumes with Leibniz that there could be something other than the world, then an argument like his from the world to God is question-begging, because “world” in Leibniz’s question includes everything but God, and God according to Leibniz is necessarily existent if he is possible.

Instead of the existence of something rather than nothing or of the world rather than no world, I take as point of departure a particular state of affairs, for example, someone reading some sentence printed in a book entitled *Beyond the New Theism: A Philosophy of Religion*. I call this state of affairs “SRS” (that is, “someone’s reading a sentence in this book”). Sometimes, as now, SRS is an existing state of affairs, sometimes not. The question is, Why is SRS an *existing* state of affairs?

Smart points out that questions of this sort about particular objects are perfectly legitimate, but he thinks they also are easily answered. He suggests, for instance, that one can ask why a certain table exists, and answer the question by saying that a certain carpenter built it.¹¹ It seems to me that if this sort of answer would do, then all questions of the form “Why does *x* exist?” could be answered by specifying the relationship of *x* to other things in the world, and the question “Why does the world exist?” would be nonsensical in the same way that the question “Where is the world located?” is nonsensical.

But Smart’s answer will not do. The existence and work of the carpenter who made the table only partially explains why the table *began* to exist. Once the man did his job, perhaps he died of a heart attack brought on by the exertion, yet the table still exists. Smart himself holds that questions of the form “Why does *x* exist?” are legitimate because statements of the form “*x*

exists” are not logically necessary. Clearly, a contingent entity does not acquire logical necessity by some sort of metaphysical inertia once such an entity is launched in existence.

Preliminary clarifications

Several expressions and distinctions which are required for the argument must be clarified. The first of these is “proposition.”¹² I do not attempt to give a complete theory of propositions, but only propose some points to forestall possible misunderstandings.

Let us imagine a conversation among four individuals who are making camp. What they do first depends upon the weather.

- A. (At 7:00 p.m.): “It’s going to be raining one hour from now.”
- B. (Immediately afterwards): “That is true.”
- C. (A few seconds later): “It won’t rain.”
- D. (At 8:00 p.m.): “A was right. What he said is true. It’s raining.”

I call what *A*’s sentence expresses a “proposition.” The proposition it expresses is what *B* refers to by saying “that.” Thus *A* expresses a proposition and *B* refers to the same proposition. *A* and *B* also express a common attitude and take a common stand with respect to the proposition. The attitude they express is belief in the proposition, and the stand they take is the asserting of the proposition. *C* expresses disbelief; *C* denies the same proposition which *A* and *B* assert. Since the distinctions between belief and assertion and between disbelief and denial are not important for my present purpose, from now on I generally ignore belief and disbelief.

When *D* says “what he said,” he refers to the proposition which *A* and *B* asserted and *C* denied. When *D* says “It’s raining,” *D* also asserts this same proposition. That *D* asserts the *same* proposition previously asserted by *A* and *B* is perhaps not obvious, because of the difference in tenses. However, the proposition could be expressed in a pidgin-English which dispenses with tenses and uses adverbial modifiers to express times—for example, “It rain 8:00 p.m. today.” Assertion could be expressed by nodding one’s head while uttering the sentence expressing the proposition; denial, by shaking one’s head. Even if *A*, *B*, *C*, and *D* used the single pidgin-English sentence to express the proposition, their *statements* of the proposition would differ in that *A*, *B*, and *C* still would be predicting whereas *D* would not be predicting.

Thus propositions can be true or false; they can be asserted or denied. They also can be believed, doubted, disagreed about, and so forth. A proposition stated as a prediction can be proved true by the eventuality.

A proposition, *p*, is distinct from someone’s asserting *p*, since *p* also can be

denied. To assert or to deny p , one must *do something* which counts as asserting or denying p . A , B , and D do somewhat different things—that is, utter different words—all of which count as asserting the same proposition. By nodding his head in agreement B could have made the same assertion which he made by saying “That is true.”

Since the same proposition can be expressed in different ways and since the same assertion or denial can be made in different ways, it is clear that one proposition cannot be identified with the many different ways of expressing it, nor can one assertion be identified with the many different ways of making it. Moreover, since there is no special reason to identify a proposition with any one of its expressions rather than with another, a proposition must be distinguished from all of its expressions. An analogous point can be made with respect to assertions of propositions.

Thus if A , B , C , and D spoke German rather than English, they would use different sentences to express the same proposition. An accurate translation exchanges expressions of one language for expressions of another, while expressing the same propositions. Thus propositions are distinct from sentences; languages can express propositions, but propositions themselves are not linguistic entities. An analogous point holds for assertions.

The sense of a sentence is determined by the meanings of the words which make it up and by its grammar. A proposition must be distinguished from the sense of any sentence which expresses it. When A says at 7:00 p.m., “It’s going to be raining one hour from now,” and D says at 8:00 p.m., “It’s raining,” and someone using pidgin-English says at any time the same day, “It rain 8:00 p.m. today,” all three sentences express the same proposition. However, the three sentences have different senses. If A repeats at 8:00 p.m. the sentence he uttered at 7:00 p.m., the sense of the sentence is no different, but the proposition it expresses is different.

The reason why sentences having different senses can express the same proposition and different utterances of the same sentence can express different propositions is that the context in which a sentence is uttered helps to determine what proposition the sentence expresses.

To nod one’s head in agreement always has the same sense, but it is not always the same assertion, either in the sense of being the same act of asserting or in the sense of expressing the same asserted proposition. In different contexts the same gesture refers to different propositions. Similarly, “I see rain falling” has the same sense regardless of who says it or when it is said, but the utterance of the sentence by different speakers and/or at different times expresses different propositions. Said by different persons “I see rain falling” refers to different persons and their different acts of seeing; said at different times, the same sentence refers to different rain.

However, the reference of a sentence is not solely determined by the context in which it is uttered. When *A* says at 7:00 p.m., "It's going to be raining one hour from now," and *D* says at 8:00 p.m., "It's raining," the difference of the sense of the two sentences precisely compensates for the difference in contexts, so that both sentences refer to the same rain falling. The two different sentences can express the same proposition because if one discounts those differences in sense required to establish sameness of reference in the different contexts, then the residual sense would be the same—for example, the sense of the pidgin-English expression of the proposition.

The sense of sentences also depends upon the context. "He has water on the brain" has a different sense when it is uttered by a physician as a medical diagnosis than it does when it is uttered by a student as an evaluation of a professor.

Propositions are composed of parts having distinct functions. I call the parts of a proposition which determine its sense and reference "concepts." Some concepts primarily determine the reference of a proposition; others primarily determine its sense. For example, if I assert that John is sitting down, *John* primarily determines the reference of the proposition while *sitting down* primarily determines its sense.¹³ I call a concept which primarily determines reference a "name" and a concept which primarily determines sense a "predicable." Since propositions are not linguistic entities, it is not necessary that concepts correspond one-to-one with words or groups of words. "Name" and "predicable" are not synonymous with "noun" and "verb."

Names determine reference by standing for some entities rather than others, and thus names limit what a proposition is *about*. For example, *John* stands for one individual human person rather than for any other entity in the universe, and thus limits the proposition that John is sitting down to being about John and no one else. Not all names are proper names. In the proposition that water is a compound of hydrogen and oxygen, *water* stands for a certain substance.

Predicables determine sense by signifying something definite—that is, by including one understandable aspect rather than any other—and thus predicables demarcate that which one knows of that for which the name or names in the proposition stand. (Of course, one *knows* only if the proposition is true and one accepts it as true.) For example, *sitting down* signifies a certain arrangement of the parts of a human or animal body; the predicable includes this understandable aspect, which is marked off from *standing*, *kneeling*, and so on. If the proposition that John is sitting down is true and if one accepts it as true, then one knows John's bodily arrangement.¹⁴

Playing their roles within the unified proposition, the name and the predicable contribute to the whole their distinct ways of determining. The

result is that the proposition as a whole has a delimited content. I call this delimited content of a proposition a "state of affairs." I call a proposition's delimiting of its content "picking out a state of affairs." Thus "picks out" does not mean the same thing as "determines" in the expressions "a name determines" or "a predicable determines." It follows that states of affairs are not entities such as John nor understandable aspects such as being seated.

The proposition that John is sitting down picks out the state of affairs of John's being seated. If one entertains and accepts this proposition, however, one can be mistaken. John's being seated might not be an existing state of affairs—for example, if John happens to be standing at a level sixteen inches lower than one supposes he is, so that he looks as if he is sitting down although he is actually standing. In this case I say that the state of affairs picked out by the proposition that John is sitting down "does not obtain." However, if John's being seated obtains, then one who entertains and accepts the proposition that John is sitting down is not mistaken.

"Obtains" used in this intransitive sense in sentences about states of affairs means the same as what I have meant by "existing" in the expression "existing state of affairs," except that "obtains" is tenseless, inasmuch as temporal determinations are consigned to the content of propositions. Thus I now dispense with this use of "existing." In other uses, "exists" cannot be replaced by "obtains." For example, "Do unicorns really exist?" cannot be translated into "Do unicorns really obtain?" A possible translation might be: "Is there a nonextinct species of horned animal characterized by having one and only one horn?" Moreover, "John's being seated exists" will not do as a substitute for "John's being seated obtains," not merely because the former is poor English, but because it has the misleading implication that the state of affairs which is John's being seated is an entity something like John or his chair.

"Obtains" could replace "happens" or "occurs" in some expressions. For example, two automobiles colliding with each other is a state of affairs; this state of affairs is called a "two-car collision" or, more generally, an "accident." Accidents are said to "happen" or "occur."

"It is raining" and "It is not raining" express the same proposition—that is, pick out the same state of affairs. The two sentences differ in that they are used in taking different stands in respect to the proposition.

One who asserts that it is raining asserts a true proposition if the state of affairs picked out by the proposition obtains; he asserts a false proposition if the state of affairs picked out by the proposition does not obtain. One who denies the proposition that it is raining wrongly denies a true proposition if the state of affairs picked out by the proposition obtains; his denial is wrong because that in respect to which he takes this stand is a true proposition. One who denies the proposition that it is raining rightly denies a false proposition

if the state of affairs picked out by the proposition does not obtain; his denial is right because that in respect to which he takes this stand is a false proposition.

Putting things in this way, it is unnecessary to suppose that there are negative states of affairs corresponding to rightly denied propositions and positive states of affairs corresponding to rightly asserted propositions. Problems are raised, however, by the fact that the meaning of some words must be explicated in terms of rightly denied propositions. "There is cheese in the icebox" and "There is no cheese in the icebox" express the same proposition, just as "It is raining" and "It is not raining" express the same proposition. Cheese being in the icebox is a state of affairs which obtains or not. But "There are holes in the cheese in the icebox" does not mean that there is not only cheese but also holes in the icebox. "Save the hole in the doughnut" is misleading because it suggests that when one finishes eating the doughnut there will be a hole to be saved.

These difficulties can be cleared up by noticing that "hole" expresses neither a name nor a predicable. "Hole" expresses the denial of a certain false proposition—for example, that there is solid cheese within the outer surface of a piece of cheese. One can describe the shape of a doughnut without introducing and denying any propositions, but in that case one would not talk about a hole; one is not likely to say that there is a hole in a tire unless there is an abnormal hole in it.

The meaning of some words can be explained as expressing predicables in some contexts but requires analysis in terms of denied propositions in other contexts. For example, "fresh" said of cheese might express a cluster of concepts which includes *recently purchased*, *moist*, and so on. But "fresh" sometimes, perhaps usually, expresses the denial of propositions such as that the cheese is abnormally dry, that it is moldy, and so on.

It would be interesting, but I do not think it is necessary, to consider the meaning of "whole cheese" and "piece of cheese." In what follows I use as examples sentences made up of words which clearly do not require analysis in the way that "hole" clearly does and that "fresh" sometimes does.

From what I have said, it should be clear that one need not posit negations within states of affairs. The negations which one might suppose to be within a state of affairs can be reduced to propositional attitudes such as disbelief and to stands such as denial. Disbelief itself is a positive attitude contrary to belief, and one who denies takes a positive stand against one who asserts. To shake one's head is not simply not to nod it; to shake one's head is to make a gesture which expresses the positive stand of denial.

But what about the nonobtaining of a state of affairs which does not obtain? Nonobtaining seems to be something negative in addition to disbelief and denial. As a matter of fact there is an additional factor, namely, mistaken

belief. Above, I introduced the expression “does not obtain” by use of the example of one entertaining and mistakenly believing the proposition that John is sitting down. It is tempting but confused to think of *obtaining* and *nonobtaining* as if they were predicables signifying contrary, understandable aspects, as *black* and *white*, *here* and *elsewhere*, and many other pairs of opposites do. But contrary predicables are conceptual constituents of propositions. “Obtains” does not express any conceptual *constituent* of a proposition. The meaning of the proposition—both sense and reference—is precisely the same whether or not the state of affairs picked out by the proposition obtains.

But, it might be urged, finding that one has a mistaken belief means observing or otherwise discovering that the state of affairs picked out by the proposition in which one believed does *not obtain*. Thus *nonobtaining* must be something one can observe or discover. This objection is important; I do not think it is insurmountable.

If one believes that John is sitting down and then observes John standing upright, the situation might be put as follows. One adds to the proposition that John is sitting down the predicable *standing upright*, and disbelieves the newly formed proposition. One then forms the propositions that John is standing upright and that John is sitting down, believes the former and disbelieves the latter. The statement of the latter proposition in such a case is as rejecting or setting aside, and this is what is meant by “finding that one was mistaken.” To observe that it is not raining when one expected rain is not to observe the nonobtaining of the state of affairs of rain falling. What does one observe? One’s view is steady and sharp in a way which is different from the blurred and shifting view one has when it is raining. In other words, one sees things as they look when it is not raining, and how they look then is different in positive ways from how they look when it is raining.

I think a similar analysis could be carried out of other cases in which one might be tempted to say that the nonobtaining of a state of affairs is itself a predicable. Still, one feels that it is plausible to suppose that one sees a hole in a doughnut, not merely a doughnut and something behind it which one would not see if one were looking at a fried cake. I think the feeling that one sees holes can be explained as an effect of nonformal inference and belief upon experience; as I suggested in chapter three, such factors enter into experience and shape the way in which we perceive the world.

The criticism of the ontological argument which was formulated at the end of chapter three (pages 33-34) now can be reformulated as follows. If the sentence “The Supreme Being necessarily exists” expresses a proposition, the meaning of the proposition both as to its sense and as to its reference could be complete, yet the state of affairs picked out by the proposition not obtain. In other words, one could know what it would be like for the state of affairs

picked out by the proposition to obtain without knowing whether it obtains, unless the reference of the proposition can be established only *if one knows* that the state of affairs picked out by the proposition does obtain. In the latter case, however, one is not proceeding, as Anselm tried to proceed, from one's understanding of the meaning of "God" to the conclusion that he exists in reality. One rather is proceeding from one's knowledge that a certain state of affairs obtains to an understanding of the meaning of "God." The argument I propose proceeds in this direction, opposite to Anselm's.

Many philosophers have criticized the ontological argument by saying that "existence" is not a "predicate," does not signify a "real property," and so on. This criticism is imprecise, because of the ambiguity of "exists," which sometimes expresses one or more predicables. However, the sense of the criticism can be more precisely expressed by saying that *obtains* is not a predicable.

Because *obtains* is not a predicable, it is possible to understand the meaning of many propositions—if not of all—without knowing whether they are true. In general, one can know what it would be like for a certain state of affairs to obtain without knowing whether it obtains. This is evident inasmuch as one who does not know whether a certain state of affairs which might or might not obtain does obtain, can wonder and ask a question of the form, "Is such and such the case?"

It might be argued that if "John" is a proper name, then one cannot understand the meaning of the proposition, whatever it is, expressed by "John exists" without also knowing that the state of affairs picked out by this proposition obtains. Whether this position is defensible depends, it seems to me, on what one means by "proper name" and "exists." But assuming these expressions can have meanings such that the position is defensible, one might be tempted to infer that the meaning of a proposition and the obtaining of a state of affairs picked out by it are distinct only in the case of general propositions. This inference might in turn lead one to suppose that *obtains*, after all, is a predicable concept.

But there are several reasons for rejecting this conclusion. One, already considered, is that obtaining and nonobtaining are not contraries, but they would be contraries if *obtains* were a predicable.

Again, one can understand not only a general proposition but also a proposition picking out a unique state of affairs without knowing whether the state of affairs picked out by the proposition obtains. For example, the reader can entertain the proposition that there is a crisp, new, Canadian \$100.00 banknote, series 1954, serial number A/J 7289748, bound between pages 100 and 101 of this copy of this book. Still, one does not know whether this state of affairs obtains until one looks.

If it is true that "John exists" expresses a proposition and that one cannot understand the meaning of this proposition without knowing that the state of affairs picked out by it obtains, this can be explained without supposing that *obtains* is a predicable. One need only suppose that the reference of the proposition can only be determined if one knows that John exists.

The sentences of logic, arithmetic, and so on, including certain sentences of ordinary language, such as "Bachelors are unmarried men," often are thought to express propositions of a peculiar sort, namely, propositions which are necessarily true and are such that to understand them is to know their truth. One might suppose that such sentences, at least, express propositions in which *obtains* is a predicable.

There are various ways of dealing with such sentences, at least three of which can be accepted within the framework I am articulating.

First, one can say that such sentences do not express propositions. This solution is drastic, but it would suit my purposes if it were correct.

Second, one can say that such sentences express propositions which are about linguistic expressions. This position also suits my purposes. I would prefer to say that these propositions pick out states of affairs involving concepts and other constituents of propositions but no extrapositional entities. Thus "Bachelors are unmarried men" can be taken to express a proposition which picks out a state of affairs in which either of two distinct predicables can fulfill a certain set of roles in propositions without affecting those propositions, or, at least, without affecting them in certain specified ways. On this theory, one can easily explain why one often (surely not always; there are proofs in mathematics) knows the truth of such a proposition in understanding its meaning, namely, because the meaning of the proposition or the meanings which one must understand to understand it, being what they are and being related as they must be, precisely is the state of affairs which the proposition picks out. One also can explain the necessity of such truths or falsities on this theory by saying that concepts are nothing but relational entities, and therefore the predicables which signify understandable aspects of concepts, by defining what the concepts are, establish them in a certain state of affairs or in a certain set of states of affairs.

This second approach seems to me more plausible. The sentences in question can be considered to be expressions of propositions without assuming that they pick out extrapositional states of affairs.

A third solution is to suppose that the sentences of logic and so on express ordinary propositions, but that the states of affairs they pick out are different from those picked out by other propositions. On this approach one knows the truth of the proposition in understanding its meaning, because the reference of the proposition is established only by knowing that the state of

affairs picked out by the proposition obtains. The state of affairs picked out by the proposition obtains necessarily, on this theory, because it is an aspect of the structure of the world.

This last view seems to me mistaken *as an account of the truths and falsities of logic and mathematics*. It might be a sound account of certain other propositions—for example, that one cannot return to an earlier time.

However the sentences of logic and other sentences which are not informative about extrapositional states of affairs are to be explained, I call them “formal truths and falsities.” From now on unless the context demands otherwise, “proposition” should not be taken as referring to formal truths and falsities.

As already explained, one can know what it would be like for certain states of affairs to obtain without knowing whether they obtain. This is true of any state of affairs which might or might not obtain, provided that one can know the meaning of the proposition which picks it out without having prior knowledge that it obtains. I call such states of affairs “contingent” and the propositions which pick them out “contingent propositions.”

Therefore, for a contingent state of affairs to be the state of affairs it is, and for the same contingent state of affairs to obtain, are not identical. “Obtains” does not express a predicable. Nevertheless, to say that a certain state of affairs obtains is to say something about it—something which makes a difference not by making the state of affairs different, but by making it be extrapositional. Consider the proposition that there is a crisp, new Canadian \$100.00 banknote bound between pages 100 and 101 of this copy of this book. If the state of affairs which the proposition picks out obtains, the banknote does not become a new denomination—for example, \$100.01. Rather, the owner of the book gains exactly \$100.00.

The nonidentity between a state of affairs which obtains being the state of affairs it is and the same state of affairs obtaining can be expressed by saying, “There is a real distinction between a state of affairs which does obtain and its obtaining.” But to say this is neither to say that the obtaining of a state of affairs is itself a larger state of affairs—which would imply that *obtains* is a predicable—nor to say that a state of affairs and its obtaining are two realities for which names might stand in a proposition.

One further question must be considered. What is the principle of individuation for states of affairs?

Understanding “individuation” in one sense, this question cannot be answered, for it is based on a false assumption. Often if one asks about an individuating principle, the question concerns entities of a sort for which names can stand in propositions. Since states of affairs *as such* are not entities for which names can stand, but rather are what are picked out by names and

predicables working together in propositions, there is no individuating principle for states of affairs in the sense in which there might be individuating principles for sorts of entities for which names can stand.

Taking "individuation" in another sense, some states of affairs are not individuated and others are, because some propositions pick out states of affairs which can have many instances while other propositions pick out states of affairs which can have only one instance. The proposition that men are mortal is of the former type, inasmuch as the state of affairs which it picks out has as many instances as there are mortal men. The proposition about the \$100.00 banknote is an example of the latter type; there can be only one instance of this state of affairs. Precisely why and how propositions of these two types differ seems to me to be a very difficult question which cannot be answered—if it can be answered at all—without going deep not only into logical theory but also into ontology. Fortunately, so far as I can see, I do not need to explain this distinction. Also, even if no one can explain it, everyone admits it.

Taking "individuation" in a third sense, one can say that states of affairs are individuated by the propositions which pick them out. Since states of affairs are picked out by propositions, there is a one-to-one relationship between states of affairs and nonmolecular propositions.

I call a proposition "molecular" if it is formed by linking other propositions by logical connectives—such as some uses of "and," "or," or "if . . . then"—*in a manner which does not affect the inner structure* of the propositions linked. Thus the truth of a molecular proposition is a function of the truth of the propositions of which it is compounded. A nonmolecular proposition is one which cannot be divided into propositional components, because all of the names and predicables in it are interrelated in such a way that removing any of them would affect the functioning of the others.

The proposition that Jack and Jill went up the hill to fetch a pail of water seems to me to be nonmolecular. If one attempts to divide this into the propositions that Jack went up the hill and that Jill went up the hill, their going together is omitted. If one attempts to divide it into the propositions that Jack and Jill went up the hill together and that they went to fetch water, the means-end relationship between hill climbing and fetching water is omitted. And so on.

However, if one entertains the proposition about Jack and Jill going to fetch water and also entertains the proposition that Jack and Jill went down the hill to fish in the brook, the two propositions are related truth-functionally. They cannot both be true. Expressing the two propositions—as the children's father might do, noticing that both they and the pail were missing, as he set out to find them—"Either the children went up the hill to fetch

water from the spring or they went down the hill to fish in the brook”—makes the incompatibility of the two propositions clear. But this way of considering the two propositions does not alter their inner structure.

If, as I think, the proposition about Jack and Jill is nonmolecular, still this rather complex proposition does entail several less complex ones: that Jack went up the hill, that Jill went up the hill, that Jack and Jill went somewhere together, that each went to fetch water, that they shared a common purpose, and so on. Each of these propositions is nonmolecular and each picks out a different state of affairs. Thus one state of affairs includes many states of affairs. However, the many states of affairs do not constitute as a compound the one state of affairs in which they are included. If they did, the original proposition would be molecular. It is also worth noticing that some—if not all—of the included states of affairs have many instances. They are included only as to one or some instances.

This clarification of the one-to-one relationship which holds between nonmolecular propositions and states of affairs should suffice for my present purpose as an answer to the problem of the individuation of states of affairs. It should be noted that one need not—and I think definitely ought not—to suppose that the world is made up of states of affairs, as if they were building-blocks of reality. Thus one need not assume that all the distinctions and relations among states of affairs as such mirror ontological distinctions and relations.

If one knew the truth about the ontological structure of the universe, that knowledge itself would be *contained* in propositions; in other words, the structure of the universe is itself a certain state of affairs. Whatever the truth about the ontological structure of the universe, the preceding explanation only requires that the world be such that if one accepts a true proposition, the content of that proposition *so far as it goes* is extrapropositionally as one believes it to be. I say “so far as it goes” because the limitations of the content need not be regarded as a reflection of limits in the extrapropositional. The limits of our knowledge only indicate that there is *something* about the extrapropositional which makes possible knowledge of it which, while true, nevertheless is limited as ours is.

If what I have proposed as a reply to the question about individuation of states of affairs avoids unnecessary metaphysical commitments, still it might seem that the previous clarifications presuppose many questionable logical, epistemological, and ontological commitments.

It might be true that in trying to lay the foundation for the argument I have made more commitments than necessary; the foundation required for the argument actually does not amount to much. However, I do need “proposition,” “picks out,” “state of affairs,” and “obtains,” and I wished to give these expressions fairly clear senses. Also necessary are the distinction

between the meaning of a proposition and its truth and the corresponding distinction between a state of affairs which does obtain and its obtaining. I hope that if the reader finds certain aspects of the preceding clarifications objectionable but unnecessary for the argument, he will dispense with what is unnecessary, and, if possible, substitute for what is objectionable something adequate for the argument and acceptable to himself.

However, it is worth noting several respects in which I might seem to be making commitments but am not making them.

In the first place, I am not committed to the subject-predicate form as the sole or even primary form of proposition. I think that what I say about propositions and their structure is in some ways more easily reconciled with modern logic than it is with aristotelian logic, which kept too close to ordinary language. I have not dealt at all with the many logical problems in respect to quantification, modal operators, and so on, but I do not think anything I have said about propositions creates any special obstacles to dealing with such problems.

In the second place, nothing I have said commits me to an epistemology according to which one intuits essences, forms, or anything of the sort. I make no greater claim in saying that predicables signify understandable aspects than anyone makes who supposes that various people and/or the same person on various occasions can sit down, and that one can tell in clear-cut cases whether someone is sitting down or not. Again, some of my examples might suggest that I am committed to an epistemology which would reduce all knowledge to basic propositions, but nothing I have said demands that such a reduction be undertaken or even that it be possible.

In the third place, I am committed to very little about the ontological status of propositions other than that they are not linguistic entities. This commitment will be objectionable to physicalists who hope to account for entities like propositions in terms of linguistic behavior. However, I think I have a good case for denying that propositions are linguistic entities, and additional reasons will be given in chapters fourteen and twenty-three for thinking physicalism mistaken. I do not maintain that propositions are some sort of ghostly entities. For a proposition to be, is for it to be entertained, believed, asserted, debated, and so on. If some states of affairs obtain without being known to anyone, one can say that there are unknown truths to be discovered, but in this context "truths" does not refer to actual propositions. It refers to possible propositions: that is, to the knowability of extrapropositional reality and to the ability of propositional knowers to learn what they do not already know.

In the fourth place, the ontological status of states of affairs also can be dealt with simply and without getting into metaphysical quicksand. States of affairs, considered simply as such, do not exist at all, because to

consider a state of affairs simply as such is just to exclude from consideration any question of existence. States of affairs insofar as they are contents of propositions exist by virtue of being picked out by propositions. A state of affairs insofar as it obtains has the extrapropositional status appropriate to the sort of state of affairs it is. Physical states of affairs obtain in the processes of the physical world; fictional states of affairs obtain in the thinking up of a story, in the writing or telling or enacting of it, in the reading or hearing or seeing of it, and so on.

Finally, in the fifth place, it is not required by anything I have said that one assume that the world is made up of substances and accidents. All that is required is that the world be such that names in propositions can stand for something or other and that words in sentences expressing propositions can be used according to some criteria so that they can express predicables. If these conditions are not met, it is hard for me to see how one could say anything about anything, whatever the makeup of reality.

Thus the commitments presupposed by the preceding clarifications are more modest than might at first appear.

The argument

A nontechnical summary of the argument, although not completely true to it, might be helpful for orientation.

As everyone knows, things don't just happen. There has to be something which makes them happen. Everything we're familiar with which makes things happen also happens, and would not have happened if something hadn't made *it* happen. There are only three possibilities.

The first comes in two versions. One version is that the whole universe is a big, perpetual happening machine, in which the happening of some things makes other things happen, and the happening of the latter things makes the former things happen, and all things making each other happen makes the whole universe happen. Another version of this first possibility is that the whole universe is a train which happens to be without a locomotive. We see the caboose coming up hill toward us, as if the train were backing up, and there are cars as far as we can see. We suppose that the train happens to go on and on forever, because that is the only way the caboose could keep coming toward us without a locomotive.

A second possibility is that the universe is just one big happening, which could as well not have happened, but just happens to happen, for no particular reason at all.

In chapter five I'll try to show that the first "possibility" is impossible and the second possibility is possible but ridiculous.

This leaves only the third possibility, and since this is the only reasonable

possibility, this is the way it has to be. Possibly there is something—call it “God” for short—which has what it takes to make everything which happens happen. God doesn’t just happen to make things happen, but he does make things happen, and nothing makes him make anything happen. God himself doesn’t happen to be, he has to be; other things don’t have to be, they happen to be. God makes other things happen to be, and nothing makes him have to be, except that he’s the sort of being who can’t help being, even if he happened to want to, which he can’t.

* * *

Tomorrow someone will read some sentence printed in a book (*B*) entitled *Beyond the New Theism: A Philosophy of Religion*. The preceding sentence (*S*) uttered at the time the reader reads it expresses a proposition (*P*), namely, that the day after the reader reads *S* someone will read some sentence printed in *B*. *P* picks out a state of affairs (*SRS*)—someone reading on the day after the reader reads *S* some sentence printed in *B*.

SRS might obtain and then again it might not. One can know what it would be like for *SRS* to obtain without knowing whether it obtains. *P* is stated as a prediction, and it will be proved true or false by the eventuality.

If *P* is to be proved true, certain conditions prerequisite to *SRS* and not included in *SRS* will have to be fulfilled. By “conditions” here I mean extrapropositional conditions, not logical conditions.¹⁵ For example, there will have to be sufficient light for someone to read a sentence in *B*, he will have to be alive and conscious, and he will have to know how to read English.

The need for sufficient light to read could be satisfied in various ways—for example, by daylight, by electrical light, or by candlelight. Thus *SRS* does not include any of these in particular, since *SRS* might obtain without all but one of them and any one would do. The requirement that someone be alive and conscious cannot be fulfilled unless many complicated neurophysiological processes go on. These in turn depend upon the environment. It is clear that *SRS* does not include these processes and the whole complex environment, since *P*, which picks out *SRS*, could be known to be true by someone who knows little or no biology or physics. But one could not know *P* to be true without knowing that *SRS* obtains, and one could not know that *SRS* obtains without knowing what is involved in *SRS*. As for knowing how to read English, this requirement could not be fulfilled if there were not a culture which has English as its language. Someone need only spend a few seconds in reading for *SRS* to obtain; the culture which makes reading possible is a complex system with a history. Thus *SRS* does not include this condition, since the duration of *SRS* and of the presupposed culture are not equal.

From these remarks it is clear that *SRS* cannot obtain simply by itself. *SRS* might or might not obtain because the prerequisites which must be satisfied for *SRS* to obtain might or might not be satisfied. Each of the conditions of *SRS* has its own prerequisite conditions, which might not be satisfied. This is true even though for all practical purposes we can take it for granted that some of these conditions will be satisfied. For example, we assume that tomorrow there will be someone who can read English, but this optimistic assumption might be falsified—for example, if everyone who speaks English is wiped out in a sudden nuclear war.

Some of the requirements which must be satisfied for *SRS* to obtain are included in it—no one can read a sentence unless he sees words. Other prerequisites, as the examples already given show, are not included in *SRS*.

Thus there are extrapositional prerequisites which (1) must be satisfied for *SRS* to obtain, (2) are states of affairs which might or might not obtain, and (3) themselves obtain only if further prerequisites not included in themselves are satisfied. I call the entire set of such prerequisite conditions "*C*." It does not matter to the argument whether *C* is part of the universe or the entire universe. It does not matter if some of the entities involved in the constituents of *C* existed only in the past or will exist only in the future. *C* includes whatever *SRS* requires to obtain unless *SRS* requires something which does not meet the second or the third of the three criteria for membership in *C*.

C is not merely the collection of the distinct states of affairs included in it. In other words, *C* is not an arbitrarily constructed class. The preceding discussion described conditions of *SRS* which meet the criteria for membership in *C*. *C* is the set of these conditions and any others like them in specified respects. It follows that the states of affairs included in *C* have in common an extrapositional relationship to *SRS*; each of them, in its own way, is a prerequisite extrapositional condition which must be satisfied for *SRS* to obtain. That all these conditions be so disposed as to provide what is required for *SRS* to obtain is itself a state of affairs. Thus *C* is itself a state of affairs. The proposition which picks out *C* I call "*Q*."

Given any two states of affairs, SA^1 and SA^2 , such that SA^2 includes extrapositional prerequisite conditions which are not included in SA^1 but which must be satisfied for SA^1 to obtain, I call SA^2 a "cause of" SA^1 , and say that " SA^2 causes SA^1 ."

Thus *C* causes *SRS*. But why does *C* itself obtain?

One could say that *C* obtains because it is self-sufficient otherwise than in the way in which the content of a formal truth is self-sufficient. *C*, after all, includes every condition of *SRS* which might or might not obtain and which obtains only if extrapositional requirements not included in it are satisfied. Perhaps the elements of *C* are mutually complementary in such a way

that they satisfy one another's requirements. Moreover, if a finite set of states of affairs reciprocally related to one another cannot obtain by itself, perhaps the elements of C are an infinite set, and perhaps an infinite set of contingent states of affairs can obtain by itself. In other words, although C only includes states of affairs none of which obtains without the satisfaction of some requirement extrinsic to it, perhaps C itself obtains by itself, without the fulfillment of any *extrinsic* condition. I postpone consideration of this supposition to the first section of chapter five. There I will argue that it is impossible to explain in this way why C obtains. I assume, for the present, that this argument will be successful.

Assuming the argument is successful, C is a contingent state of affairs; Q is a contingent proposition. It must be remembered that "contingent" said of a state of affairs simply means that it might or might not obtain. Thus even if some entities involved in constituents of C always existed—for example, if C includes the whole universe and if the universe has some permanent constituents or unalterable structural features—still C and the states of affairs included in it are contingent. Moreover, according to the third criterion, constituents themselves of C obtain only if further prerequisites not included in themselves are satisfied.

From these considerations it follows that C does not obtain simply because its constituents are *what* they are. If a proposition picks out a state of affairs which does not obtain necessarily and extrapropositionally, yet the proposition is true simply by virtue of its own content, such a proposition is a formal truth. But since Q is a contingent proposition, it cannot be a formal truth.

Thus, assuming the argument in chapter five will be successful, there is no answer to the question "Why does C obtain?" in C itself and in its constituents. Furthermore, since all of the extrapropositional prerequisites of SRS which meet the three stipulated criteria already are included in C , there is nothing which might be called upon to explain why C obtains which is not included in C but meets the same criteria. In other words, what explains C must not be subject to the set of criteria for inclusion in C .

But *must* there be an answer to the question "Why does C obtain?" Perhaps the entire universe—that is, all states of affairs which obtain only if prerequisites extrinsic to themselves are satisfied—is included in C . Every state of affairs within the universe which might or might not obtain, but which actually does obtain, can be explained to the extent that other states of affairs provide what is required for it to obtain. But perhaps the universe as a whole simply obtains. It must be noticed that the supposition here is *not* that Q is about the universe as a whole, and that the universe as a whole necessarily obtains—although no part of it obtains both extrapropositionally and necessarily—because it is *the state of affairs* it is. This supposition,

previously considered and excluded, would make Q a formal truth. Nor is the supposition here that the universe might have no prerequisite conditions except its own contingent constituents; this is the supposition discussed and postponed for consideration in the first section of chapter five.

The present supposition is that the universe, while it might or might not obtain, simply obtains because it obtains. In other words, the universe is merely because it happens to be. This supposition is the one which J. J. C. Smart suggests when he says that a proper answer to the question "Why should anything [the universe] exist at all?" might be "Why shouldn't it?"

Many people are inclined to dismiss this supposition as absurd. If "absurd" means logically impossible, I think such a dismissal is a mistake. I do think this supposition utterly unreasonable, but postpone stating the reasons why I think so to the second section of chapter five.

In sum. C does not obtain merely because—although no part of it obtains both extrapropositionally and necessarily—it is the state of affairs which it is; C is not such that Q is a formal truth. The supposition that its own constituents might explain why C obtains—especially if these constituents are an infinite set—will be considered in the first section of chapter five. The supposition that the universe *is* because it *is* will be considered in the second section of chapter five.

Thus, for C to obtain—which is required for SRS to obtain—there must be a further extrapropositional prerequisite for C to obtain rather than not. This additional factor I call " Dc ." Since Dc 's relationship to C satisfies the previously stipulated definition of "cause," I call Dc the "cause of C ." Being the cause of C , Dc also is required for SRS to obtain, since Dc , as a prerequisite for C to obtain, also is required for anything to obtain which C causes to obtain.

C and what is included in it do not explain why C obtains. Hence if Dc does explain why C obtains, Dc must be distinct from the set of factors already included in C . Since Dc is like the states of affairs included in C in being an extrapropositional requirement which must be satisfied for SRS to obtain, Dc must not be subject to one or both of the other criteria which define factors included in C .

The second of these criteria is to be a state of affairs which might or might not obtain. Dc must meet this criterion.¹⁶ Dc causes the causing of SRS . SRS might or might not obtain. If Dc obtained noncontingently, SRS would obtain noncontingently.

Only the third criterion remains. Dc is not subject to the third criterion; Dc obtains without requiring anything not included in itself. In other words, Dc is the cause of C , but Dc itself does not require that some further prerequisite not included in itself be satisfied. Dc is not related to anything as

SRS is related to *C* and as *C* is related to *Dc* itself. There is no cause of *Dc*. I therefore call *Dc* “an uncaused cause.”

Corresponding to *Dc*, there is a proposition (*Xc*) that an uncaused cause causes *C*, which, in turn, is the proper cause of *SRS*.

Dc might or might not obtain, but it requires nothing which is not included in itself to obtain. The arguments I present in chapter five against the possibility of *C* being explained by contingent states of affairs included in it and against the rationality of assuming that *C* is simply inexplicable also apply to *Dc*. Thus *Dc* must include in itself a peculiar state of affairs. This state of affairs must be noncontingent. Being the state of affairs which it is must be the sole requirement for it to obtain. This state of affairs, included in *Dc*, I call “*D*.”

D is included in *Dc*. The whole characterization of *Dc* is that it is an uncaused cause. Insofar as *Dc* causes *C* and *SRS* to obtain, *Dc* is contingent since *Dc* does not cause *SRS* if *SRS* does not obtain, and *SRS* is contingent. *D* is distinct from *Dc* precisely because *D* is the prerequisite required by *Dc* to obtain. Therefore, *D* is simply an uncaused entity.

D does not obtain because any condition apart from *Dc* is fulfilled; nor does *D* obtain simply because it obtains. *D* obtains because it is *what* it is. It must be noticed that to say that *D* obtains because it is what it is, is not to say that even in this case *obtains* is a predicable. *D*'s obtaining is not what *D* is. Rather, what *D* is, is the sole condition for *D* to obtain, and since *D* does obtain, this condition obviously is fulfilled.¹⁷ The proposition *X*, which corresponds to *D*, is that there is something which is not caused—an uncaused entity.

Assuming as we are that *SRS* obtains, if one also understands what the proposition *X* means, then one knows that it is true. But it does not follow that *X* is a formal truth. *D* obtains extrapropositionally; *SRS* cannot obtain unless *D* obtains.¹⁸ The truth of *X* follows from its meaning together with the assumption that *SRS* obtains because *X* is derived from a relational proposition, *Xc*, and *X* has no meaning apart from this derivation. *Xc* is reached from *Q*; *Dc* is necessary for *C* to obtain. Both the sense and the reference of *X* emerge from the argument itself; *D* must obtain for *SRS* to obtain.

Throughout the argument I have been assuming that *SRS* obtains. But tomorrow might never come. To assure that this factual assumption of the argument is fulfilled, therefore, I substitute for the first sentence in this section the following: Someone has written a book entitled: *Beyond the New Theism: A Philosophy of Religion*. The preceding sentence is uttered at the time the reader reads it, and appropriate adjustments are made throughout the section.

D is not a contingent state of affairs, and yet it obtains although it is uncaused. I call such a noncontingent, extrapositional state of affairs a "necessary being." Since *X* picks out a necessary being, *X* is necessary truth.

The preceding argument remains provisional in the sense that two important steps in it are reserved for treatment in the first two sections of chapter five. After these two steps are supplied, I will restate the argument more concisely in the third section of chapter five. In the final section of chapter five I consider the question whether *D* should be called "God."

No doubt objections have occurred to the reader. Many potential objections will be considered in part three. How the sense and reference of *Xc*, and thus of *X*, emerge from the argument itself will be explained in part four.

5: Development of the Argument

A self-sufficient set of contingent states of affairs?

In the argument provisionally stated in the previous chapter certain conditions required for *SRS* to obtain are grouped together in a class defined by three criteria: (1) these requirements must be satisfied for *SRS* to obtain; (2) they are states of affairs which are contingent—that is, they might or might not obtain; and (3) they themselves obtain only if prerequisites not included in themselves are satisfied. States of affairs meeting these criteria are included in a state of affairs, *C*, which causes *SRS*.

The first question raised in the previous chapter and postponed for consideration in this chapter is whether *C* might not be self-sufficient, otherwise than as a formal truth is self-sufficient. Although *C* includes states of affairs which might or might not obtain and which obtain only if further conditions are fulfilled, could not *C* itself obtain without requiring anything not included in itself? It might be supposed that *C* could be self-sufficient either because its elements mutually satisfy one another's requirements or because they are caused causes ordered in an infinite series.

I think the supposition that *C* obtains without requiring satisfaction of any condition not included in itself can be shown to be impossible by a single, general argument, but the force of this argument is unlikely to be appreciated unless various cases are also considered one by one. I present the general argument first.

The question "Why does *SRS* obtain?" arises because *SRS* is contingent. One can suggest that at some point the question "Why does *x* obtain?" must

be set aside as unanswerable; this suggestion will be considered in the next section.

Nothing is explained by itself, nor is anything's being *F* explained by something else which is precisely like it in being *F*. Therefore, if a certain state of affairs is contingent and if explanation of its obtaining as contingent is not impossible in principle, either something in that state of affairs is not contingent or something not included in that state of affairs itself is required. The second alternative is incompatible with the supposition under consideration. In other words, if it is shown that to obtain *C* needs something not included in itself, then this step of the argument is completed. Thus if the supposition that *C* is self-sufficient is to be sustained, either *C* must be noncontingent or *C* must include something noncontingent in itself.

Whether the elements of *C* are few, many, or infinite, they are prerequisites of *SRS*, as is *C* itself; thus all *as such* are contingent, inasmuch as *SRS* is contingent. A noncontingent factor which would explain *C*'s obtaining as self-sufficient would have to be some state of affairs within *C* which obtains simply by being the state of affairs it is. Thus, within *C* there would be an uncaused entity. Either this uncaused entity itself is within a state of affairs which is an uncaused cause, or not. The former alternative is impossible; an uncaused cause is excluded from *C* by definition. The latter alternative—that is, that there is an uncaused entity in *C* but that this uncaused entity is not within a state of affairs which is an uncaused cause—would make the assumed uncaused entity inaccessible to human inquiry beginning from contingent states of affairs.

The last point might seem obvious. However, it has been denied.

If *C* includes everything normally regarded as a contingent state of affairs, at least one major philosopher holds that there is an uncaused entity somehow identical with *C* and unlike *D* precisely in not being the nucleus of an uncaused cause. The philosopher in question is Hegel, and the uncaused *entity* which is not an uncaused *cause* is Hegel's Absolute Spirit. For Hegel, inquiry begins from what seem to be contingent states of affairs, but ends by discovering that the universe as a whole and all its parts as such obtain necessarily. In the end the rational is the real. Hegel intends his system as a whole to express a single rationally necessary proposition. This proposition, although necessary, like a formal truth, also picks out all states of affairs ordinarily thought of as obtaining contingently.

Hegel considers what is normally regarded as the contingent, extrapropositional world as the content of the thought of Absolute Spirit. This content in the past was like an incomplete formal truth gradually unfolding itself. At the culmination of this development, which Hegel claims occurs in his own philosophy, Absolute Spirit, fully self-conscious, completes the proposition. Its rationality as a quasi-formal truth appears; Absolute Spirit recognizes as its

own the content which previously seemed contingent. Thus meaning is united with actuality. According to Hegel everything is explained by Absolute Spirit, which is an uncaused and necessary entity, although not an uncaused *cause*. Absolute Spirit does not cause anything; it is everything.

In chapters ten and eleven I expound and criticize Hegel's thought. I try to show that an uncaused entity, such as Hegel's Absolute Spirit, which is not an uncaused *cause*, cannot consistently be posited as the outcome of a human inquiry beginning from contingent states of affairs.

Since Hegel, many philosophers—in other ways quite diverse from one another—have proposed self-contained, uncaused entities on a more human scale than Hegel's Absolute Spirit. According to these philosophies human thought and action are inseparable; together they constitute certain states of affairs, which are limited, unlike Absolute Spirit, but which are similar to Absolute Spirit in that understanding these states of affairs is inseparable from knowing that they obtain extrapositionally.

John Dewey, for example, holds that knowledge is achieved only in the actual resolution of real problems; the satisfaction of the requirements for understanding a problematic situation and for the obtaining of the state of affairs projected as a solution to it coincide in problem-solving action. Wittgenstein, in his later work, holds that philosophy is an activity which aims at clarification. Clarification is achieved by bringing together understanding and extrapositional states of affairs involving linguistic activity. Many existentialists and dialectical materialists also seek explanatory principles in man himself, where meaning and existence meet.

Philosophies such as these center upon action. If they do not consider human action somehow *constitutive* of reality in general, they do not conflict with the thesis that *C* and states of affairs like it, which are made up entirely of contingent factors, are not self-explanatory. Sometimes interpretation of a philosopher's writings is difficult and hotly disputed, as in Wittgenstein's case. Only on some interpretations or in the work of some disciples, perhaps, does a method become a metaphysics. When such a method does become a metaphysics, essences are denied; amorphous obtaining is shaped into a world by the meaning which human action confers. All meaning *originates* in use; existence is *prior* to essence; things are seen truly *only when* they are seen in the perspective of revolutionary action. What I am concerned with here is not a particular philosophy, so much as it is the exploitation, sometimes contrary to their originators' intentions, of a variety of contemporary philosophical methods. I call this metaphysical exploitation of such methods "post-hegelian relativism."

The plausibility of such metaphysical theories arises from a certain non-contingency within human action, namely, from the reflexivity present in it. Suppose I had begun the argument in chapter four: "Someone is now reading

some sentence." Anyone who understands the meaning of this sentence also knows that the state of affairs picked out by it obtains extrapropositionally. However, such a state of affairs does not obtain simply by being *what* it is; rather, the state of affairs picked out by such a proposition obtains because a certain human action, which is necessary for understanding the meaning of the proposition, is picked out by the proposition.

In chapter twelve I expound the positions shared by various forms of post-hegelian relativism and in chapter thirteen criticize these positions. The noncontingency of certain states of affairs because of the reflexivity present in human action is conditioned upon prior states of affairs which are contingent; thus states of affairs which are relatively noncontingent still require an uncaused cause.

Assuming that hegelianism and post-hegelian relativism cannot satisfactorily explain why contingent states of affairs obtain, the general argument already proposed shows that *C* and what is included in *C* cannot explain why *C* obtains. However, the general argument can be specified to various cases.

The simplest case is that of two mutually interdependent contingent states of affairs. These must be included in one state of affairs, for if they were not, there could not be a proposition picking them out as mutually interdependent. The larger state of affairs itself is contingent or not. If it is contingent, it must be explained; moreover, since the states of affairs included in it obtain only if it obtains, why they obtain also still must be explained. If the larger state of affairs is not contingent, the project of showing the self-sufficiency of a set of contingent states of affairs fails. The logical situation is represented by the relationship of four conditional propositions: If *p*, then *q*; if *q*, then *p*; if *r*, then *p* and *q*; if *p* or *q*, then *r*. If either of the two mutually interdependent states of affairs obtains, then both obtain; if both obtain, then each obtains. But this says nothing about whether either or both do obtain. No set entirely composed of conditional propositions can yield any unconditional conclusion.

The next case is the circle: for example, four states of affairs such that SA^1 depends upon SA^2 , SA^2 depends upon SA^3 , SA^3 depends upon SA^4 , SA^4 depends upon SA^1 . This system also forms a larger state of affairs. If this larger state of affairs obtains yet is contingent, why it obtains must be explained. The included states of affairs can only explain why the larger state of affairs obtains if something explains why each of them obtains, for each of them is contingent. The logical situation is: if *p*, then *q*; if *q*, then *r*; if *r*, then *s*; if *s*, then *p*; if *t*, then *p*, *q*, *r*, and *s*; if *p*, *q*, *r*, or *s*, then *t*. The circle closes upon itself; if any of the interlocking states of affairs obtains, they all do; if they all do, each one does. But this relationship still provides no premise for an unconditional assertion.

Unless either the system itself or some included state of affairs is non-

contingent, an additional principle still is required. The question why each state of affairs in the system obtains is partially answered by reference to the others only if the others obtain. I call such a partial answer a "conditional explanation." A conditional explanation does not forestall further questions. The question why each state of affairs obtains only becomes more acute as the potentiality within the system for conditional explanation approaches its limit.

This case is the one I referred to in chapter four as a "perpetual happening-machine." The reference could be misleading. If one imagines a frictionless mechanism which does no work, then one could suppose that the mechanism might run forever without being started by anything. I do not think this is logically impossible; *moving* is a predicable. But if such a machine exists, a proposition picking out the state of affairs still would be contingent; one knows what it would be like for this proposition to be true without knowing whether it is true. Thus, one could still ask "Why?" —not why the parts of the machine move, but why the state of affairs obtains which is picked out by the proposition that there is a perpetual motion machine.

Sometimes opponents of cosmological argumentation suggest that to ask for a cause of a state of affairs in addition to the mutual causality of its members is like asking for an explanation of the grouping of a crowd of people on a street corner in addition to the reasons why each member of the group happens to be there. But as an objection to the argument proposed in chapter four, this analogy fails. The argument begins from the fact that *SRS*, which might or might not obtain, does obtain. *C* includes conditions *required* for *SRS* to obtain. *C* explains *SRS* to some extent, but as a state of affairs made up of contingent states of affairs, *C*'s obtaining itself raises a further question. If *SRS* requires *C*, and if *C* is no less contingent than *SRS*, then both *SRS* and *C* require something else.

An apt analogy would be a circle of four persons, all with arms tightly linked, standing together a few feet off the ground in thin air. Each is asked in turn: "What is holding you up?" Each gives the same answer: "My friends to my right and left." At this point, although the answers are partial explanations, it is clear that even taken together they are not satisfying. What is holding them all up? The question becomes acute precisely when the conditional explanations come full circle.

If this is true, why do people think that such circles, if large enough, might be self-contained? I think there are two reasons.

First, there is the logical necessity of an interlocking set of conditional propositions. This necessity mirrors causal relations among the states of affairs involved, and these causal relations, whatever philosophers might think of them, are felt to have some sort of necessity. Thus it is easy to slip from "Things have to be so" to "Things have to be," not noticing that nothing

must be so unless it is. This mistake is the basis of the ontological argument, criticized at the end of chapter three and further analyzed in chapter four. Even when one is not trying to demonstrate God's existence it is easy to suppose that necessity within a state of affairs unconditionally explains its obtaining.

Second, the multiple members in a circle of interdependent states of affairs do, to some extent, explain one another's obtaining. The sharp dichotomy sometimes made between explaining how and explaining why is mistaken. The satisfaction of the requirements included in *C* is required for *SRS* to obtain. Science begins when one asks why some state of affairs obtains. Science, unlike logic and mathematics, does not merely trace ideal relations among possible states of affairs. Thus, as long as one takes for granted that the world exists, an explanation of why a contingent state of affairs obtains by reference to other contingent states of affairs is appropriate and satisfying. Again, the situation recalls the ontological argument, which seems convincing if one takes for granted that God exists.

But an explanation of a contingent by reference to contingents is incomplete and unsatisfactory just to the extent that the states of affairs which provide the explanation do so only if they themselves obtain. To assume that the latter states of affairs obtain without knowing why they do and to stop at this point, would be to stop with something as much in need of explanation as that from which one started.

The most common case in which it is supposed that some set of contingent states of affairs might be self-sufficient is that in which an infinite series of contingent states of affairs is posited. Why could *SRS* not be explained by a particular cause, and this cause by another cause, and so on *ad infinitum*?

It might be objected that this supposition lacks plausibility, because contemporary scientific cosmology strongly suggests that the universe is not infinite. A proponent of the infinite series might answer that the scientific evidence is not complete and that future theories might make an infinite series more plausible than present theories do. This argument seems to me rather weak as an answer to the objection, because it involves speculation against the best available information on the subject. If someone arguing for the existence of God had scientific cosmology against him, his opponents would make the most of it. However, nothing in the argument I propose depends on the physical universe being finite. Therefore, I grant for the sake of argument that the physical universe is infinite and that a particular state of affairs might have infinite antecedent causal conditions—whether antecedent in time or not—each of them itself a contingent state of affairs.

The infinite series can be considered in two ways. In one way, it is a set of discrete states of affairs. Each is contingent; why any one obtains is explained only if one assumes that the one before it obtains. No one of them explains

what it causes except to the extent that it itself obtains, and all of the members of the series obtain because infinite prerequisites are satisfied. In another way, the members of the series are a single state of affairs, unified by their common disposition in respect to the particular state of affairs, *SRS*, which they all help to explain.

It makes no difference whether one considers the states of affairs which make up the series one by one or considers the single state of affairs in which they are included. The proposition picking out each particular state of affairs is contingent. Therefore, no conjunction of such propositions, even though they be infinite, can provide a premise for any unconditional assertion.

The state of affairs as a whole—assuming such a state of affairs possible—is equally contingent. One can know what the infinite series of contingent causes would be like without knowing whether such a state of affairs obtains. This is evident from the occurrence of the argument mentioned previously between a proponent of the infinite series and a defender of scientific cosmology. If an infinite series of causes does happen to obtain, it still makes sense to ask why it does.

Frederick Copleston, S.J., used an argument somewhat like the preceding in a debate with Bertrand Russell. Russell replied that Copleston's argument involves a fallacy of composition. Russell illustrated his point: "Every man who exists has a mother, and it seems to me that your argument is that therefore the human race must have a mother, but obviously the human race hasn't a mother—that's a different logical sphere."¹ The short answer to Russell is that the argument does not involve composition, and so cannot be guilty of a fallacy of composition.

If someone denies that an infinite series of contingent causes would be a single contingent state of affairs, it is hard to see what he is denying; he must refer to something which is a unity to deny its unity. If it is a single state of affairs, it is either contingent or not. If someone wishes to hold that the whole state of affairs is noncontingent, then a noncontingent proposition must correspond to it, and this noncontingent proposition will entail the propositions picking out the states of affairs included in the whole. Only something like Hegel's philosophy of Absolute Spirit could begin to make plausible a noncontingent whole which includes and explains its contingent parts. If the infinite series as a whole is contingent, then the question remains: "Why does this state of affairs obtain?"

If Russell, when he said "human race," meant the species rather than the totality of human persons, his analogy was unsound. For, on any account, the supposed infinite series is not merely a class; it is an infinite number of actual individual states of affairs. With this distinction in mind, one can construct a more apt analogy than Russell's to illustrate the preceding argument. One can imagine that an insane mendicant becomes world ruler and decrees that no

one can eat anything he has obtained otherwise than by begging. Each member of the human race might live on begged food. The food supply of each individual would be accounted for by reference to those from whom he begged. Still, there would be a question how the human race obtained its food. One cannot imagine a system, even with infinite members, in which no one ever gathered, hunted, or raised any food, yet everyone ate quite well on the rations he managed to beg. To suppose that since all individuals could live on begged provisions, the whole race could live on begged provisions, would be to commit a fallacy of composition.

The following parable also might be helpful. A certain Tweetlebottom needed money and asked a friend for \$100. to tide him over. The friend said he did not have the cash, but would be glad to try to raise it, if he could have a little time. Much later, the friend returned, dragging a long strip of paper which reached over the horizon. Putting the end of the paper on Tweetlebottom's table, the friend wrote, "Pay to the order of Tweetlebottom," and signed his own name. "Here, Tweetlebottom," the friend said, "is your money. Just endorse this and I'll hand over the cash." Tweetlebottom did as he was told and received the crisp \$100 bill mentioned in the previous chapter (which is one reason the reader did not find it between pages 100 and 101 of this copy of this book). Feeling a slight curiosity, Tweetlebottom looked at the reverse side of the end of the strip of paper. There he saw all the usual information found on a check, except that it lacked the signature of the maker. "I expect the name of the person on whose account it is drawn is somewhere along the strip," Tweetlebottom said. But his friend answered, "No, this isn't your usual check. It's not drawn on anyone's account at all. I couldn't find anyone with \$100. to write a check, so I asked my fairy godmother to get an *infinite* group of people to *endorse* this check. Now that you've endorsed it, you can keep the \$100, and I'll take the check, and pass it back along the line. No one needs to worry about the check ever getting to the bank." Tweetlebottom was pleased to receive the \$100, and he promised to pay it back, but he still did not quite understand how a check could be without a maker.

The logical situation with respect to the infinite series is that the links correspond to an infinitely long chain of conditionals. *SRS* if *p*, *p* if *q*, *q* if *r*, and so on. This set of logical relations reveals that *SRS* does not obtain unless all its infinite antecedents obtain. Thus, if *SRS* does obtain, we know that all the propositions in the series are true. But all of them, taken as nonmolecular propositions, are contingent. Thus neither the fact that all of these states of affairs obtain nor the causal chain linking them explains unconditionally why any one of them obtains.²

It is also worth considering why infinite regresses are generally regarded as unacceptable in philosophy. If one asks a question and receives an answer,

and if this answer raises a further question the answer to which reveals that the line of questioning is *inevitably* interminable, then the first answer is rejected, because it is no answer at all. The point of questioning a position is to see if it can stand; a position which retreats every time one approaches it is no position at all. Each step in the regress is an instance of a common model; as soon as the common features of the question-answer complex make clear that continuing the line of questions will not alter the questionableness of the initial state of affairs, there is no point in continuing. The purpose of asking questions is to get answers, and any satisfactory answer will explain all states of affairs similar in relevant respects to that from which one started. If the same question must be asked over and over, it was not answered the first time.

Thus, if one is seeking an explanation of why a contingent state of affairs obtains and if one is not satisfied with conditional explanations, there is no point in positing an infinite regress of contingent causes. What, then, is the point of positing such an infinite regress?

As explained previously, the awareness of the incompleteness of conditional explanations grows as the conditional character of the explanation of one contingent state of affairs by reference to other contingent states of affairs becomes clear. To posit an infinite regress is to suggest that conditional explanations might be endless, as well they might be. This move in the argument seems to me to be a symbolic way of suggesting that science might be an inexhaustible quest—as well it might be—and that one ought to settle for the conditional explanations of science, instead of asking why *all* the contingent causes of anything obtain.

It is the last position which must be challenged. This position is not that the contingent as a whole is self-sufficient, as if it were somehow noncontingent. Thus the question to be considered next emerges: Must there be an answer to the question “Why does *C* obtain?” *C* is a state of affairs which includes all of the causal conditions of *SRS* which themselves, if they obtain, require the satisfaction of conditions distinct from themselves. One who answers this question in the negative is not saying that the whole system of contingent causes constitutes a state of affairs somehow noncontingent. Rather, he is saying that the demand for explanation somehow becomes inappropriate when one reaches this point.

Must there be an explanation of the contingent?

The argument provisionally stated in the previous chapter does not begin from the existence of the world as a whole. The argument begins from a particular state of affairs, someone’s reading a sentence or writing a book.

From this starting point the argument proceeds to conditions which must be satisfied for the initial state of affairs to obtain. All the prerequisites which themselves obtain only if further prerequisites are satisfied are grouped together in a class, *C*, which is not only a collection but also a single state of affairs—namely, all the prerequisites for a certain state of affairs to obtain being so disposed that it does. It has now been shown that *C* itself and the states of affairs included in it, whether finite or infinite, cannot unconditionally explain why *C* obtains. An unconditional explanation would answer the question why *C* obtains by reference to a state of affairs which is noncontingent, the necessary entity *D*, which obtains because it is what it is.

Some critics of cosmological arguments insist that proceeding to this question is inherently fallacious, either because one need not explain a whole if its parts can be explained scientifically, or because any question about the entire universe is meaningless. For example, Paul Edwards, in an influential article, argues that just as the explanation of a group of five Eskimos standing on a street corner in Manhattan might be nothing more than the statement of the different reasons why each happens to be there, so the explanation of the whole of contingent things need be nothing more than the explanation of each contingent thing. Edwards also says: "I may hold that there is no 'universe' over and above individual things of various sorts. . . ."³

Now, the first of these objections is the point with which the previous section dealt. What is at stake in the argument to an uncaused cause is not the explaining of a group after its members have been explained, but the attempt to more fully explain a particular state of affairs, which is only explained by the whole set of its contingent prerequisites to the extent that one takes for granted that they obtain. The second objection is closely related to the first. But it is worth noting that *C*, in the argument I propose, is not defined by reference to the universe or to any other totality selected arbitrarily, but by reference to *SRS*.

I am willing to grant that *C* might include every contingent state of affairs which obtains; if it does, as the preceding discussion reveals, one can pursue conditional explanations in the largest possible domain. For this very reason, those who do not care to seek an unconditional explanation are usually the ones who suggest that the universe as a whole is adequate to explain each particular state of affairs in it. I accept this formulation of the problem as a concession to the opposition, not as something my own argument requires.

The present issue, to repeat, is whether there *must* be an answer to the question "Why does *C* obtain?" The supposition which I wish to show unacceptable here is that *C*—which might be the universe as a whole—simply obtains because it obtains. This is the supposition which J. J. C. Smart suggests when he says that a proper answer to the question "Why should anything [the universe] exist at all?" might be "Why shouldn't it?"

Another way of expressing this supposition would be to say that perhaps *C*—or the universe as a whole—is an extrapositional prerequisite for *SRS* to obtain, and that *C* itself meets the three criteria which are listed at the beginning of this chapter, but that *C* meets the third criterion in a peculiar way. The third criterion for counting a state of affairs among the prerequisite conditions which are included in *C* is that it be a state of affairs which does not obtain without conditions not included in itself being satisfied. On the supposition being considered, *C*—or the universe as a whole—would meet this third criterion merely by being nonidentical with its own obtaining, just as is any lesser state of affairs. But unlike any lesser state of affairs, the obtaining of *C*—or of the universe—would be the *sole* extrinsic determinant of its obtaining rather than not obtaining. *C*—or the universe—on this supposition is because it is, and that is all there is to it. *C*—or the universe—need not be and nothing causes it to be. Yet it is.

Smart himself and other philosophers cited in the introduction to chapter four, although they do not admit that the existence of things is to be explained by positing an uncaused cause, do admit that it arouses deep awe. Smart also says that he thinks other people and himself ought to feel this awe. Why do we feel this awe? Why does even someone like Smart say that we ought to feel it?

Often proponents of the cosmological argument have answered this question much too quickly by saying that if one does not posit an uncaused cause, then nothing is explained at all. But this answer would be seriously misleading. If one does not posit an uncaused cause, contingent states of affairs do partially explain each other's obtaining, but these partial explanations remain conditional. The argument of the previous section, if it is correct, has made clear that the conditional explanations which science provides are not only incomplete insofar as they raise further questions which can be answered by further conditional explanations but also are inevitably incomplete. To the question "Why does *x* obtain?" only an answer which posits a noncontingent state of affairs, such as *D*, precludes asking *the same question* of that to which one refers in answering the initial question.

But it must be admitted that even if one posits *D* as an unconditional explanation of why *C* and *SRS* obtain, this answer does not preclude asking additional questions about why *SRS* obtains. Only a few of the conditions included in *C* are known. Until one knows not only that there is an uncaused cause but also precisely what are the contingent causes of the states of affairs being investigated, one does not have a complete explanation. In other words, if one responds to the awe one feels in the face of the contingent by positing an uncaused cause, one does not render scientific inquiry any less necessary.

Leibniz and other rationalists make quick work of the step in the cosmological argument from contingent beings to a necessary being. Contingent

states of affairs might be or not be. If there is no necessary being, yet contingent states of affairs do obtain, they simply happen to obtain. But this is incompatible with what Leibniz calls the "principle of sufficient reason." He formulates it as follows: "No fact can be real or existent, no statement true, unless there be a sufficient reason why it is so and not otherwise, although most often these reasons cannot be known to us."⁴

If this principle were true, the question "Why does *C* obtain?" must have an answer, and since, as has been shown, the answer cannot be found in the contingent itself, there must be a necessary entity. If *D* is not, then *C* simply obtains because it obtains, and this is not a sufficient reason, in Leibniz's sense, because *C* is contingent—that is, it might be otherwise, it might not obtain. But is the principle of sufficient reason true? I think not.

It has often been pointed out that the principle of sufficient reason can hardly be regarded as a mere generalization from facts. As Leibniz and other rationalists state it, the principle pretends to be absolutely universal and necessary. However, it is not a formal truth. Formal truths cannot be denied without contradicting oneself, because the reason why the formal truth is true is intrinsic to it. The principle of sufficient reason is designed precisely to deal with cases in which something is so but could be otherwise; if the reason why it is so were intrinsic to what is to be explained, then it could not be so *or* otherwise, it would simply be so.

Another way of putting this important point is as follows. When the question "why" is asked, there is always some gap between what is given and what is understood. If someone says that a certain logical or mathematical conclusion follows, and one does not understand the formal necessity, one asks to be shown why the conclusion follows. If one is faced with a fact, such as an eclipse, and does not know how this fact fits into a regular system, one asks why the fact occurs. If one's friend behaves in a peculiar way and one cannot comprehend his intentions, one asks the friend why he is behaving so oddly. Similarly, faced with contingent states of affairs and their obtaining, and with the gap between meaning and obtaining, one asks why. If in all these cases the reason were identical with that which is to be explained, the gap would not exist; there would be no occasion for asking "why." Thus, whenever there is an occasion for asking "why," the reason which is sought cannot be found in the intelligibility of the state of affairs which raises the question. Thus one can suppose, without *self-contradiction*, that there is no reason at all.

Richard Taylor proposes a brief and clear version of the cosmological argument. To set the stage for the introduction of the principle of sufficient reason, he describes an imaginary situation in which one, while walking in a forest, comes across a large ball, about one's own height, perfectly smooth and translucent. One certainly would wonder how it got there. If one does

not come across a ball in the forest, one does not wonder why there is no ball in the forest. The existence of the world, Taylor argues, is apt to be taken for granted. But, in fact, it is strange indeed. Taylor thus formulates the principle of sufficient reason “by saying that, in the case of any positive truth, there is some sufficient reason for it, something which, in this sense, makes it true. . . .” Noting that the principle is neither a factual generalization nor a logically necessary truth, Taylor suggests an alternative: that it is a presupposition of reason. One could not prove it without assuming it. If one tries to deny it, he is likely to find that he is not denying what the principle asserts. The principle, Taylor thinks, is “something which all men, whether they ever reflect upon it or not, seem more or less to presuppose.”⁵

Now, although I think the principle of sufficient reason is false, I think that what Taylor says about it is close to being correct. The first thing which must be done is to show that the principle is false.

The question “What makes this individual teacup different from that individual teacup?” is a perfectly intelligible question. One can point out slight differences in shape and so forth. But suppose the two were exactly alike in these respects? One could say that they are made of different clay, but this only pushes back, not answers, the question. One might say that they are in different places, but their places can easily be exchanged. Finally one might say that they are not in the same place at the same time. But this seems to say no more than that they are different individuals.

Medieval philosophers devoted much attention to this problem, and as far as I know never solved it. Leibniz, following out his principle of sufficient reason, said that any two individuals must differ by at least one predicable. If not, they would be the same. This is Leibniz’s “identity of indiscernibles”—everything must be *intelligibly* distinct from everything else. This might seem harmless enough, but it implies that ideally names can be dispensed with in favor of predicables. Such a scheme might be suited to logic and mathematics, but it is unsuited to empirical knowledge. Propositions which are not formal truths must have reference, and the something to which they refer cannot in principle be reducible to predicables. Following Leibniz’s principle of sufficient reason to the end would eliminate empirical knowledge. Leibniz more or less saw and accepted this implication of his position, and he drew a number of peculiar conclusions from it.⁶

There are other areas in which the principle of sufficient reason leads to strange conclusions. In a discussion of scientific cosmology an author of a recent article remarks:

There are some interesting problems at a more fundamental level that seem not so much to invite an answer from within the framework of the model as to demand an explanation in order that the model itself seem less arbitrary. Choosing to work backward from the present state of the

universe to gain some knowledge of the initial conditions is not at all arbitrary, but it does not suffice to *explain* the initial conditions. Probably the most we can expect from this approach is that we shall be able at least to *describe* those conditions.⁷

Someone who believes in God might easily be led from this sort of observation to meditate upon divine causality. And, it is true, the work of physics, as it reaches the ultimate boundaries and tries to understand a system with no boundary conditions, does point up the conditionality of all scientific explanations. However, it would be a mistake to suppose that the initial conditions of the physical universe can be explained if this means showing why these conditions, rather than some other imaginable conditions, obtain.

But is this not to admit that there is no need to posit an uncaused cause? No, an uncaused cause is posited, not to explain why states of affairs which obtain contingently are *contingent*, but to explain why they *obtain* despite their being contingent. To put the point in another way. Scientific questions ask both why a state of affairs obtains and why this state of affairs, rather than some other state of affairs, obtains. Both questions are answered by science with conditional explanations, which leave gaps to be filled. What I am saying is that the gap between states of affairs being what they are and the same states of affairs obtaining can be closed if there is an uncaused cause which is a necessary entity. But the gap between some states of affairs rather than others obtaining cannot be completely closed, just as differences among individuals cannot be completely explained.

"But," the believer might object, "one can explain why the initial conditions of the universe are what they are. God chose that they be so." This answer leads to a further question: "Why does God choose just this set of conditions rather than any other?" "God chooses freely," is the answer. "Precisely. He chooses *freely*. Therefore, there is no sufficient reason for his choice." If a choice really is free, then while there might be many reasons for this choice, there must be the same total set of reasons for this choice and for its alternative. When all the reasons and conditions common to the alternatives are given, there is no sufficient reason for this choice being made rather than for an alternative choice being made. Thus, if one supposes that God creates freely, this supposition explains why contingent states of affairs *obtain*, but it does not explain why God chooses to create certain contingent states of affairs rather than others.⁸

The principle of sufficient reason, then, does not underwrite reasoning to the existence of God from contingent things. Instead, it eliminates contingency from things, and thus removes the starting point of cosmological argumentation. Indeed, since the possibility of explanation depends upon a gap in intelligibility and since the point of explanation is to close the gap, if

everything could be explained, then everything would be one, and so nothing could be explained.

One of the most persuasive arguments of determinists against human free choice appeals to the principle of sufficient reason. If a choice is free, the only reason why this choice *rather than its alternative* is made is the choice itself. Determinists generally protest that this is unintelligible, absurd, and so forth. In protesting thus, determinists sound very much like leibnizian rationalists. It is clearly not self-contradictory that there be free choices, and I think it has been convincingly argued that someone can make a free choice.⁹ The odd fact is that many of the same philosophers who invoke the principle of sufficient reason—without calling it that—in arguing for determinism reject it when they are criticizing arguments for the existence of God.

Thus I think the principle of sufficient reason is false. If it is true, there simply is no contingency.

However, this conclusion does not mean that explanations are not to be sought or that one can determine *a priori* what is allowable as explanation. Many who attack the cosmological method of arguing to an uncaused cause say that such argumentation “involves an obscure and arbitrary redefinition of ‘explanation,’ ‘intelligible,’ and related terms.”¹⁰ Often they offer some very simple model of scientific explanation, and triumphantly conclude that since the question why contingent states of affairs obtain—if an unconditional answer is demanded—cannot be answered according to the model proposed, the question must be illegitimate.

Apart from the fact that this approach tends to reduce all explanation to the paradigm of scientific explanation, although there are many other forms of explanation,¹¹ it is not at all clear that “explanation” in science is as uniform as is often suggested. One need only look at contemporary writings in philosophy of science to see that it is by no means clear that scientific explanation is reducible to a single model.¹² What is more important, the question is not, in the first instance, to find something which everyone will say is an “explanation.” The question is why *C*, the cause of *SRS*, obtains, although it might not. If one admits the legitimacy of the question, it makes no difference whether its answer would be called an “explanation.” Someone might say that this question is not legitimate. If he explains why it is not, his explanation is unlikely to look much like a scientific explanation.¹³

Another mistake sometimes made when the principle of sufficient reason is rejected is to conclude that there is no sufficient reason for anything. Since not everything can be explained and since every explanation we actually give leaves room for further questions, it is easily assumed to be an error in principle to seek explanations which answer a question with more than practical finality. Any satisfactory answer to a “why” question renders the

original fact intelligible by reference to something which does not admit of being questioned in the same way, and which the person asking the question thinks reasonable to take for granted. In many cases what is reasonably taken for granted does depend upon one's practical purposes. "Why is my favorite brand of tea not on the shelf?" "The boy will get it from the basement." It is reasonable to take for granted the tea's being in the basement and the boy's working in the store and a great many other things, so long as the tea is forthcoming.

Children's questions seem endless partly because they do not have very limited purposes in asking them, and so do not see that it is reasonable to take much for granted. But in a purely theoretical inquiry, whether in science or in philosophy, some things are taken for granted for reasons which are more than merely practical purposes. One can see why one should not ask why. In a biological theory of evolution one finds it reasonable to take reproduction for granted; the data to be explained, not a practical purpose, determines this limit of inquiry.¹⁴ Plato's treatise on unity and multiplicity in his dialogue *Parmenides* provides excellent reasons why both unity and multiplicity must be taken for granted by philosophers.

Thus, I reject the principle of sufficient reason as false, and I also reject *a priori* restrictions which would rule out the question "Why does *C* obtain?" But must there be an answer to this question? If one answers affirmatively, is one not supposing a more restricted version of the principle of sufficient reason?

A more restricted version suited to the case can easily be designed along the following lines: If a cause of a contingent state of affairs obtains, and if this cause is itself contingent and such that every causal factor included in it itself requires a cause, then there must be an uncaused cause. This restricted version of the principle of sufficient reason would be adequate, but to posit it as a justification of the step in the argument in question against someone who denies the need to take the step would be question-begging. Thus, it seems to me that this step in the argument cannot be underwritten by a theoretical principle.

Still, it seems to me that the obstacle to carrying through the argument can be surmounted. Contingent states of affairs do obtain. There is a gap between what they are and their obtaining. Therefore, it is legitimate to ask why they obtain. It might not be prudent or practical to ask this theoretical question at a given moment, but many people have asked and do ask the question. To ask the question with regard to particular states of affairs leads to some success in theoretical science, which provides conditional explanations. The question "Why does *C* obtain?" is formed in such a way that a conditional explanation will not be acceptable as an answer. But any radically new and interesting theoretical question in some respects precludes a standard

reply or a reply worked out according to a standard method. If there were not something very *odd* about the questions which great scientists ask, there would never be any revolutions in scientific theory.¹⁵

It is not clear that there is anything wrong with the question "Why does *C* obtain?" which would prohibit us from asking it, as there is something wrong with "Why do individuals differ?" and "Why are certain choices—assuming them to be free—made rather than others?" In the case of *C*'s obtaining it is reasonable to ask the question and to expect some sort of answer to it. The positing of an uncaused cause, which is a necessary being, does provide a partial answer to the question why *C* and other contingent states of affairs obtain. It provides a partial answer because given *D_c*, the question why it obtains is answered by saying that it includes *D*, and *D* obtains because it is *what* it is.

It is clear that answering the question "Why does *C* obtain?" by positing *D* is not very satisfactory. One knows nothing about what *D* is in itself; it is a theoretical entity introduced because it is required to satisfy the conditions of the problem. But positing *D* is at least some sort of answer, and it puts one in a position to raise the further question: "What is *D* in itself, and precisely how does *D_c* cause *C* to obtain?" Since the positing of the uncaused cause and of the uncaused entity which is its nucleus moves the inquiry forward, one *must* answer the question "Why does *C* obtain?" by saying, "Because an uncaused cause causes it to obtain."

It will not do, in this situation, to say that while contingent states of affairs need not obtain but do, they simply obtain by their obtaining. It is unsatisfactory to say that things just happen to be when one can posit something which would explain them; it is unreasonable to stop the inquiry at *C* when one can move on to *D*. Making this move does not explain everything, but it does open the way to a question "What is *D* in itself?" which, if answered, would be a reasonable place to stop. "Why is *D* what it is?" is meaningless, because it demands an explanation of the self-identity of the entity. Explanation closes a gap; there is no gap to be closed where there is self-identity.

Many philosophers will object to this argument that there is something radically wrong with the question "Why does *C* obtain?" or with the answer "Because an uncaused cause, which is a necessary being, caused it." Hume and philosophers who follow his lead object along these lines. Hume's position will be expounded in chapter six, and the objections he and others raise will be answered in chapter seven.

Other philosophers will argue that the implicit analogy in the preceding argument to the procedure in theoretical science is fallacious. Human understanding, they will maintain, is limited to the world of experience. One can think beyond this world, but if one does so, and imagines that he is gaining

theoretical knowledge of nonexperienced things, such thinking will end in absurdities. Kant raises this sort of objection. Kant's position will be expounded in chapter eight and criticized in chapter nine.

Assuming that objections such as those of Hume and Kant can be met, I think the preceding line of argument shows that one must make the step from things which happen to be to something which has to be. The reasoning depends upon certain suppositions, which I call "rationality norms." They include the following.

If a question arises and if one sees no good reason not to ask it, one should ask it. If a question of a certain form has been asked and answered, one can expect another question of the same general form to be answerable if it is asked. ("Why does x obtain?" is not unanswerable in principle, so why should it be unanswerable when one arrives at C ?) If one asks a question, one ought to suppose that things are as they must be if the question is to be answered. If one can provide a partial answer to a theoretical question by positing a theoretical entity, and if doing so opens the way to further questions which, if answered, promise a satisfying answer to the initial question, then one ought to posit such a theoretical entity.

The rationality norms to which I am appealing are, in a certain sense, presuppositions of reasoning, as Richard Taylor suggested the principle of sufficient reason might be. But they are not, directly and in themselves, statements about the way things are. They lack the metaphysical ring of Leibniz's principle of sufficient reason. However, many perennial puzzles can be clarified by noticing that a rationality norm, rather than a theoretical principle, is what is presupposed.

For example, one can justify the use of various forms of deductive inference. But how can one justify the simplest forms, such as *modus ponens*? (*Modus ponens* is reasoning of the form: if one proposition, p , is true, then another proposition, q , also is true; but p is true; therefore q is true.) Max Black has argued very plausibly that it is unreasonable to expect a theoretical justification of *modus ponens*; a person who uses it without reasons is not behaving irrationally, and one who refused to accept it would be unreasonable. But at the same time there is nothing conventional about *modus ponens*.¹⁶ Black's position, it seems to me, amounts to saying—although he does not put it this way—that there is a rationality norm which might be formulated: If one is presented with a deductive argument which seems valid, and if no justification of it is possible, then one ought to accept the argument as valid.

Similarly, Black makes a strong case against a variety of efforts to justify or to vindicate inductive reasoning. "Why should we accept the conclusions of inductions which, after all, are not necessarily true?" Black's conclusion is that human beings belong to what he calls "the inductive institution"; we are

all necessarily subject to “norms of belief and conduct imposed by the institution.”¹⁷

I think the puzzle about the uniformity of nature can be reduced to a rationality norm: If certain uniformities have been observed and one has no special reason not to expect them to obtain in the future, then one ought to expect them to obtain. Simplicity rules, used in evaluating hypotheses, although notoriously difficult to formulate—for reasons which the subsequent discussion will partially clarify—also express rationality norms for theory construction.

Probability is based on rationality norms. When one knows that the proportion of women who live to age seventy is greater than the proportion of men who live to age seventy, and when one knows that a certain husband is older by ten years than his wife, then one ought to expect the wife to outlive her husband, assuming one knows nothing special about the couple which would indicate life expectancies different from the average, with a probability which can be calculated from past experience registered in mortality tables.¹⁸

Michael Slote, in arguing against scepticism with respect to the existence of the external world, explicitly formulates a number of rationality norms, although he calls them “principles.” An example is his *Principle of Illusion and Evidence*:

... one who is (even in the slightest degree) rationally justified in believing any (fairly specific) causal claim must have evidence which he is rationally justified in trusting or using in order to support that claim, and must, therefore, not be rationally justified in believing that all his sense and memory experiences are illusory (non-veridical).¹⁹

The heart of the matter might be put more briefly: If one cannot possibly have any good reason for rejecting experience as illusory, one ought to accept it as genuine. Obviously, this is a very strong norm.

A person who believes what he is told is acting on a rationality norm: One ought to believe others unless there is some reason to doubt their word or their competence. A person who asks questions acts on rationality norms, some of which I have set out in the preceding argument. A person who reasons relies on rationality norms such as the general dependability of deduction and the justifiability of taking the measured risks of induction. Even a person whose motto is “Seeing is believing” follows a rationality norm similar to that stated by Slote.

There are many other rationality norms. They are not often articulated explicitly, and they have not, so far as I know, been recognized as a class having many common characteristics. All asking of questions, all reasoning, and all judging are governed by such norms.

What are these rationality norms? Children follow them spontaneously, although children oversimplify them. Children ask questions, accept and use various forms of argument, and make judgments, all of which can be questioned by a sceptical adult. But children are not sceptical. They do not realize that one need not ask and cannot answer every question which comes to mind, that sometimes there is something wrong with a question. They do not realize that one need not accept the conclusion of an intuitively valid deductive argument even if one has granted the premises, for they are not aware that even the simplest forms of argument can be fallaciously used. Children do not imagine that life as a whole might be merely a dream; they are not sensitive to the extent to which illusion infects what seems evident. In these matters children are innocent, naive, and trusting, just as they are in their relationships with other people. They believe what they are told; they take for granted that they are loved; they do not wonder whether mother might be putting poison in the porridge.

Experience shows the fallibility of knowledge, just as it shows that mothers sometimes murder their babies. One learns that the steps of questioning, of reasoning, and of judging which one can take, can fail. One sees that one need not take them. One acquires the ability to make a choice. One finds it possible to be critical and cautious, if not sceptical. And the more sophisticated the adult, the more he is able to decide whether he will ask a question, follow an argument, or make a judgment. Thus, the policies which children follow spontaneously must grow up into adult rationality norms. Adults do not simply enshrine their childhood ways of thinking—at least one hopes they do not. They refine them, qualify them, and orchestrate them so that they can use them in concert.

Yet this whole process is for the most part inarticulate. Rationality norms only become explicit in one or another area of inquiry, not as a unified system. As long as these norms are not violated, no one calls attention to them. When violations occur, the norms are articulated. Often the first articulation is too simple, as is Leibniz's formulation of the principle of sufficient reason.

And often, as in this case, rationality norms are expressed as if they were universal, necessary, descriptive statements about reality. The reasonableness of rationality norms, their obviously objective normativity, leads people to express them in a form appropriate to what is not normatively but factually objective. However, rationality norms are not descriptive. Yet they are objective; they are nonconventional, not relative to individual purposes, and cognitive. Their cognitiveness is not descriptive; they do not tell what reasonableness is. But rationality norms do provide a guide to straight thinking—to asking legitimate questions, developing sound arguments, and making critical judgments.²⁰

There are some pragmatic rules of thought which are relative to particular purposes and even conventional. These are not rationality norms. One must have such pragmatic rules only to the extent that one wants something from thinking besides knowledge—for example, success in some specific task. Rhetoric, in Aristotle's sense, provides pragmatic rules of thought and expression for the purpose of persuasion. The working out, the use, and the justification of such pragmatic rules of thought always *presuppose* rationality norms.

Because they are not pragmatic norms, rationality norms are not conditioned by particular purposes. But they are not simple, unconditional principles or laws of thought. They have built-in qualifiers, provisions for exceptions, other-things-being-equal clauses. The various rationality norms limit and complement each other.

Since rationality norms are not laws of thought, one can choose to violate them. To do so is to indulge in rationalization, self-deception, obscurantism, bias, or the like. In the face of the categorical demands of the rationality norms that one face the facts, quit evading the issues, get one's head out of the sand, take an opponent's objection seriously, and so on, one can be unreasonable. This possibility arises from the fact that one can be concerned about values other than knowledge of the truth, and that one can prostitute one's thinking, not merely make it an honorable handmaiden, to these other values.

"Be reasonable!" is very like a moral demand, if it is not precisely a moral demand. Rationality norms are very like a code of ethics for asking questions, arguing, judging. Someone who violates them cannot be convicted of self-contradiction for violating them, because rationality norms direct all and only the moves which admit of choice, and one who is face to face with an inconsistency no longer has a choice. I have explained elsewhere how moral norms can be cognitive though nonnaturalistic, and how one can apply moral norms with sensitivity while avoiding moral relativism.²¹

Most people recognize that knowledge of truth is a basic human good. This does not mean that one must never pursue other goods, and it does not mean that one may not seek knowledge as a means, not merely as an end in itself. It does mean that one ought not, where truth is at stake, act contrary to it, by concealing it from oneself, by cherishing opinions one would not wish to submit to critical examination, by refusing to accept the essential risks of making mistakes which are inseparable from a fallible knower's pursuit of knowledge and wisdom. Rationality norms are the law of the love of truth, but dedicated scientists and true lovers of wisdom do not feel this law as a constraint, because it is second nature to them.

Sophists of every age realize that rationality norms are usages which need not be followed. If challenged, sophists point out that their procedure is not

self-contradictory and claim that they are therefore not irrational. The sophist follows rationality norms for the most part, but he does not admit them to be categorical. He insists upon his freedom to invoke the principle of sufficient reason—or some more accurate expression of the norm which that principle imprecisely expresses—when it suits him, and to point out that it is no law of thought when this suits him. No doubt one is free to be immoral. The sophist asks for a demonstration from extramoral principles that one ought to be moral, and not receiving such a demonstration, he declares that his immorality is rationally vindicated.

Rationality norms initially are shaped by experience. For example, one accepts inductive arguments because one has learned by experience that while they are not an infallible means for coming to know, they are a necessary means for coming to know many things. Is this a circular justification of induction? No, it is not a justification at all. Children have no choice about whether to expect the future to resemble the past, to expect data to be veridical, to believe what they are told, and so on. Experience teaches how well these natural dispositions work in thinking toward truth. The most basic rationality norms, once learned, are subject to little modification.

But experience also teaches the need for sophistication. The child gradually learns that there are ways in which questioning, reasoning, and judging can go wrong unexpectedly. Thus by the time one is aware of his ability to make choices, one also has a considerable body of experience. One who loves the truth follows policies which, so far as he knows, are more likely than alternative policies to lead to the truth.

Sophists adopt other policies, policies which are conducive to the goods they love more than truth. Yet they are adept at articulating a rationality norm when it suits their convenience, often without its necessary built-in qualifiers, provisions for exceptions, and other-things-being-equal clauses. Each sophist seems to develop a special skill in using one or a few rationality norms as irresistible weapons for coercing honest persons who are seeking truth.

Someone might object that if the principle of sufficient reason is replaced in the version of the cosmological argument I propose by a mere rationality norm, then the argument attains only a certain degree of probability, not certitude. If this objection means that the argument does not achieve the sort of absolute cogency which Leibniz hoped for, I concede. However, rationality norms underwrite all human thinking, even deductive argument in logic and mathematics, and thus it is too simple to suppose that if a rationality norm is explicitly adverted to in an argument, the argument is thereby admitted to be weak.

In some cases, such as the norms governing probability judgments, judging in accord with the norms is reasonable, but one is aware of specific reasons

why, in the nature of the *sort of case* one is concerned with, one's judgments will sometimes turn out mistaken. In some cases, such as the choice of one's own career, one knows that there are incalculable risks, but one cannot estimate how great they are, since one's judgment as to what career would be best for him cannot be considered as a mere instance of a class of cases.

In other cases one has no specific reason whatever for supposing that the question is illegitimate, the reasoning unsound, or the judgment mistaken. Some strong rationality norms, such as the principle of illusion and evidence which Slote formulates, apply in such cases. One only has a choice in these cases if he considers the general fallibility of human thinking and averts to the lack of logical necessity which accompanies the acts of thinking at every step of the way.

All *acts* of thinking do lack logical necessity. For necessity is in the content of propositions, not in the acts of questioning, reasoning, and judging. Acts of thinking are just as distinct from the content of propositions as contingent states of affairs are from their own obtaining.

Methodical doubt or heuristic scepticism can be justified as reasonable procedures for testing how far one can proceed in doubting before coming to rock bottom. However, to insist at every step of a philosophical argument that the contradictory judgment is logically possible, that the reasoning could be unsound, and that the question might be meaningless is to speculate against the value of rational discourse. Speculation against the value of rational discourse, like monetary speculation, causes inflation. Elaborate arguments are constructed to show that rationally necessary acts of thinking are not logically necessary, and then a great deal of time and effort is wasted in futile attempts to show that rationally necessary acts are logically necessary.

To say "Still, this might be mistaken" can be salutary as a reminder of general human fallibility. But "might" which expresses mere logical possibility is strictly equivalent to "might not." A great deal of confusion is engendered by using "might" in this logical sense as if one had some basis for assertion—that is, as if "might" meant "more *likely*," when, in fact, what might be is altogether unlikely. A question might be meaningless, but if one has no good reason to think that it is, it is irresponsible to suggest that it might be in a way which is likely to lead someone to undertake the task of showing that the question *is not* meaningless.

I think that the rationality norms which replace the principle of sufficient reason in the version of the cosmological argument I am proposing are very strong. They are open to sceptical challenge. But unless specific objections, such as those proposed by Hume and Kant, are sustained, it seems to me that it is rationally—although not logically—necessary to ask why contingent states of affairs obtain, to assume that the question is answerable, to posit an

uncaused cause which is a necessary being, and to be ready to pursue the inquiry into what this necessary being is. If specific objections, such as those of Hume and Kant, are not sustained, it would be unreasonable to block inquiry with an obscurantist refusal to proceed in this case as one would proceed in other investigations.

The argument is not, as the saying goes, knockdown. But the conclusion, assuming specific objections are met, should not be qualified as "probable." When one thinks as straight as one can and sees no special reason to suppose that the outcome might—"might" in a more than logical sense—be mistaken, one is entitled to say that one knows. To ask for more is to demand something which perhaps the angels have, but which is not available to human persons.

Summary restatement of the argument

Having developed the argument, I now restate it in summary form. This summary is not intended to replace the statement of the argument in the previous chapter, but only to help the reader to see the relationship among that statement of the argument, the treatment of the two important steps in the argument in the previous sections of the present chapter, and the matters still to be considered in parts three and four. It is especially important to notice that several concepts essential to the argument, including "cause" and "necessary entity," are defined only in the context of the statement of the argument in chapter four.

1. *Some contingent state of affairs obtains.* Nothing in the argument depends upon the particular content of the state of affairs from which it begins. Thus the argument can be generalized; it proceeds from any contingent state of affairs *which obtains*. "Contingent" here does not mean dependent or transitory. A contingent state of affairs is one which might or might not obtain; its obtaining does not follow from its being the state of affairs which it is. The primary evidence that there are contingent states of affairs is that we can know what it would be like for many states of affairs to obtain without knowing whether they obtain.

2. *It is reasonable to ask why any particular contingent state of affairs obtains and to expect an answer which would begin to provide an unconditional explanation.* An unconditional explanation would explain why a contingent state of affairs obtains otherwise than by reference to other contingent states of affairs themselves assumed to obtain. Although it is not reasonable, according to the preceding argument, to expect an explanation of why contingent states of affairs are *contingent*, it is reasonable to expect an explanation of why they *obtain*, unless there are good reasons for not

proceeding with the inquiry. Hume, Kant, and philosophers who more or less closely follow them argue that human knowledge is necessarily limited in certain ways which would rule out the question, the answer, or both. I argue in part three, chapters six to nine, that such attempts to delimit knowledge fail.

3. *The question why a contingent state of affairs obtains is not satisfactorily answered by positing a necessity which is identical with some or all contingent states of affairs.* Hegel attempts to overcome the distinction between what contingent states of affairs are and their obtaining by his theory of Absolute Spirit. Post-hegelian relativism limits philosophic explanation to cases in which meaning originates in human action and thus coincides with a state of affairs which obtains. I argue in part three, chapters ten to thirteen, that such attempts to comprehend obtaining—that is, to explain it without an uncaused cause—fail.

4. *The question why a contingent state of affairs obtains is not satisfactorily answered by saying that it obtains because it is the state of affairs which it is.* A noncontingent state of affairs can be explained in this way. Thus, if formal truths pick out states of affairs, it is reasonable to say that such states of affairs obtain—in the sense in which they do obtain—because they are what they are. It also is reasonable to say that an uncaused entity obtains simply because it is what it is. But since a contingent state of affairs is the state of affairs which it is whether it obtains or not, what a contingent state of affairs is cannot explain its obtaining.

5. *The question why a contingent state of affairs obtains can and must be answered by saying that there is an uncaused entity, which necessarily obtains, and which causes contingent states of affairs to obtain.* It must be admitted that in saying this one uses language in irregular ways. But an irregular use of language need not be arbitrary. If the way in which the irregular use is derived from ordinary uses can be clarified, extension and stretching of ordinary language and the bending of linguistic rules can be reasonable. In part four I try to clarify the ways in which language is used in the conclusion of the argument and argue that the irregularity of these uses is reasonable.

6. *To say that a contingent state of affairs is caused by an uncaused cause is only a partial answer to the question why it obtains.* This answer is only partial for two reasons. No particular contingent state of affairs obtains in isolation. The relationship of contingent states of affairs to one another is part of the explanation of why they obtain. Philosophical and scientific explanations complement one another and in a sense bear upon the same subject matter, but they cannot substitute for one another. Moreover, the uncaused cause, *Dc*, and the uncaused entity which is its nucleus, *D*, emerge

from the argument only as theoretical entities which are posited to satisfy the conditions of the problem. What is *D* in itself? How does *Dc* bring about contingent states of affairs? Such questions naturally arise, and it is false to suggest that one has a complete unconditional explanation of why contingent states of affairs obtain unless these questions are answered.

God, god, and gods

If the preceding argument were not somehow relevant to religion and to the great human concerns centered in the religious aspect of life, it would be of little interest. But the histories of philosophy and theology make clear that there is some relationship between an argument of this sort and him with whom—or that with which—religion is concerned. The main point of the present section is to clarify the relationship between the theoretical entity posited through the argument and the divine entity or entities worshipped in religious rites. A secondary point is to relate the argument I propose to other ways of reasoning toward God—I use “God” here as equivalent to the cumbersome phrase “God, god, or the gods.”

Thomas Aquinas ends each of the Five Ways with a phrase identifying the entity to which that way of reasoning points as God: “and this everyone understands to be God,” “to which everyone gives the name ‘God,’” and so on. Perhaps Thomas—who, after all, was writing theology—used “everyone” to refer to a well-defined group, namely, philosophically sophisticated Christians of his own time. But still one feels that he made a crucial, final step of the argument too easily.

If one is to identify a theoretical entity, such as the uncaused entity toward which the preceding argument points, with an entity called “God,” some clarification is needed of the relationship between reasoning of the sort involved in the argument and religious concerns. I do not mean that a further clarification is needed of the relationship between philosophy and theology, reason and faith. The question rather is how acts of reasoning and religious acts are related to one another.

This subject is important, vast, and difficult. However, the main lines of a sketch which I hope will be adequate for the present purpose can be marked out quite briefly.

Part of the difficulty of the question is the logic of the concept of *God*. Is *God* a proper name, a predicable, or some other sort of concept? A recent book-length study is devoted to this question. To try to fit *God* into any one of these categories—while attending to the use of “God” in a variety of religious contexts—leads to logical difficulties.²²

The author of the study to which I refer refrains from drawing a conclu-

sion which, I am afraid, incautious readers of his book are likely to draw, namely, that since *God* does not easily fit into the logical categories which are used in thinking about what is not God, "God" is a meaningless word and God does not exist. Unfortunately, fallacious inferences of this sort are not uncommon. Thus it is worth giving the fallacy a name. I call it the "procrustean-bed fallacy."

To dissolve the puzzles engendered by arguments involving a procrustean-bed fallacy, one must show how to put God to bed elsewhere or how to stretch the bed to fit him. In other words, one must show that there are other categories than those admitted in the argument or that the categories admitted in the argument need not be applied in so restrictive a way. Thus, the present section must also suggest a solution to the problem of the logical status of the concepts expressed by "God," "god," and "the gods."

The first and most obvious point is that these words need not be taken as having a single meaning in all their many occurrences, nor need the concepts they express be assumed to have a single logical role. Still, the words are not used with altogether different meanings, and this suggests that there is some consistent logic of the various roles played by the concepts which these words express.

The meanings of "God" are partly the same and partly different. Thus, when pagans said "the gods" and when Christians said "God" ("God, the Father of Our Lord, Jesus Christ"), they obviously did not mean the same thing. Still, when pagans said "the gods" and Christians said "God," their expressions had related meanings. St. Paul in Athens was able to pick one of the many gods worshipped there as a suitable referent for his preaching about Christ crucified; the god he picked was one worshipped at a shrine dedicated "To an Unknown God." Paul said that the God he proclaimed was the one the Athenians already worshipped without knowing it (Acts 17:23).

Many who believe in God and whose main interest in philosophical arguments such as the one I propose is a religious interest undoubtedly feel considerable disappointment when they read of an "uncaused cause," an "uncaused entity," and so on. As I explained at the beginning of chapter four, the argument I propose does not presuppose a meaning and reference for the word "God," and then set out to prove that God exists. Each reader can decide for himself whether *D* is what he calls "God" or not. How might one make this decision?

The initial reflections of some believers might be along the following lines. "When I think of God, I do not think of some peculiar state of affairs called 'an uncaused entity.' What I think of is someone much more personal and relevant to my own life. The world is in a complete mess. We are all likely to be wiped out in an eventual nuclear war. Corruption abounds. We've tried everything to solve our problems. First education became progressive and

then it became permissive. What is worse, my own life is a mess too. I know I am a bum. My wife went to a psychiatrist who talked her into the idea that she needed broader experience of interpersonal relationships—with him. I just can't believe that life as we know it is all there is. There must be something better, or nothing makes sense. Personally, I just cannot accept the idea that nothing makes sense. So I believe in God. As far as I am concerned, God is someone up there who *cares* and who will make things come out right in the end."

This way of thinking about God seems utterly different from the argument of the preceding section. But there is a relationship between the two.

The rabbis, in commenting upon Genesis, noticed that when Abraham makes his first appearance (Gen. 12:1), he is being addressed by God, who orders him to leave his home and native land, and to move to a distant country. Why did Abraham pay any attention to the order? How did he know that there is a God who is Lord of the world? To answer this question a parable was constructed. Abraham was like a traveler who came to a place where he saw a building ablaze ("doleket," which means either *brightly lighted* or *burning down*). The traveler did not see anyone around and he wondered, "Is it possible that this building has no owner who cares for it?" The owner looked out and said, "I am the owner of the building." Similarly, because Abraham wondered, "Is it possible that the world has no Lord?" the Holy One looked out and said to him, "I am the Lord; I care for the world."²³

The parable, being ambiguous, was interpreted in two ways. One interpretation was that Abraham reasoned to the existence of a Lord of the universe from the evidence of divine causality one finds in it. This interpretation most naturally fits the pattern of an argument from design, but it might be stretched to fit a cosmological argument. Finding the world ablaze with the metaphysical brightness of *obtaining*, which brings it out of the night of *nonobtaining*, Abraham reasons that there must be an uncaused entity. Another interpretation was that Abraham was ready to receive God's orders because he was looking for a redeemer. The world is destroying itself with evil; is it possible that there is no one who cares enough to put things right? This interpretation, obviously, is nearer to the thinking of the believer, sketched above, who considers God to be someone "much more personal and relevant to my own life."

In fact, the ways of thinking have a great deal in common. In each case one encounters a set of facts which raise a question to which one finds no satisfactory answer in the world of experience. At this point one might give up wondering and accept the absurdity of it all. But acceptance of absurdity is not easy for the human mind. There is an alternative, namely, to suppose that there is an answer to the question, but that this answer points outside the

world of experience to an unseen reality, to a being or beings unlike anything in the world of experience.

This general pattern of reasoning can be carried out in many diverse ways. These differ not only in their starting points but also in the mistakes to which they are liable. Thus the entities at which various examples of such reasoning arrive are described quite differently.

No matter how reasoning of this sort is carried out, the conclusion is of more than theoretical interest. Such reasoning begins in wonder, and reasoning which begins in wonder normally ends with an attempt to adjust oneself more adequately to reality. Thus, those who follow this pattern of reasoning to its conclusion make an effort to take into account in their dealings with the world and with other persons the reality of the unseen to which that conclusion points. But since the details of the ways in which such reasoning is carried out vary considerably, the efforts to take into account the that-to-which instances of it point also vary considerably.

In most cultures of the past and in many of the present, reasoning of this sort is not an individual project, although individuals obviously contribute to the common inquiry. A tribe, a society, or a whole cultural group carries on such reasoning, draws the conclusions, and experiments with ways of adjusting life to the reality of the unseen as it comes to be conceived.

For example, if a couple happen to have sexual intercourse in a field and if that field produces an unusually good crop the following season, then since there clearly is a relation between the two events, and since it is not clear how the first caused the second, it is only natural to assume that the invisible reality makes the connection. Having intercourse in the fields at an appropriate time thus becomes part of the right way to take the reality of the unseen into account when dealing with the world.

Thus a basic reasoning pattern establishes a referent which, once available, readily becomes a dumping ground for anything which cannot be easily disposed of in one of the other categories built up by experience and available for use in a given culture. A system of behavior grows up around the unseen reality in an attempt to deal with it suitably. Obviously, what happens to be dumped in each culture's dumping ground will lead to even greater diversities among the complexes of behavior adopted for dealing with the unseen. This diversity multiplies the diversity which arises from the variety of ways in which people reason to the unseen.

Furthermore, there is a dynamic relationship between a conception of the unseen and the pattern of behavior intended to adapt life to it. People seek what they expect and expect what they get. Man experiments with the unseen just as he experiments with the visible world and with society itself.

The word "god" is used in one sense, at least, to refer to anything which is arrived at by the general pattern of reasoning to something unseen. Not every

invisible reality is regarded as a god. The whole pattern of reasoning defines the meaning of "god." In other words, any entity can be called "god" in this sense only if it is posited to answer questions for which one otherwise has no answer and for which having no answer at all seems rationally unacceptable.

Corresponding to "god" in this sense is religion in general. In other words, any way of adjusting to the reality of an entity which is a god is religious. An integrated system of such ways of adjusting is a religion. Whatever is necessary to integrate the system is added to the concept of god; there is considerable freedom to make such additions, since the concept to begin with is quite broad. Thus the characteristics of gods differ greatly from place to place and vary from time to time.

The functional relationship between a god and a religion obviously entails that there are at least as many gods as there are religions. If two religions are partly alike, their gods will be partly the same and partly different. This consideration clarifies many puzzles—for example, whether Moslems and Christians worship the same God, whether Lutherans and Roman Catholics worship the same God, and so on. The answer in each case is "more or less"; in the latter case rather more than less, and more than in the former. But both cases can be contrasted with the much greater difference between St. Paul's God and the Unknown God of his Athenian audience.

The multiplying of gods and of religions not only occurs among different cultural groups. Within one culture the unseen can be found to have incompatible properties or can be assigned incompatible roles. Since a single entity cannot have incompatible properties or fulfill incompatible roles, as many gods as necessary are posited. There is a corresponding multiplication of religions, or of subsystems within a religion. Religious systems also are affected by various social stresses and strains. If one group of worshippers cannot get along with another group—perhaps for reasons which initially have nothing to do with their god—their religions will diverge and their gods consequently begin to differ.

When a group of people pays attention to the facts that other religions are different from their own and that the unseen entities to which others are devoted are not identical with the unseen entity to which they are devoted, they naturally give their own god a proper name. At the same time, recognizing the similarities among unseen entities, they need a common name or a descriptive phrase for gods and they need predicables to signify the characteristics of divine beings. The proper name can be used interchangeably with a suitably definite description—for example, "Yahweh" with "the God of our Fathers." Moreover, there is nothing inconsistent in saying both that Yahweh is the only God and that he is the God of gods. "God" is not used in the same sense in all three cases, although the senses are closely related.

In his *Metaphysics* Aristotle offers an argument to the existence of an

unseen entity, a primary, self-thinking thought. He wishes to call this entity "God," although obviously it is very different from the gods with which most of his readers were familiar. (It also is quite different from *D*.) Reflecting upon the discrepancy, Aristotle remarks that the ancestors had handed down a myth that the divine encloses the whole of nature and that the primary reality is God. But the myth picked up accretions in the course of its tradition, and Aristotle suggests that if the accretions are stripped away, the residual myth—which is compatible with his own view—must be regarded as an inspired utterance.²⁴

Aristotle obviously is engaging in persuasive definition. He is rejecting the establishment gods and proposing what he considers a better idea—a god built to satisfy a philosopher's mind and heart. That there is heart as well as mind in Aristotle's reflection is evident from the following beautiful passage:

If, then, God is always in that good state [contemplative thought] in which we sometimes are, this compels our wonder; and if in a better this compels it yet more. And God *is* in a better state. And life also belongs to God; for the actuality of thought is life, and God is that actuality; and God's self-dependent actuality is life most good and eternal. We say therefore that God is a living being, eternal, most good, so that life and duration continuous and eternal belong to God; for this *is* God.²⁵

Aristotle builds his ethics on a religious principle proportionate to this god. His religion is simple and austere: to imitate God as much as possible by devoting oneself to the philosophic life of contemplation. "We must not follow those who advise us, being men, to think of human things, and, being mortal, of mortal things," Aristotle urges, "but must, so far as we can, make ourselves immortal, and strain every nerve to live in accordance with the best thing in us," namely, the intellect, "for even if it be small in bulk, much more does it in power and worth surpass everything."²⁶

Such reasoning exemplifies a philosophical reduction of the divine to rational categories. The reader might wonder whether the argument to the uncaused entity, which I propose, is intended to accomplish a similar reduction.

I will argue in chapters fifteen through seventeen that there cannot be many uncaused causes and that there is a sense in which there is just one. However, I am not proposing the uncaused entity as such as an object of religion. In other words, my intention is not to suggest, without adding anything further, that *D* is God. The concept of *D* is considerably less rich than that of Aristotle's god, and Aristotle's god is not a very adequate object of worship. What I am ready to call "God" without qualification is the Trinity in whose name and names I bless myself whenever I make the sign of the cross. The logical relationship between *D* and the Trinity is that *D* is a

definite description of that for which “the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit” is a proper name and of them for whom “Father,” “Son,” and “Holy Spirit” are proper names. How these names are introduced into discourse and how a single definite description can correspond to four proper names are matters considered to some extent in chapter twenty-four.

Arguments quite different from the one I propose also yield definite descriptions of something which I would call “God” without qualification. For example, many philosophers and theologians reject a straightforward cosmological argument in favor of a moral argument for the existence of God. Some moral arguments so clearly beg the question that they can hardly be taken as articulations of the manner in which anyone actually reasons to God. However, many such arguments proceed along lines which are illustrated by Plato’s thought, at least according to some interpretations of it. Plato seems to argue that there must be a transcendent Good which backs up fundamental human values even when men ignore and violate them—backs them up not by enforcement but by giving them an objectivity which stands up against human weakness, ignorance, and malice. I think most Jews and Christians tend to identify this Good as God, even though Plato does not call it “god.”²⁷

Perhaps every morally good person reasons along the lines Plato marks out. If so, every morally good person accepts the reality of something which most Christians and Jews would identify with God. Everyone, of course, is an atheist relative to the gods in which he does not believe. However, if moral reasoning along Plato’s lines is correct, then any morally upright person who received a revelation—if revelation is possible—would be able to refer the revelation to the reality toward which he directs his moral aspiration, respect, and submission.

If this conclusion is correct, then those who maintain that there can be no reasoning to God apart from faith also might be correct; on their view a person’s first morally right act cannot occur before the grace of faith, by which sinful man is justified.²⁸ Of course, the view that God is known implicitly in all moral knowledge also implies that if the religious act of faith is itself a morally good act, then there is some rational knowledge about God antecedent—not necessarily temporally, but logically—to the act of faith. For on this position the knowledge which a person requires to do any morally good act would imply some rational knowledge of the Good which backs up fundamental human values. Of course, this knowledge would not need to be explicitly articulated; it could be a matter of nonformal inferences.

If there are different sound arguments for the existence of something transcendent which a believer would call “God,” the difference among such arguments which is philosophically interesting is what they yield for reflec-

tion. Arguments which are closer to moral and emotional needs always will have more existential force and will be preferred by those whose main orientation in talking about God is ethical. The argument I propose, if it is sound, has the advantage of being defensible against the philosophical objections to be examined in part three and of serving as a good point of departure for the further linguistic clarifications proposed in part four.